

AUTOMOTIVE WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION IN 10 *EASY* STEPS

How to optimize your auto dealership website to capture more leads

PERQ

About the Author



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Russ Chandler is the Product Manager behind PERQ's highly innovative dealership website conversion software suite. With over a decade of experience in the auto industry as a dealer, he has seen firsthand the problems dealerships face everyday. Russ combines this expertise with powerful technology, providing PERQ's clients an increased response and conversion on their marketing.

Introduction

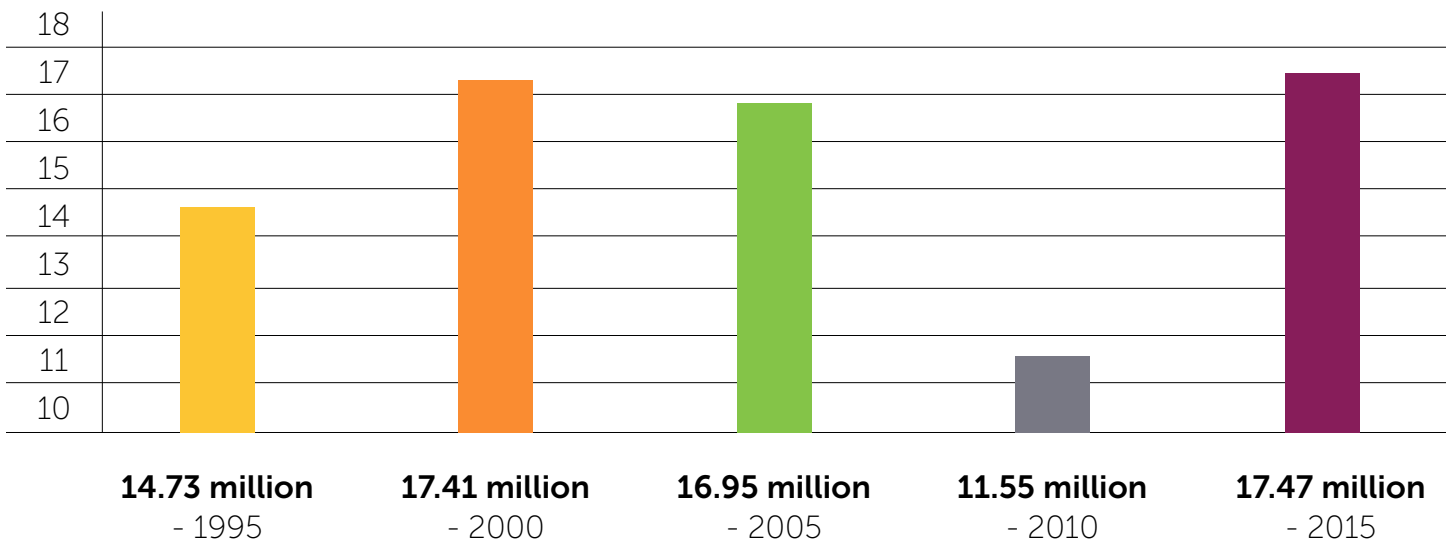
With U.S. car sales recently hitting 17.47 million, there's no question that it's a good time to be in the automotive industry. Experts are now predicting the upward trend won't let up anytime soon. All great news. But is your dealership making the most of that growth? Getting more sales?

If not, there's a good chance you're missing out on potential sales by failing to generate and capture quality leads on your website. The shift toward digital consumerism means there's less tire kicking — and a lot more clicking — as part of the car-buying process.

This 10-step guide provides the tips you need to collect more leads through your website, build better customer relationships and sell more cars. Read on to get more traffic and more leads — and, quite possibly, record-breaking sales.



U.S. sales hit a record of 17.47 million vehicles in 2015, breaking the mark of 17.41 million vehicles in 2000.



— AutoData Corp. & Statistica

1. Understand the basics.

Before optimizing your website for lead capture, it's important to fully grasp the importance of doing so. The behavior of car buyers has changed drastically within the past decade; they're much more likely to conduct most of their search online. Many would even consider doing the whole car-buying process online. That's why it's critical to engage visitors to your website — long before they even think about setting foot in your dealership.

Your website is the first place to show off the parts of your dealership that set you apart from competitors — as well as develop an initial relationship with online visitors. While marketing automation tools can simplify the process, it's important to take the extra step of identifying visitors who are ready to buy — and be there with the answers that can lead to better customer engagement.



Number of dealerships a buyer visits before purchasing a vehicle



1994



2015

— Accenture global survey, 2015

“The impact of the digital customer is becoming pervasive, disrupting the traditional car-buying experience and the competitive landscape.”

— *Christina Raab*, global managing director for Digital Consumer Services in Accenture's Automotive practice.

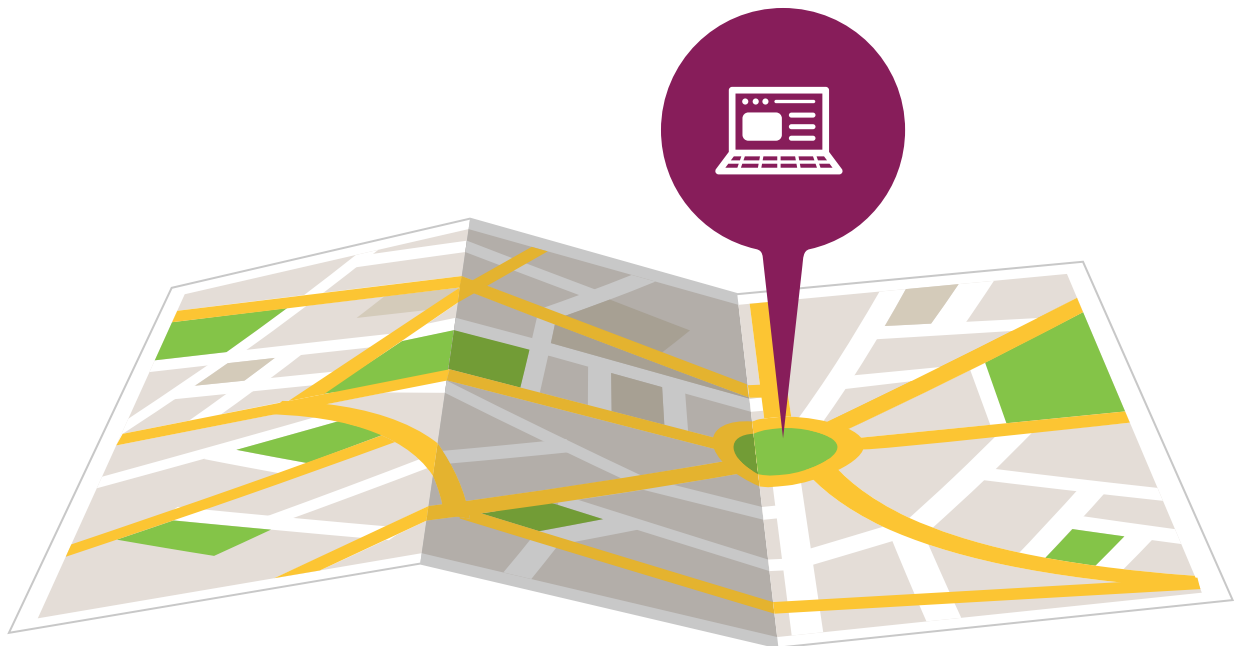
2. Figure out where you are.

Then pick a destination. As with any strategy, you need to size things up before launching a new plan. In this case, that means taking a good look at the results you're getting with your current website. Optimizing your website to capture quality leads requires that you look beyond the number of visitors to your website. You also will need to identify short-term goals that can help you achieve your long-term objective to make more sales. Pull in several team members to conduct an audit.

Here are 8 good questions to start off with:

1. Do we have a solid lead capture strategy?
2. Is it generating quality leads?
3. What percentage is leading to actual sales?
4. How regularly do we check its performance?
5. How often do we test and update it?
6. Which landing pages get more visitors?
7. Which landing pages convert more leads?
8. Which CTAs get more clicks?

OK. How do you stack up? Before launching a new lead generation strategy, it's important to evaluate all aspects of your current site to compare and track your progress.





Before buying a new car...

80%

of consumers research online before visiting a dealer

62%

initiate the car-buying process online

— Accenture global survey, 2015

It's also important to set short-term goals as part of reaching your destination — or ultimate objectives. The path to converting a visitor to a qualified lead can be complex. There are typically steps that lead a visitor to becoming a buyer.

They can include:

1. Gaining consumer trust
2. Increasing brand awareness
3. Ensuring customer satisfaction
4. Better educating consumers
5. Gathering more consumer data to refine your strategy and communications

What's a strong lead?

It's also important to determine how you define a lead. Any number of factors can come into play — filling out a form, requesting additional information or a test drive, or signing up for service. Determine which actions qualify a person as a strong lead, and then focus your conversion efforts on these online visitors. This step will help you accurately measure the success of your campaign through testing and analytics. You may decide later to redefine what it means to be a qualified lead.

3. Get into the buyer's mind.

You wouldn't let a person walk through your showroom and leave without anyone bothering to talk to him. The same goes for your website. An online visitor is the equivalent of a car dealership visitor. If you don't immediately engage them in your digital space, there's a good chance you may never see them at your dealership — or ever convert them into customers.

However, it's important to perfect your strategy for engaging them. Your winning smile obviously won't do the trick. Engaging online visitors requires understanding their mindset — from the type of information they're seeking to the obstacles that could stand in the way of them purchasing. Keep in mind what types of behavior turn visitors off in your showroom. For instance, if an aggressive or overbearing approach doesn't do the trick there don't give off that vibe with online copy and CTAs (call to actions). Make every effort to convey friendliness and helpfulness.

It's also important to check your [website analytics](#) to see where visitors are lingering. This data can help you shape your content and buyer personas — the type of consumers most likely to purchase your vehicles. Let this information guide you into developing a personalized experience, using website infrastructure and ongoing communication through forms and other content that address specific questions.



“This is the most dramatic change we’ve seen in the auto industry and how people buy cars in the last 50 years.”

— Hans-Werner Kaas, McKinsey senior partner.

4. Redesign your website



An outdated stale website won't likely keep visitors engaged. In fact, it could have them jumping to another website before you even have a chance to engage them. It's that important. Work with a professional website design company to update and optimize your site — ensuring that the banner, messaging, buttons and other elements are visually appealing.

Keep in mind that your website should be more than pretty. It also must be functional and easy to navigate. Make sure you clearly discuss your goals with your designer to ensure the site is properly executed. Your website should provide many opportunities to keep your visitors engaged — including cost comparisons, calculators, and videos.

And always keep your buyer personas in mind. What would they be looking for to help them in their car-buying decision? Make sure your website delivers those relevant answers.

A few tips for developing an engaging auto dealership website:

- Keep your website design and messaging simple and uncluttered
- Post multiple CTAs on your site, ensuring that you have at least two on each page.
- Post photos, videos, interactive features and other visuals throughout the site.
- Provide users logical next steps to gain additional information.
- Make sure you provide plenty of opportunities for them to gather additional information, including contact forms, email addresses and telephone numbers.

5. Build your credibility.

There's no better way to build credibility and trust than by being transparent. No matter what industry you're in, consumers won't expect it. You'll get their attention when you're upfront about your pricing, sales process and any special offers or incentives you have available.

As you build your lead generation strategy for specific vehicles, for example, make sure you're including a CTA that leverages price or an incentive. Take the time to clearly explain the deal, what it takes to qualify and why you're offering it. Make it easy for the consumer to trust you.

If all a consumer sees on your website are CTAs that require them to submit their personal data simply to get a price, trade-in appraisal, financing or other offers, it's no wonder they hesitate to take the next step. If you keep them guessing as to whether they will really get a good deal, you're building distrust.

Also, keep in mind that as you build trust among prospects — and, eventually customers, you're increasing your likelihood of getting positive feedback about your dealership. Use that to your advantage. Invite customers to provide testimonials, whether through social networks or other types of intake forms at your location or on your website. Testimonials are another solid way to boost your credibility.



80% of American shoppers check online reviews before making a purchase

— Mintel, 2015



Dealers who offer information regarding their pricing strategy, trade-in appraisal process or details around the sales process are more credible.

Matter of Trust

When asked to rate professionals, Americans placed car salespeople at the bottom of the list for being very honest.

Nurses.....	85%
Medical doctors	70%
Engineers	70%
College teachers.....	53%
Bankers.....	28%
Journalists	24%
Lawyers	19%
Congres.....	10%
Car salespeople.....	8%

— Gallup poll of 1,015 Americans

6. Customize lead capture forms.

The success of your web optimization strategy lies largely in your ability to gain visitors' trust. It's not a simple proposition.

You use lead capture forms on your site to make sure you're able to get the information you need to build customer relationships with the people landing on your website. However, those visitors won't willingly give up personal information — even if it's as simple as an email address — if they don't perceive value from doing so.

Don't settle for generic forms or generic approaches. For example, bombarding visitors with lead generation forms to **"Get a quote!," "Get your credit score!"** or **"Get Pre-approved!"** the moment they land on your website can come across as overwhelming and, worse yet, a bit desperate.

Unfortunately, many industries don't get high marks for trustworthiness, whether they deserve it or not. Consumers' perception of car manufacturers and car dealerships generally fall at the bottom of that list.

When developing forms, keep these 6 tips in mind:

1. Think about where you're placing forms.

Strategic placement of lead generation forms is key to making sure you're not scaring off your online visitors. If you bombard them with too many forms — and little to no helpful content, they're off to your competitors' sites. Give users their space; they should be able to look around and naturally land upon forms providing additional information. Vary the sizes and locations of the forms, placing them at the top,

sides and bottom of your pages. Just don't overdo it. Two to three on a page should be sufficient.

2. Provide incentives.

Why would online visitors give you their email address? Phone number? Or any other personal data? You need to define something of value to give them in exchange for that information. As part of exploring your buyer personas, determine what those incentives could be. Maybe they're not ready to buy yet. Invite them to sign up for a newsletter that keeps them informed of deals on sales or services. Discounted oil changes? Offer a form to schedule service.

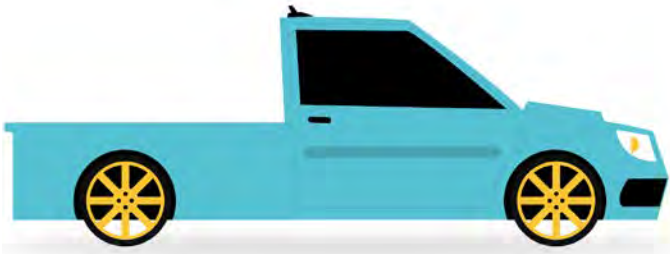
Try something different every once in awhile. For example, if a car manufacturer is releasing a "hot" vehicle, invite website visitors to be among the first to schedule a test drive.

3. Mix up your forms.

Don't post the same CTAs on every page of your website — all leading to the same form. Think of different ways to engage your visitors. While one CTA/form may not get your visitor's attention, an incentive offered on another form — and on another page — could do the job.

4. Post forms on every page.

Make sure you place different forms on numerous pages. You never know when — or where — a visitor will be ready to take the next step in engagement. Be available when they are ready.



5. Make them engaging.

Take a look at your site from the consumers' point of view. Chances are the beautiful vehicles you're promoting are the attention-getters. That's great. However, you also can build excitement and a personalized experience through the addition of interactive lead capture forms. Think of it as keeping the conversation going after a visitor has landed on your website. Instead of simply asking for their name, email address and phone number, you can take it a step further. By asking questions like "What type of car do you prefer?," "What car are you currently driving?," or "Are you in the market for a new or used vehicle?," you're further engaging them and making their car-buying experience more tailored to their needs. You're conveying that you're interested in them as individuals — just as you would if they had walked into your dealership.

Don't forget to say thank you!

It may seem obvious, but it's worth repeating: Say "thank you." When an online visitor gives you their personal data, it's a sign of trust. Thank them for showing interest in further information from your dealership and give them a hint of what may be coming next — such as updates on deals for cars and services, helpful tips for car owners or a cost comparison.

27% of marketers reworked lead generation forms in previous year

— Ascend2 survey

6. Regularly review and update.

If an intake form is generating great results, by all means keep it going. If the results are lackluster — or if you're not getting leads of people who seem genuinely interested in purchasing at any point, it could be time to rework your lead generation forms. Use A/B testing (a comparison of different types of forms) to see which ones perform better.

7. Be transparent & provide value.

Don't get a lead just for the sake of getting a lead. Make sure you don't let your website visitors down by having them exchange their personal data for worthless information. That's not a way to build trust as part of your ongoing relationship with a prospect.

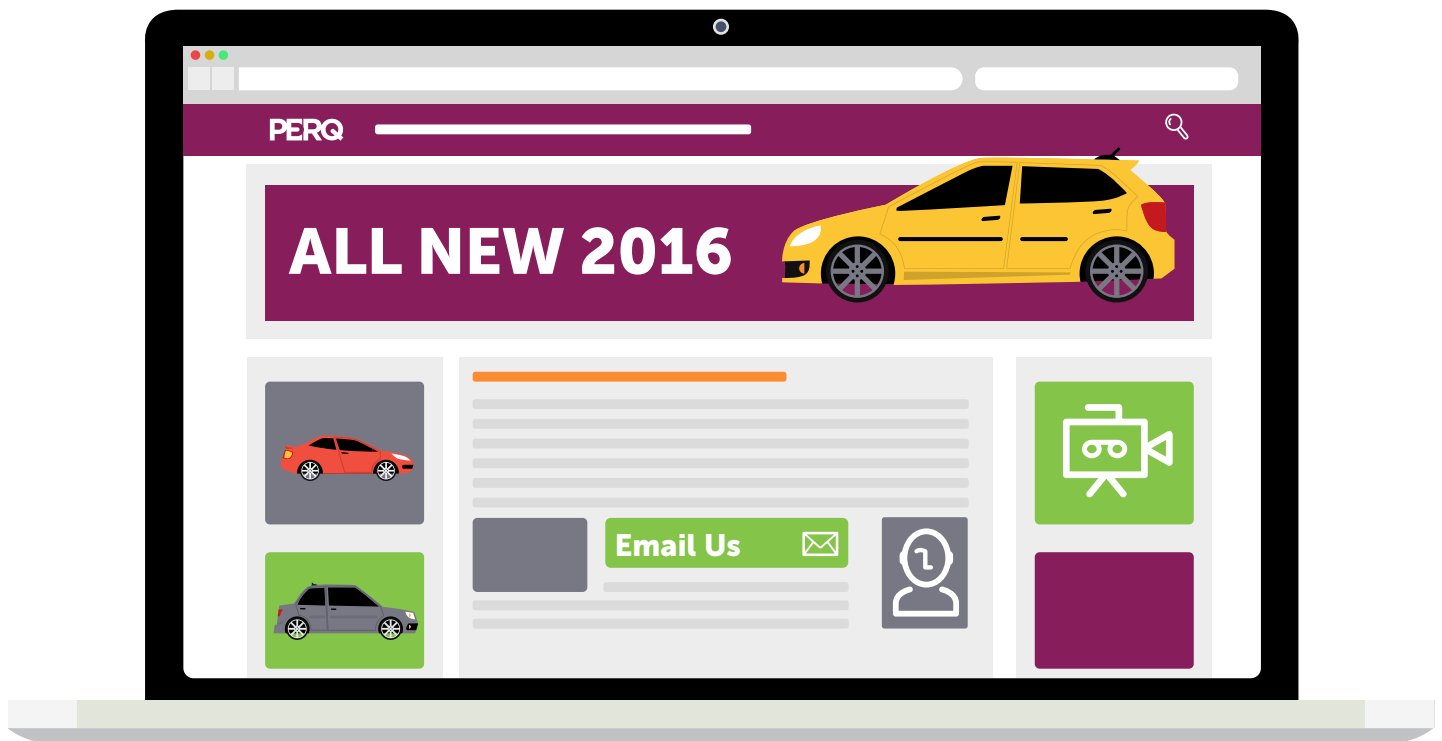
Take the time to develop and offer content that provides value. Also, be upfront about the information they will receive as part of the exchange. Keep at it.

Incentives

68% of respondents said free oil changes/maintenance would influence purchase of new car

69% want to hear about special offers/discounts from dealer/manufacturer

— Accenture



8. Start lead scoring.



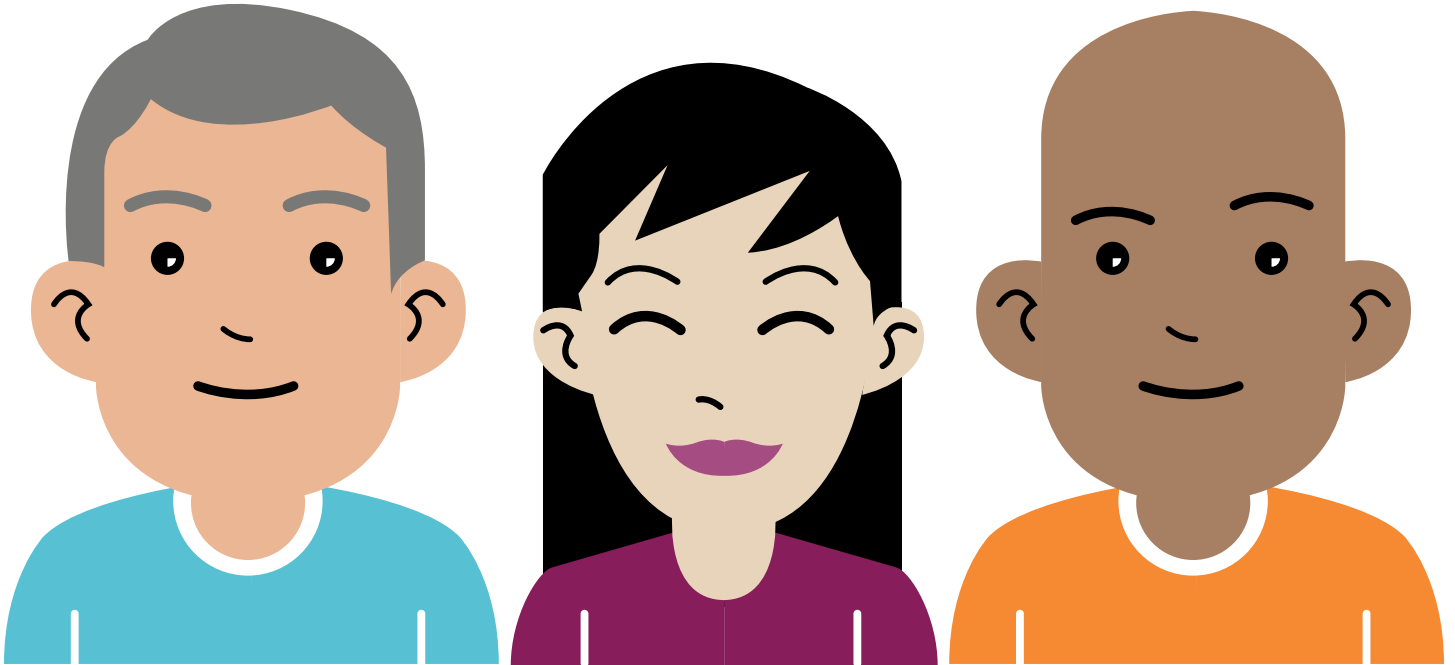
As you already know, all customers are not alike. Some are just looking around, while others may be at the final stage — ready to pick out the accessories on their new vehicles.

Determining which categories your online visitors fall in may not be as complicated as you think. You can set up a scoring system to determine where they fall in the car buyers' journey.

For example, if you know that people who typically request a pre-qualification quote are not as likely to purchase as quickly as those who request a quote on a trade, you can score those interactions differently.

By setting up a scoring system, you can focus your efforts on those leads who may be close to making a purchasing decision. Your interactions with them could give you an edge over a competitor. It also can shape the way you interact with different consumers.

9. Got leads? Now what?



Once you're pulling in great leads, don't let up on your efforts. Take the time to segment your leads, using the scoring system you established in Step 8. Now, it's time to develop different follow-up messages based on the categories you're placing your leads in. These messages should be personalized to address where they are in the buying process. If you have used interactive lead capture tools, you should be able to develop messages that are a better fit for each group's interests and needs.

Tone is key to this process. Speak to your potential customers as if you're having a one-on-one conversation with them inside your dealership. With each follow-up email message, make sure you're providing something of value or interest.

This may include:

- Updates on newer models, current inventory.
- Maintenance and car care advice.
- Discounts on oil changes, repairs and maintenance.
- News related to the automotive industry.
- VIP options

It's also important to continue the relationship after the sale has been made. Of course, you'll tailor your messages differently. Keep in mind that you could gain a customer for life by periodically communicating with them about helpful and interesting tips and updates.

10. Test everything.

Checking the performance of your lead generation strategy takes time — but the payoff can be significant. Using your testing and analytics software, determine which CTAs and pages are underperforming — or not performing at all. Reposition or redesign them to see if you're able to get better results.

Likewise, if certain strategies are working to bring in solid leads, focus your efforts on duplicating the messaging and design. Don't limit your efforts to forms and messaging. Try updating your site with photography and videos to test whether those changes increase engagement. By regularly implementing this testing process, you can take steps to improve your ability to turn solid leads into sales.



75% of consumers would consider buying a car entirely online

— Accenture global survey, 2015



Consumers' preferences for taking their shopping experiences online don't seem to be showing any signs of slowing down. However, car dealerships don't need to leave the personalized customer experience behind. With a strategy designed to engage your website visitors from the start, you can develop a customer relationship that helps them trust you to get them behind the wheel of their next car.

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