CONTACT AT ONCE!

2014 DEALER SURVEY RESULTS

Tap into Instant Connections with Online, Mobile Shoppers

More and more digital conversations are happening

* Based on the volume of digital conversations (chats and texts) between consumers and dealers facilitated via the Contact At Once! network of sites each year.
IS YOUR DEALERSHIP PREPARED FOR THE FUTURE OF CAR SHOPPING?

The steady advancement of the millennial generation into prime car-buying ages and the growth of mobile technology use in every generation are playing big roles in what automotive consumers now expect and dealers are starting to provide. But just how prepared are dealerships when it comes to actually engaging today’s (and tomorrow’s) car buyers?

In a recent survey, Contact At Once! asked dealership professionals for their opinions on several key communications for the online shopping path, and we’ve chronicled what they could mean for the industry here:

Methodology
Along with outside research into consumer trends, this report is based on a two-week July 2014 survey Contact At Once! conducted with 1,600 dealer professionals in North America, from GMs to sales managers, Internet sales managers and directors, as well as salespeople. About 66% were from dealer groups; 34% were from stand-alone dealerships. Statistics are based on opinions expressed by respondents on specific topics and questions. All questions were not answered by every participant; nor did every participant have knowledge applicable to every question.

What’s the Online Shopping Path?
It includes steps a consumer takes online before purchasing, from searches to website visits, inventory views, video plays and, of course, direct engagement (chat, text, email), etc. Check out last year’s 2013 Dealer Survey Results for more on this new path to purchase and how chat can help dealers win: autodealerchat.com/download
WHAT’S CHANGED FOR CONSUMERS

*Millennials and mobile continue to be hot topics in every industry, and they’re only getting hotter.*

**Millennials:**
**A Force to Reckon With**

It used to be easy to discount the millennial generation—too young to buy cars, not making enough money, etc. But guess what? They’re growing up. Every day, more millennials edge into the car-buying consumer market:

- **Recently,** J.D. Power and Associates said millennials generated a larger share of U.S. new vehicle sales than the slightly older Generation X (26% vs. 24%).

- **By 2020,** they’ll make up about 40% of the car-buying population.

- While they currently lag behind baby boomers as the car-buying majority, remember: **Millennials will be where the boomers are sooner than you think.** And they’re bringing their smartphones and mobile mindset with them.

**CHALLENGE:** Understand and adapt to millennials’ buying behaviors so you can reach and influence them before their decision is made. (For example, 94% of our survey respondents say that millennials do more research before coming into the dealership.)
Mobile Technology: It’s Changing Everything

Online research isn’t just something millennials do, either. Google says that 95% of vehicle shoppers use digital channels—and many of their up to 24 research points are now accessed via mobile device. That mobile access is what’s really changing the game:

Almost everyone’s using it: As of June 2014, comScore reports that 173 million people in the U.S. own smartphones (72% of all mobile subscribers).

Those who do are always-on, always-connected: Consumers spend 2 hours, 51 minutes on their mobile devices per day; 38 hours per month on phones alone. And 43% never unplug.

It changes how consumers research, communicate & buy: More than 4 in 5 U.S. smartphone/tablet owners use those devices for shopping activities. In the auto world, this often translates into mobile searches and visits (63% even do this while on a dealership lot). In fact, 35% of auto research is now done exclusively on mobile.

No wonder most buyers show up with their “homework” done. But will they show up at your dealership? The chances are significantly higher if you can get into their circle of influence and build your value story as they research. They’re looking for answers; provide them!

CHALLENGE: Meet and interact with shoppers at those moments of need, no matter when or where or the device used.
HOW CONTACT AT ONCE! DEALERS ARE ADAPTING

Offering mobile-friendly communication options—like chat and text—helps dealers appeal to the growing number of always-on digital consumers, including millennials. And the survey says that it’s paying off.

Almost all (98%) of our survey respondents say their text-based communications are important; about 75% call them very important. Perhaps that’s because with chat and/or text messaging, their shoppers have easy ways to ask questions and get answers in real time right as they research...on the screen of their choice.

Such convenience only seems to get more attractive as consumers get more mobile. Chat and text are what millennials prefer, according to 90.8% of our respondents. Plus, we looked back at the last three years of Contact At Once! data and found a steady increase in the number of chats that convert to sales.

Want More About Chat?
Download last year’s 2013 Dealer Survey Results for more on how dealers are using chat to boost their sales opportunities: autodealerchat.com/download
And it’s not a fad. **It’s an evolution.**
Offering Choice: The Ultimate Convenience

Another interesting find in this survey is the number of dealers who believe in offering car shoppers multiple options to connect: 86.4% of respondents say they’d miss opportunities if they relied exclusively on phone and form leads.

Now, some shoppers who chat or text with dealerships today would still place a call if that was their only choice. But—this is key—some shoppers wouldn’t. They’d put it off, giving competitors more chances to woo them away with convenience or deals. As previous Dataium results revealed, chat adds leads to the ones gathered from a dealership’s more traditional sources.13 Those added leads are consumers who might not otherwise have reached out.

Look at it this way: You don’t make “ups” jump over a barbed wire fence to get to your showroom. Why do it to your digital shoppers? Instead, lower the barriers to taking that first online (or mobile) step toward a sales conversation. Let them choose what’s most convenient for them at the moment.

It can only invite more opportunities your way.
WHERE WE COULD IMPROVE

Is your dealership doing all it can to prepare for the changes mobile consumers are driving? Many are moving in the right direction, but there’s still work to do. Based on the survey results, here are a few improvements to consider:

**Get an Official Texting Solution**

While almost every salesperson in the survey said they texted with their customers, the majority of respondents didn’t use a secure texting solution under the dealership’s control. If such is the case for your dealership, it means you might not be able to track and capture those mobile leads and conversations in your CRM, and you might be at an increased risk of non-compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA).[^14]

**Optimize for Mobile Everything**

Don’t stop with texting or adding the ability to chat from your mobile site. Start thinking about mobile-optimized solutions not just for your website, but for email design, local advertising, credit applications, service reminders, payments, etc. Look at all your dealership’s processes the way a consumer might: How can they do more with you right from their smartphone or tablet?

**Whatever You Do, Be Fast**

Around 96% of survey respondents say it’s important that each customer request be followed up with quickly. Other studies say responding to online shoppers within five minutes[^15] is vital, which fits right in with the instant gratification that millennials grew up with and mobile technology spreads. Chat or text make it easier to provide even faster responses because they’re live, ongoing conversations.

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**Tip**

MAKE THIS A PRIORITY:

Look for a solution that builds in permission-based rules, automates opt-out processes, and records and tracks all conversation transcripts for your one-to-one business-to-consumer texting. (For example, Mobile Text Connect offers all that while syncing to the same Contact At Once! platform you can also use for chat.)

**Tip**

Don’t forget mobile solutions for your own team! If you chat or text, make sure your team downloads the provider’s mobile app so they can interact with customers anywhere (without losing tracking abilities).

**Tip**

Look into additional help—from backup as needed to after-hours coverage and fully managed solutions—so you’re prepared when your team just isn’t available to respond quickly. (Almost half of the survey respondents who use Contact At Once! chat or text on their dealership websites also use our Virtual Receptionist service for this very reason.)
IN SUMMARY

According to a 2014 Accenture survey, 78% of marketing executives expect that digital and mobile will transform their businesses in five years, yet only 21% think they’ll be prepared to reap the full benefits. Don’t let that be you!

Mobile is a fact of life for almost every car-buying consumer, and dealers need to respect its power. Pay attention to mobile consumers’ needs (be they millennials or any other generation). More importantly, start adapting to those changing needs, as many in this survey have done:

- The vast majority of salespeople who participated are already texting with customers, and almost all respondents thought they’d miss opportunities if they didn’t.

- Almost everyone confirmed that it was important to respond to customers quickly...and we know that emails just don’t cut it in that case. (Perhaps that’s one reason they also said they’d miss opportunities if they just relied on phone and form leads.)

- And remember: Many of those who chat and text with dealerships do end up buying, according to both this survey and recent IHS Automotive analyses.

Questions?

If you want to know more about Contact At Once!, Chat Connect 360 (our chat solution), Mobile Text Connect (our texting solution) or Virtual Receptionist (our managed chat and text service), please visit www.autodealerchat.com...or text with us at 404-850-9297!
RESOURCES


BE EVERYWHERE YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE, READY TO RESPOND

Contact At Once! software boosts engagement by making it easy for consumers to connect with auto dealers and ask questions at the moment their interest is piqued. More engagement can translate into more sales, and that’s why 13,000 dealers, the world’s busiest automotive classified sites and many automotive manufacturers rely on the Contact At Once! digital conversations platform to build relationships with online shoppers. In fact, we’ve been #1 in dealer satisfaction for 4 years running at the DrivingSales Dealer Satisfaction Awards.

Call or Text: 404-850-9297
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