

Watch for Waves of Car Videos

By Steve Finlay

YouTube may be the go-to Web site for videos of goofy dancers and weepy fans of Brittany Spears, but it also is becoming a popular place for automotive marketing.

Despite a decline of overall car shoppers, a surge of consumers are viewing automotive videos online, according to a study commissioned by the search-engine firm Google.

The study says the volume of automotive branded keyword searches combined with the word “video” has risen 237% year-over-year, as car shoppers seek out “relevant” video online. In March, Internet users performed 240,000 such searches.

Those numbers are prompting auto makers, marketers and dealers to get out the video cameras.

The survey says 21% of online auto video viewers consume content on sites other than auto makers’ web sites.

YouTube is one such destination, with 41% of in-market automotive shoppers visiting the video site in March, according to the commissioned study done by Compete Inc. that surveyed 780 Internet users to determine the degree to which auto videos influence their buying considerations.

Thirty-five percent of recent automotive buyers who viewed video content prior to purchase consider video influential in their purchase process, according to the study. **The top three cited reasons why vehicle-specific videos were sought out are: 1) to see the vehicle; 2) to learn more about its specifications; 3) to get an overall review.**

Brands that have used the YouTube platform to engage with consumers include Ford, Jeep, Cadillac, Hyundai, Toyota and particularly Chrysler with such sites as youtube.com/chrysler300 and youtube.com/chryslerlistens.

Meanwhile, Cars.com, an online car-selling site, has launched VideoShowcase to help dealers better merchandise their inventory and strengthen their store branding.

The new feature allows dealers to enhance their Internet advertising by fully demonstrating vehicle features and condition.

“Very often, the sale is in the details,” says Dennis Galbraith, Cars.com’s vice president-dealer products and operations.

VideoShowcase allows dealers to combine video with voice-over narration to tell the story for new and used cars. Links identify Cars.com listings that include video.

Cars.com points to industry studies indicating dealer adoption of video will grow significantly during the new few years.

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For example, a Kelsey Group study says **55% of consumers visited a business' Web site after watching an online video advertisement**. Of those visitors, **24% made a purchase**. "It adds depth," says Wayne Ussery, Internet marketing director for Atlanta, GA-based Jim Ellis Automotive Dealerships.

He began using video with vehicles advertised on his nine stores' Web sites in 2006. A year later, he expanded the initiative to include his listings on Cars.com and other third-party shopping sites.

Since then, monthly page views have doubled, he says.

Meanwhile, Kelley Blue Book's www.kbb.com, a provider of new- and used-vehicle information is pitching to dealers the benefits of its new video add-on program. It allows franchised dealers to purchase advertising by exclusive territories, featuring one vehicle make per county.

"In a tough vehicle market, video provides dealerships the opportunity to really bring the brand to life and create an emotional connections with prospective car buyers," says Joe Vranetz, Kelley's vice president-dealer sales.

One of the first dealership users of the new service is Mile OneAutomotive Group, with 64 stores on the East Coast.

"Our new video ad units on kbb.com will allow us to further develop our brand locally and drive more Internet traffic to our dealership sites and ultimately sell more cars," says MileOne's chief marketing officer, David Metter.