

Dealer Digest Daily

YOUR DAILY BRIEFING ON INDUSTRY NEWS, EVENTS & MARKET MOVEMENTS
IMPACTING DEALER PROFITS & SALES

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THE Dealer Profit Center



Let's Have a Little Search Engine Optimization, Please!

The fact is there's no single more logical, sustainable, and high ROI way to drive service business into your dealership than by improving your search placement at the Googles--where the vast majority of your customers are now turning in their hunt for auto service providers.

Today, Service Profits Equal Survival

It seems like every time we turn around, the predictions for new vehicle sales have been revised downward. J.D. Power recently lowered its 2008 forecast to 13.6 million units, an even more sobering 13.2 next year--while other predictions start at 12.2 million for 2009, which would represent a 30% nosedive from 2007. New sales are at 25-year-lows--no one's expecting any meaningful turnaround until 2010--and NADA predicts 700 dealerships will close shop this year. It's always a truism that service is a dealer's core profit center, but today it's a lifeline for survival. Service now generates a record 81% of dealer profits, and with car shoppers putting off purchases (keeping vehicles four months longer this year than last), there's even more business out there to grab.

Search--The Way Consumers Search For You

When is the last time you picked up the Yellow Pages? Roughly 9 in 10 consumers now use Internet search to hunt down local businesses--up from 70% just a year ago. And 8 in 10 consumers now



use search to research/locate car dealers, making it the No. 1 resource used (trumping Yellow Pages, newspaper, TV). And studies show that dealers who've adopted a strong SEO strategy are generating even more calls into their dealership for service and parts than they are for vehicle sales. Let's face it, when a precise search like 'Miami Honda service' generates over 300,000 hits on any given day--and 7 in 10 searchers only click on the first page of the results--you can see why if your dealership's not coming up high in service searches, you might as well not come up at all.



Tips To Get Started With Fixed Ops SEO

While a serious, technical discussion of the complexities of search engine optimization could fill a book, the central fact is simple: high search rankings are a relevance game. Sure, you can talk about inbound links, page rank and fresh content, which play key roles--but relevance is always king. An SEO guru might complain this is over-simplification, and they'd be right--but just as in life, in business simpler the better. That said, here are 5 simple things you can do to improve search placement for Fixed Ops:

1. Because relevance is king, separate out a page, or better yet, a group of pages within your website, solely dedicated to service, parts and accessories. By building this mini-site within your site, you're creating more concentrated relevance for service searches, which will further elevate your value (relevance) in the eyes of the search engines, catapulting you closer to the top results.

2. When creating these service pages, make sure you create unique meta-tags specific to service, parts and accessories. Just carrying over your templated tags to each new page won't work: it dilutes the message of service with your sales, certified and used cars focus.



This may require a little wrangling with your web provider, as many have very restrictive templated designs, but it's worth it.

SEO Delivers Far Better ROI Than Pay-Per-Click

Dealers keep throwing big bucks at paid search, but the facts are: 87% of all clicks come from 'free' search results, not paid ads, and searchers are up to six times more likely to click on organic results than any paid listings. Automotive search term prices spiked 300% in 2007, and cost-per-click for service is running higher than either new or used vehicle terms, hitting \$5.23 a click last year. Most would agree that in this abysmal vehicle sales climate, finding new, smart, affordable ways to drive service revenue has never been more crucial. Dealers simply need to get a service department SEO game plan.

Shoot High and Stay the Course

Of course, the difference between "pretty good" and "awesome" search penetration is a function of many more complex, small details in aggregate, and this is where it can become challenging for your Internet manager to keep up with your competitors who are increasingly taking SEO many steps further. But the tips outlined in this article create a solid foundation on which more advanced tactics and components can be built. Ideally, it takes an expert, or better yet, a dynamic, automated system to manage SEO tasks. Because optimizing a website is not a 'one-off' deal: achieving top search placement is a constantly moving target, requiring a constant, ongoing process for long-term results. Studies show that dealers who've adopted these aggressive solutions see an average 165% growth in Internet-generated service calls into their dealerships—not to mention the powerful impact on new and used sales leads. That's probably why a recent, national poll of U.S. marketers revealed that in these tough recession times, the No. 1 tactic they'll be investing in over the next 6 months is...SEO.

3. Create service, parts and accessories content within each service sub-page to give the pages body, and make sure to keep your tags and content fresh over time, to maximize your value to the 'spidering' search engines. Optimally they like to see a little something new every time they visit.

4. While the use of Flash may captivate your site-users, be sure to retain some contextual service-related relevance on the page--and/or employ new best practice techniques for making flash files relevant to search engines. As a rule, simpler, flash-free sites are far more search-friendly.



5. Place your service department phone number on the results links that come up in searches. A significant percentage of searchers grab your number, without clicking through to your site. Make sure separate, prominently placed numbers to your sales and service department appear on every page of your site. Set up a dedicated local or toll-free number for service, to manage inbound call traffic. The Internet is all about instant gratification...make it easy for people to reach the service department, without bouncing around reception, etc.



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