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The DATA that DRIVES GOOD DESIGN

Insights and Approaches to Build
Your Best Digital Storefront Experience

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Abstract

As a market leader in automotive dealer websites for more than two decades, Dealer.com continuously evaluates market forces along with the granular details of what vehicle shoppers and vehicle buyers expect when visiting your website. The qualitative and quantitative data we analyze informs Good Design.

We have the team to put this data to work. The Dealer.com User Experience Lab is the data-driven product design team for our website platform, and is the team that puts this data to work. This group of designers, researchers, and analysts work together to turn behavioral metrics and attitudinal data into new, innovative features that consumers want to use. We use research and modern design patterns to devise experiences that build trust and grow engagement in one-to-one interactions while pushing the digital storefront into the future.

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How We Measure Engagement

Dealer.com's UX Lab collects website data in two dimensions: behavioral and attitudinal. Behavioral data provides insight into **what visitors do** on a site and how often. Attitudinal data provides insights into visitor impressions, expectations and **the reasons why** they clicked and responded as they did. Dealer.com uses eye-tracking, A/B testing, customer interviews, task analysis, and surveys to optimize its website designs, focusing on the types of content visitors are looking for and how they want to view it. This data also provides insights that can help any dealership optimize its own website to attract customers that convert more leads to sales.

Consumer Behavior on the Website

Dealer.com studies website engagement behaviors across the pages and devices most critical to the consumer.
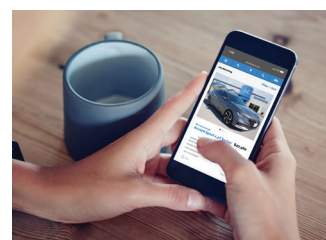
Where Consumers Shop

The homepage experience, the vehicle search results page (SRP) and the vehicle deal page (VDP) are the most critical aspects of the shopping journey. These pages attract the most shopper attention, as they contain the tools to cut though the sea of options, helping shoppers find the fastest path to the perfect vehicle.

How Consumers Shop

The majority of consumers (58% and growing) are searching for their vehicle information on mobile phones, followed by 43% on desktops or laptops, and another 7% on tablets. The mobile experience should be optimized first, or dealers will lose customers.

How Consumers Access Inventory

From a combination of behavioral and attitudinal data, the path traveled by shoppers both into and through a dealership's Digital Storefront has been clearly mapped. For many, their journey begins with the homepage, which may be populated with targeted offers and vehicle recommendations based on current inventory. From there, the shopper will likely use a search tool to set the parameters of their query, leading to vehicle listings and the SRP. Selection of the vehicles returned by the search quickly results in navigation to a VDP, where the shopper will seek more detailed vehicle information and may look to begin the retailing process.

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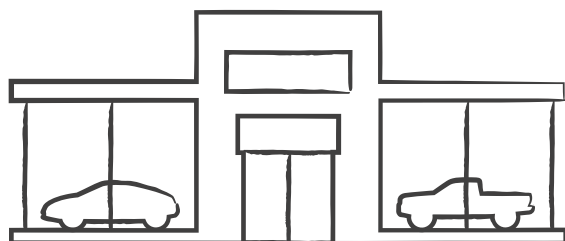# The Homepage: Making the Best First Impression

The homepage is the most valuable real estate for establishing a dealership's brand. Visitors spend 20 seconds or less on the homepage during their entire visit to the website, but more than half of visitors (52%) start on the homepage and at least 66% see the homepage during their visit, even if they don't start there. Dealerships get the most bang for the buck by prioritizing these homepage elements:

Value Statement

During our research, a Value Statement was a key differentiator. Shoppers want to know what makes your dealership better than another. That means highlighting manufacturer or customer service awards, third-party sourced reviews, charitable work or community involvement, and emphasizing a commitment to personal service.

Hero Photo

High-quality photography gives a positive impression. Photos of the dealership's exterior with the building entrance, signage or lot is the best option, along with interior showroom or facility shots. Another option is to use photos showing staff helping customers, clean service bays, or lifestyle imagery featuring popular models supplied by your OEM.

Fast Path To Inventory

Consumers want to drill-down to your inventory, and a homepage facet search—where shoppers are able to use filters to narrow choices—helps them search more accurately. When facet search and free text search are offered side-by-side, consumers chose a facet search 4:1. Dealerships find the most success including a facet search near the top of the homepage, and in our research, these were the most used homepage facets:

75%	59%	35%	18%
MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	BODY STYLE

Personalization

Consumers expect some level of personalization these days; they see it in their other eCommerce experiences. Dealers don't need to greet customers by name when they visit the site, but providing relevant, personalized vehicle recommendations and incentives make a big difference to the shopper. Recent research indicated that Website Visits who were exposed to personalized vehicle recommendations were more than twice as likely to submit a lead and viewed 175% more VDPs than when personalized content was not shown.*

*Website performance of a large automaker whose dealers leveraged Experience Optimization over a six month period. Based on this set of dealers, Visits where shoppers were exposed to personalized content through Experience Optimization were more than twice as likely to submit a lead than when personalized content was not shown. These visits viewed an average of 175% more VDP views per visit. January 1 - June 30, 2020.

The Data That Drives Good Design

SECTION 3

Finding the Right Vehicle in Your Inventory

While the homepage is the leader for establishing your brand and may be considered the gateway to all other pages on your site, there is one page that gets more views. The SRP is the most viewed page on the average dealership site; it's included in 82% of all sessions, making up more than 200 million visits across our network each month. The SRP has a huge job to do, and must cater to all types of shoppers: Searchers, Tool-Users, and Browsers.

Searchers

Searchers are confident in what they want, and are frustrated by website experiences that force them into predetermined paths that don't meet their primary motivations. Searchers make up the smallest number of online car shoppers, as many customers don't know enough to articulate exactly what they want through a search tool.

Dealer.com's SRPs cater to Searchers by offering features like auto-complete search suggestions, free-form or faceted searching, and more organized information that eliminates negative workflow. In testing, shoppers viewed fewer vehicles overall with no drop in lead volume. In other words, shoppers worked less to achieve the same result.

Tool-Users

A second type of car shopper, Tool-users, desire a more interactive online shopping experience. They like to set up parameters and manipulate information within a widget. These shoppers are the puzzle-solvers, the gamers, and the high-level explorers of online car research.
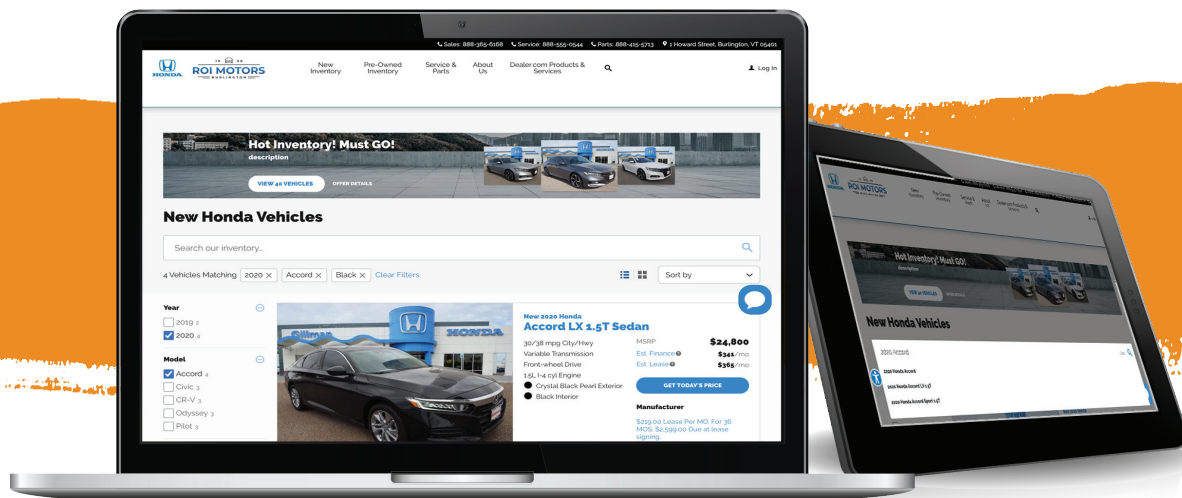
Tabbed Search Content and Search Facets allowed these shoppers to refine vehicle lists quickly and efficiently. Our new SRPs gives shoppers tools to interact with the car buying experience in a more intuitive way. Tool-Users favor mobile browsing, so mobile-minded menus make interacting with search facets easy for shoppers on-the-go. Interestingly, while designed for mobile shoppers, in testing these facets saw an uptick in use on desktop, suggesting easy engagement on any device.

SECTION 3 *Continued*

Browsers

Browsers consume whatever information is in front of them at the time, and may wander through different high-level categories of vehicles until they eventually find one that meet their needs. Browsers tend to be learners and explorers, a low-intensity strategy for finding the right vehicle.

Catering especially to these types of customers, our new SRP experience brings the Photo Carousel feature from the VDP further up into the funnel, and allows browsers to see additional product photos within the listings page. Moving this feature to the SRP provides another layer of engagement to help shoppers find the right vehicle. In testing, 35% of mobile shoppers and 16% of desktop shoppers used the photo carousel feature on the SRP. As a result, shoppers viewed fewer VDPs but there was no change in lead volume, as customers found what they wanted sooner in the shopping process.

SECTION 4
The SRP: Striking the Right Level of Inventory Detail

Pricing

Some visitors appreciate the detailed disclosure of discounts and incentives in listings, but a majority of visitors find it too overwhelming. Stacked pricing is especially problematic on mobile devices where space comes at a premium. Visitors use the SRP for high-level judgements. Showing a MSRP, total discount (including incentives and other discounts but not including conditional offers), and final price is a nice middle ground.

Vehicle information

While granular vehicle information like engine and packages are not recommended in the listing title, this information can provide value when included in the listing as secondary information. The advantage of including this information in the SRP listing, as opposed to only the VDP, is it allows visitors to do comparisons directly on the SRP and make informed selections sooner in the shopping process.

By watching consumer behavior and analyzing user needs, Dealer.com recommends including the following vehicle information in the listing:

- Odometer
- Body Style
- Seats
- Fuel
- Economy
- Engine
- Transmission
- Drive Line
- Exterior Color
- Interior Color
- Packages/Options

Vehicle Photos

When it comes to comparing vehicles, visual aids are an invaluable tool for shoppers. In addition, the type of photo may be just as important as the quantity. Data shows the importance of providing shoppers with photos and the value placed on actual photos over stock images:

- **38% OF MOBILE VISITORS** *engage the SRP carousel.*

- **19% OF DESKTOP VISITORS** *engage the SRP carousel.*

- **9% LIFT IN PHOTO VIEW RATE,** *which is supported by the fact that 1 out of every 3 visitors engages with the photo carousel.*

- *New vehicles with actual photos were* **30% MORE LIKELY** *to receive at least one lead in a seven-day period.*

- *Used and certified vehicles with actual photos were* **40% MORE LIKELY** *to receive at least one lead in a seven-day period.*

This performance suggests that used and certified vehicles are disadvantaged by stock photography more than new vehicles.

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The Digital Point of Sale

The VDP is the dealer's opportunity to get in front of the customer with specific vehicle information and current deals that can lead to a sale. With so many options and avenues for consumers to research vehicles online, it is critical to aggregate key elements of the research process on one page. The VDP is often the place where the customer makes the decision to contact the dealership for next steps on their buyer journey.

Photos

At least 60% of viewers interact with VDP photos. Viewers see six or more photos on average when interacting with the VDP photo gallery. Given the interest in the photos, we recommend using actual vehicle photos, not stock photos. Research shows that when more than 65% of the vehicles on a site display unique photos, shoppers spend at least 5% longer on the site and view 20% more VDPs, compared to websites using stock photos. Given the choice, 4 out of 5 shoppers prefer high-resolution photos and a full-screen gallery, as it allows them to view the vehicle in greater detail.

Pricing

Shoppers expect to see pricing details once they determine the vehicle matches their criteria. After vehicle information is displayed, share complex pricing information— MSRP, discounts and estimated lease and financing payments. For dealers featuring transparent pricing, "Confirm Availability" received the highest click-through rate (4%).

For dealers not featuring transparent pricing, here's the click-through rate for various pricing terms:	8.2% "GET TODAY'S PRICE"	7.3% "GET OUR PRICE"	6.0% "GET YOUR PRICE"	5.7% "GET EPRICE" (DEFAULT)

Call To Action Placement

To further optimize CTAs, place them in context to content. For instance, drop price-related CTAs next to the final price. Take this another step by ordering them by engagement, so better-performing CTAs are closer to the top of the page. Style the CTAs to help guide the shopper in recognizing order of engagement, making a high-contrast button the primary next step and a lower contrast button style for alternative next steps.
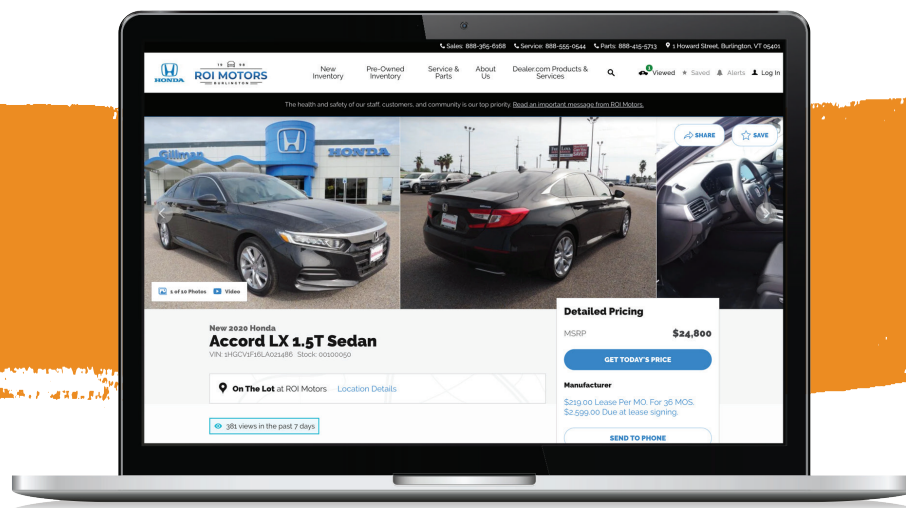
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SECTION 5 *Continued*

Digital Retailing

Once shoppers see the pricing information, help them understand what this will mean for them and their budget. Embed a payment calculator to encourage interaction. Our research shows that 30% of VDP visitors configure payments when offered the opportunity on the page.

Kelley Blue Book Reviews

Shoppers are used to seeing product reviews when contemplating online purchases. These reviews make a big difference in consumer decisions on whether to buy a product or move on to a competing one. Given the amount of money involved, vehicle purchases are usually researched more heavily by buyers. Having trusted and professional reviews available on the VDP keep the shopper on the site longer, while providing higher value and greater customer confidence.

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CONCLUSION

Build Your Best Digital Storefront

It's not enough to design a dealer website and forget about it. Just as showrooms are constantly reconfigured to keep them interesting and fresh, a dealer's website needs continued attention as well.

- Among new buyers, dealer websites were the top websites used to make vehicle decisions for 24-41% of buyers, depending on the brand, according to the 2019 Cox Automotive Car Buyer Journey research.

- In 2019, shoppers were visiting fewer dealerships in their search for a new or used car than they did just two years earlier. To get them clicking and walking in the door, dealers need to consider how easy they're making it for shoppers to find what they want, to price out their options and to make the purchase.

- A dynamic inventory search experience allows the shopper to gather individualized and specific information to help make decisions and take the proper next steps.

- The website should simplify the customer experience and create a true digital version of your storefront— creating a tailored, streamlined process for the car shopper and a more efficient, effective sales process for dealerships.

Fueled by UX research, data science and exclusive integrations with other Cox Automotive brands, Dealer.com websites deliver a full-service, personalized Digital Storefront experience designed to bring ease, efficiency, and delight to consumers wherever they are in their purchase or ownership process. Dealer.com delivers automotive eCommerce solutions that save time and help dealers build long-term customer relationships.

LET US HELP YOU BUILD YOUR BEST
Digital Storefront.

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