



DealerFire[®]
by DealerSocket



The **Truth** *about* **Automotive SEO**

A Car Dealer's Guide to Market Dominance in the Internet Age

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forward

SEO: What exactly is it?

Automotive SEO has evolved through the years, but much of the execution continues to lag

When I started at DealerFire almost 10 years ago, I was tasked with creating ongoing custom content for car dealers – something not many were doing in the industry at the time. Rather quickly, we were seeing positive results, and I was soon asked to build out a full team and creative strategy to keep up with the demand and develop our niche.

It became clear that we were on the cutting edge of the next wave of SEO – adding rich, relevant content to sites on a regular basis. And it made a lot of sense, even though it wasn't the traditional way SEO was thought of at the time. Back then, it was more technical SEO in terms of meta and overall structure – and most were selling those as their sole SEO services. But DealerFire already had that figured out, and it didn't make sense to charge extra for what should be expected. Our sites were rich with technical SEO elements. And starting with that solid foundation made our efforts even more meaningful in terms of content marketing.

Nearly a decade later, we're still seeing a lot of the same trends, as well as some new ones. Technical SEO within site development remains the cornerstone of quality SEO – and people are still charging for it. Content marketing is much more widely adopted, but a lot of providers are simply offering it, and not necessarily excelling or adding value with it. Other components have emerged as well – including on-site and off-site signals that are part of a full SEO and content strategy.

Given how many people know SEO is important, but still not necessarily why, I find myself having weekly conversations with industry professionals that don't quite have it figured out. And that's okay – unless SEO is your sole job, it's difficult to keep up with all the trends. And that's not to say that we've done everything perfect through the years. But all that experience of what works – and what doesn't – has led us to the position we are in today.

In that vein, we've crammed our knowledge into a playbook for you, in the hopes of being a part of the constant improvement in automotive SEO. If even a small portion of this is helpful to your dealership, we've done our job.

A spark is all it takes.

Wes Lungwitz

Director of Digital Marketing, DealerFire



Summary

SEO is more than just content marketing, but content marketing is SEO, and is a large part of a successful SEO strategy.

Think about how content affects your daily life as a business owner or marketer. It's not only the pages that you create on your website, but also the blogs that go on WordPress, or the posts that go on social media. Without content, SEO experts would have nothing to optimize for search engines. All of that code-level work to optimize a website would be wasted if not for the pages and posts that make up your digital showroom. Every link earned by every marketer points to a piece of content. And, most importantly, the keywords entered by shoppers are an attempt to find...content.

Ultimately, content gives your audience something to think about. It doesn't matter if you're selling sinks, or cars, consumers have questions that need to be answered, and the demand for those answers increases every year. What's more – the ways in which consumers seek those answers is diversifying. Handheld devices, voice search, social media, these are all avenues that have been discovered and optimized to ensure concise delivery of message. The only difference now is the quality of message – the best information must be engaging as well as visible, because gone are the days of simply optimizing your website using keyword stuffing. Today, we all have to be more prescriptive when curating content in an effort to attain and retain shoppers online.

Typical content marketing includes items on your website, like landing pages and blogs, but it can also include new mediums like podcasts, videos, and email marketing. The first step in any successful content marketing strategy is

Content isn't stuff we write to rank higher. Content is anything that communicates a message to the audience. Anything.

– Ian Lurie

CEO, Portent, Inc.

defining the audience you're looking to inform. Once your segmentation is complete, you should rely on the experts in your field (or in your business) that can provide the high value information that will start to make up your pages and posts. And, while timelines are important to continually create and deliver content, don't get discouraged if you don't see the immediate return on investment that you're used to. Most content strategies – especially in automotive – can take over 90 days to see results. That initial period is where more marketers give up, but it's where you can take over.

Take it from one of the more successful content generating platforms in the business – HubSpot estimates that marketers who prioritize blogging efforts at 13x more likely to see positive ROI.

PART I

The **SEO HEIST**



The SEO HEIST

Stick 'Em Up!

Most dealers don't realize that there are two main components to SEO: architecture and content. Architecture is the far sexier component, with terms like meta data, and schema markup. But, it's also the most technical and complicated, making it an easy tactic to deceive business owners.

A little history to get us going. Over a decade ago, marketers started flooding the automotive industry with new strategies around acquiring website traffic. So, why automotive? Car dealerships were just coming off the downturn and finally had inventory (and cash) to get their businesses going again. As the advertising dollars started to flood the market, again, some marketers offered dealers more bang for their buck by optimizing websites for search keywords. It started off innocently enough, SEOs were updating things like meta titles, descriptions and keywords to ensure their clients' websites were being found by consumers. Soon enough though, the "black hats" started to pile on, realizing that they could take advantage of the still relatively new search engine landscape, and optimize websites for things they had no relation to.

Lucky for all of us, Google and other search engines are crazy smart and have updated their algorithms over time, pushing out more of the unethical methods of optimization by prioritizing unique, original content. A decade later, and we literally have companies dedicated to understanding and deciphering search engine algorithms – Moz, Ahrefs, Raven Tools, and SEMRush.





As the advertising dollars started to flood the market, again, some marketers offered dealers more bang for their buck by optimizing websites for search keywords.

The dishonest providers are long gone, but now a new threat had reared its head – the SEO package. It sounds harmless enough, but hundreds of dealers nationwide have been swindled by those three little words. It's not anyone's fault necessarily, though. We know SEO to be an important part of our online success, and don't even get me started on bundles – who doesn't love a service packaged together at a discount?

The problem here lies with actual deliverables. Is \$1,000 a justifiable expense for SEO services? I guess it depends on what you're getting for that money and if the provider you're working with can justifiably explain that tactics that they are using. One thing is for sure, though, if the answer to your questioning is a simple "optimization", it's time to run.

The SEO HEIST

Increasing Quantity and Quality

SEO has become a bit of a mine field – how do you balance the duty of creating and content, and ensuring that it's appealing enough for users to interact with? The answer is quantity and quality.



Quantity

Some marketers believe that in order to drive traffic (and by extension - leads), you need to publish content often. If you're getting assets into the market at a break-neck pace, and they are mostly answering shoppers' questions, you're in a good spot. But, just because you have that Monday blog post due doesn't mean you should just drop a lame article because you need to be able to justify the time.



Quality

We've officially hit 'peak content' in automotive, meaning that dealers, marketers, Tier 1, Tier 2, 3rd parties, and more, are publishing articles at an astonishing rate. The competition to attain quality traffic is increasing every month, and simply being visible isn't a solution anymore. Instead of contributing to the noise, auto dealers need to be the lone signal in the noise. Authoritative information.

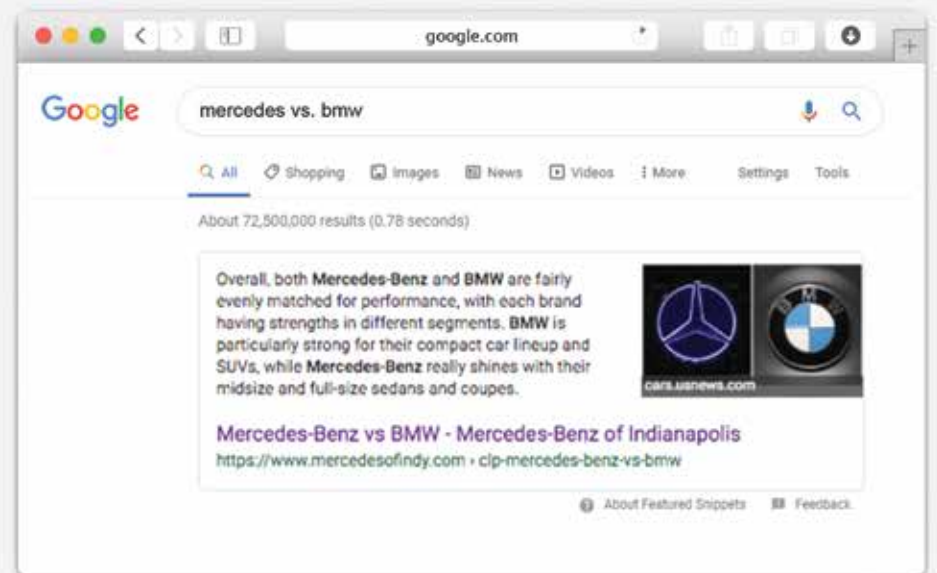
We need to think about content curation like product managers. We know that producing content is important, but we shouldn't be writing just to write. Our process around content development should meet the market demand and solve issues for consumers.

The SEO HEIST

Organic Explanation

**The best place to hide a dead body
is the second page of Google Search**

- Every marketer, ever



PART II

CONTENT *is* ALIVE!



CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

What is Content Marketing?

Content is the heart of what we do as marketers and business owners; we talk to our customers and what we say is our content.

Your website as a library

You spent all that time working with your provider to create the perfect website. The architecture is in place, and your digital storefront is now being crawled by search engine bots from across the internet. So, now what?

Think about your website as a brand-new library. It's just been built and has that brand-new building smell. The tables and chairs are in place, the computer system is up and running, and the elevators are up to code. But where are all the books?



Keyword
Research



Content
Research



Content
Writing



Graphic
Design



Promote
Share

Auto purchasers continue to research heavily online



75% of auto purchaser research time is spent on digital

Online is the initial source for car shoppers



talked to family
or friends



offline media
(TV, print, radio)

Source: Google

Content marketing is the books that fill in the shelves of your brand-new library. All different types of articles, how-tos, infographics, and more. The more books you have, the more people will be interested in visiting your library to get the answers they need. Even better, the more people that trust and refer your library create new opportunities for you to engage with (and influence) new visitors.

In automotive, content typical consists of on-site, and off-site. On-site items would include custom landing pages,

blogs, videos, and more. Off-site items would include press releases, social media, podcasts, etc. More channels are added every day, but your message should never change. The value proposition of why your business is the most knowledgeable about your product.

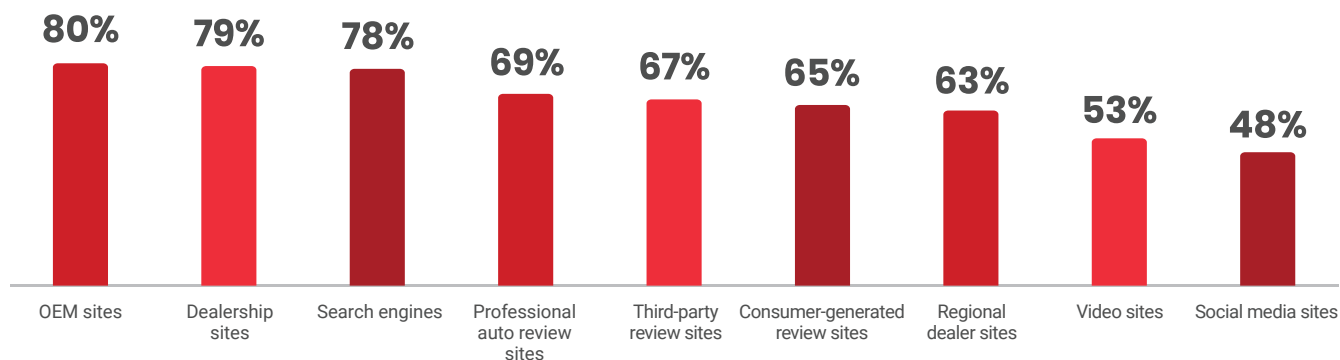
The respect and admiration of your audience will take some time to build, but once you've proven your knowledge and continue to deliver trustworthy information, your website will be the one shoppers turn to for advice

CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

It's More Than Being Found in Search

Being found in search is extremely important for your site. But consumers are using your site to research as well. Is your content making your site the authority – or are they going to your competitor?

Online resource usage Source: THINK with Google Automotive, 2019



Dealership sites are now closing in on OEM sites as the best resource for consumers to utilize in their vehicle search. But once on your site, it's more than just inventory. Having dedicated pages on each model that feature 100% unique content to your site that give all the details on the model, how it compares to the competition and how buying it from YOU is the best choice keeps them on your site. There is plenty of competition out there. What keeps a top-funnel customer on your site?

CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

The First Steps

Click-clacking on the keyboard is easy – it's busy work. Real content marketing starts with vision, a strategy that defines how and why your content will be created.

Two questions that bubble up during any marketing audit are “what are we doing?” and “why are we doing this, again?” Content is the method that helps you continually answer those questions internally. Consider your dealership and your audience. Where do you think both of those pieces will be in three years? The strategy you put into place will be your guiding light on the way to achieving those goals.

Successful SEO is not about tricking Google. It's about partnering with Google to provide the best search results for Google's users.

– **Phil Frost** Main Street ROI

Define your audience

We must understand who we're talking to. Do our users like to learn more about model releases? Do they enjoy seeing videos about service and maintenance? Is the majority of our traffic from our own primary marketing area? The five questions we should be asking?

1. **Who is our customer? (age, gender, location, etc)?**
2. **Where are they on the internet (what other sites do they frequent)?**
3. **What channels do they use to communicate (Twitter, Instagram, etc)?**
4. **Who do they listen to (a little thing called influencers)**
5. **What are their pain points?**

Take inventory

Even if you're starting from scratch, you're likely within an organization that has been around for a few years. If that's the case, you might already have a base of content to work with. Start a catalogue and score it against these 5 categories:

1. **Topic** – Create a list that encapsulates what you're trying to cover internally
2. **Length** – Is the content a feature / book, or is it short and sweet?
3. **Tone** – What's the voice of your dealership? Is it funny, educational, etc?
4. **Relevance** – How directly aligned with your business is the topic?
5. **Datedness** – Some content lasts forever, but make sure you know the expiration dates.

CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

Fresh, Relevant Content

If content marketing were easy, everyone would be on Google page one. It takes time, effort, thoughtfulness, and a fresh perspective on an old market.

Late in 2014, a newly drafted NFL quarterback took the NFL by storm. His name was Johnny Manziel, and he was one of the most polarizing players at the time. Football fans everywhere were transfixed by his nature – brash and cocky – and he was one of the most searched names in Google over a two-year span. So, what does Johnny Manziel have to do with content marketing for an automotive dealership? Everything.

You see, a small Mercedes-Benz dealership in Illinois realized that they could capitalize on Johnny Manziel's popularity at the time. It was well-known that Johnny was a fan of Mercedes-Benz vehicles, and was even driving a Mercedes-Benz C-Class before even entering the NFL draft. They constructed a simple content calendar to run the length of the NFL season, detailing

the journey of Manziel, and even speculating what Mercedes-Benz he might buy next. A simple blog post, "What Does Johnny Manziel Drive" was posted on August 22nd, 2014 and began to accumulate pageviews. Over a six month period, the post was viewed over 1,000 times and shared constantly on social media.

This is a great example of dealers putting a fresh, relevant spin on traditional automotive content. Sure, we can write about model releases, engine specs, and trim levels all day, but is any of that appealing to your shoppers or customers? They would much rather read a blog about NFL bust Johnny Manziel and the Mercedes-Benz he's driving than click on another article about the Mercedes-Benz C-Class Service Warranty.





**The best
marketing
doesn't feel
like marketing**

- Tom Fishburne

Founder and CEO,
Marktoon Studios

A word about duplicate content

No, copy and pasting content from another source to your website will not hurt your website indexing. It will, however, cause search engines to completely bypass your website, essentially causing the same effect. We're not copyright lawyers, but we can tell you not to steal someone else's work – this includes images. Feel free to attribute short portion of text, as well as quotes, but when in doubt, ask permission.

CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

Value to Searchers

How you treat a shopper that you've never met makes a huge difference in lead generation outcomes. Informative information is everything.

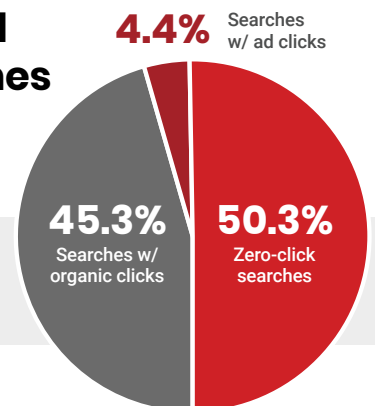


One of the more interesting facts to come from SEOs this year is that for the first time ever, over 50% of Google Search queries ended with zero organic clicks (SparkToro 2019). Crazy! That literally means shoppers are using Google as their store front, asking questions and getting answers before ever interacting with a brand or clicking over to a website. This is bad news, right?

Paid, organic, and zero-click searches in Google (June 2019)

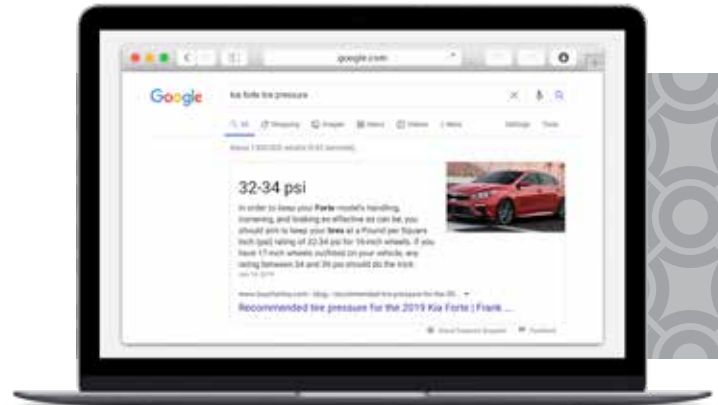
Data from 40M+ browser-based searches on millions of desktop & mobile devices in the United States

Source: SparkToro



It's good news if you're starting (or continuing) your content marketing strategy. Google and other search engines are starving for fresh, relevant content, so the marketers that develops with the best quality, end up with the best results. Remember, building all the content in the world doesn't mean anything unless someone clicks on it.

A good example of value to visitor is the “featured snippet”. These little boxes can be found on Google’s search results page and are formatted differently from other organic listings. Featured snippets help people more easily discover what they’re seeking. Take, for example “how to connect Bluetooth in my Volkswagen Jetta”. This is a very simple search string that will return a descriptive paragraph from a well-trusted website: <https://screencast.com/t/u0GEEMec3e>



**What helps people,
helps businesses**
– Leo Burnett

Dealers can capitalize on featured snippets by investing in their own dealership employees. We typically ask those customer-facing reps, “what are the top 10 questions you get from customers on a daily basis?” You’d be surprised by the responses, but it’s a great sample size to build some customized content around.



CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

Voice Search

It has been forecasted that 50% of online searches will be voice search in the near future.

Voice search and local SEO for car dealers

Consumers are regularly searching for local business via voice search. In fact, 58% of consumers have used voice search to find a local business within the last year. And 46% of voice search users look for local businesses on a daily basis.

As a car dealer, this means that you need to have your site optimized for local SEO. Title tags, meta description and on-site content that features rich geo-targeted keywords in the main pages like SRP and VDP and ongoing content pages is vitally important. A custom organic SEO strategy that gains your relevance within the markets that you want to pull customers from is key.

This includes custom pages in addition to the interior site pages. Geo-targeted automotive landing pages, pages on local sales and events, and much more are able to give a car dealer website the relevance it needs to stand out in local search – and in turn, voice search.

The other vital factor of local SEO and voice search is having your Google My Business page fresh and updated. Make sure your business hours, phone number, address and all the important information about your dealership

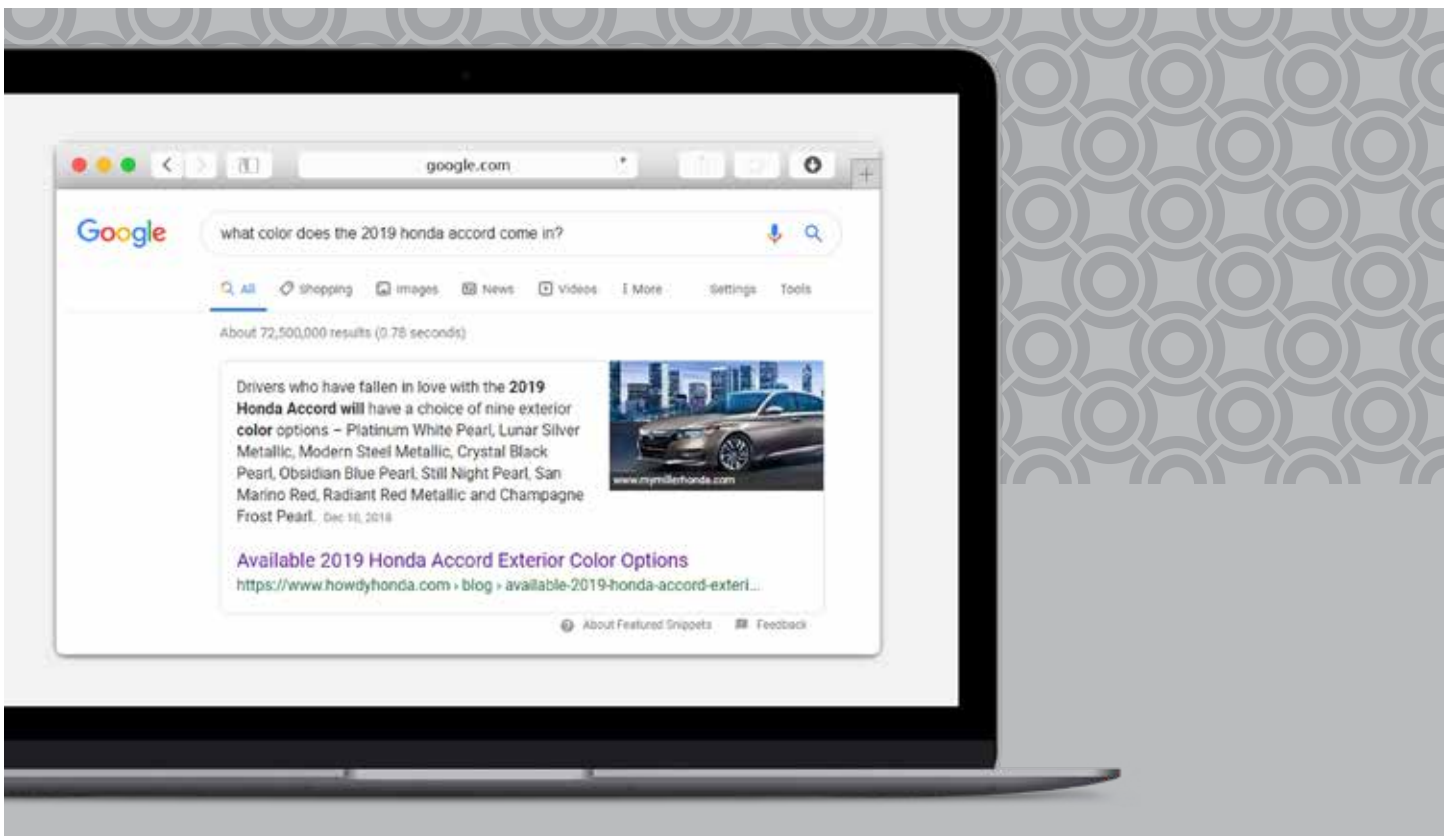


is completely current. This information can all help your dealership be found first with someone that is looking for a dealership using voice search. Getting your dealership to show up and then directing the consumer there via a map app is a quick way to a sale, as consumers are visiting fewer dealers than ever in person.



Voice Search and Vehicle Specific Searches

Another opportunity with voice search can be found in the form of vehicle-specific searches. Having your site's SEO structured to show up for relevant vehicle listings is a great way to get someone on your site via voice search. This includes pages that feature informative, digestible content about a given vehicle that will increase a dealership's relevance and chance to be offered up to certain voice search queries.



Featured snippets are a prime example of a great SEO voice strategy. These are the “0 results” that Google provides on a SERP that lay out the answer to the search query higher than the first result. While this Google tactic is much maligned by SEO professionals who feel that Google is taking away clicks, it's actually a huge opportunity for those that know how to leverage it properly.

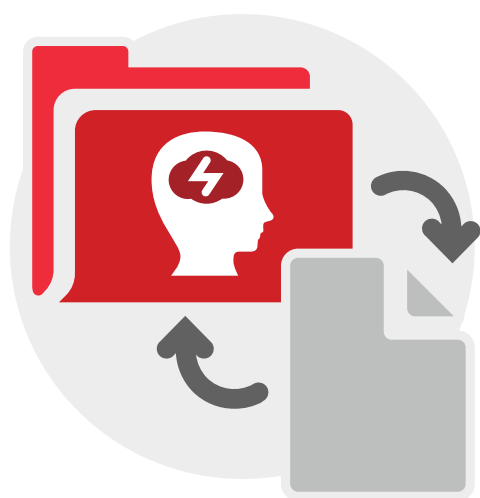
CONTENT *is* ALIVE!

Sparking Creativity

Ideas are everywhere, but a normal day at the dealership can stunt the growth of any content strategy. Identify your team and get the notebook out.

The spark file

The spark file is what we call our repository of previously developed content ideas. We know, a little on the nose, but the point is that everyone needs their own spark file. We'd recommend that it be digital, but if you're more of a pen and paper kind of marketer, more power to you. There are also some high-powered programs out there that can help you consolidate, categorize, and sort through your information, but in the short term, a OneDrive or Google Drive folder will do.



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is about four goals:

1. **Identify your team:** you want to identify and include the people from your dealership that have the most to contribute. Ideally, this would be people from both the sales and service side of the house.
2. **Open the field:** Focus on enabling participants in the early stages, as opposed to shutting down ideas that you don't agree with. You need to recognize the validity and connection of every idea.
3. **Find the spark:** Every idea needs to tie into your overall brand and marketing strategy, but you should also be seeking topics that stir interest, grab attention, and inspire action.
4. **Record everything:** This is why whiteboard rooms were designed. Designate a note-taker, or even just record the session audio, as you'll need to recall previous topics and conversations to find the root subject of your content calendar.



In a sea of mediocre content, a brave tone can be a big differentiator

- Ann Handley

Head of Content, MarketingProfs

Competitive Intel

If you're trying to get a peek behind the curtain of what your competitors are doing, you need to understand that there are two types of competitors. First, your traditional competitors are right across the street and they can grab the attention of your customers. Secondly, your organic competitors are the business and websites that you compete against within the SERP. Identifying your closest competitors in both categories will help you define a value proposition that follows your dealership's strategy.

PART III

GETTING STARTED *with Content*



GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Keyword Research

It's important to understand what your audience wants to find. Keyword research can help you identify key competitive advantages in your market. It takes time, but it's worth the effort.

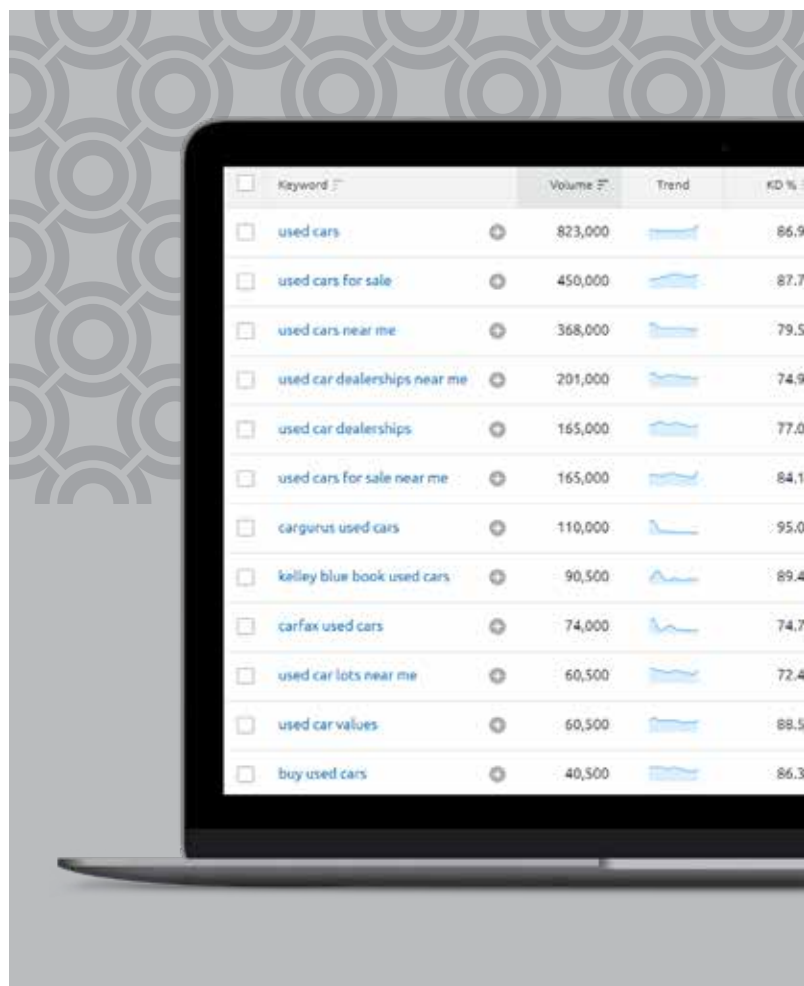
Existing keyword analysis

Generally, there are three questions that you're trying to answer when creating a keyword strategy:

1. **What are people searching for?**
2. **How many people are searching for it?**
3. **In what format do they want the information?**

We recommend creating a "master list" of products and services that you offer. The list doesn't have to be too detailed, but make sure to hit on the topics that really drive your business's profit centers. Once you have the master list, take the keywords that you're started with and run them through a free keyword explorer tool. A couple of our free favorites are: Moz Keyword Explorer and Google Trends. Using tools like this can help you expand your keyword diversity and give you a nice list to work with.

Next, take your keyword list from above and create your "competitor list". This should be a list of your direct competitors that currently show for keywords that you drop into Google. This strategy will give you some insight into who is developing content around your market. You'll want to focus on local competitors, however, since sites like AutoTrader and CarGurus will always show in top positions because of domain authority.



Remove branded keywords

You may have realized this already, but your keyword strategy does not have to include your business name. Lucky for you, Google recognizes digital business properties via GMB (Google My Business), so you're likely already represented in search for users looking for your exact name.

PRO TIP:

Create an FAQ page for your website! Discovering what questions people are asking in your market – and adding those questions and answers to a page can yield incredible organic results.



Competitor keywords

Once your keyword list has been expanded, you'll want to start moving in different directions. Our recommendation is to prioritize high-volume keywords that your competitors are not currently ranking for. You're really looking to take advantage of your competitors' missed opportunity, here.



GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Local SEO

Every dealer's dream is to rank nationally for high-volume keywords, but it's a tough climb. Instead, focus on local optimization with the following strategies.

Do the math

Outside of paid results, there are 13 total organic results on Google's first page. Some of those spaces grab more attention than others – like Google Maps listings, and featured snippets. On top of that, higher ranking websites like AutoTrader and CarGurus will likely grab the first few organic spaces. That means that you have limited space to show up to localized results, especially if you're in a competitive market with 10+ dealerships.



Local SEO

Local SEO is all about ensuring search engines know where your business is located. While there are some code-level architecture requirements (we'll get to this on the next page), you also want to make sure your quality content has location signifiers. There is no magic number of times that your dealership's city should be mentioned in pages and blogs, in fact you should keep any mention conversational and engaging.



PRO TIP:

Create service content to stand out in the crowd. According to Google, customers that service their vehicles at your dealership are 4x more likely to buy in the future.



A word on national results...

National results are sexy. They are the peak of content optimization and can really wow your Dealer Principle. They can also be a bit misleading. A few years ago, we found the top of this mountain with the keyword "Mercedes-Benz vs BMW". Over 200 million results within Google, and our dealer was on page one – cool! But, at the same time, the dealer was seeing their website conversion rate plummet, and bounce rate soar. Why? This national result was bringing in thousands of new users to the

website daily, and it was essentially trashing the analytics for the dealer. Someone from 4,000 miles away is likely never going to buy a car from them, but they still factor into these vanity metrics.

When this happens, keep calm. Remember, Google Analytics was not built specifically for automotive. A simple filter or segmentation of users entering the site through that page URL is easy enough to apply.

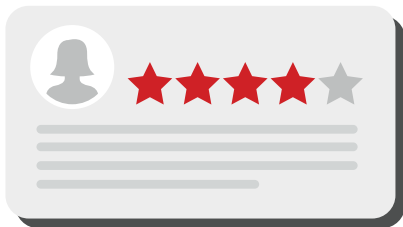
GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Google My Business

If you aren't paying attention to your GMB page, you should be. GMB is one of the keys to dominating local search...and it's free.

The GMB basics

Your dealership's GMB listing gets a ton of views every day. When it comes to local SEO, your GMB page is not only a main landing spot for consumers, but it provides a large amount of click-through traffic to your site. Creating separate sales, service and parts listings, in addition to optimizing the categories of each page, can help your site show up in search much more often, especially on mobile.



Reviews

Another huge factor for GMB is customer reviews. This is where every customer review that is submitted to Google is housed. If nothing else, you should be responding to reviews – negative and positive – because consumers are absolutely reading your reviews.

If you have someone doing reputation management for you, make sure to prep them for the best ways to either respond or notify you of poor reviews. Leaving reviews unanswered doesn't look good in the eyes of consumers. For negative reviews, it can signal that the dealership does have these problems, as there is no response to say otherwise. On positive reviews, it can be deflating for someone that leaves a positive review to go unrecognized.

PRO TIP:

Load some of your specialst in as Google Posts – it's free placement of great offers you have going on, right on your GMB listing.

Q&A

The Google My Business listing also offers the opportunity for customers to ask, and answer, questions.

First off, literally anyone can ask and answer questions. As a business, you should be addressing the questions that require your attention, while ensuring that the answers that may already be there are accurate. Unanswered questions from the business can be even worse than an un-responded to review – as it is obvious to everyone looking at that section that the dealership didn't bother to reply.

Secondly, there is often lead potential in the questions. For example, people may ask if you service certain vehicles or how long a vehicle special applies. If you didn't follow up with that person, you are missing out on potential conversions.

Google posts

A somewhat new feature that Google is offering is Google Posts – this is essentially free advertising space on the Google My Business listing. The posts contain an image and a call to action for the consumer to take.



The categories that the posts can cover include Product, What's New, Events and Offers. It's a really good idea to keep fresh posts displayed on your page every month.

GETTING STARTED *with Content*

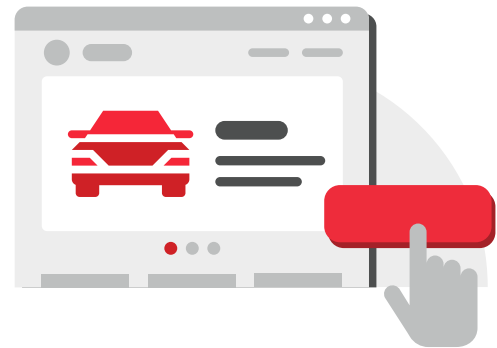
Fire Up The Engine

The keyword research has been done, and the competitors have been named. Let's get to work with some of the more pressing tactics.



Install a blog

If you're working with a known website provider, the odds are good that you can install a blog, whether it's proprietary or hosted through WordPress. Your website's blog is really important because it gives Google and other search engines reason to continually re-visit the website – "oh, look another post!" We refer to blogs as the "story of the dealership" because they are meant to be written less formally than traditional website content. They can focus on things happening at your dealership, in your community, or even with your manufacturer. You'll always need a hook for your blog posts because you want to ensure they are the most engaging content you write.



Custom landing pages

Custom landing pages, or CLPs, are the perfect introduction for consumers looking to use your business for information. Your OEM will typically provide you with CLPs if you're enrolled in a certified program (like CPO benefits, or service plans), but you want to make sure you're balancing the Tier 1 content with your own. CLPs are written a bit more formally and tend to include things like model release info, events, special inventory segmentations, or offers. No matter the subject, you'll always want to make sure these pages contain a "next step" for the shopper, as in, what should I expect the shopper to do next (submit a lead, call my dealership, print a form, etc).



PRO TIP:

Find your community's event calendar online. This will help you plan blog posts to coincide with popular things happening in and around your town.



Social media posts

The great thing about content is that it only needs to be written once and can be shared thousands of times. Think about your content generation as the knowledge of your website. If you're creating, you're filling your pipeline with relevant information that just needs a distribution channel. Re-post links to your blogs on Facebook and Twitter. Add your website infographics to Instagram. These are all organic tactics that cost nothing to put in front of people where they spend the most of their time.

GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Fire Up The Engine (Cont.)

“Content is king.” That’s one of those common SEO buzzwords used so often that it makes content marketers cringe when hearing it. That said, as clichéd as the phrase may be, it’s just as true today as it was when Bill Gates first coined the term in 1996.

Creating content isn’t the same as it was in 1996. It’s not even the same as it was 5 years ago. SEO is always changing, and your dealership’s customer base is changing along with it. So, in an ever-changing digital world, what should content look like and how do you create it? And we’re not just talking about what content marketing and SEO should look like in 2020, but also what it should look like in 2021 and beyond.

Content marketing is more popular than ever, and for good reason... It works and offers the biggest gains available in digital marketing. This means that it’s also more competitive than ever. In the old days, you might be able to create a landing page or a blog post every once in a blue

moon, have a few friends share it via email out of goodwill and feel relatively happy with the traffic it generated. These days, people are inundated with far too much website content to even care.

That may sound harsh, but it’s true. The internet is built around content, and it’s content that is generated by anyone, whether it be a business, news publication or your neighbor Jeff who spends most of his day posting blurry pictures of his lawncare efforts to Facebook. Some of it is low quality (looking at you, Jeff) and some of it is high quality, but altogether it makes up a very competitive landscape. To be successful in today’s SEO world, you need to stand out by accomplishing two main things:

- **Create content your audience cares about, whether it answers a question they have, provides information they would have difficulty finding elsewhere or offers them a unique deal.**
- **Create content that is visible. Sharing links with a few friends isn’t visible enough these days. As we approach the third decade of the new millennium, your content should not only rank on the first page of the search engine results page (SERP) but rank right there in those very top spots.**

PRO TIP:

Give your content marketing efforts time to build authority. Six months of regular, relevant content posting is when you should start to see results.

Featured snippets are the present and future of organic search

One of the biggest changes to content SEO in the last few years has been the rise of featured snippets. How many times in the last few days have you searched for something on Google and found the answer without having to even click on a website link? Probably several times, and the answer probably came from a featured snippet. That's because Google isn't in the business of delivering traffic to your website or any other website. It's in the business of providing the best experience possible to its users, and that means providing answers to user search queries as quickly and simply as possible.

Featured snippets are one element of SERPs that achieve this, pulling a snippet of content from a webpage that Google feels sufficiently answers a search query. That content is then displayed in an exclusive section at the very top of the search results (so exclusive, in fact, it's known as "position 0").

As we mentioned, getting your content showing on the first page of the SERP is good, but it often isn't good enough in 2019. To truly lead in organic search, you need to be competing for these snippets. If you don't, then your competitors will. Considering their high visibility, unless you want your competitor's receiving the lion's share of website traffic for a given search term, that's the last thing you want. Moreover, because Google has handpicked your webpage to answer a given search query, your website appears as a top authority on the subject for users.

Give your customers something to E-A-T

That authority is a big deal, not only in the eyes of users but in the eyes of Google as well. It is crucial to your long-term SEO success due to an acronym known as E-A-T.

It stands for Expertise, Authority and Trustworthiness. The acronym is relatively new in the industry, but the significance behind it is something that cutting-edge SEOs have included in their strategies for some time now.

Content marketing is SEO. If you're doing it right, the results will come. But you have to invest the time and effort.

- Wes Lungwitz

DealerFire Director of Digital Marketing

Today, you can't rank your website for any keyword you want... at least, not right away. It takes time to build up your expertise, authority and trustworthiness in the eyes of Google, and doing so requires a content strategy that is informative and engaging.

GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Fire Up The Engine (Cont.)

Automotive content for establishing your E-A-T

This content can take many forms, but it should always keep the components of E-A-T in mind. It starts with establishing your expertise by completing keyword research to understand what your audience is searching for. Authority comes into play when a user clicks into your webpage and receives a sufficient answer to their search query.

Let's consider the example of a blog post explaining how to sync a smartphone to a car's Bluetooth. Does the post outline clear step-by-step instructions, or is the information thrown confusingly into a few paragraphs? If the standard and available infotainment systems are different, are instructions written out for both, or just one? When it comes to trustworthiness on a local level,

are you providing information your community cares about, such as holiday events in your city or ways drivers can save money on their next oil change, or is the content just trying to push people into a sale?

As a dealership that has worked years to build a trustworthy brand, you know authority in an industry isn't built overnight. Finding true success on Google requires constant, dedicated efforts. But, here's the thing with E-A-T... Those long-term efforts result in long-term gains. Just as expertise, authority and trustworthiness aren't acquired in a day, they aren't easily lost, either, and will establish an SEO presence that can provide gains lasting years.

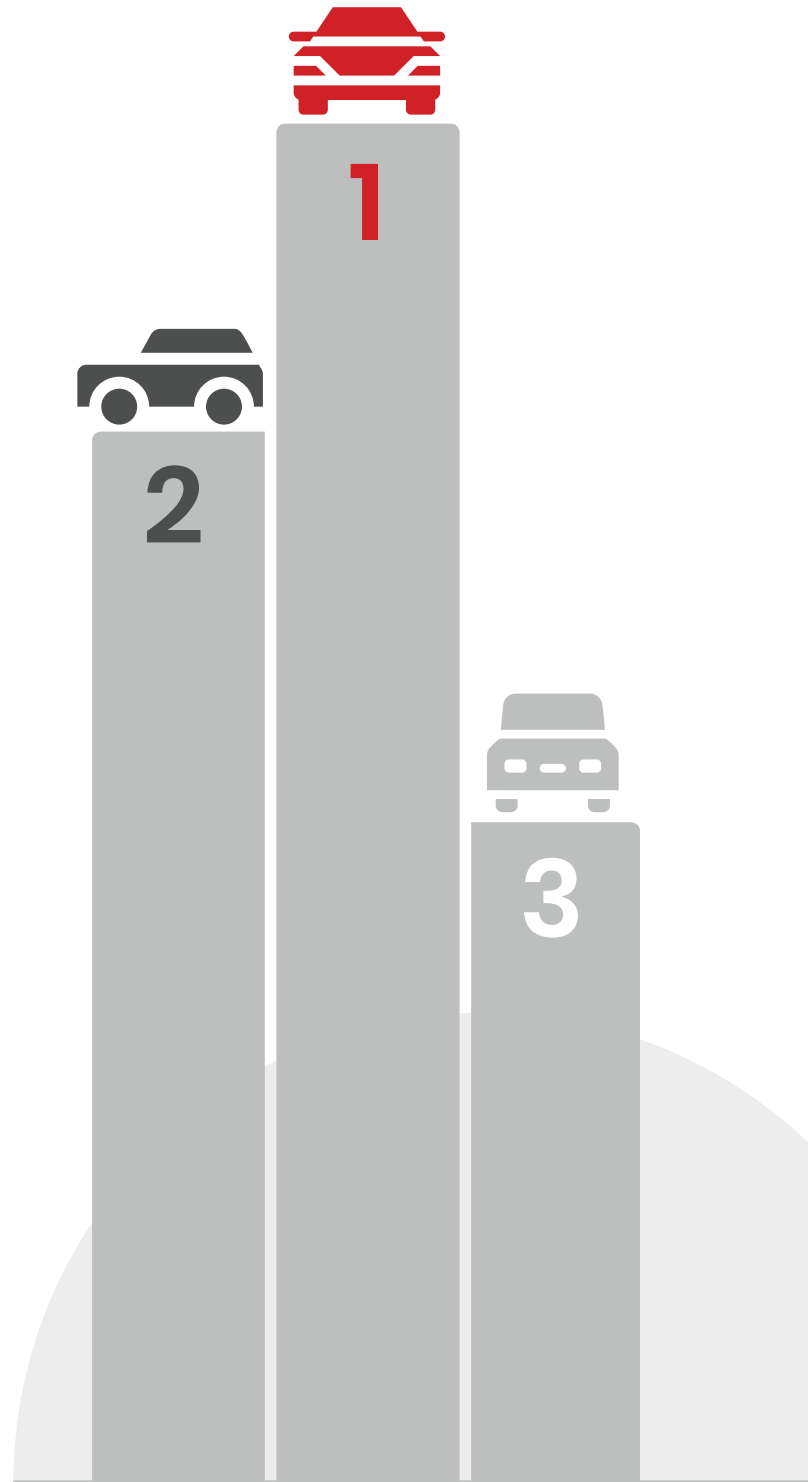


PRO TIP:

If you want to rank, your content needs to run deep and be useful to an incoming searcher. Think: “Would I read this if I were searching for a vehicle?”

So, what does SEO content look like in today's SEO world? It means taking the time to create content that establishes your dealership as an expert, an authority and a trustworthy member of the automotive industry and your local community. It also means staying up-to-date on the latest best practices, adjusting content strategies as needed and taking advantage of the changing SEO landscape through the acquisition of featured snippets.

Accomplishing this also means working with those who are experts in both the automotive and SEO industry. If you're unsure where your current content strategy stands, let us help. Our team will offer their expertise via a free website SEO audit. See what's working and not working, and what we recommend to keep your dealership successful in the digital space.



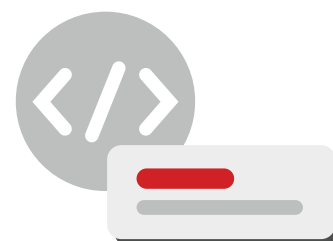
GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Page Optimization

Writing content and optimizing content need to go hand in hand. The following five SEO architecture elements will help your pages gain ground in Google.

Meta Title

This is the snippet of text that shows up in the tab portion of your browser (right above the URL address bar). It's also the title that displays as the link in Google's SERP. Meta titles should be no more than 60 characters and should contain your primary keyword or phrase, along with your city and state.



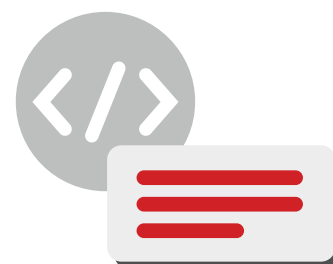
URL

Your website should allow you to set custom SEO rules, if not, time to find a new provider. When creating URLs, make sure to add location identifiers like /hybrid-vehicles-city-state. Setup 301 re-directs for any URLs that you're looking to change so you don't lose any of that link equity.



Meta Description

The meta description shows just below the meta title in Google's SERP. This approximately 160-character paragraph does not get counted within Google's ranking algorithm, but it can help persuade shoppers why your page has the information they are seeking.



PRO TIP:

Create an FAQ page for your website! Discovering what questions people are asking in your market – and adding those questions and answers to a page can yield incredible organic results.



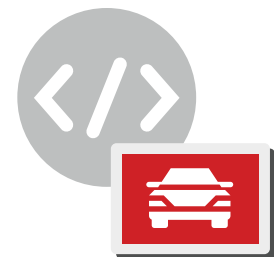
H1 Heading

The H1 is just one of the heading tags that can be added to your page, but it's also the most important, as it acts as the headline for the page's content. Try to be descriptive, along with local (add city, state), but don't let the H1 run too long.



Alt Image Tag

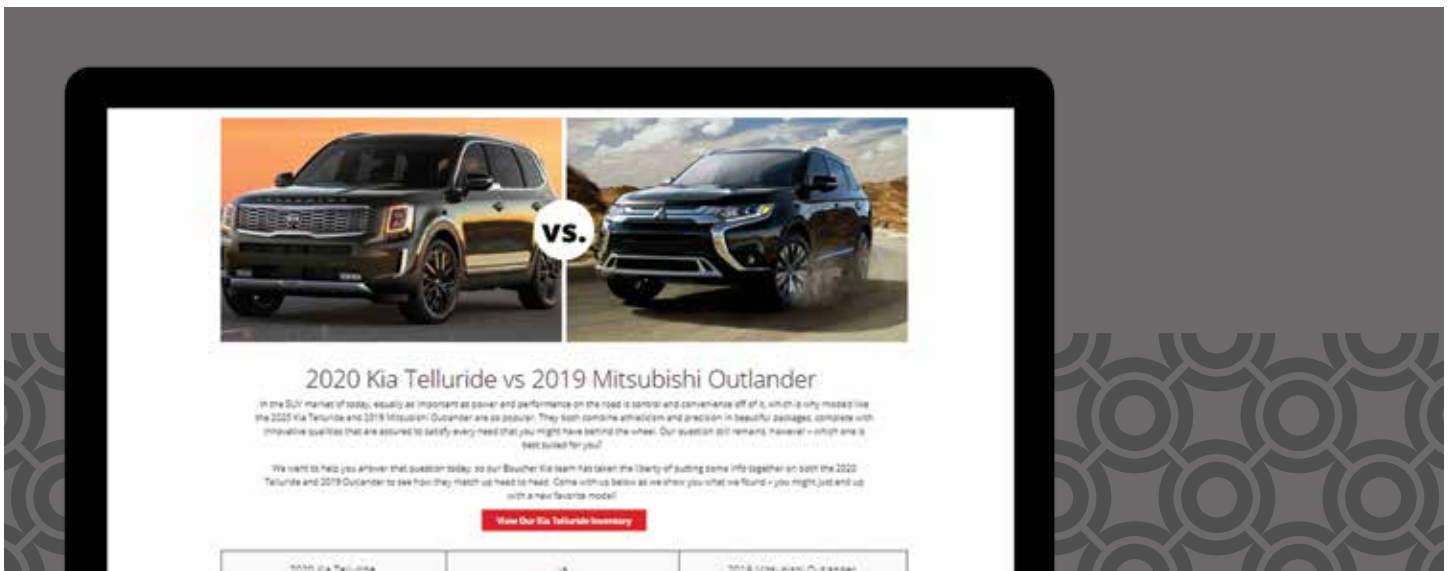
Did you know that Google and other search engines cannot read images? That's why it's important to add alt. image tags to every image that you upload to your website. This helps search engines identify the exact element. You can also include local signifiers like city, state here, as well.



GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Comparison Content

According to Google, 8/10 shoppers start their search with a brand in mind, but only 2/10 end up buying that brand. Your shoppers are more open to influence than you think.



Finding comparisons

Comparison content is extremely valuable. By creating custom landing pages on your website that outline the differences between like models from competing brands, you can gain search equity in your market for models that you don't sell.

Some of your comparisons will be easy, like your primary brand competitor. Maybe you're a Toyota dealer and

you lose business to the Honda dealer down the road. Other comparisons will be a little harder to find, like trim comparisons – what makes the Mercedes-Benz GLA250 different from the GLA250 4MATIC? Either way, a good exercise to find relevant comparisons to to venture over to Google. Simply type in your most popular models with the “vs” keyword. The top instant results will be your primary targets to start your comparison campaigns with.

**PRO TIP:**

Don't water down the organic relevance of your comparison content by inserting too many comparisons into a single page. Sure, it's cost effective, but it won't help you rank any higher.

Don't skew the details

You'll be tempted to make your manufacturer's model look more attractive. Resist. Remember that consumers are looking for the most relevant information for their search. They are not looking for you to tell them why they should purchase one model over another. Instead, focus on the popular details for each model: packages, MPGs, MSRP, etc. If the content is compelling enough, you'll nurture consumers to return to your website for more information later.

One of the more interesting trends we see when implementing content marketing is a strong correlation between organic traffic and direct traffic. If consumers are getting the information they desire from your website via search, soon enough they'll skip Google and go straight to your domain.



GETTING STARTED *with Content*

Measure Results

It's important to understand what your audience wants to find. Keyword research can help you identify key competitive advantages in your market. It takes time, but it's worth the effort.

Organic segmentation

Your provider can help you create important segmentations within your analytics. The first segmentation that should be set is a comparison of website traffic with and without content marketing. When you build content, make sure you're using custom tags in the URL to identify which pages to segment. Tags like /clp-toyoya-camry-city-st, or /blog-how-to-setup-bluetooth can help you segment fluidly. Your comparison should compare traffic and leads.



Search positions

Use your initial keyword list – the master list – to create a report of search ranking positions. This will help you keep track of visibility progress through your content calendar. There are some free tools for this, but the best versions are paid (like SEMRush).

Google is always releasing information on algorithm changes. Don't get too hung up on the small changes, as they happen all the time. Instead, be on the lookout for wholesale changes that could affect your previous strategy. If you're focusing on quality, you'll be fine.

PRO TIP:

Ask your provider to build a custom Google Data Studio report to focus on your content marketing efforts.



Vanity metrics

It seems that each quarter, a new automotive-specific metric is released by an industry consultant. Keep your eye on the prize by focusing on what metrics really drive your business. Your goals might not be the same as other dealerships because your strategy is going to be unique. Are you looking to grow your organic traffic, your organic leads, or maybe just your social media following? One specific metric that you should avoid is bounce rate. Any marketer investing in content knows that they have total control over the written text, and absolutely zero control over the ranking. If a specific piece of content “goes national” it means that you’re going to see a lot of new users from new markets. If your bounce rate starts to climb, it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re attracting bad traffic, it means that you’re content is extremely useful, so keep at it!



PART IV

Avoiding **CONTENT PITFALLS**



Avoiding CONTENT PITFALLS

Blackhat

Blackhat SEO refers to the unethical practices to help a website rank higher in Google. Often, a website doesn't know that unethical methods are creating issues.

True Blackhat SEO has been chased out of automotive for some time, but there are still some methods being used that don't necessarily help your website's ability to rank. While we wouldn't consider these are deal-breakers, they are typically used by marketers looking to find shortcuts to the top of search results pages.

Keyword stuffing

This tactic attempts to "stuff" ranking keywords into a website's meta tags, visible content or backlink anchor text to gain an unfair rank advantage with search engines. Have you ever seen a page with "dealership name city, state" plugged into every paragraph? Yeah, that's stuffing.



Duplicate or low-quality content

You probably remember this from your school days. Don't re-use or re-purpose someone else's work. Google has since removed their algorithm penalty on duplicate content, but search engines will just ignore any content that is sourced from another website, netting you no gains.





City or doorway pages

City pages used to be quite popular in automotive but have recently fallen off the map due to their limited effect. These pages were developed to grab multiple organic slots in search results, but then lead users to essentially the same central page. You've likely seen the "Dealer Name Serving City, State" pages making their rounds in your market.



Avoiding CONTENT PITFALLS

Dishonest Providers

SEO has gotten so vague that most dealers don't even know what they are paying for anymore.

Put all previous relationships and connections aside. Your dealership's marketing budget needs to go to work and providers need to be held accountable. In most cases, a few simple questions can usually differentiate the honest SEO providers from the dishonest ones.

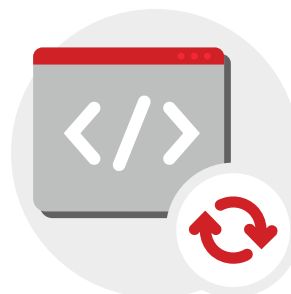
Define deliverables

Before you get that \$1,000 SEO quote, ask your provider to outline the exact services to be performed. Will they be creating content? Will they be re-writing meta data? If so, how many pages per month? This will help you both stay on the same page and calculate an ROI during your reporting sessions.



SEO audits and meta updates

Occasional meta updates are good for your website, but constantly updating the same pages won't bring any success, in fact, it can hinder your efforts as search engines need time to crawl and index content.



Backlinks

The number of backlinks is only important if users click on them. Tools like SEMRush will provide a report of the number of backlinks pointing to your website, but don't get caught up in this vanity metric.



Number one rankings

If a provider guarantees a number one ranking, it's time to get out. Although some providers have gotten very good at estimating the reach of specific content, no one can instantly game Google and other search engines. SEO has turned into more of an art than a science. It takes hard work and patience to find the right mix of quantity and quality.



Results of a Cohesive SEO Strategy

Implementing a strategy that includes both website architecture optimization and content development results in higher visibility and engagement.



Standard Website

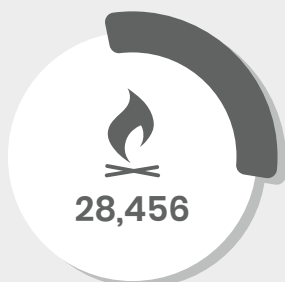


Standard Website + Standard
SEO Strategy with Content



Standard Website +
Cohesive SEO Strategy

Average organic VDP pageviews



Average organic pageviews



110,842



217,592

96% higher than base website



469,834

324% higher than base website



The ROI of SEO

While increasing organic traffic is a given with a strong SEO content strategy, tracking traditional ROI is often overlooked. But the data proves that consistent content development produces more leads, and ultimately, sparks more vehicle sales.



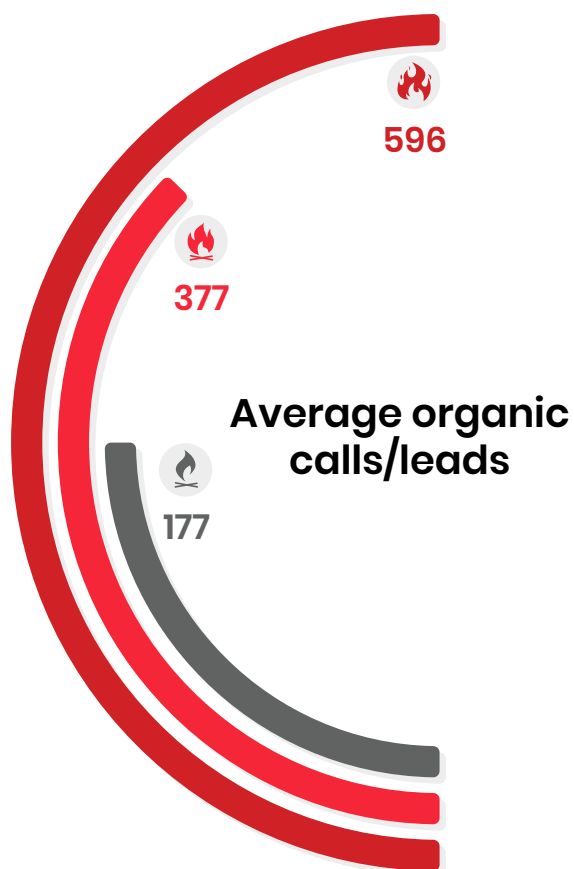
Standard Website



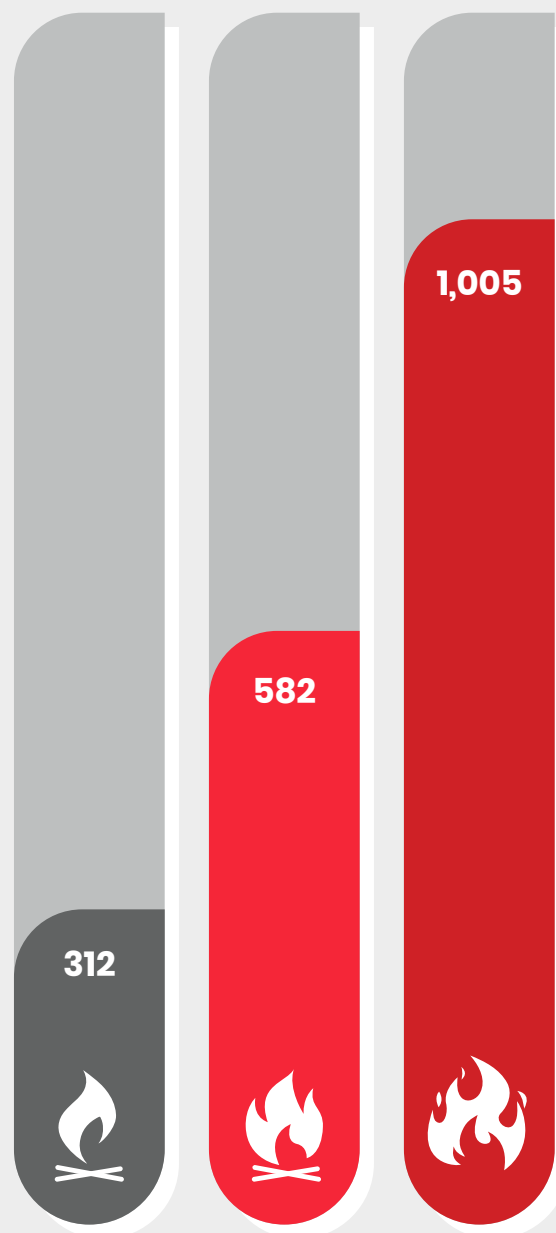
Standard Website + Standard SEO Strategy with Content



Standard Website + Cohesive SEO Strategy



Average organic form fills/leads



Notes

Notes



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Learn more at dealerfire.com/seotruth or call 833-873-5624