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How Scott Robinson Honda Revamped Their Web Site to Compete With Some of the Nation's Top Dealers to Win

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FACE OF THE DEALERSHIP

How Scott Robinson Honda Revamped Their Web Site to Compete With Some of the Nation's Top Dealers to Win

They compete against some of the highest-selling dealers in the country, in a time of economic downturn, when technology is changing the landscape faster than most dealers' ability to keep up with it. With all these reasons to "go along with" the recession, Scott Robinson Honda is winning. The third-generation family owned dealership has more than doubled its sales from Internet leads, and generating an incredible amount of appointments made from online customers.

AutoSuccess recently talked with General Manager Eric Bolstad, Marketing Director Chris Carlson and Internet Sales Director Crystie Lucero to see how they did it, and why they believe the best is yet to come for their dealership.

AutoSuccess: Eric, describe your dealership's market area.

Eric Bolstad (general manager): We are a metro Los Angeles dealer, in an above-average affluent community (one of the nearby communities, Manhattan Beach, is one of the most expensive areas to live in the state of California). There are seven or eight other Honda dealers within 30 miles, and two of those dealers are in the top 15, if not the top 10, for overall sales in the entire county. We're on a major thoroughfare, and currently, there are eight or nine dealers still on the boulevard.

AS: Sounds like pretty stiff competition. What have you done to increase your share of the market?

Chris Carlson (marketing manager): We spend at least 85 percent of our marketing budget on the Internet. We don't do much, if any, print. We don't do radio or TV. We've done a ton of video search using TK Carsites, and a lot of little things like press releases on relevant things about what we're doing with the store. We've revamped the BDC for a more thorough process on handling leads that come in.



"To me, the web site is the face of the dealership. The stronger your Web site, the stronger your Web presence, the stronger you appear in search engine optimization, key word search, videos, etc., I think the more successful you're going to be." - Eric Bolstad

AS: Prior to that, how were sales?

EB: Two or three years ago, we were what you'd call a traditional dealer. We didn't really have a BDC. We had an Internet department, which consisted of Chris, Crystie and another employee. They were responsible for handling their deals from start to finish. They'd work the numbers, and they'd deliver the vehicles. Through the help of Dealer Synergy, we put in a BDC, which Crystie has been in charge of, and hired a bunch of call center representatives to make as many appointments as possible, and it's proved to be a huge success. We are getting somewhere in the neighborhood of 70 to 80 percent of appointments shown to appointments made. It's incredible.

CC: We went from selling 30 to 40 vehicles a month between the three of us before to as many as 90 now, with six people making phone calls and turning leads over to the showroom.

AS: Any surprises in that process?

Crystie Lucero (Internet manager): In the beginning, it's hard to have everybody on script, because we were used to doing things one way, and then we changed everything, so it was a little tough getting my older employees to change how they were doing things. But once they saw results from it, everyone was all for it.

Also, before, they didn't have to make a certain number of phone calls; now we have 100 calls a day minimum, and they can see the results from that. They can see people come in and buy cars from that. Everyone is on board now and doing a great job.

AS: What role has your revamped Web strategy played in the dealership's success?

EB: Everything if you ask me. The problem is that third-party lead providers are so expensive, and your closing percentages on them are very, very low — if you can get 10 percent you're considered a god in the industry, but face it; most of us can't get that. So we spend a ton of money trying to recruit customers into our dealerships from other Web sites and a lot of dealers don't spend the time or the necessary energy to invest into their own Web site and make that your biggest marketing tool.

To me, the Web site is the face of the dealership. The stronger your Web site, the stronger your Web presence, the stronger you appear in search engine optimization, key word search, videos, etc., I think the more successful you're going to be.



An Interview by Susan Givens



Eric Bolstad



Crystie Lucero



Chris Carlson

I know for a fact we're one of the very few dealers who have the guys dedicated to maintaining our Web site on a daily basis. We decided to make this move about two years ago, and it's proven to be a huge success because there's so much data, so much information that you're trying to share with the consumer when they come to your Web site that it has to be accurate, has to be up to date, it has to have the latest and greatest specials and incentives that you have to offer to your consumers to get them in, but at the same time, it also has to tell a story about who you are as a dealership and what you're all about. What do you stand for? I think we've done an outstanding job of doing that and have had huge success because of it.

CC: And we give a lot of credit to TK Carsites. I've already seen a huge spike in lead generation for our Web site since we've been using them. The leads that the new Web site is generating for us are almost double of what we were getting a couple of months ago.

EB: I spend a lot of time looking at other dealership's Web sites, especially my competitors', and it's amazing how, when you click on their specials, it says "come back soon" or "under construction."

We're a little "mom and pop" dealership, third generation, so for us to compete in a market that's dominated by corporate chains and multi-franchise type operations, it's not easy. It's like David going up against Goliath. But we've found a way to knock the big guys down a little bit, and that's the Internet, maximizing our Web site and bringing as many people to that Web site as possible. We get it. We've seen how the Internet has changed the car business, and we've decided to roll with it instead of fight it.

AS: Describe your sales process.

EB: When a customer has an appointment scheduled through the BDC, the BDC representative will set the appointment with a specific sales manager on duty. When the customer comes on the lot and they're greeted by a sales associate, the customer will say they have an appointment to see one of our sales managers (they ask by name), and right then and there the sales associate knows the customer had an appointment made through the BDC.

At that point, the sales associate will walk the customer in and introduce them to the sales manager, and the manager will come out and basically say, "Hi, welcome to the dealership, what is it you're interested in?" At that point, they'll turn it back over to the sales associate and say "he/she will go out and show you the vehicle, and answer any and all of your questions, and when you're ready to come back down and get serious, that's where I'll come back into play and work all the numbers for you." It's very non-invasive, very inviting, very welcoming. The customers seem to like it because they always like to know there's a manager working on their behalf, and from that point, it just follows the normal sales process.

CL: We also have a digital appointment board that we put their names on. They come in and they can see themselves on the board. It's very personalized.

AS: What about other departments? Has your new Web strategy helped your fixed operations?

EB: What was really neat with TK's "Power of Five" strategy is having a spot for service, body shop, and parts department. We have videos of each department explaining where, when, why and how to use us, along with current specials.

That was critical when we launched a customer rewards program. That program has been huge for us. You have to think of it as, if you had a chance to talk to somebody who has never been to your store before and ask them why they should do business with you, that's what we use our Web site for.

CL: Using that value package is one of the things we go over in the BDC with every single customer we speak to — the value package, what makes us different and why you should do business with us. We do that every single phone call.

AS: What have you found that works best to generate leads?

EB: Specials, specials and more specials. On our home page, we treat it as our billboard, featuring whatever it is we're promoting, we're definitely noticing phone calls from that, with people coming to the store saying "I saw this particular special on your Web site, and that's what I'm interested in." We make sure that everything is up to date on the Web site and it's plentiful.

AS: What do you think is the main thing that lets you stand out from your competition?

EB: The traditional dealer I don't think is this deep into the game. I think they're still five years behind the technological curve. I remember going to NADA last year and being in a meeting where the speaker was talking about the use of video on your Web site, and out of 150 dealers in the room, I was the only person in the room who raised their hand when he asked who was using video.

A lot of traditional dealers are still going to fight the Web. They still think that things are going to go back to the way they were in the 1980s, and that's not ever going to happen. I think it's only going to get more Internet driven as time goes on.

For more information about the progress of Scott Robinson Honda, contact Joe Turner, the executive vice president for TK Carsites. He can be contacted at 866.432.8618, or by e-mail at jturner@autosuccessonline.com.