

Recapture 'lost' business by tracking calls

Facilities to provide dynamic trackable phone numbers to online car searchers are helping dealers to assess and improve the returns generated by their marketing.

Doing so can give dealers a better understanding of how their marketing mix works – where exactly a prospective buyer has looked online before picking up the phone – and what their staff need to do to convert more of these enquiries into sales.

Calltracks is working with a growing number of franchised dealers, including most of the 10 biggest groups in the AM100, and Stuart Buckley, its founder and chairman, said the company is helping them to understand what ultimately drives sales.

"The traditional way of marketing is that whatever brings the phone call in gets the credit, which is fine if you're doing a 'news about your car' letter offering to put them into a new one – that would be correctly attributed. But with digital it's quite difficult because you have all the different third parties, you have organic search, paid search, business. To measure that, it's about understanding the overall journey," he said.

Buckley believes Google is illustrating the problem cleverly, using images that show a journey from Tinder, through a first date, then a proposal, and finally a marriage.

"If you look at the traditional tracking method of 'last click', then the proposal alone would get the credit for the marriage, and not Tinder nor the first date," he said.

Another uses a hangover to illustrate the problem, with beers in a nightclub, then vodka shots, then a bottle of water. Again, Buckley said, using the last-click process, you would attribute the hangover to the bottle of water.

"It just doesn't stack up. So what we're trying to do is give some visualisation to the dealerships of how their marketing mix ends up selling cars." From that, dealers can understand they should be doing a little bit here and a bit there, he said.

The call tracking system uses dynamic numbering, which means that when a consumer visits a website it provides them with a unique phone number. This remains attached to them via a 'cookie', so Calltracks can track the journey thereafter.

"Marketing reporting is a bit like a clock face," said Buckley. "If all the components in the clock are there and working correctly, it will tell you the right information. But take some of those components out and who knows what you'll get."

"We are a part of dealers' wider tracking. You track your live chats, your form fills, your walk-ons, your 'value my vehicle', your test drives. If you haven't got the phone call in there you're missing this information."

Three times more enquiries come into dealerships via phone calls than from online forms or instant messages, according to Calltracks' research. Buckley said the channel is still so popular because almost two thirds of people are already using their mobile phone to search for their next car, according to Google data. When they need a piece of information they cannot find, such as when they can come in for a test drive or to check the price, 'click to call' is often the easiest and quickest way of finding it.

Google data shows 73% of online searchers for cars indicate they need help at some point, they like to have answers within three minutes, and 60% of usage is mobile.

While 10 years ago many people were still ringing dealers to request a brochure at the start of their search, said Buckley, the phone call has now moved towards the latter end of their journey just to get a quick answer.

"They want a human ratification. They are about to make a big decision and spend a lot of money, and before they do so in an invisible digital world they want to talk to someone and check that it feels right," said Steve Chippington, Calltracks' marketing director. He said consumers are demanding, and if no one answers the phone, or someone answers but puts them off, they could go elsewhere.



Buckley agreed it is vital that the person answering the call can add value. From Calltracks' study of calls, it believes that a good quality phone enquiry is about two-and-a-half minutes long. Shorter calls mean low engagement, such as the caller is told the car

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measure. They create a black hole in paid search return on investment data," said Buckley. According to Google, calls convert to revenue 10 to 15 times more often than web leads, and mobile searchers are 40% more likely to call a business and 50% more likely to make a purchase.

Calltracks' staff have been visiting dealers and exhibiting at events to educate dealers about the new abilities to track and measure calls. In late 2017, it created a series of YouTube videos on its channel to illustrate to dealers how easily calls can be lost and to suggest ways they can give a better experience by knowing what a customer has been looking at or asking about.

Buckley said Calltracks account managers can support clients on a monthly basis, or at least with a quarterly review.

Last year, Buckley moved into a chairman role to allow him more time to work on the evolution of Calltracks' services. He recruited Barbara Marchelle, a former telecoms executive and business mentor, to his previous post of chief executive; hired a sales director, Darren Williams, who in the past has run his own dealership, Grants Seat; and promoted Chippington from marketing manager.

Buckley emphasised that Calltracks' aim is to help dealers become more efficient: "What we're about is identifying those potentially lost sales and alerting the people on the shop floor to get back to them. I would say, don't use this as a tool to beat the guys up for messing up a call, just think about it as cash walking up the road and go get the customer back and sell the car."

"It's getting that 10-20% that are falling through the cracks."