

Video streaming transforming the car industry

With more than a billion users and channels in almost 80 countries, YouTube is a global phenomenon, its viewing figures up some 40% in the last two years.

Even the most committed technophobe must now acknowledge that online video streaming can reach audiences in ways which would have seemed like sci-fi – even just a few years back.

As always though, when technology advances at unprecedented speed there remains a gulf between those who are aware of the new medium and those who can truly exploit its potential.

However, thanks to a self-confessed 'geek' from South Wales, the world of YouTube, live streaming and much more is now being delivered to the UK's automotive industry.

Every element of the car buying, maintenance and repair process – from new car sales to damage appraisal, from turntable spins to detailed 360-degree walk-rounds of pre-owned models – can be done by dealership staff with ease through Cardiff-based AutosOnShow.TV.

Auction houses also use the AOS software to create entries for their online catalogues in just 60 seconds, and fleet operators – and their clients – are benefiting from end-of-lease inspection videos.

Filming the videos is as simple as taking a holiday snap on your smart-phone or tablet, according to AOS managing director, Adam Price, and the company's clever software then does all the rest and uploads the images to your web-site in pin-sharp HD.

AOS, which is the largest provider of video streaming services to the automotive industry, was

founded by Price, who has been developing innovative software solutions and internet applications since 1999 – long before the arrival of YouTube.

He initially specialised in creating videos and websites for the Welsh tourism industry until he decided to replace his old car.

"I'd been looking around, and found a car I fancied which was at a dealer 120 miles away," recalled Price. "Obviously, I didn't want to spend hours driving there and back before I knew more about its condition, and got a proper feel for it, but their website only had a couple of pictures of the vehicle.

"I'd had ten years' experience of coding, building videos into sites, and thinking up ways of making images more powerful and relevant to people, and was sure there had to be a much better way of delivering information to customers before they bought cars."

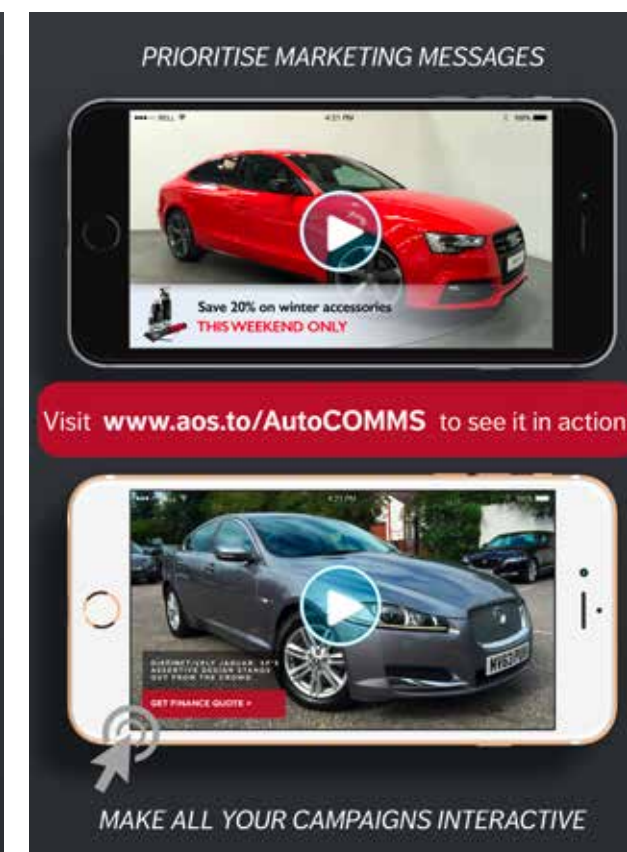
Price set about assembling a specialist development team, devising and trialling several systems before working with a major leasing operator to see how the results looked in real time.

A positive reception followed, and soon new features were added, including a 'pause' button for the walk-round videos.

The initial trial results were so promising that Price and his AOS team were invited to present their technology to Volvo Cars UK.

"They loved it, but then they asked if we could visit all their dealers across the UK to train their staff, which would have been an enormous task, so we went back for a second development phase," said Price.

The software engineers and coders then created a new solution, using a platform which could be



downloaded from the App Store, with a video to guide users through each step, before devising a simple system for uploading images and videos, which dealership staff could use with no technical knowledge.

Price said: "It took us something like 18 months of really hard work. We kept tweaking and improving the system, then going back and forth to Bruce Greenwood (Volvo's national used car programme manager) in St Albans.

"Finally, he was happy with every aspect. It was our 'eureka' moment. Bruce smiled and ten minutes later our system had been installed at every Volvo dealership in the country.

"From then, we've focused on solutions for automotive clients; dealership groups, franchises, independents, auction houses and leasing operators. It's not about size or scale, it's about what the customer wants and because all our systems are innovative and intuitive, they are always well-received."

Price said that many customers are happy with an off-the-shelf package, but some want a bespoke solution, adding: "Because all the software we use has been designed and patented by us, we have the expertise to deliver exactly what they require.

"There's nothing our technical people enjoy doing more than resolving an issue within a customer's operating systems, or identifying a process which needs to be automated."



One piece of AOS kit which has proved popular with clients is AutoSERVICE, a software programme which uses videos and annotated images to carry out Electronic Vehicle Health Checks (eVHCs).

Dealers use the system while identifying 'red work' and can share the results with customers to offer improved transparency during the servicing process.

Traditional eVHCs have a low conversion rate, not least because the information is usually a few biro notes on a sheet of paper handed over to customers as they're about to pay for the service.

AOS's system allows the technician to easily record an HD video of the vehicle, with each suggested area of work clearly highlighted.

The software, which works straight out of the box

or can be integrated into a dealer's existing eVHC system, also allows the video to be e-mailed direct to customers in a straightforward fashion.

Price said: "We didn't do eVHC solutions at first, but JLR asked if we could. It was clearly a crowded marketplace, so we evolved a solution which had our own stamp on it, and they've just adopted it."

Another notable recent success has seen the AOS team devise a system for allowing manufacturers to deliver tailored marketing campaigns which allows a manufacturer to create a year's advertising campaign in just one day, according to Price.

He said: "It might sound impossible, but it can be achieved because the software does all the work. You can very easily create specific content for particular vehicles, it might be their age or their colour scheme, or you could create a different campaign for dealers in Manchester than the one you were using in London.

"Dealers have immediately seen the benefits, not least for multi-franchise groups who can have their campaigns set up centrally by the marketing teams at each of their manufacturers.

"We had to create a new analytical system to make this platform work, but for dealers, it takes just 10 seconds to run.

"The popularity of the new platform has meant that, by the start of September, we were already delivering more than 50 million assets a month through client web sites."



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Adam Price, AutosOnShow.TV

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