

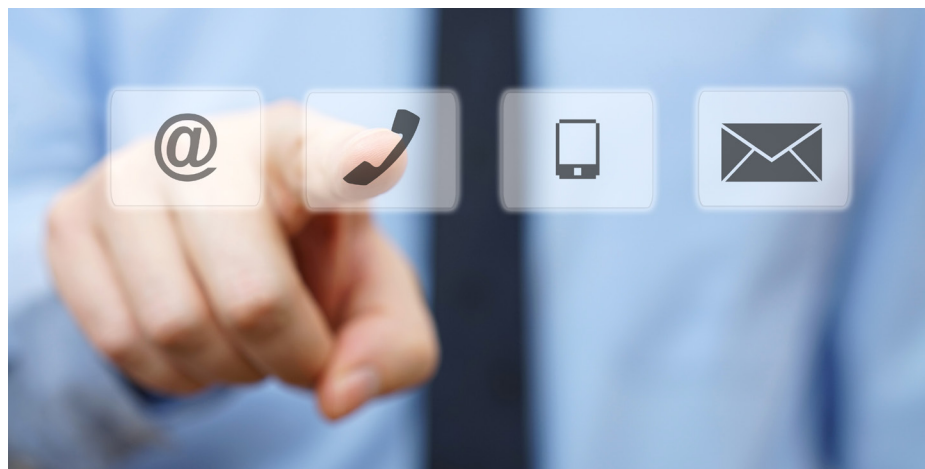
Why dealers should aim for conversations, not contacts

A few years ago, people got very excited about digital marketing, but they forgot one thing – digital marketing leads to digital engagement. They spent a lot of money on pay-per-click and on their website, but they forgot that when the digital consumer comes in you need to convert that into a conversation that will lead to a business opportunity for them. That's where dealers have been falling apart."

According to managing director Nick Reisinger, this was just one of the opportunities that led him to start Call It Automotive, a business specialising in supporting dealer networks in their contact with customers.

"Although it looks like we're providing contact centre services, the reality is that we're providing much more data management off the back of the contacts we make, which helps our clients in managing the full contact cycle they have with their clients," said Reisinger.

Call It Automotive started working with dealers in 2010, and was noticed by manufacturers as a result. It currently works with Lexus, Kia, Nissan, Renault and Suzuki on several of their individual franchised network programmes, but also works directly with several dozen dealer groups, such as Ridgeway, Hartwell, HR Owen, Jardine Motors Group and Lookers.



"Our focus is always on supporting dealers, because that is where the problem lies. Manufacturers have resources, funding, the time to do things well, they recruit super graduates, but the real problem has been that the dealers are where the failure takes place, in our field of expertise."

Although dealer resources can be stretched, the experience for the consumer still needs to be seamless.

"We are working on behalf of the dealer or the

manufacturer or finance house, so we introduce ourselves as such. The consumer does not know that they are handled through our processes," said Reisinger.

Some of Call It Automotive's customer contacts start on behalf of the manufacturer, such as in lead generation. However, once that lead has been passed to a dealer in that manufacturer's network, Call It Automotive can again find itself managing that contact on behalf of the dealer.

"Of course if they ask, we have no problem saying we're an external party working for the manufacturer or dealer, and they quite understand that," said Reisinger.

Call It Automotive's expertise includes customer contact for sales, aftersales, end-of-term finance and lapsed customers.

Reisinger said his company has gained plenty of experience in what is most effective when working with dealers' customer data. Steps include data cleansing against DVLA information, then segmentation to identify which consumers are best to target, such as those who have been in contact with the dealership within the past few years.

The data is then loaded into a contact strategy, which splits the data depending on contact permissions, so that Call It Automotive and its client can remain compliant with data protection regulations.

Call It Automotive is also able to advise the client on the specific contact strategy. In the early stages, emails can be particularly cost-effective, with SMS to the customer's mobile as the next stage. Phone calls are effective as the third stage, particularly to



gather feedback on why a customer has been unresponsive, but they are more expensive than the previous two channels. Finally, if all else fails, the service can send a letter, for example stating that a dealer has been trying to contact them, that their service is due and could they get in touch.

Within this contact strategy, Call It Automotive can read the dealers' live chat web interactions and tailor the communication strategy accordingly if the consumer has been active on the dealer's website.

Reisinger said the strategy avoids problems such as the customer being contacted with service reminders when they have booked their service the day before.

Client data can also tell Call It Automotive if a customer whose finance is nearing the end of term has requested a brochure, so it can tailor its marketing to them appropriately.

Depending on the client and the objective of the marketing programme, Call It Automotive can determine if it needs additional data from other sources. Reisinger said manufacturers usually already have it, but it can source more, particularly when they are looking for new, incremental business.

He said the success of a campaign is down to two things: the data, and the quality of the contacts.

Call It Automotive has arrangements with third-

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Nick Reisinger, managing director, Call It Automotive

party service-booking websites and can re-solicit consumers who have dropped out of the franchised aftersales network to try to recover their custom and make them aware that the manufacturer has a financially attractive offer to bring them back into the franchised service network.

In conjunction with GForces, Call It Automotive launched a live chat function that handles about 25,000 automotive live chats a month. Each chat includes a light-touch, but comprehensive, qualification process and takes an average of 16 minutes.

From past activity, the company knows that web visitors typically seek a conversation about whether a car is still available, its key features, and what finance they could get. This information is usually already available on the website, but customers are often seeking reassurance. One in

three of the live chat conversations happens outside normal trading hours.

The 16-minute conversation runs at the enquirer's pace, it's not a constant stream of information. Reisinger said a challenge for dealers trying to do it themselves is that their showroom staff may be otherwise occupied when an enquirer attempts a live chat, whereas his dedicated staff respond within three to five seconds.

The win for Call It Automotive is not a sale, but an appointment. It's about starting the relationship, starting to warm the consumer to the brand, said Reisinger.



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