

Value of online reputation cannot be overestimated

An unprecedented upsurge in online consumer engagement has sparked an accelerated development of digital sales processes among car retailers over the past two years.

But, although the internet is now the acknowledged first port of call for car buyers, most dealers are falling short in their efforts to grow their brand's profile and appeal in this vast marketplace, according to Reputation EMEA automotive director Andy Wand.

The global business – said to hold the third highest volume of consumer feedback data, after Google and Facebook – has now grown its UK presence and is actively helping automotive businesses grow their online visibility and reputation to secure increased sales and profitability.

"Peer reviews, social media transactions and even complaints: responding to these things, using them to build an online reputation, is the strongest marketing tool any business has right now," says Wand.

Vast volumes of website visits, online search data, social media posts and reviews from platforms including Google, Feefo, Auto Trader and JudgeService are analysed by Reputation in real-time.

Now a single-view customer experience and marketing dashboard developed by Reputation brings together its full spectrum of insight into one place.

According to Wand, a study by Forrester Consulting found that most businesses have to log-in to five separate systems to gain a similar overview of their social media, reviews, online business listings and marketing activity into one place by the system, alongside OEM customer satisfaction scores.

"Everyone is awash with data, pretty much whatever your role in a retail business," Wand says. "The difficult part is finding the right data that you can generate actionable



insight from.

"We've now realised an ambition to bring all aspects of the online consumer journey together in one portal that harnesses all that data and makes that job of managing online marketing and reputation possible in real-time, from a single log-in."

Reputation's single log-in platform builds a thorough, real-time view of all aspects of a business' reputation KPIs to deliver an easily digested overview and to ensure positive responses can be rapidly delivered. It also draws in online CX data from rival businesses, giving valuable data that could shape decisions to give a competitive advantage.

"Online reputation – a customers' view of your business online – has never been more important," says Wand.

"Visibility, accuracy and trust are the key things to developing customer appeal online and will absolutely grow vehicle sales and profitability."

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IF CUSTOMERS SEE POSITIVE REVIEWS OR HEAR GOOD THINGS FROM A FRIEND, THEIR DESTINATION WILL BE THAT RECOMMENDED OR TRUSTED CAR DEALER

ANDY WAND, REPUTATION

More than 90% of car buyers read online reviews before deciding which car to buy and where.

In its 2021 Automotive Report audit of car retail groups and manufacturer brands' online presence, Reputation found 41% of car retail customers read at least five reviews before visiting a dealership, with 64% stating they would travel more than 20 miles to a top-rated dealership.

Wand believes both positive and negative reviews should be embraced by car retail businesses to "create a narrative of good customer service".

"Responses to online reviews and social media posts are essential," he says. "In the past we have been asked if we can remove the negative customer feedback online. That is entirely missing the point. Negative reviews give the opportunity to demonstrate great customer service, something that people will read and see exactly how well you respond when things don't go quite right. That's a hugely powerful tool."

Reputation's annual Automotive Report includes analysis of online review ratings, search impressions, social engagement and review responses to assign a 'Reputation Score' for automotive retailers and brands out of 1,000.

The score is fast becoming the "industry standard" across the numerous sectors Reputation operates in, Wand says.

And responding to consumers' online activity is a core element of the success of top-rated OEMs Hyundai, Toyota, Kia and Renault, he asserts.

Snows Motor Group topped this year's dealer group results with a score of 751, finishing ahead of Vantage (746), RRG (722), JCT600 (711) and Listers (699).

Reputation counts 30 of the AM100 among its clients, but the potential of its new single log-in software package is yet to be fully realised, Wand says.

"The system has been rolled-out over the past 12 months, and it will be the catalyst to bring so much insight to the car retail sector. The potential is huge.

"Right now, we're at the very, very edge of this new way of thinking about the value of reputation across all sectors."

A global business, Reputation includes Costco, Ford, Kia, Inchcape, Halfords and Hertz and Parkdean Resorts among its clients. "Even Amazon uses us," says Wand.

US-based Reputation has almost doubled its European workforce since he joined the business a year ago, with the same proportion of growth



seen at its Liverpool offices.

Part of the service being offered to car retailers is a Business Value Assessment – offering an initial view of how a business' online visibility and reputation influences financial impact – and interested car retailers are encouraged to get in touch for a consultation.

Wand says that, in an age of sophisticated online customer journeys, online reputation cannot be ignored.

"The customer journey used to be very binary, you'd choose a brand

because you liked it, you'd research the model you liked and you'd eventually go and buy one," he says.

"Now there is a vast amount of research done online and, once you are seen online as a potential customer, brands will target you with communications.

"You might be in the BMW dealership when you get an alert on your smartphone from Audi telling you about a new feature, model or safety rating and you head out of the door to explore the Audi showroom.

"The deciding factor in most consumers' minds, however, is reputation. If they see positive reviews or hear good things from a friend, their destination will be that recommended or trusted car dealer."

Reputation is offering car retailers the chance to learn more about online reputation and the future of CX at its forthcoming Transform 2022 conference **here**.

Taking place at London's County Hall, on May 11, it will include presentations on 'The Future of Innovation in Reputation Experience Management' and 'Predictions for the Future of Customer Feedback'.

Wand says: "It will offer some real in-depth insight and will be a great showcase of the power of CX."



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