

RESEARCH

Mobile plays increasingly important role across five crucial car-buying moments

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BMW X1

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Mobile searches for videos, images and other content related to the car-shopping journey are up significantly in the past year, according to a new report from Google that pinpoints five crucial moments for reaching these consumers and where smartphones fit in.

Google's study, *The 5 Auto Shopping Moments Every Brand Must Own*, reveals that the average car shopper makes just two dealership visits in the search for the right vehicle. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in mobile searches for videos and images related to car buying as well as from car dealerships in the past year.

"The idea is to not disrupt but instead provide some value to a consumer once a signal has been received that the consumer is in market for a car," said Lauren Moores, vice president of strategy for [Dstillery](#). "Consumers can provide intent by visiting dealer or OEM sites, downloading an OEM app or searching for images.

"These can all be used as a trigger to advertise: directions, maps, incentive or an experience to interact with the product through VR or gaming," she said. "In addition, any one of these consumer actions can be used as a model to find prospects for the auto brand."

Video is influential

One of the key moments for car buyers is early in the research process when consumers are deciding which car is best.

This stage is increasingly influenced by video, according to Google. Of consumers who used YouTube while buying a car, 69 percent were influenced by it, more than TV, newspapers or magazine.

Auto review videos on YouTube have been watched more than 3 million hours in the first 9 months of 2015. More than 1.2 million of these were on mobile, an increase of more than 2 times over last year.

Video also ranks highly at the stage when consumers are trying to decide if a car is right for them. Three of the top types of video content auto shoppers are search for are vehicle test drives, highlights of features and walkthroughs.

Developing relationships

Mobile images are also important at this stage. Search interest for "pictures of [automotive brand]" is up 37 percent year-over-year, with 80 percent of these searches happening on mobile.

Automakers Web sites are also important and need to help shoppers understand options and build their own vehicles. Google reports that configuration searches are 3 times higher on mobile than last year.

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"The biggest opportunity lies in developing a relationship with consumers via their mobile devices," said Brian Maraone, president of the automotive division at [Phoenix Marketing International](#). "In other words, using mobile devices as a consumer engagement platform to stay in touch, alert them to new products or deals, inform them of philanthropic activities the brand participates in, gather feedback from customers, and monitor where consumers are in the purchase funnel.

"The stronger the relationship the greater the opportunity automotive brands will have of capturing their business when it comes time for a new vehicle," he said.

Car dealerships

Once shoppers get interested in a particular vehicle, they want to know if they can afford it. Search interest for MSRP & list prices is at its highest levels ever, growing 25 percent in the past year, driven in large part by mobile, which accounts for 70 percent of these searches.

When shoppers move onto the where-should-I-buy-it moment, one in three is locating or calling a dealer on their mobile device. Search interest in dealer phone numbers is up more than 78 percent in the past year, the majority of which is on mobile.

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Once shoppers are at the dealer, they want to know if they are getting a good deal. Mobile is helping them answer that question, with mobile searches from dealership lots increasing 46 percent in the last year and half of all car shoppers with mobile devices using their smartphones while at the dealership. Searches for Kelley Blue Book and competing dealers occur more often when at the dealership.

With these mobile moments in mind, marketers need to consider how to get in front of mobile users at the right time, how to be useful and be quick.

"The main thing automotive companies should keep in mind when targeting consumers on mobile devices is that consumers want to know about the product," Mr. Maraone said. "They want to know what makes the product unique, how the product and/or its features will be beneficial to them, and they want a product that excites them.

"The other thing to keep in mind is to make consumers feel at ease by not always trying to get them to buy something," he said. "When trying to develop a relationship, it can't always be so blatant and one-sided. It shouldn't appear as though the auto company is trying to capture every last dollar in the consumer's wallet."

Final Take

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