

Published: April 02, 2007  
The Hows of Handling Your Media



By [Jim Irving](#)  
[More by this Author](#)  
[Contact Author](#)

**Jumpstart Automotive Media's VP of strategic media development discusses dealer strategies for media planning, from in-house management to outsourcing options.**

With 7 out of 10 car buyers using the web as part of their shopping process (according to J.D. Power & Associates) the question on dealers' minds is no longer why advertise on the web, but how? Here are some of the ways dealers are handling the how:

#### **In-house**

Some dealers choose to handle their internet initiatives entirely in-house and are finding success. This can be an effective plan of attack when done correctly, though there are some downsides to consider as well.

For many dealers, "handling internet initiatives in-house" means focusing solely on search engine marketing. Yet, SEM is most effective when it is used as one tactic that supports a larger digital strategy. That said, dealers who handle internet initiatives in-house with a narrow focus may be missing other valuable opportunities to reach car shoppers in their market.

Second, most internet sales managers (ISMs) and general managers (GMs) recognize that search is an effective tool for generating a higher volume of quality leads via their website but do not have the experience (nor bandwidth) to effectively measure and optimize their campaigns. And why should they? Their job is to sell cars, not be internet experts.

Finally, ISMs only have a micro-view of the online world, since the only benchmarks they have to work with are the ones that their individual dealership establishes. Other firms who work across a number of automotive accounts have a much more macro-view, since they have insights working across multiple dealerships.

#### **Managing multiple vendors**

Through trial and error, many dealers realize that there are better alternatives than the in-house approach to handling internet initiatives, especially those who are aware that there is much more than search to a solid Internet marketing strategy. The result for many has been to develop a number of vendor relationships that when combined covers a number of digital tactics. Yet, there are a number of challenges that exist when employing this option.

Multiple relationships can equal multiple headaches. Every relationship needs to be managed individually, which can amount to a serious drain on resources.

**Accountability issues.** The more vendors involved in an internet strategy, the harder it gets to hold any of them accountable for your overall performance results.

**Limited leverage ability.** The more dollars that are spread across multiple vendors, the less you mean to each one on their own. Aside from inability to leverage dollars for better rates, dealers are less likely to get the most experienced resources put against their account.

**Data silos.** The more vendors involved in executing a digital strategy, the more 'siloed' essential online data becomes. Spreading data out across multiple vendors makes it more complicated to compare apples to apples when measuring results and drawing timely conclusions that aid in real-time campaign optimization.

### **Outsourcing to digital partners**

Some dealers who recognize how critically important their internet strategy is to their overall bottom line, have opted for an outsourced solution that leans on digital experts to handle and execute their digital strategy. Although the out-of-pocket costs can be greater than in-house executions, the potential for increased ROI more than outweighs these increases. Additionally, dealership resources can be greatly reduced when outsourcing these robust programs.

With this type of solution, dealers are far more likely to have top resources managing their digital initiatives. This is one of the most underestimated advantages to working with a solid outsource solution.

Another advantage is that data are all housed with one provider, which makes it much easier to review results while they are piping hot and to make decisions in real-time that can add to the bottom line.

Dealers can expect dedicated, experienced digital partnerships to bring new solutions to them that are appropriate for their business, as opposed to expending internal resources to try to sort out the options. Digital media companies focus all their energies on knowing the ins and outs of these options, so when the market introduces new products and technologies, they are sought out for their ability to incorporate and roll out the products with ease and authority.

Since the partner you choose should have deep experience in both internet technologies and how they function specifically for the automotive market, they should already have deep intelligence that your dealership can tap into, helping you achieve results much faster than on your own or with a partner that does not have a deep automotive background. In other words, dedicated digital partners spend their time staying plugged into the marketplace and learning the latest information from digital conferences, so you don't have to spend time doing this yourself.

As you can see there are a number of ways to approach the how question as it relates to handling your internet initiatives. Although all three ways mentioned above can yield great results, dealers who partner with the right trusted digital media firms stand to achieve the greatest gains: increased market share and reduced burden on internal resources.

*Jim Irving is VP of strategic media development for [Jumpstart Automotive Media](#). [Read full bio](#).*