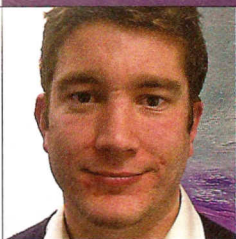


BERTIE STEVENSON
Director, Global Reviews



Car sites should make cheap and easy refinements to user experience

From Q3 to Q4 2008, car sites' customer experience scores rose by only 0.45%

The automotive industry is in decline. Spend is being cut across all areas of marketing so it's more important than ever to make every resource count. In December 2008, Global Reviews assessed 13 car manufacturers against its automotive customer experience benchmark. To meet customer expectations, sites need to score above 55%; to exceed customer expectations, they need to score above 69%. Renault topped the league with 65%, followed by BMW, Toyota and Volvo on 63% (see graph).

The most noticeable trend is the amount by which all brands have developed their websites from quarter to quarter. From Q2 to Q3 2008, scores increased by an average of 1.5%, yet from Q3 to Q4 they rose by only 0.45%. This slowdown is understandable but it leaves the

question of what digital people are supposed to do without investment.

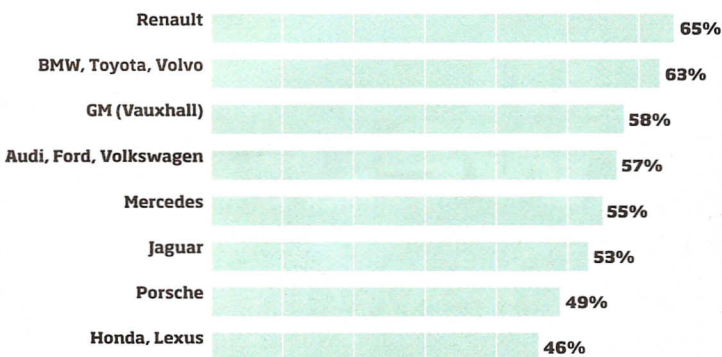
Analysing the sub-category scores, sites offer great functionality in selecting cars and configuring new vehicles, but could do more to help users make contact and self-serve where appropriate. These improvements don't require expensive reworking of wireframes or the development of Ajax functionality, meaning web owners can continue to improve their online experience without huge expense.

Car sites provide excellent contact information for dealers (scoring an average of 71%) but perform poorly in providing an online enquiry form: the industry average is only 39%. Improvements here will have a measurable impact on customers getting in touch through the web. Honda led this sub-category with 70%, followed by GM with 57%.

The content within the FAQ section could also be developed to help customers who want to self-serve. The industry average is only 40%, which shows a wide gap in the answers sites provide and those consumers want. Asking dealers the questions prospects ask in the forecourt can be a very cost-efficient way to identify what's needed.

While some major developments may have to go on hold in 2009, it shouldn't be all doom and gloom in the digital teams of car companies. With some careful thinking, there are still areas of improvement that will make a difference.

Car site customer experience scores



source: Global Reviews