The Car Dealer’s Guide to Mastering Online Reputation Management

Strategies from CarGurus Top Rated Dealers to help you build trust with consumers and boost your bottom line
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................. 3
Why reputation management is so important .... 4
Tips for monitoring reviews .............................. 4
How to ask for and encourage online reviews ... 5
How to respond to reviews .............................. 6
Integrating reviews into your marketing strategy ... 7
CarGurus Top Rated Dealer Awards ................. 8
How dealer reviews work on CarGurus .............. 8
Reputation Management Checklist ................... 9
Conclusion .................................................... 10
INTRODUCTION

The growth of the internet and social media has made it easy for people to share their buying experiences—good and bad—with fellow customers. As a result, it’s more important than ever to pay attention to your dealership’s online reputation.

From responding to reviews and collecting new ones to incorporating them into your marketing strategy, a lot goes into maintaining (and improving!) your reputation.

We asked CarGurus Top Rated Dealers for their own reputation management tips and tricks. This eBook draws on their expertise and provides insight into how car dealers can use reviews to stand out amongst the competition.

Your dealership’s reputation can make or break your business—59% choose a dealership based on reputation, according to SalesFuel—so use the following information and make review management a priority in 2019 and beyond.
WHY REPUTATION MANAGEMENT IS SO IMPORTANT

“If we stick to our principles of treating customers fairly, we have nothing to fear from transparency. Transparency is a customer-first approach. It’s one thing that digital does to every sector: the availability of information makes it inevitable.”

- Alex Brown, Head of Digital, Jardine Motors Group

“Even before making everyday purchases, I always look at product reviews. And cars are one of the biggest purchases that people make, so it’s no surprise that they tend to rely on reviews even more.”

- Alistair Grist, Director, ADG Sevenoaks

Whether it’s the fact that 50% of CarGurus buyers say they always look at a dealer’s reviews before contacting them,¹ or that 33% say a dealership’s reputation and reviews are the most important factor to consider when choosing a car, it’s clear that reviews really matter.² So much so, that 91% of 18-34 year old consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.²

In addition to improving consumer confidence, reviews are also a great way for you to see what’s working and what’s not. Today’s most effective dealers see every review as an opportunity to get valuable feedback and a chance to retain an existing customer or influence a potential one.
TIPS FOR MONITORING REVIEWS

Once you start actively encouraging customers to leave reviews, it’s crucial that you also start paying attention to them. Set up email alerts, designate an employee to be your review watchdog, or simply do a quick Google search of your dealership from time to time—there are plenty of ways to keep a pulse on your dealership’s online reputation. Monitoring your dealership’s reviews—and responding promptly and appropriately—will help you prevent bad reviews from turning into full-on disasters.

HOW TO ASK FOR AND ENCOURAGE ONLINE REVIEWS

Asking for feedback can sometimes feel uncomfortable, but it’s a crucial step for dealers who want to build trust, boost brand awareness, and ultimately, sell more cars. Plus, reviews are nothing to fear: 93% of CarGurus customers leave a 4-star review or better.³

As a general rule of thumb, don’t offer incentives to customers in exchange for reviews. This could lead to a biased or dishonest review that doesn’t accurately reflect the customer’s experience. Instead, send an email to a customer after their purchase and ask for a review. Adding signs around your dealership promoting the review sites—like CarGurus or TripAdvisor—where customers can leave reviews is another great way to improve response rates.

93%
of CarGurus customers leave a 4-star review or better
If a customer has taken the time to leave a review for your dealership, it’s always a good idea to respond. Plus, acknowledging reviews—both good and bad—shows that you take customers’ experiences seriously and can help build trust with future customers.

Positive Reviews

While it might be tempting to smile and skip over positive online reviews, showing appreciation for your customers is a great way to encourage repeat business. A simple response thanking the customer for their business and extending future help will go a long way. But those are the easy ones.

Negative reviews

Negative reviews require a little more attention, but a simple, professional response shows that you care about your customers and is often enough to put future readers at ease. Responding is your chance to offer your side of the story and an opportunity to try to turn a customer’s negative experience into a positive one. In your response:

- Offer something to make up for the issue, like a discount or a free service.
- Don’t over-explain or get defensive—a simple response will humanise your brand. If someone's being irrational, a calm, short response will make that apparent to readers.

- Recognise the customer’s problem and own up to the issue.
- Explain your solution and how you plan to learn from the customer’s negative experience.

“You can’t always please everyone but if you respond, you can at least give yourself the opportunity to win others that might be reading the review. A slightly negative review is sometimes better than a good one if handled properly. It adds validity to all your positive reviews and gives you a chance to rectify the feedback”

- Chris Roach, Owner, Chequers Cars
Consumers feel better when they hear real-life stories from other buyers about a product or service, which makes reviews powerful marketing tools for dealers.

So how do you leverage your customers’ reviews in your dealership’s marketing efforts?

- Showcase your best and most helpful reviews in your email newsletters
- Incorporate them into your paid search ads
- Link to your website’s review page in your email signature
- Include customer quotes in your print materials
- Share them on social media

By putting the customers’ voices into your dealership’s marketing strategy, you’ll give a nudge to those ready-to-buy car buyers who are still on the fence about which dealership to buy from.

“Reviews are one of our favourite forms of advertising. They’re believable, in real-time and from genuine customers who have interacted with our business. Great reviews help bring new customers to our dealership.”

- Alex Kuligowski, Director, Horsepower Motor Centre
CARGURUS TOP RATED DEALER AWARDS

“Top Rated Dealer is a badge of recognition for us, which has actually been voted by the customer via their reviews. It shows customers how we work and that we care about our customers.”

- Chris Roach, Founder, Chequers Cars

“When buyers see an award from CarGurus, it puts them at ease. It automatically tells them that they’re buying a vehicle from a dealership they can trust.”

- Jason Golder, Director, Marshams

If the prestige of being named a Top Rated Dealer isn’t enough to motivate you to collect reviews, here’s more evidence that reviews matter. On CarGurus, moving from a 1-star dealer rating to a 5-star dealer rating leads to a 50% increase in interactions per vehicle—that’s over 2x more connections for your dealership. There’s also a big jump moving from a 3- or 4-star dealer rating.\(^3\) In a world where consumers are struggling to find trusted info, the validation that reviews provide is a big factor for consumers.

HOW DEALER REVIEWS WORK ON CARGURUS

CarGurus strongly believes in transparency in car shopping, so we let car buyers publicly review dealerships they’ve worked with while they’re shopping for a car. We then allow dealerships to respond to those reviews directly. Dealers with a CarGurus account get a notification shortly after a customer submits a review, giving them the opportunity to respond to it or challenge it as fraudulent.

Dealer reviews are one of the many factors taken into consideration for a listing’s deal rating. This is important because we always show what we believe to be the best deals first (based on our algorithm, not how much a dealer pays us).

3. CarGurus data, Q4 2017
REPUTATION MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

Monitor your online reviews
- Do a Google search of your dealership's name
- Check the major review sites for reviews of your dealership
- Designate a review watchdog at your dealership
- Set up an email alert to get notifications for new reviews

Ask for and encourage online reviews
- Email customers after the sale requesting a review
- Hang signs around your dealership promoting the review sites you use
- Invite past customers to provide reviews on third-party sites like CarGurus

Respond to your reviews
- Show appreciation for positive reviews with a genuine thank you
- Don't over-explain or get defensive when responding to negative reviews—a simple response recognising the issue and explaining your solution is enough
- When necessary, offer something to make up for the issue, like a free service

Integrate your reviews into your marketing strategy
- Showcase your best and most helpful reviews in email newsletters
- Include customers’ quotes in print advertising
- Share your reviews on social media
- Link to your dealership’s review page in your email signature
CONCLUSION

Customer reviews, good and bad, can help set the tone for how your dealership is perceived by future customers. They're crucial drivers of new sales, and your dealership can't overlook their importance. Every review is an opportunity to engage with your customers and build your reputation, so make sure you're taking advantage.

To learn more about online reputation management and how to earn a Top Rated Dealer Award, call us at 0808 196 0235.