

Car Shoppers Are Judging You

How Digital Word of Mouth Influences Your Sales



Exclusive new research shows how consumers are using reviews to make decisions on what to buy and who to buy from—and it may not be from you.

by **Zach Englum**, Associate Manager, Partner Marketing | January 2017



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The Influence of Reviews

Dealer Reviews are more important than ever in today's "go-online-first" world. The vast majority of consumers begin their research and shopping journeys online. In fact, consumers use online reviews for half or more of new purchases. Reviews are influential.

Today, online resources carry more weight in consumers' minds as compared to more traditional information sources because of the speed at which information is updated and made available for consumption. If you're an advertiser, spending more of your time and energy in digital will pay off more in reaching and gaining share with consumers because of the speed at which the online marketplace moves.

Specifically, reviews play a pivotal role in the consumers' mind by helping them decide how they will proceed in their shopping journey after looking up a product or service and analyzing how other consumers felt about their experience. Over 90 percent of consumers who shop online, regardless of product or service, say they use online reviews.¹ That's significant! Online reviews aren't going away, and how you react to online reviews will greatly impact your standing in the consumer's mind.

With this paper, we provide insight into the role digital word of mouth plays—especially online reviews—in driving action for consumers throughout the car purchasing and car ownership lifecycle. Furthermore, we want to provide key takeaways that help dealers better understand how consumers use and interact with reviews at different stages, provide ideas to help dealers update processes and strategies related to digital word of mouth, and discuss the role negative reviews can play in digital word of mouth.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace with new forms of buying and with new car sales expected to slow after years of record growth², it is imperative to understand what strategies are effective in gaining the trust of consumers and influencing their purchase decisions.

¹ Review Usefulness and Recency, Cars.com, November, 2016.

² 2016 Auto Outlook: The Thinning of the Media Pack, Borrell Associates, 2016.

But, what makes a successful online review experience?

Well, to start, both access to positive and negative reviews—or rather those reviews that lay out the pros and cons of the purchase being considered—are important to consumers. If those reviews have photos, that's a bonus! Recency is a key factor as well for a successful online review, especially those from the most recent three months.

In our study, all the above factors apply across product categories, including Automotive. But, we didn't just focus on the benefits of positive reviews, we looked at other factors involving negative reviews and explored aspects of the shopping process that matter less to consumers. We did this to better speak to a strategy that looks at all factors of an online review to reach the ultimate goal—influence a vehicle purchase from YOU!



Methodology

Our goal is to increase understanding of how digital word of mouth affects dealers and explore what they can do to further their brand online by using online reviews to drive action throughout the car purchasing and car ownership lifecycle.

Through our own online questionnaire in partnership and with execution and analysis by an independent third party, Versta Research, we performed a quantitative survey of 503 recent and prospective car buyers from November 3 – 15, 2016. Our sample was carefully sourced and screened from a large national research panel.

Included in the sample were only individuals who use online reviews to inform any type of purchase, own or lease a car for their own use, have ever purchased from a dealership or private party, have at least joint responsibility for car purchases, and have used the Internet for car related activities.

The following analysis is a breakdown of this study with key takeaways to better help dealers capitalize on their digital brand and presence.



Summary

WHEN AND HOW ARE CONSUMERS USING ONLINE REVIEWS DURING THE CAR BUYING PROCESS?

This is a critical question to answer. Understanding when and how online reviews are used can help to make sense of a complicated topic. So, when are reviews most sought after by consumers and what's so important about them?

- When beginning the car buying process
- When narrowing down cars to purchase
- When researching options within a make and model

Keeping the above in mind when creating or updating an online reviews strategy is important to be successful. Understanding when consumers search out reviews is key to capitalizing on reviews as an influencer tool towards a purchase.

We also learned when reviews are less frequently used:

- When a consumer selects a dealership after having chosen the make and model that interests them
- When choosing a specific salesperson at a dealership

KEY TAKEAWAY

Dealers need to reach consumers early in their process to really leverage their online presence in the dealers' favor, and there are numerous ways to go about it. This means leveraging reviews for consumers who are searching for a dealership, seeking service or repair, and looking for a salesperson at the dealership as early as possible.

In today's 24/7-connected world, we also wanted to know what methods consumers are using to engage with online reviews, especially the role that mobile plays versus desktop and laptop.



Most online car reviews are read on desktops and laptops—82% for car reviews, similar to other product categories.

What about mobile? Smartphones are used for Car Reviews by 42% of consumers (similar to the other product categories in our study), but over half of those users are under age 45 (58%). Tablets are used by one-quarter of consumers across product categories (26%). This goes to show that no touchpoint is irrelevant to consumers when they are seeking out reviews or when conducting online research.

WHAT'S MOST & LEAST EFFECTIVE AT DRIVING A CAR PURCHASE?

Specifically looking at online reviews, more reviews are better, but most respondents are satisfied with three to five depending upon where they are in their car shopping journey. Recent, positive reviews from the past three months are ideal.

Both reviews by other consumers and reviews from vehicle experts drive decisions to purchase equally from this study.

Reviews that include photographs are more helpful than those without. Dealers should encourage consumers to post reviews with photos of their new vehicle highlighting their experience at the dealership.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Reviews that support decision making around car options and specs within a particular make and model help. The more specific they get, the better.

However, we also found what consumers are least likely to act upon when encountering an online review.

What's less effective at driving a car purchase you may ask?

- No online reviews at all (48% of respondents avoid buying a product without any reviews)
- Reviews in advertisements aren't any more helpful
- Reviews that are more than a year old
- Sponsored reviews



Uses of Online Reviews

HOW CONSUMERS USE ONLINE REVIEWS

Consumers use online reviews for half or more of new purchases. Reviews are influential. But, to what degree? Well, a large majority feel that online reviews are helpful and almost half would avoid a purchase without them, in general.

> **Of the 40% of consumers indicating they use online reviews most often for purchases, those under age 55 use online reviews the most.**

It appears that the specific purchase being considered may have an emotional factor to it when reviews are considered. When asked if consumers would avoid buying products for the first time if they have no reviews, only 5% completely disagreed and 16% somewhat disagreed. Translation, the marketplace demands reviews to make an informed purchase decision.

> **Know that consumers use online reviews for half or more of new purchases.**

Having reviews matters to the majority of consumers. Borrell Associates' study, 2016 Auto Outlook: The Thinning of the Media Pack, predicts a plateau of New car sales throughout 2017³. If you're fighting for new car sales and wanting to influence more used car sales, online reviews can be key to influencing consumers for the foreseeable future.

³ 2016 Auto Outlook: The Thinning of the Media Pack, Borrell Associates, 2016

USES OF ONLINE REVIEWS CONTINUED

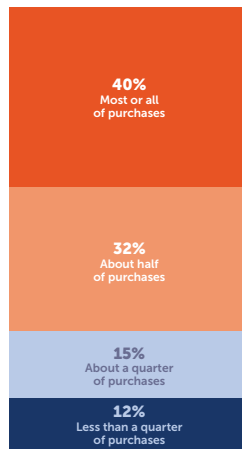
Dealers need to understand the extent to which online reviews influence purchase decisions. It makes sense that in our digital culture today, younger consumers use reviews more compared to consumers 55 years and older, but older consumers shouldn't be ignored in an online review strategy. If a dealer doesn't have online reviews, they are effectively ignoring the younger, Millennial generation with significant buying power.

"Eighty percent of Millennials said that they plan to purchase a vehicle in the next five years. At 80 million strong, and with more than \$200 billion in annual buying power, there are plenty of sales to be generated from Millennials⁴."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understand the demographics of consumers who are reviewing you and update your online review strategy accordingly
- Younger consumers use reviews more than older consumers (55y/o +)
- Millennial Generation (35y/o and younger) are the least likely to make a decision with no online reviews

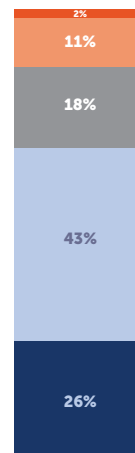
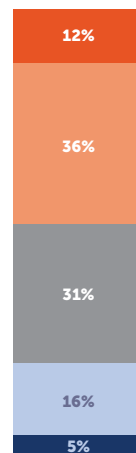
How often online reviews are used in purchase decisions



Attitudes about online reviews

I tend to avoid buying products for the first time if they have no reviews

I don't typically find online reviews very useful



Completely agree
Somewhat agree
Neutral
Somewhat disagree
Completely disagree

⁴ Millennial Car Shoppers, CDK Global, 2015.

WHAT REVIEW SOURCES DO CONSUMERS TRUST THE MOST?

Consumers trust reviews from experts and from others who have purchased the same product they are interested in as the most influential.

From our study, three quarters of consumers trust expert reviews, and nearly as many trust reviews from other customers. The level of trust in experts and other customer reviews is on par with family and friends as sources.



Do you ask your customers what influenced them to show up on your lot?

Sourcing where consumers heard about your dealership is key to optimizing your ad spend and will only help you improve your own online review strategy moving forward.

Advertisements, whether online or through other media, are not as trusted. It is interesting here, though, to note that men, parents, and frequent review users are more likely to trust advertisements for making a major purchase—those sources by TV, radio, newspaper and other traditional media—with 25% indicating as such compared to 73% trusting expert reviews.

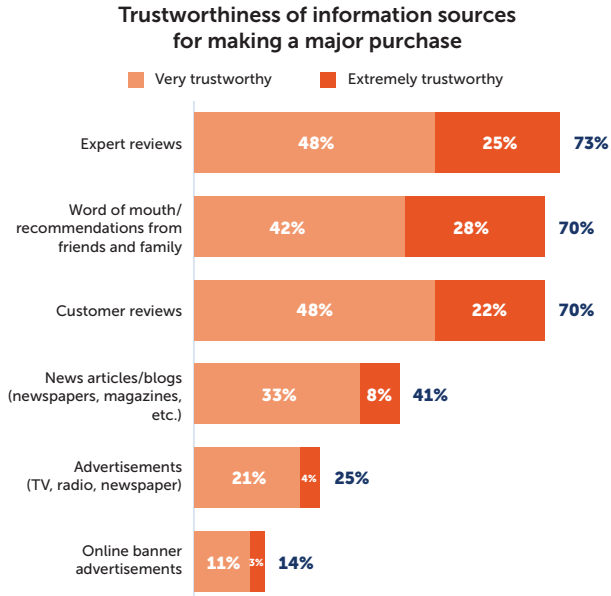


73% of consumers say expert reviews are trustworthy.

We recommend dealers have a process in place that highlights expert reviews on the makes and models they carry that will reinforce their own brand and get consumers talking. Dealers should also highlight reviews provided by customers who have previously purchased from their dealership. Doing so can help reassure potential consumers they are making the right decision in choosing the dealer they are researching.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Create a strategy that highlights and sources expert reviews
- Highlight consumer reviews wherever you can on the lot and on social media
- Men and parents trust traditional advertisements over other demographic groups



HOW CAN YOU LEVERAGE NEGATIVE REVIEWS WITH YOUR POSITIVE REVIEWS?

Negative reviews are a chance to grow your dealership’s credibility in the minds of consumers. More than you think, it’s also an opportunity to influence more consumers that you’re the dealership for them. It’s the dealership that understands how to read, interpret, and respond to negative reviews that grows.

Both positive and negative reviews are useful, as are those that weigh pros and cons in consumers’ minds. When both sides of an argument are provided, it adds more credibility to the case that consumers should choose you.

> 77% of consumers find negative reviews either somewhat or very useful to their research.

If you receive negative reviews—and we know it happens—use them to your advantage!

Negative reviews not only provide a look into how perceived poor experiences are handled at a dealership, but they can also highlight a pain point that may need addressed in the dealership's own sales, service, or operations processes—an issue that may not have been apparent before. But, responding to negative reviews and showing other consumers that you're willing to do what's needed to make consumers happy after purchase can greatly improve your digital word of mouth and credibility in the minds of future consumers—setting you apart in the marketplace.

Dealers need to start looking at online reviews as a tool to help them retain employees. A recent study by DealerRater.com found that 97% of car shoppers would prefer to select their salesperson before walking into the dealership⁵. Consumers do look for information online to find the right person to work with or buy from when considering a purchase, with 41% of consumers saying this information is useful.



41% of consumers indicated that information about a specific salesperson is useful in the car shopping journey.

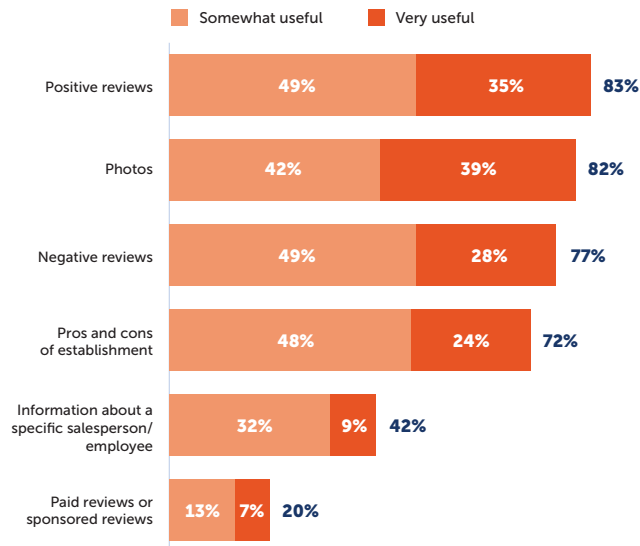
Knowing this, it could help employee retention by creating an incentive program for employees mentioned in reviews that can help you both retain top talent and reward your sales team for great customer service.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Positive and negative reviews are both deemed useful to consumers
- Millennials find reviews on your sales staff helpful when researching online
- Create a process that highlights your ability to make unsatisfied customers happy after leaving a negative review
- Use negative reviews to your advantage by making updates to your review process whenever you receive reviews, both positive and negative

⁵ Survey of 10,000 recent car shoppers on DealerRater.com, March 2016

Usefulness of online review content



HOW DO PHOTOS IN A REVIEW HELP DEALERS?

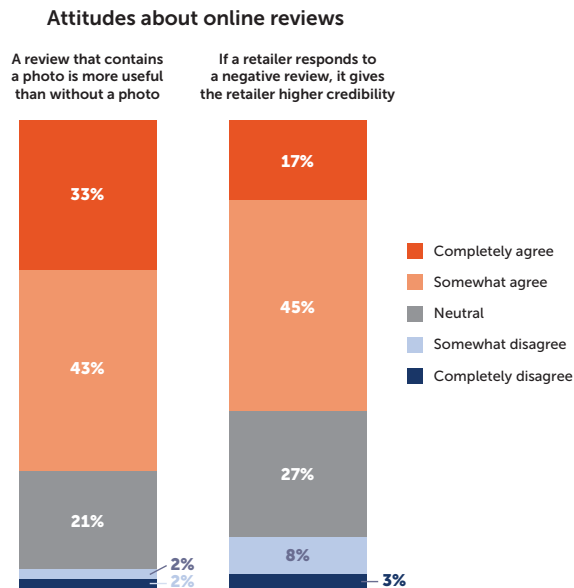
Reviews with photos are more useful than those without, according to consumers. We know that not everything that can be reviewed has the option of a photo to accompany it or needs one, but if a photo does accompany a review, it can work to dealers’ benefit.

We can infer from our study that the bonus of something visual helps consumers better make purchase decisions—further expanding dealers’ digital word of mouth. Online credibility is important, as dealers don’t know when a consumer will necessarily come in contact with their brand. But, what if a negative review has photos accompanying it?

Allowing customers to see the negative side of an interaction and how dealers responded can go a long way in building trust and reinforcing their brand online, something we’ve already covered. It also gives dealers control of the conversation after the customer has been to the dealership by addressing the negative review and the potential photo, and showing the digital world how the dealer treats customers in these instances. Doing so has the potential to turn an agitated customer into a champion of the dealer’s brand and could encourage repeat business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Create a platform that allows for consumers to review their sales experience with the dealer and then have them highlight a photo of their new vehicle
- Ask customers for reviews of their vehicles after being serviced in your service department
- Respond to negative reviews to take control of the conversation—show you care by working to make the customer happy after purchase



WHAT ROLE CAN COUPONS IN ONLINE ADS PLAY?

If dealers aren't using coupons in some of their advertising, they may want to start. One in four consumers say they always or often click on coupons or ads on review sites. Such ads could be a good entry point for consumers to dealers' brands, and an opportunity to influence them as they move along in their shopping journey.

Among all consumers who click on ads or coupons, 15% say they consistently take action 75% of the time and 21% say they take action half of the time as a result of seeing these coupons when they are looking for reviews. In fact, in a study by eMarketer, they found that 121.3 million people utilize digital coupons in the US⁶. There is great opportunity in reaching consumers should this number continue to grow.

⁶ eMarketer.com, US Millennials Emerging as Heavy Coupon Users, 2016.

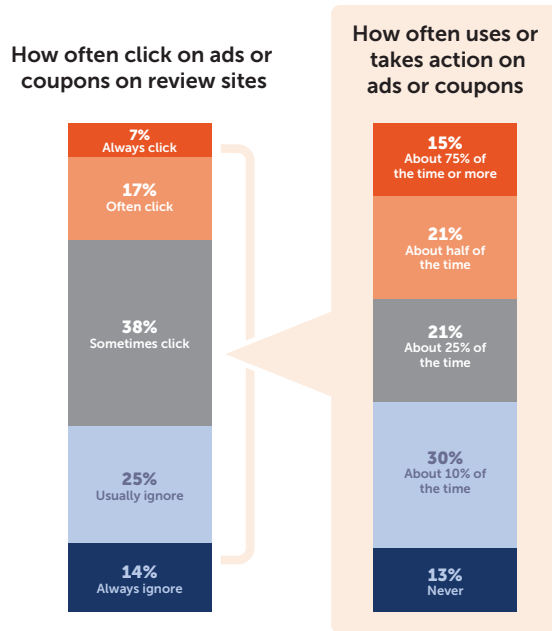
That’s interesting. If dealers are spending money for online ads, they want these ads to be enticing enough to influence consumers. Involving coupons in some fashion may be a way to do that.

> 24% of consumers often or always click on ads or coupons on review websites.

Creating a strategy around online coupons that reinforces current sales goals or service lane goals can go a long way in also driving dealers’ digital word of mouth and growing their brand.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Utilize coupons to create a call to action for consumers with your reviews
- Create a strategy around online coupons that reinforces your current sales and or service goals
- Use analytics tools to track the success of your coupons from online review sources



WHAT LEADS A CONSUMER TO WRITE A REVIEW?

It's not always easy to get a review from a consumer when they are wanted. Dealers may have a great strategy in place to ask consumers for reviews, but they may still be coming up short in how many they receive and the frequency at which they receive them. So, what do they do? Well, we found that those who feel strongly about a product—whether positive or negative—are compelled to write a review about it.

This isn't surprising. But, one wouldn't be in the wrong to assume that the more special a dealer makes an experience for a consumer, the more likely they are to receive a review on that experience, further growing their online reputation.

Think about the last time you were SO happy that you wanted the world to know. That's the feeling that can drive positive reviews. Those types of reviews, either on a website or via social media—which can influence word of mouth reviews—are what can grow dealers' brands. It's these types of experiences that we should strive for in the customer experience.

The same can be said for an awful experience, which can happen for any number of reasons. It's how dealers react to the negative reviews, as we've mentioned, that can show their true colors to consumers and that's where dealers should make sure they have a strategy in place for how to deal with them.

Additionally, experiences with particular salespeople, both positive and negative, will also prompt reviews. This can be tricky. Dealers want to reward salespeople for a job well done and correct any negative behaviors or processes that arise as a result of a negative review.



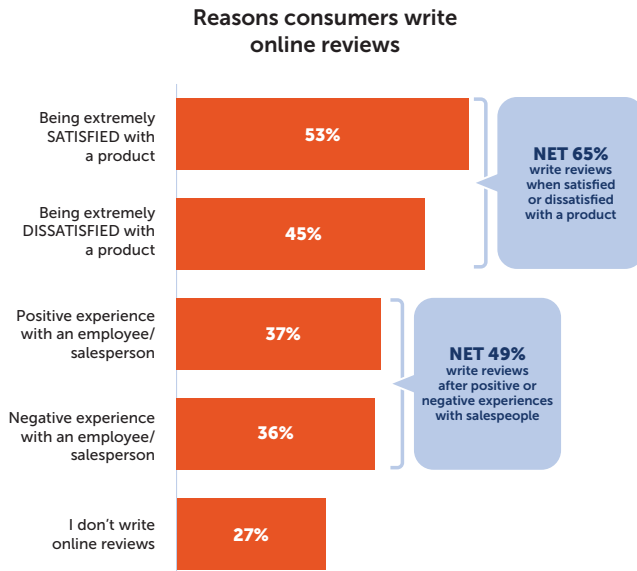
65% of respondents write reviews when satisfied with a product.

Net 49% of respondents write reviews after positive or negative experiences with sales people.

Millennial consumers under 35 are more likely to write a review about a negative experience than a positive one. This is important as well. If dealers don't have a process in place yet to respond to reviews about experiences and salespeople, they need one. It can only work to their benefit to show consumers they'll work to make it right in the consumers' mind and show others consumers the work they did.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Analyze your current dealer review process to make sure you're effectively soliciting reviews
- Train your salespeople on the role reviews play in not only the dealership's success but their own success as well
- Educate your salespeople on the benefits of creating a positive experience for customers to create repeat business, not just for vehicle sales but in the service lane as well





Types of Online Reviews

WHAT'S THE MINIMUM AMOUNT OF REVIEWS THAT INFLUENCE A PURCHASE DECISION?

Across categories, consumers want to read at least 4 to 5 reviews before making a purchase decision. We also found that one-third of consumers are wanting ten or more reviews to help them make a purchase decision. Think about it—what goes through your mind when you see a product or service with one review? Thoughts may range from, “It must not be good if there’s so few reviews” or “they must be new if there’s only one. I’ll keep looking.” The amount of reviews a dealer has available to consumers online matters—the more the better.

Customers think the same thing. Work hard to grow the amount of reviews for consumers to read, and keep them coming!



11—that’s the number of consumer reviews consumers want to read before deciding on a particular vehicle AND a dealership.

Those consumers who are frequent users of reviews expect more reviews than those who aren’t using reviews as often. Car reviews specifically are the second most useful type of review that we found, and car reviews have the largest amount of minimum reviews needed to satisfy consumers—with a mean minimum of 11 reviews being ideal to influence their purchase decision. Car dealership reviews are expected to have the same amount of reviews to be considered useful by consumers when choosing a dealership. If dealers have an effective online review strategy that prioritizes growing reviews, then this number shouldn’t be hard to achieve and it keeps fresh review content alive for an online audience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The more reviews you have, the better to help consumers make a decision
- Frequent review users expect more reviews than those who don't utilize them as often

Use of online review type



HOW RECENT DO ONLINE REVIEWS NEED TO BE TO BE DEEMED RELEVANT TO CONSUMERS?

When discussing recency, car reviews should be within the past six months to be considered useful. Across categories, however, consumers mostly accept reviews within 6 months to one year. Reviews within the past three months are ideal and are seen as having the most value.

Now, not everyone looks at the age of reviews, but for those that do, the more recent the better. Consumers want to make their decisions based on—practically—real-time information. Younger audiences, especially the Millennial generation, live in a world of instant gratification. If they can't find what they're looking for or don't like what they find at a dealership, they're likely to keep looking until they do. Dealers who don't have enough recent reviews are going to lose in the marketplace when it comes to digital word of mouth.

Depending upon where a consumer is in their shopping journey, a review could be the catalyst to make a decision sooner. Dealers want to have their best and most representative foot forward to help consumers make that purchase decision—to buy from them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 43 percent of respondents want reviews to be within the last three months
- An online review strategy will help you keep reviews coming and fresh for all consumers, regardless of age

Use of online review type



WHAT DEVICES ARE CONSUMERS USING TO INTERACT WITH REVIEWS?

It's interesting to see what devices consumers use to engage with reviews. You could assume that those who choose to write reviews on mobile devices are 'in the moment' and happy with their experience and want to write a review while it's still fresh in their minds. On the reverse, they could have had an awful experience and want to vent. Either way, mobile is a means to review experiences and do it quickly. We found that 42% of consumers leave online car reviews via their smartphones.



58% of consumers leave car reviews across all devices.

In looking at dealership reviews, 34% of consumers leave them, but 47% of these reviews are done via smartphones—more than individual car reviews.



34% of consumers leave dealership reviews across all devices.

On the other hand, some consumers may choose a desktop to leave reviews. We found that because of the ease of use for some consumers or a lack of urgency to leave a review, a desktop may be more ideal for some consumers after purchase. For dealership reviews, we found that 78% of reviews are done on a desktop. We also found that 82% of car reviews written are done on a desktop as well.

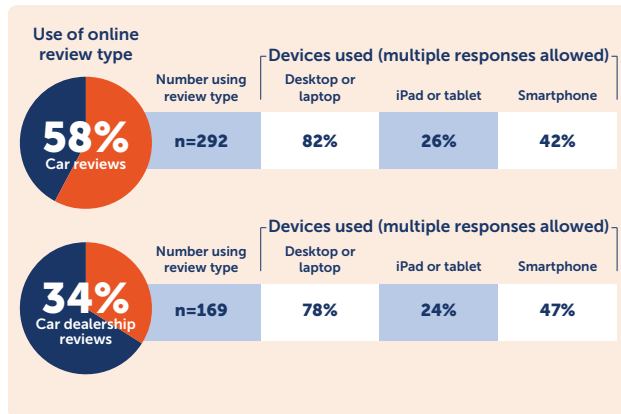
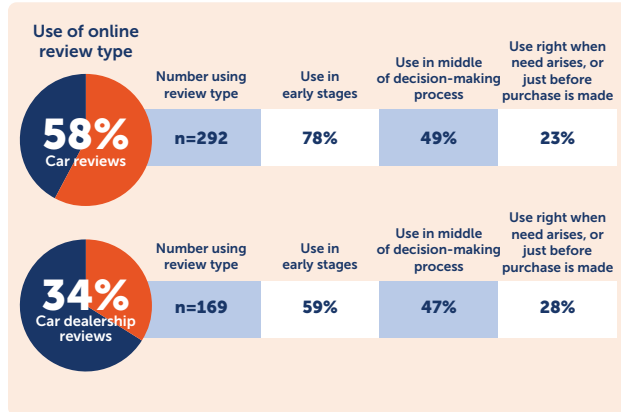
For the largest purchases in a consumer's life—vehicles and homes—they tend to use online reviews earlier in their research process compared to other purchases.

In any scenario, dealers need to create and execute a strategy to follow up with consumers after their purchase, asking for reviews of their experience to continue growing that digital word of mouth. Perhaps a consumer didn't have a mobile device to leave a review when they were on the lot. Maybe the consumer meant to leave a review but forgot. Sending follow up emails, making phone calls, or sending texts can be a great way to continue growing dealers' brands by asking the customer how happy they were with their experience and then asking for a review.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Younger audiences are much more likely to access all kinds of reviews on mobile devices
- Consumers leave car and dealership reviews predominantly via their desktops versus their smartphones
- iPads and tablets are a distant third option for consumers to leave either car reviews or dealership reviews
- Create a process to reach out to the consumer after purchase to make sure they had a positive experience and ask them to review that experience—bonus if they add photos

WHAT DEVICES ARE CONSUMERS USING TO INTERACT WITH REVIEWS?





More Details on Online Reviews

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT WHEN RESEARCHING CAR OPTIONS?

Reviews. Car buyers are most often using reviews at the very beginning of their car shopping journey. Reviews come back into prominence when consumers are trying to narrow down the makes and models of vehicles they are interested in.

> **64% of consumers use car reviews at the very beginning of their vehicle research process.**

This makes sense, consumers don't want to waste their time researching every available option. Reviews can help isolate what interests consumers the most by reading the opinions of others for the same vehicle. If someone has already purchased what you're researching, you tend to trust that review—especially if you don't know much about available options with the same vehicle—and you become more informed to move forward in your own search.

> **60% of consumers use car reviews once they have different makes or models in mind.**

Reviews are most important when consumers have a specific question to answer: which vehicle, which vehicle options, and which dealership. Car reviews do carry varying levels of importance to different people. This reinforces the need for an online review strategy that can speak to in-market car shoppers throughout their car research process. Maintaining dealers' online brands is important when others review a sales or service experience. Consumers can come across reviews at any point. It's up to the dealer to take control and find partners that best help them do that.

Optimization of consumer and expert reviews of vehicles and the dealership itself can help consumers make a decision quicker in their car shopping journey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Car buyers use reviews in the beginning stages of their research
- Car buyers also use reviews to help them narrow down their make or model options



**WHAT'S MORE VALUABLE—
CONSUMER OR EXPERT REVIEWS?**

Not every review out there has equal weight in the minds of consumers. The trick is finding the type of reviews that consumers use the most to influence their purchase behavior. Consumer and expert reviews of vehicles are equally valuable in the eyes of consumers—96% and 94% respectively. Consumer reviews provide a level of unbiased input to the consumer on the vehicle or service of interest. Expert reviews can better inform consumers on aspects of a vehicle or a repair. For instance, expert reviews can provide input on fuel efficiency and environmental impact. Information they may not have considered before reading the review.



94% of consumers find service reviews in various forms somewhat to extremely valuable.

Service center reviews are also valuable in the eyes of consumers. This begs the question: what are dealers doing to highlight their service centers? Service and repair center reviews can help optimize the service lane for dealerships. If sales are slow, focusing some efforts on the service lane (working with online partners, monitoring online service reviews, and responding to them) can help grow business. We found that 76% of consumers look for service centers with good reviews.



33% of consumers use service and repair reviews to find a service center with specific certificates or credentials when deciding on a dealership to purchase from.

Consumers who look at service center reviews are mostly in search of a good service center or repair shop nearby. Understanding this mentality and catering to consumers in this way is good for business.



One in five consumers read reviews specifically to find salespeople.

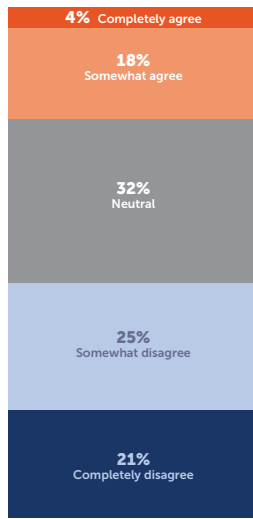
Additionally, a third of consumers have sought a specific salesperson based on positive reviews. As we stated earlier, Millennials (consumers under 35 years old) tend to use reviews more. Demographically, targeting younger car shoppers and car owners with sales staff reviews can be a good strategy to bring in more consumers and create incentive programs to retain top sales talent.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

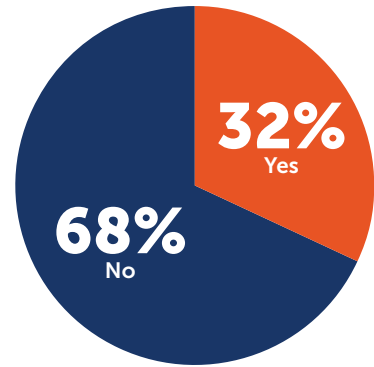
- 22% of consumers seek out reviews on particular sales staff. Embracing reviews as a way to support sales staff can help retain top sales talent.
- Consumers under 35 years old are more likely seek out a particular sales person based on reviews

MORE DETAILS ON CAR REVIEWS CONTINUED

I often use salesperson reviews to see out a particular salesperson/employee

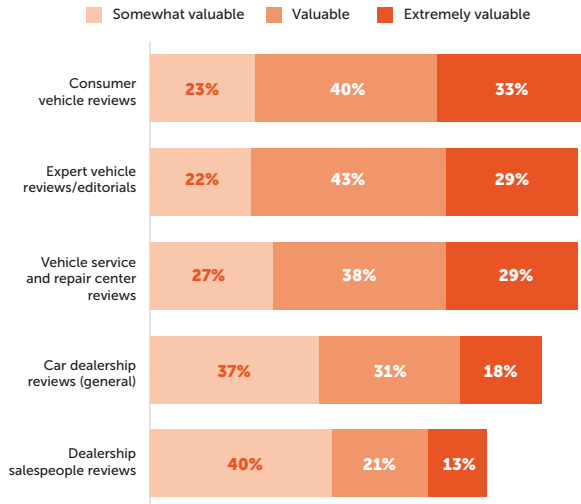


Has sought a specific salesperson based on positive review



Among consumers who use dealership reviews, n=304

Value of car and dealership reviews



HOW DO CONSUMERS USE CARS.COM REVIEWS?

Over half of consumers use Cars.com for reviews. The most used sites with vehicle and dealer reviews are Kelly Blue Book, AutoTrader, Cars.com, and the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).



54% of consumers use Cars.com for online reviews.

Social media sites like Facebook and Yelp are not dominant in the world of vehicle or dealer reviews, with 29% of consumers saying they use Facebook and 13% saying they use Yelp. This proves that automotive third-party websites are the destination of choice for in-market car shoppers.

Most consumers go online to research the vehicles they consider purchasing, from reviews to specs to pricing. Consumers either go directly to a website with which they're familiar or head to a search engine to find what they want. Fewer than half are using online resources to select a dealership or service and repair provider.

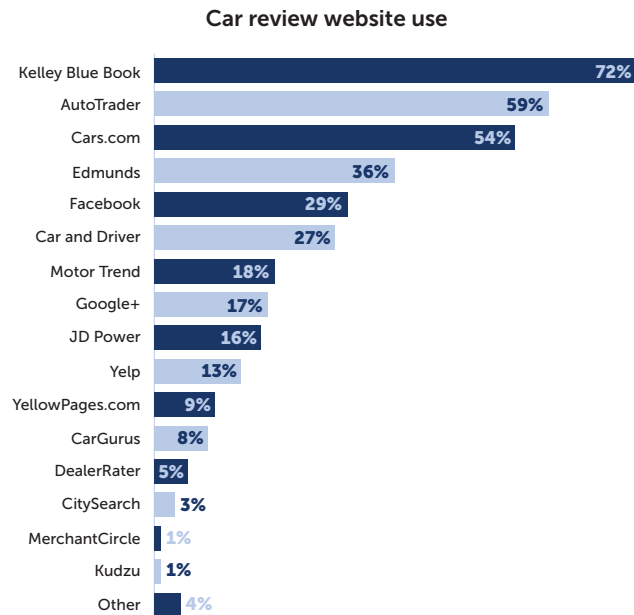
Other marketplace third parties like CarGurus and Kudzu do not have a significant share of the online review marketplace with 8% and fewer of consumers indicating they use these and similar sites.

With Cars.com's acquisition of DealerRater, there is the added benefit of review syndication across Cars.com properties and the added value of allowing consumers to search for particular salesperson. This allows for casting dealer reviews across the Internet to an audience of millions and across numerous other automotive websites like Kelley Blue Book, AutoTrader, and OEM sites.

There is a huge network of industry experts and third parties that dealers can partner with to ensure their online reputation and brands grow in a positive direction. Partners can help connect consumers with the right salesperson, the right vehicle, at the right dealership and at the right time.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Dealers need to partner with third party sites to help maintain their online reputation and digital word of mouth
- Recognizing the value in online reviews as a tool for employee recognition and retention is key to expanding dealers' online reputations and growing their business. However, while specific salespeople reviews maybe used less frequently currently, they're on the rise with Millennials and should continue to be reinforced in use.



WHAT ARE CONSUMERS DOING WITH CAR RELATED REVIEWS?



A CARS.COM COMPANY





HOW ARE YOU TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR DIGITAL WORD OF MOUTH?

Online reputation is important to be successful in moving metal. Dealer reviews are necessary not only to help dealers take charge of their online reputations, but are an influential force in helping consumers make car buying decisions. When it comes to the types of reviews out there, be it dealership reviews or service and repair reviews, they are a pivotal tool in a dealer's digital arsenal—a tool that is underutilized today in a variety of ways. But, that can be easily rectified by taking control of your digital word of mouth.

Salespeople reviews are also key. These types of reviews will help them market themselves in the eyes of car shoppers and create that personal connection that will further dealers' online reputation and incentivize sales staff to sell and stay where they are. We've also discussed the way reviews drive traffic to dealer lots, dealer websites, and dealer SRPs and VDPs through the likes of third party partners—all necessary to reach today's digitally savvy car shopper.

Effective use of online reviews requires a strategy that includes soliciting reviews for sales and service, monitoring online reviews, responding to both positive and negative reviews, and using reviews as a tool for sales employee retention and success.

With this information, dealers can create or update their current review strategy to better target shopper demographics that use reviews more—and on the device they use the most. We shed light on the influence of reviews, traditional advertisements, third party partners like Cars.com, and potential of coupons in reviews. We've also discussed key takeaways from this study to implement this information and make it actionable at the dealership level.

Dealers need to take control of their digital word of mouth now. Implementing strategies based on data and placing the consumer first will not only help the car shopper walk away with a great impression, but make them advocates for dealerships online. It's up to dealers to take control of their digital word of mouth, and reviews are the way to do it.