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Internet inquiries: Respond by e-mail or telephone?



More than 80 percent of today's motorcycle shoppers visit a Web site before visiting a dealership, so we shouldn't be surprised as more and more shoppers' first contact with a dealership is by Internet/e-mail too. Successful dealerships have a defined process in place to handle Internet/e-mail leads, but is the "best practice" to respond by e-mail or by telephone?

Some experts argue that since the customer contacted the dealership by Internet/e-mail, the response should come by e-mail too. Others argue the most effective selling only begins with a phone conversation. What's the correct answer?

First of all, before we get to the answer, a reminder that the single highest predictor of a dealership making the most of an Internet/e-mail lead is a timely response. The most successful dealerships consistently respond within 30 "business" minutes, often first with an automated e-mail response introducing (and selling) the dealership, followed shortly by a brief personal e-mail answering the prospect's specific questions.

But back to our question: Response by e-mail or by telephone? The best practices answer is "both." First treat the lead as if no telephone number was provided and send an e-mail answering any questions. But also immediately follow-up with a phone call, not to obviously sell, but simply to let the customer know that you sent a response to him and you want to be sure that your message made it through the customer's spam filter. The result is a positive first impression even if the customer doesn't have time to talk. Many times the customer will voluntarily begin a conversation that will lead to a visit to your dealership.