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Internet business is no longer incremental business



In the auto industry, we recently learned that industry-wide 36 percent of customer inquiries over the Internet remain unanswered after 24 hours. Granted, that is a car business figure, but when we measured the same figure for the motorcycle industry back in 2008, we found that the motorcycle industry responsiveness to Internet inquiries was roughly one-half of the auto industry's performance.

Think about what that means. ... Imagine if your salespeople paid absolutely no attention to every third customer who walked through the door of your showroom, or if your service writer ignored every third service customer. A dealer principal would never knowingly accept that sort of performance for "in-person" activities, yet it happens every day to customers reaching out through dealership websites.

Customer expectations for Internet responsiveness have changed too. We remember four or five years ago when it was acceptable to respond to customer Internet inquiries within four business hours. Today, with the spread of smart-phones, the expectation is for response within one hour, and the top dealerships respond personally in minutes.

How can you tell how your dealership handles Internet inquiries? Have a friend "mystery shop" your dealership by sending in an Internet inquiry. How quickly did your dealership respond? Did your dealership answer the customer's specific questions? Attempt to contact by telephone? Encourage a visit? Sell your dealership?

Why is it important to focus on these Internet inquiries? Because Internet business is no longer incremental business. It is becoming the business. Today the most successful dealerships meet many of their customers via the Internet. This requires an easy-to-use dealership website and a consistent inquiry response process, but also – and just as importantly – a dealer principal unwilling to accept poor Internet lead performance.

