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## Dealership Study: Overactive Filters Block Some Legit Customer Leads

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"Today, identification and diagnostics of software system failures is just as important as managing employee performance," says Fran O'Hagan, head of Pied Piper Management Co.



"It is a matter of how quickly dealers jump on a problem and get it fixed, because things will happen," O'Hagan says.

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Bots don't buy cars, but efforts to block them can unwittingly prevent real customer digital leads from reaching car dealerships.

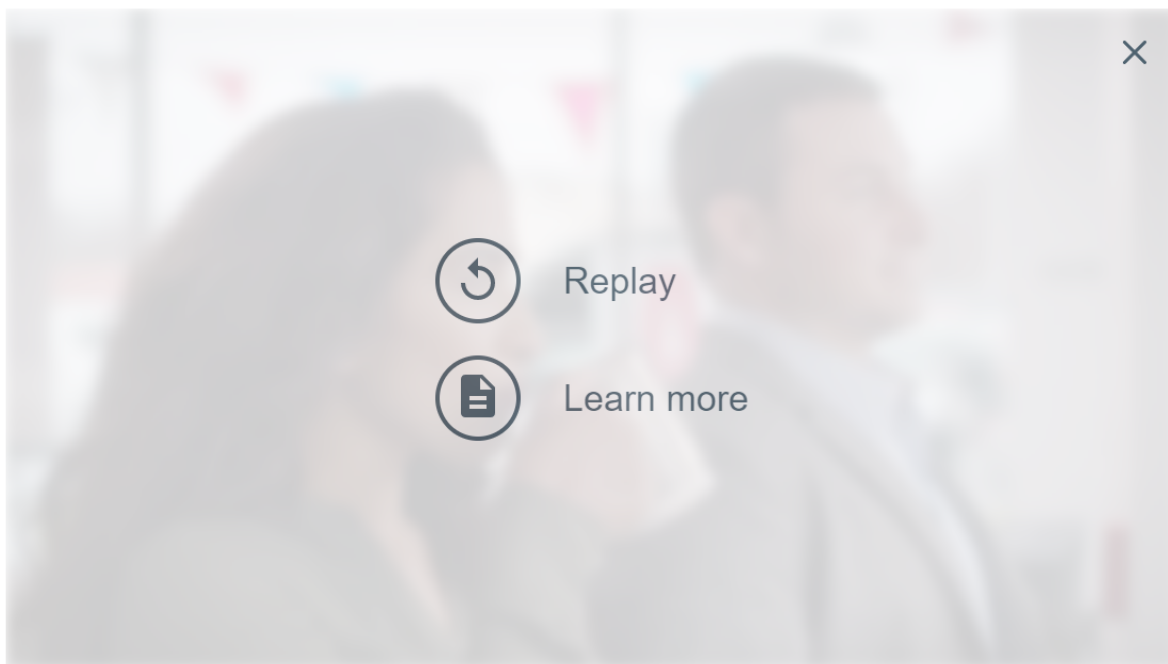
When Internet filters diligently battle bots and spammers, such collateral damage can occur. That's an ancillary finding of the 2018 Internet mystery-shopping study by consultancy Pied Piper Management Co.

Overall, it annually measures how dealerships by brand respond to customer inquiries received through dealer websites.

Mercedes-Benz leads the pack this year, with Porsche, Lexus, Acura and Lincoln in the top five, in that order.

Mercedes has shown consistent improvement in recent years. It once ranked 24<sup>th</sup> out of 33. *(The full ranking is below.)*

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The Pied Piper Internet Lead Effectiveness Benchmarking Study measures whether dealership employees perform the duties assigned to them, such as responding to digital inquiries, how quickly they do that and how well they answer specific customer questions.

But successful dealership web responses depend just as much on multiple software processes that often are invisible to dealerships and manufacturers, says Pied Piper CEO and President Fran O'Hagan. That's where bot and spam filters factor in.

First, a customer inquiry must successfully transition from the website to the customer-relationship management system and avoid getting misclassified by a third party's bot- and spam-detection software, he says.

Likewise, when a digital lead does make it through, a dealer's response – whether automated or manual – must avoid getting flagged as spam by a customer's email provider.

"Today, identification and diagnostics of software system failures is just as important as managing employee performance," O'Hagan says of modern dealership duties.

The over-filtering is not a rarity, he says. "One in 10 customers today receive absolutely no response to their web inquiry, and of those who receive a dealer response, one in seven dealer emails lands in the customer's spam folder."

Because of the issue, a new Pied Piper performance measurement includes how well a brand's dealership emails avoid being unfairly exiled to spam folders. Granted, it is not something dealers directly control, but it is an issue they can take up with responsible parties, O'Hagan tells *WardsAuto*. "It is a matter of how quickly dealers jump on a problem and get it fixed, because things will happen."

He offers advice on how dealer responses can make it through the spam filters of Google, Outlook and other email providers. "Straightforward images usually get through, but there's clearly a problem if a dealership sends text incorporated into a photo."

Yet certain things defy logic. For example, the Pied Piper study found a salesperson's personal response was more likely than an automated response to end up in a spam folder. "We're not sure why," O'Hagan says.

Regarding the other side of the two-way problem, dealers' CRM software in determinedly trying to bar bots can prevent legitimate customer inquiries from getting through.

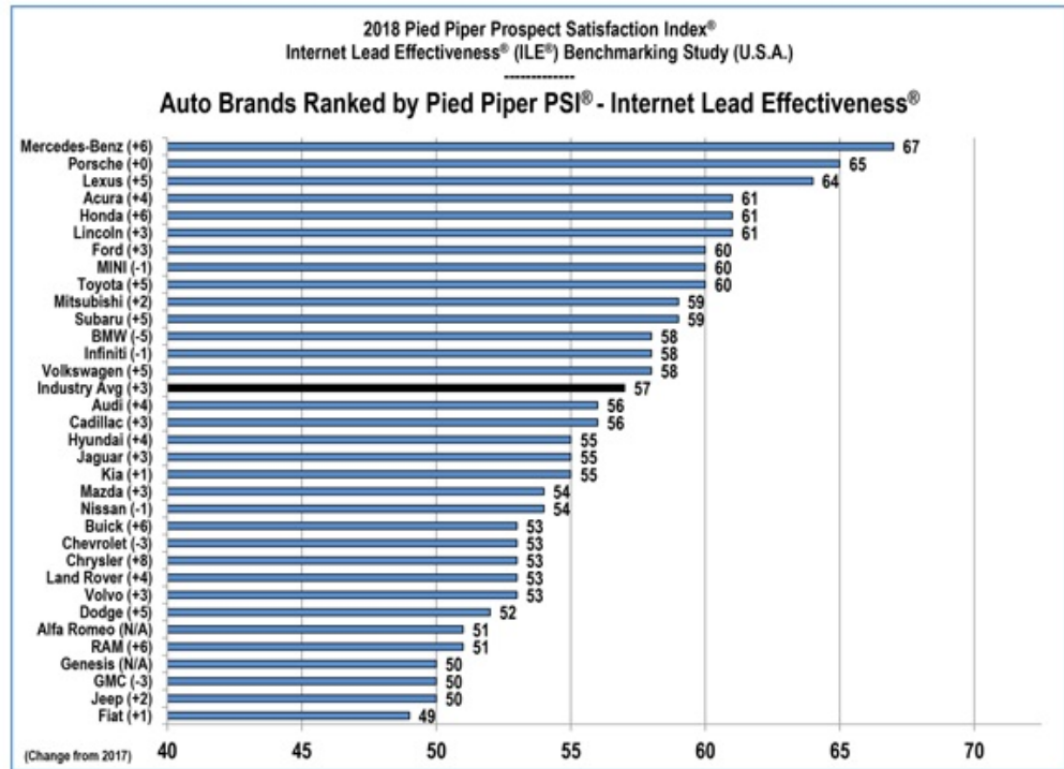
It ultimately is the responsibility of dealerships' digital partners, "but dealers can point it out to them" after they themselves learn of disappearing leads. It is a matter of finding out where in the chain the problem is.

"CRM is like a traffic cop," O'Hagan says. "If you are keeping out all bots and, in doing so, one customer inquiry doesn't get through, that's presumably OK. But if you are keeping

out 20% of customers, that's not OK.

“You don’t want to run the risk of some tech person keeping out all bots at the expense of keeping customers out. Some dealers would say, ‘I’ll take the bots, if it means all of my customers’ inquiries getting through.’”

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Source: 2018 Pied Piper PSI® ILE® Benchmarking Study (USA)