

Cox Automotive Canada's Maria Soklis on Dealer.com's launch of new capabilities to Canadian dealers

Q&A

According to the Cox Automotive Future of Digital Retail Study, 90 per cent of consumers say they prefer a personalized car-buying experience allowing them to shop and buy uniquely. Because shoppers today are doing more and more buying online, dealers understand they need a connected digital marketing experience more than ever.

In this interview, *Canadian AutoWorld* Editor Tom Venetis spoke with Maria Soklis, President of Cox Automotive Canada about how the company's Dealer.com is addressing the needs of today's car-buyer with new and innovative digital marketing services now available for the first time to Canadian dealers that put the consumer first.

Earlier this February, Dealer.com made big news with the addition of several new capabilities to its digital marketing solution to the Canadian market. Can you expand on the significance of these new offerings?

For years, dealers have been accustomed to hearing about all the great innovations Dealer.com was making to its platform and services in the U.S. But those enhancements were never made available in Canada.

That is no longer the case. All the great tools and features in the U.S. will now be available to Canadian dealers in both French in English. We also have a dedicated team for sales, strategy and operations in Canada. Canadian dealers now have unfettered choice, freedom and flexibility to choose a digital marketing solution that is best for them, using state-of-the-art, modern innovations that are trusted by more dealers than any other.

Is it correct that some of Dealer.com's innovations are available now for the first time in Canada?

That is true, and something our team is excited to share with our Canadian clients.

For starters, we've enhanced our advertising solutions to target and enhance engagement effectively. This helps dealers reach more car-buyers, direct them to more inventory and deepen their engagement. And we've created integrated ad campaigns to leverage advanced data-targeting capabilities that connect in-market consumers across paid, social and video channels to leverage car-buyer demands in today's digitally-driven customer journey.

These solutions, integrated within the Dealer.com customized advertising package, save time and increase efficiency for dealers and consumers alike, creating a more intuitive experience for car-buyers, advertising and website alignment for dealers, and increased traffic and leads. With effective targeting, Dealer.com has been able to connect to consumer experiences. Every month, we are informed by more than 72 million unique consumer engagements across North America. The result is we have delivered an intuitive experience for car shoppers, advertisers, and dealers that increase website traffic and more leads.



Maria Soklis

Cox Automotive Canada already delivers a market-leading suite of solutions tailored to Canadian needs

How important is it for dealers to be able to present their brand throughout the online purchasing experience consistently?

As more car-buyers become comfortable with the evolving online purchase experience, this is critical. It is why Dealer.com is also expanding our offerings through our Managed Services team to differentiate dealerships and better serve consumers.

Our team of digital marketing experts provide cutting-edge strategy and execution to bring dealers the SEO, content and creative, and social media services needed to differentiate their dealership, drive more sales and book more service appointments. They also add content and creative capabilities to support fixed ops campaigns to promote specials and incentive campaigns. Videos can also now be embedded within landing pages on the client web site and become an asset to strengthen broader marketing efforts, including social media and search engine optimization. These innovations allow dealers to differentiate their dealership, book more appointments and drive more sales.

How is the relaunched Dealer.com addressing another big concern with dealers: the rising threat of advertising fraud and the dealer's ability to protect their investment?

Last year over six billion dollars was lost to fraudulent ad traffic. A dealer makes significant investments in advertising to generate traffic to their virtual showrooms. They want to make sure that those dollars are being spent on actual humans who are shopping for a vehicle and not a

bot or other form of digital advertising fraud that would waste the dealer's investment.

To protect that investment, Dealer.com is one of the first to have one, and now the only to have two layers of certification to protect against fraudulent ad traffic reducing all bot traffic to below one per cent, saving over 20 million dollars in ad spend last year alone. Our partnership with White Ops, the market leader in automated threat prevention, helps combat advertising fraud and protect the return on investment for automotive industry advertisers.

How will online car-buyers benefit from these innovations?

Today's car-buyers are savvier than ever, and they do their research. They use all the online tools available to them – from search and reviews to videos and social platforms. When a potential buyer arrives at a dealer's website, the experience needs to be the same as if they were walking through the front door of that dealer's showroom. Dealer.com's consumer-first redesign delivers a personalized website created for the modern-day car-buyer.

That's why we are taking a mobile-first strategy. According to the Cox Automotive Future of Digital Retail Study, more than half of website traffic comes from mobile devices. Once again, going mobile-first with this Dealer.com redesign adds immersive Vehicle Deal Pages (VDPs) and more. Our goal is clear: to turn browsing consumers into car-buyers.

As the President of Cox Automotive Canada, you drive the development and execution of the company's Canadian business strategy and operations. And you are also responsible for Dealertrack Canada, as well as Manheim, NextGear Capital and Ready Logistics. How do Dealer.com clients benefit from these synergies?

A big reason for dealers to come on board is the strength of our parent. Cox Automotive Canada already delivers a market-leading suite of solutions tailored to Canadian needs, exclusive front to back integrations and a unique ability to serve and support dealers holistically – as a one-stop shop.

Together, Dealer.com and our global Cox Automotive family of brands connect to help simplify the process, remove friction and enable the smart, connected, and enjoyable experience all car buyers and sellers expect.

Admittedly, automotive retailing is changing quickly. In the foreseeable future, where do dealers need to focus their digital marketing efforts?

Now more than ever dealers realize they need a connected digital marketing experience, as shoppers today are doing more and more of the car buying journey online. For dealers, that experience must be personalized, customized, and tailored to the individual across all digital platforms. The advertising a dealer does has to do the same.

In the end, dealers have to ensure that the transition from online to in-store is seamless so that customers are confident that all of their time spent online was not wasted once they arrive at the dealership. **AW**

Maria Soklis is the President of Cox Automotive Canada.