



**7**



**ways car dealers sabotage  
their own marketing**

(and some of them might surprise you)



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# Why most car dealer ads just don't get a response.

We hear it from car dealerships all the time, "if I could just find that magic advertising formula, life would be so easy." Unfortunately, technology and consumer behavior are targets that never stop moving.

But there are a few timeless fundamentals, when applied boldly and consistently, that will drive more traffic to your store now, and help you build a strong brand for the future.

**Now I will caution you.** Much of what you read in this guide will sound counterintuitive. It may go against every strategy you've ever tried. And quite frankly, it may hit you right in the ego.

But if you'll read and consider this information with an open mind, I think you'll feel a sense of freedom. You don't have to brag that you're the best at everything. Instead, you just have to fulfill your mission: take great care of your customers.

**Here's the paradigm shift:** taking care of your customers doesn't start when they walk on your lot. It starts when you enter their lives through your advertising.

Your primary marketing goal should be to connect with shoppers so they'll trust you. **This guide will show you what to say and what not to say.**

Be brave and give it a shot. It might just be the magic formula you've been searching for.

Sincerely,



**Jeff Hayes**  
CEO & Creative Director  
Dealer Creative



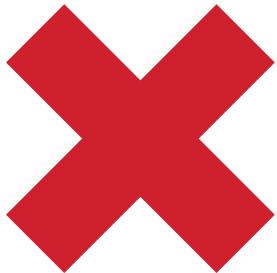
# Problem **#1**

## **Focusing on the dealership more than the customer.**

We get it. There's so much you want to tell the world about. Your low prices, massive selection, and commitment to service. Then of course there's your free lifetime warranty, new state-of-the-art showroom, you just won the president's award for the 24th year in a row, and the business has been around since your great granddaddy started the company as an Oldsmobile dealership in 1908.

These are things you, your family, and your team should be very proud of.

But is it what your customer wants to hear from you?



## **The consequences of focusing on the dealership more than the customer:**

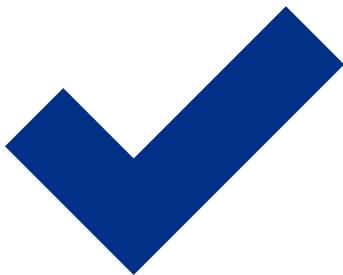
### **You're turning customers off.**

When the spotlight is on you rather than the customer, you're pushing them away.

Effective advertising happens when the dealership addresses and solves the customer's problems. But very often, dealers incorrectly identify what their customers' problems really are.

We all know that low prices, huge selection, and a commitment to customer service are a benefit to consumers. But if you state it the wrong way and always talk about yourself, it just sounds like bragging.

In fact, the customer could easily assume the spot's self-centered attitude applies to your entire business.



## The Solution:

### **Be a problem solver.**

Make sure you know what problem your customers face. The external problems of monthly payment, finding the car they want, and a convenient place to shop are the obvious ones that every dealer says they can fix. But what are your potential customers feeling and why are they feeling that way?

Are they scared or embarrassed because they have bad credit? Are they wanting to keep up with the Joneses? Are they unsure about whether or not they're going to get ripped off?

Then address those feelings in your advertising. That's where the real connection will be made.

Should you abandon talking about price, selection, and a century of serving car buyers? Of course not. Just reposition those talking points as solutions to your customers' problems and feelings. You'll win every time.

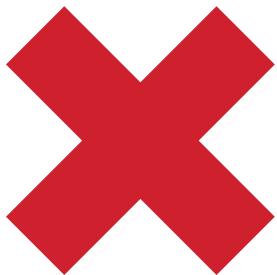


## Problem **#2**

### **Placing too much emphasis on location.**

Surely, you have to tell people where you are and how to reach you. After all, nobody knows where your giant, flashy building with acres of new cars is located, right?

The truth is that in most cases, people already know where you are. You're likely paying for high-visibility real estate, but then you pay for it again by using up valuable real estate in your commercials, communicating information that people already know or can be found elsewhere.



## **The consequences of placing too much emphasis on locators and maps:**

**Location details don't solve the customer's problem.**

Viewers don't necessarily care about where you are, they care about who you are. They care about how your products and people will solve the problems they have.

Car buyers will travel a long distance to buy the right product from the right people. But when you take up valuable time talking about your location, you're attempting to solve a problem most shoppers don't have.

Some dealers like to use maps, but maps don't work very well in video. They're hard to understand on screen because they're usually too small and not visible long enough to be studied and understood.

Long, involved locators become confusing. Phone numbers just get in the way and cannot be remembered. Lengthy URLs are easily forgotten.

Ultimately, your commercials need to be focused on just a few key items that will cause viewers to take action and do business with you. Overdoing the locators distracts from that purpose and contributes to information overload.



## The Solution:

### **Eliminate the geography.**

Unless you're in a unique or hard to find location, don't use maps and complicated locators in your commercials. They're simply not necessary.

### **Spend as much time as possible motivating shoppers to take action.**

People Google everything. If you've convinced them to take action, they have the tools to figure out where you are.

By the way, if you do choose to use a simple locator, do not say, "ABC Toyota, located across from Taco Bell." No, Taco Bell is across from you! The tiny stores around you are not landmarks. You are the landmark.

Again, if your commercials truly resonate with the viewer, if your offers are radically compelling, and if you communicate very clearly, your car buyers will figure out exactly where you are.



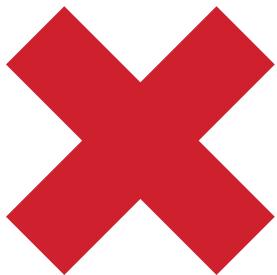
## Problem **#3**

### **Bragging about a large inventory.**

One of the worst things a car dealership can do is boast about its selection.

Common thinking is that if you can demonstrate to your customers that **you** have more cars in stock, you have a better chance at winning the business.

That's understandable. After all, you want to appear to be the biggest, and you want to be known as the dealership that has exactly what the shopper wants. But the customer may not see it the same way.



## The consequences of boasting about a large inventory:

### A: You're killing all sense of urgency.

While you do have the appearance of having something for everyone, you're also saying that you'll *always* have this much inventory. The signal your sending is that there's no need to hurry up and buy. You're giving car shoppers permission to procrastinate.

### B: Shoppers get overwhelmed with too many options.

When faced with too many choices, people freeze and don't make a decision.

Think about it. If you had to choose a color to paint a bedroom and your spouse presented you with three options: tan, gray, or white, it's easy for you to visualize those options and decide. On the other hand, if you were presented with three shades of tan, four tones of gray, plus white, blue, light blue, a slightly lighter blue, and a gray-blue mix, you're less likely to make a decision quickly, if at all.

Car shoppers are the same way. They're eager to make a decision, but you have to make it easy. They are in the market for one car, not 5,000 cars. Just *thinking* about the energy and effort it will take to sort through 5,000, 500, or even 50 vehicle choices is enough to shut our brains down.



## The Solution:

### **Brag about scarcity.**

You expect that when you go to the grocery store they will have hundreds of salad dressing choices. Customers expect that when they shop at a car dealership, they'll have plenty of choices as well. So, you really don't need to brag about it.

Be bold and do the opposite of conventional wisdom: tell customers that supplies are *limited*.

Instead of saying you have hundreds of trucks in stock, tell customers you have a special selection of 20 trucks priced at \$199 per month, and the last time we had this sale price, the inventory sold within a few days. So hurry in and get yours because this offer won't be available again for a while.

**Don't be afraid to let scarcity, rather than choice, be the factor that drives urgency in your advertising.**



## Problem **#4**

### Trying to say too much.

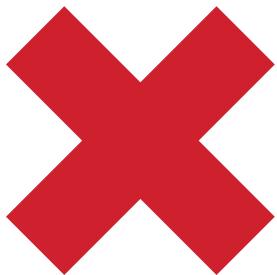
It's understandable. You have a lot to say, but a limited amount of time to say it. And you have an ad budget that's even more limited.

Your hope is that if you promote a before and after price, a lease payment, an APR offer, a lifetime warranty, and a complete list of options, there will be a nugget in there for everyone, and therefore everyone has a reason to respond and do business with you.

So you fill up the screen with every bit of information you can think of, and you cram as many words as you can into the script.

But does this "throw everything at the wall and see what sticks" method of advertising really work?

And how much does a shopper really need to know before they decide to do business with you?



## **The consequences of saying too much:**

### **A: The clutter is distracting.**

When you load up one scene (or the whole commercial) with tons of text and images like it's a newspaper ad or direct mail piece, viewers will not know where to look. And if and when their eyes do lock onto something, it's too late because the commercial suddenly cuts to the next frame.

So what just happened? The viewer saw, processed, and remembered nothing you showed them.

### **B: People don't and can't act on confusion.**

Let's say you have a big decision to make, but you're confused about the options. Are you able to make a decision? Of course not. Only after you clearly understand your choices are you able to decide.

With a jam-packed script, a rushed announcer, and a screen loaded with prices, words, video clips, starbursts, awards, your logo, address, phone number, website, and a long disclaimer, your potential customers will be totally confused, guaranteed. And that means they can't take action.

People ignore what they can't immediately understand. When you overwhelm your audience, you simply won't be heard.

**Remember, as the amount of information you share goes up, the retention rate goes way down.**



## The Solution:

**Focus on one main goal per commercial.**

Most car dealerships just want the viewer to contact them so the shopping and buying process can begin. What's the quickest and easiest way to do that? Just slow things down a bit and focus on **one main goal** in your ads.

Ask yourself, "*what is the ONE thing I want the viewer to do after seeing this commercial?*" Be specific. And then be bold and brave: **cut out all other information that doesn't support this purpose.**

**Getting the graphics right is crucial too.**

Remember:

Cut the clutter.

Take away excessive text.

Lose the locators until the end.

It seems counterintuitive, but it's true: **the less you say, the more that's remembered.** By saying less, your message will be much clearer, you'll make a much deeper connection with the viewer, and they will know exactly what you want them to do.

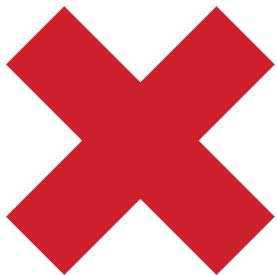


## Problem **#5**

### Rushing through the creative process.

Dealerships often wait until the monthly incentives are announced before they begin work on their advertising. Then they panic and haphazardly create new commercials to air that weekend.

Obviously, there are reasons you might play this waiting game. For some dealerships, knowing which models are being discounted and by how much is a big part of how their creative is typically designed. But this is a dangerous method of marketing for a number of reasons.



## **The consequences of rushing through the creative process:**

### **A: Falling behind your competition.**

If the dealer across town was planning out this month's advertising *last* month, they are weeks ahead of you in executing their strategy. This means they gain share of voice in the market while you're silent and invisible.

### **B: Little time for creative approval and review.**

With no plan in place heading into the month, many dealerships and agencies fall into the trap of just airing last month's spot again because they're out of time. It's critical that you and your marketing team have ample time to develop a fresh creative strategy each month rather than airing last month's stale spots—which customers may not respond to. (more about this issue on page 18).

### **C: No differentiation.**

With no time to be innovative and a "let's just get something on the air" mentality, you can fall victim to the vanilla syndrome: blending in with everyone else's bland creative, and being a part of the clutter instead of cutting through it.



## The Solution:

### **Plan ahead.**

Work with your creative partners to think 90 days ahead (or longer if you're really ambitious). Having a plan in place means no more scrambling on the first Tuesday of every month. It will simply mean plugging in your offers and fine tuning your message a little.

But the best part of planning ahead is beating your competition to the marketplace with this month's killer offers. And that means more market share for you.



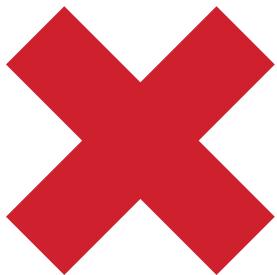
## Problem **#6**

### **Not keeping your creative fresh.**

Some dealers think they'll save some money by running the same commercial for an entire month, two months in a row, or even three months straight.

Others just change out the offer and disclaimer thinking that will freshen up the spot.

Well if you want to cut through the noisy advertising landscape, is sticking with the same spot month after month really a good approach?



## The consequences of not keeping your creative fresh:

### A: Stale advertising costs you money.

You may have heard that frequency always wins, so that's why you let the same spot roll for a while. Frequency is still very important, but thanks to social media and shrinking attention spans, today's viewers also expect new and fresh—all the time. If your spots are even just a few weeks old, you run the risk of becoming irrelevant and ignored in a hurry.

So if you're trying to save a few bucks by extending last month's spot into this month, how much money are you actually *losing*? A stale, worn out spot goes in one ear and out the other.

### B: You're not generating urgency.

What's the most popular sale to have in November? Black Friday... **all month long**. Where's the urgency in that? If a car shopper sees your Black Friday All Month Long spot on November 7th, but you say it's going on for the entire month, you're essentially saying, "eh, you have time, no hurry, you can wait for a while..."

That's very passive advertising, and it won't deliver the response you want.

The same principle applies to President's Day Savings All Month Long, Memorial Day Sale All Month Long, and any kind of event that runs for weeks or months at a time.



## The Solution:

### **Stop thinking in monthly terms.**

Don't view your spots as a month-long plan, or even worse, two or three months. Really savvy and ambitious marketers develop new spots twice a month, sometimes weekly. Consider at least a bi-weekly plan.

Don't water down a Black Friday sale (or any sale) by doing it all month. Do it ON Black Friday and make it really special. Conduct different compelling events on the other weekends of the month with specific end dates, so each sale has a ton of urgency. And don't extend the sale, end it! That way customers will believe you every time you have a "limited time" offer.

### **"Frequency and fresh" work together.**

*Frequency* doesn't always mean running the same spot forever. *Fresh* doesn't always mean starting from scratch. It just means presenting the same general message in a different way, in a different context.

Even the most effective spots get old, lose their punch, and because of their familiarity, get buried in the noise of the day. So mix things up a bit and constantly hit your audience with something new and inviting.

Your goal should always be to generate extreme top of mind awareness by advertising constantly and creatively. That means frequency with a fresh message, updated more than once per month. Dealers who keep it fresh are always two steps ahead of their competition.



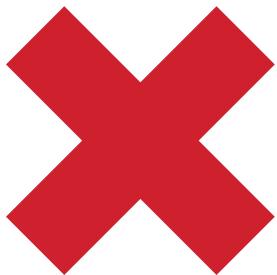
## Problem **#7**

### **Trusting in free or cheap production.**

So what's the harm in saving a few hundred dollars by having the TV station, radio station, or a one-man-band production company produce your spots?

It's understandable. Advertising and all the related expenses can really add up. So why not save some money here and there, especially if somebody is offering it to you? After all, a commercial is a commercial... does it really matter who creates it?

But is saving a few bucks now really worth it in the long run?



## **The consequences of trusting in free or cheap production:**

### **When the price goes down, so will your confidence.**

We've heard horror stories from dealer groups who saved money on production, but lost confidence because their spots weren't done on time and weren't very effective.

Would you be comfortable if your college-age daughter who is a thousand miles away from home took her car to Billy Bob's auto repair shop to have her car fixed? Of course not. You'd want her car to be serviced only by factory-trained technicians at a reputable, franchise dealership.

The same idea applies to your advertising.

The production guys at the TV stations are not focused on driving traffic to your stores or building your brand. Their job is to produce a stack of commercials as quickly as possible so the station can get something on the air.

### **There's a price to be paid for free or cheap.**

"If you think it's expensive to hire a professional, wait until you hire an amateur." That's a quote you see posted all over LinkedIn, but when it comes to auto dealer creative and production, nothing could be more true.

The payoff you'll receive by hiring professionals will be 100x greater than the chump change you'll save by hiring a beginner.



## The Solution:

### Hire a professional advertising company.

Choose an automotive creative and production firm which places a heavy emphasis on strategy and strong copywriting. Good marketers know that the writing is the foundation for all effective communication.

The company you choose should have experts and professionals in every creative area: strategists and writers, graphic designers, video editors and videographers, sound designers, and professional project managers to keep it all flowing smoothly and ahead of your deadlines.

They should have a collaborative environment and a studio facility that's built to move quickly while not sacrificing quality.

Look for companies who specialize and have their values rooted in local businesses, not national ones. You'll see much better results when you partner with a creative firm who has a passion for you and your mission as a local or regional player.

You shouldn't have to settle for cheap production and media people who aren't thinking about your business and how to help you grow it. Is it really worth it just to save a few hundred bucks? This is your business. Your brand. Your image. Your legacy. When you cut corners on creative, you're putting all of that in jeopardy.

# **Be bold and courageous. Take the steps your competition won't.**

**These may seem like some pretty bold actions**, but figuring out which parts of your advertising are working is very difficult. Therefore, you have to eliminate as much doubt and uncertainty as possible. Avoiding the seven pitfalls in this guide will help you gain more advertising confidence.

We're sure that when you

- focus on the customer more than the dealership
- solve the customer's problems
- use scarcity to create urgency
- focus on one goal per ad
- plan ahead
- keep your creative fresh
- trust in creative professionals

your advertising and brand image will be so radically different than your competition. Customers will take notice, and you'll take more market share.

**To learn more about these strategies, or advice on how to put them to use for your dealerships, contact Dealer Creative today:**

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[info@dealercreative.com](mailto:info@dealercreative.com)

