

Consumers Show Car Dealers They're Behind the Wheel When Buying a Vehicle

Study by C+R Research reveals role of independent research in automotive buying decisions

CHICAGO, Sept. 4, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- In a crowded automotive ecosystem, car shoppers rely on only a small handful of trustworthy resources when researching and purchasing a vehicle, according to a new report by C+R Research. Through an independent study commissioned by Cars.com, C+R Research found that the majority of consumers demand explicit control during the car shopping process, opting to use independent automotive research sites and experience-based activities, such as visiting a dealership and talking with friends, rather than traditional advertising channels, to navigate the still-arduous process of buying a car. To download the full study, please visit: <http://dealers.cars.com/digital-influence-study>.

"Consumers can be overwhelmed by automotive content, but rather than tune it all out, they're selecting the pieces that are most valuable to them, effectively curating their own car buying experience," said Simon Tiffen, senior manager of advertiser insights at Cars.com. "They're willing to put the time in to gather all the information they need so that they're confident when they eventually head to the dealership."

Additional findings from the study include:

- **Exposure, influence and utility of sources:** From TV and radio advertisements to independent research sites and offline conversations, consumers are inundated with auto-related messages – across all platforms - throughout the car shopping process; however, the majority of consumers report being influenced by just six to seven sources. Of those sources, only one or two are used as primary decision making tools. These "go-to" sources are typically viewed as the most helpful and trustworthy by consumers.
- **Offline experiences, not offline advertisements, influence consumers:** The most influential offline information sources are experience-based and include: talking to friends, visiting a dealership and noticing a vehicle on the street. Only nine percent of shoppers were influenced by outdoor ads, while just 8 percent cited radio advertisements as influencing their buying decision.
- **Digital sources have a significant impact on vehicle and dealership consideration:** 2 in 3 shoppers referred to an online source as being one of their "go-to" resources; nearly half of shoppers cited independent research sites as being a primary shopping tool.
- **Online research is a substitute for dealership contact:** Only half of all car shoppers reported contacting a dealership prior to visiting, with most citing that they felt it was unnecessary given the information available online.

"Not all sources are the same, and consumers are quick to realize this," said Tiffen. "Each source serves a different purpose during the shopping journey, which makes understanding context critical. For example, though a manufacturer's TV or radio advertisement might help a consumer gain awareness for a particular vehicle, there's still a gap in trust. The consumer is going to build their knowledge of the advertised product and verify facts using additional, less-biased sources before making a decision."

Knowing when to leverage each source is equally important. The study found that online sources are more influential earlier in the shopping process, while offline sources, such as visiting a dealership, become more important once primary online research has been conducted.

"Digital platforms give shoppers the tools and knowledge to communicate when and how they choose, allowing them to control the dialogue with dealerships on their own terms," said Tiffen. "It's why only half of consumers contact a dealership before making a visit; there's often little incentive when similar information is available from independent sources online."

The study, *The Digital Influence: How Online Research Keeps Auto Shoppers in Control*, examined survey responses from more than 1,000 in-market shoppers and recent automotive purchasers collected between April 30, 2014 and May 9, 2014.

To download the study, please visit: <http://dealers.cars.com/digital-influence-study>.

ABOUT CARS.COM

Launched in June 1998, Chicago-based Cars.com is a leading independent research site for car shoppers that offers credible and easy-to-understand information from consumers and experts to provide buyers with greater control over the shopping process. The website and mobile app allow shoppers to search, compare and connect with sellers and dealers all over the country. Leveraging its growing audience of approximately 12 million unique visitors per month, Cars.com provides digital marketing solutions to dealers, manufacturers and other

organizations looking to position themselves in front of captive, in-market car shoppers. For more information, visit www.dealers.cars.com.

About C+R Research

C+R Research is a consumer and market insights firm. For more than 50 years, the company has provided its clients with insights on the thinking behind consumer behavior in a variety of industries, including consumer packaged goods, financial services and retail.

The 2013 Market Research Supplier Satisfaction Survey ranked C+R as the No. 1 full-service market research supplier in the U.S.

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