

Attract shoppers in less than *10 seconds* — or lose them.



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Executive Summary

You have less than 10 seconds to grab a shopper's attention and a constant ticking clock after that to keep it. Dealers can't afford to miss the mark with content or design, whether in the store itself, on your webpage, or in email communications.

From length of content, reader level, and the impact needed to make your headlines stand out, to the way each consumer scans their inbox or the design of your homepage, there are simple but vital tips to make sure your dealership is heard amid the din of competing voices.

This whitepaper details crucial best practices for creating the best website and emails by:

- Refining content length and readability
- Making the most of limited time for punchier headlines
- Utilizing today's design standards to their fullest
- Leading consumers to digest your content most effectively

Content

A recent Microsoft study found that the human attention span is now 8 seconds long, down from 12 seconds in 2000, which forced marketers across industries to admit that the average consumer has a shorter attention span than a goldfish (9 seconds).¹

This doesn't mean consumer brains are melting, just that our minds are adapting to the influx of multiple sources of information to consume this data overload based on priority.

Hubspot shared an infographic that might leave dealers like yourself even more nervous about how to keep potential buyers interested once you get them to your website. At most, people will only read 28% of whatever page they land on, usually closer to 20%, and the average user doesn't stay for minutes but only 10-20 seconds before they click somewhere else.²

Those first few seconds need to be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Relatable
- Easy to Navigate
- Engaging

¹ <https://advertising.microsoft.com/en/WWDocs/User/display/cl/researchreport/31966/en/microsoft-attention-spans-research-report.pdf>

² <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/human-attention-span-decreased>



This starts with reading level, especially when you're talking about a website's homepage. According to Copyblogger, the average American reads at a basic 8th (or even 7th) grade level—not 12th grade or college level with a word-a-day calendar to build up their vocabulary.³

“So if you want to improve your conversion rates, you have to present your [products] in a very concise, reader-oriented manner, without relying on unnecessary explanations or adornments that couldn't be understood by 8th or 7th graders.”⁴

What else does the average attention span mean for dealers and how you market to customers and prospects? VentureBeat says it's time for:

1. Shorter and more interactive formats
2. Premium long-form
3. Sensationalism

Those first two might seem contradictory, but consumers either want short content (between 300-500 words) or lengthier, meatier content closer to 2000 words, not in between.

“Essentially, although the majority of articles in a given news publication will likely become bite-sized (point #1), the remaining articles would become extremely high-quality, long-form articles (point #2). We'll likely start seeing middle-length news articles disappear.”

Bite-sized can also mean the limited-character appeal of sites like Twitter. If, as a dealer, you want your headline, your ad, your marketing campaign to catch the attention of consumers, you have to be sensational in only a few words.

How often do you, as a consumer yourself, scan dozens of headlines without reading a single story? You're like 60% of the rest of Americans who do the same thing.⁵

What about email?

Subject lines and email content work under the same principles as what we've covered so far. You still need to keep your message clean and concise, and you still need to consider that dwindling attention span with reading level and appealing content.

HelpScout's “A Brief Guide to a Better Email” is all about the retail experience and how personal that interaction

³ <http://www.copyblogger.com/how-to-read/>

⁴ <https://expresswriters.com/successful-web-content-reading-levels-aim/>

⁵ <https://venturebeat.com/2016/12/04/our-8-second-attention-span-and-the-future-of-news-media/>



needs to be. Two points made for better emails that dealers need to remember are to individualize your communications and use the word ‘thanks’.⁶

Don’t forget about reputation management inherent in email responses to customers and prospects as well. How you respond to negative feedback can have a lasting impact on your bottom line, whether that’s through email, on your website, or on third party review sites.

Even if your webpage or email looks beautiful, it’s only a pretty package without good content.

Design

Now let’s turn that around and admit that even the best content might be undervalued or ignored if it’s hidden in a crappy wrapper, and while bad content might take longer for someone to notice and abandon, consumers don’t give bad design more than — you guessed it — 8 seconds.

68% of website visitors fail to convert “because they don't think you care about their experience.”⁷ It isn’t about making a good product, it’s about the entire consumer lifecycle and their perception of you from the moment they land on your website or receive their first communication.

Hubspot takes us through the key components to exceptional web design, and the first on their list shouldn’t surprise you.

1. SIMPLICITY

When you’re shopping online, all you care about is whether you know where you are, who you’re interacting with, and if you can easily accomplish what you want. It’s a ‘call-to-action’ because dealers like you want people who come to their site to DO SOMETHING specific, but if they can’t get out of the experience what they want, they’re not going to submit the lead you want.

Anything beyond simple is too much for our inundated brains to process and we just want to leave. So, for your webpages stick to:

- 3-7 colors MAX
- 3 different basic font types MAX
- Purposeful graphic choices
- Functional design elements

⁶ <https://www.helpscout.net/guide-to-better-email/>

⁷ <https://vitamintalent.com/ux-statistic/#Introduction>



2. VISUAL HIERARCHY

Additionally, design your pages so that font size, reading from left to right, and the general layout naturally draw consumers to the important elements on each page.

“When it comes to optimizing for usability and user experience, the goal is to lead visitors to complete a desired action, but in a way that feels natural and enjoyable. By adjusting the position, color, or size of certain elements, you can structure your site in such a way that visitors will be drawn to those elements first.”⁸

3. NAVIGABILITY

Ease of navigation should be intuitive and goes back to simplicity. It shouldn't be a guessing game on how to find current specials, get a quote on a trade-in, or send in a request for a test drive.

This can be accomplished by having a clear navigation bar at the top and bottom of every page, breadcrumbs to remind consumers what page they're on and how they got there, search bar functionality, and embedded links in your content copy that are clear about where they lead.

4. CONSISTENCY

The last thing you want is for a consumer to click on a specials page and think they've left your site entirely because the design is so far removed from the general look and feel of other pages. Just like the design of your brick and mortar store, there should be similar themes throughout with use of the previously described best practice elements across every page of your site.

5. ACCESSIBILITY

Yes, this is where we remind you about responsive design and how crucial a mobile presence is to reach the most consumers the way they want to be reached.

comScore tells us that tablet internet consumption grew 30% between 2013 and 2015, and the same time period for smartphones grew 78%.⁹ Dealers can't wait for 100% of their customers to be shopping on desktops, tablets, or smartphones before they cater to those design needs.

The good news is a responsive web design automatically configures to fit the device being used, same with responsive design in emails.

6. CONVENTIONALITY

Finally, when it comes to web design, some conventions have become staples that consumers expect, like having:

- Navigation at the top (or left)
- A logo at the top left (or center) that is clickable and leads back to the homepage
- Links that change color when hovered over or clicked on

⁸ <https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/30557/6-Guidelines-for-Exceptional-Website-Design-and-Usability.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2016/2016-US-Cross-Platform-Future-in-Focus>



There are many ways to get creative with web design. These basic conventions aren't where you should be different.

But don't only listen to Hubspot.

Sharpened Productions goes over the same basic list of best practices with a couple additional points that also shouldn't be forgotten.¹⁰

Multiple devices are important to design for, but the same goes for multiple browsers. At the very least, always test what your pages look like in new browsers before making them live.

The most obvious but often missed piece of advice is to check for errors. The tiniest typo can cause a consumer to close a window and never return. If you don't care about your website, maybe you don't care about your products or your customers either. Typos, broken links, and images that are slow or fail to load should all be attended to.

And now for email again.

You guessed it, all of the previously discussed tips for webpages also apply to email, the main point being that you need a template that makes your message appealing and easy to read.

Obviously, every email template you use should include your logo, but while you want to show off your brand, don't think oozing personality with insane customization takes precedence over tested best practices.

Emails, whether targeted and shorter or lengthier newsletters, should be concise and easy for the eye to follow.

"Research has shown that people scan emails in an "F" shaped pattern... Important information should be at the top, including your company logo, your call to action, and any key points that you'd like readers to take away from your email."¹¹

Whenever possible use shorter sentences, shorter paragraphs, or bullet points to better direct people's eye and hold their attention.

Attention-grabbing subject lines are important as well, but don't trade context for that desired sensationalism. What do you want to accomplish with your email? What do you want the consumer to get out of it? That should be the focus of your subject line and the very top of your message, because many people won't scroll all the way to the end if they even open an email fully. Make sure your call-to-action is front and center.

Remember to also keep contact information and share options readily available. The point of communicating with customers and prospects is engagement. To increase the likelihood of engagement, individualize your content to each person. Send customers who just purchased a vehicle 'thank you' emails and invitations to review their experience online, as well as service reminders to keep your dealership top of mind.

¹⁰. https://sharpened.com/web_design_rules

¹¹. <https://www.pardot.com/blog/7-examples-successful-email-templates-case-study/>



Newly in-market customers, on the other hand, should receive information on vehicles they're most interested in. Cross those wires and both consumers might click the unsubscribe button.

Conclusion

Take your first steps toward content and design improvement by keeping in mind how limited your time is to keep each consumer engaged. 8 seconds can fly by, so as you refine your webpages and email templates for 2018, remember these best practices to leave a lasting impression.

ABOUT OUTSELL

Outsell drives more revenue for auto dealers by keeping them in front of customers and prospects throughout their individual lifecycles. Using automated marketing communications across channels, Outsell's proprietary technology helps dealers optimize and merchandize their VDPs and tip them off when consumers are most ready to engage, buy, or service – helping them retain more customers and attract new ones. The Outsell marketing platform manages millions of interactions every month for dealers representing all major automotive brands.

