

How “tierless” marketing can increase digital sales

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Why auto brands and dealers need to move toward a ‘tierless’ marketing approach

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Tom Laymac, global director of digital at Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, explains how “tierless” marketing led to a more seamless customer experience and increased sales.

Approaching marketing problems with a “silo” mentality is one of the biggest limitations in the industry today. This is particularly true with the automotive behemoths, where the brand, regional, and dealer segments, known as “tiers,” behave as autonomous entities, each responsible for their own successes and failures.

Consumers ... want to have their questions answered with as little friction and confusion as possible.

Auto shoppers do not differentiate between messages coming from the dealer and the manufacturer. Consumers — whether they are still in the research phase or ready to buy — want to have their questions answered with as little friction and confusion as possible.

This is where “tierless” marketing comes in. By removing silos and consolidating data, auto manufacturers and dealers can see these consumers through the same lens, aligning and even reinforcing the response back to the consumer, thereby permitting a more seamless customer experience regardless of where that customer is in their purchase journey.

But if you work in the auto industry or another industry that has traditionally relied on a tiered approach to marketing, there are some things to consider if you’re looking to go tierless.

Brands need to integrate their business teams and goals so they can project a cohesive image.

Align KPIs to drive toward one common goal

When teams work in a vacuum, it creates gaps in our understanding of the entire customer journey, often into an incomplete or incorrect answer to the customer’s question. Brands need to integrate their business teams and goals so they can project a cohesive image, simplifying the path for their customers.

Until recently, each tier within our organization defined success differently. At a brand level, we were focused on driving upper-funnel metrics, like brand awareness, and increased reach while our dealers were solely focused on driving leads. We measured different KPIs through different analytic platforms by multiple agencies, each through their own lens.

To combat this, we made operational changes across the organization to ensure key stakeholders across the tiers within the brand, sales, and marketing group were all looking at the same data, in the same way, and coming together at the same time to discuss how we collectively respond. A unified response to the constraints along the path to purchase drove alignment and reduced internal conflicts, while substantially reducing variation in how we address the consumer. Ultimately we focused on achieving one goal: increasing our digital contribution to retail sales — in our case, a percentage of retail sales attributed to a form or a phone lead.

Connect customer insights through a single platform

Previously, we were only looking at segments of the customer journey, so there was no way to understand what the consumer had just done or where they were coming from. We knew what that consumer was doing on each individual website, but we couldn't stitch together a coherent journey to understand their real intent. And we couldn't move people along to the next stage, closer to purchase.

In response, we partnered with the 2,700 dealers in our co-op program to bring customer data into a single measurement platform, in this case, Google Analytics 360. Since manufacturer, regional, and dealer website data is now being pulled into a single place, it's much easier for us to see what the customer previously did or researched, and then guide that customer to the next stage without redundant or irrelevant messaging or confusing the consumer, which can drive them in the wrong direction.

Accept the detours

We know we're still not 100% there yet. One of our remaining challenges is optimizing the experience as the consumer bounces between the brand, regional, and dealer experience. Each tier continually tracks and improves the consumer experience within its own ecosystem. Next we need to stitch together the experience across all tiers — every page, image, and click — to eliminate redundancy and efficiently get them to the next step. This challenge is exacerbated by the large number of website and certified digital media providers we work with.

We are making definite progress despite these headwinds. We know we must be flexible as we continue to improve how we hand off customers between tiers. And, as they bounce back and forth, it's our job to make their experience as seamless as possible.

Although we're still in the early stages of this coordinated strategy, we're happy with the results we've seen thus far: Targeting high-intent consumers yields a more efficient paid search spend. We've been able to more than double our digital-lead retail sales at the same marketing cost. This strategy has also enabled us to strengthen the bridge between tiers and make more informed marketing decisions.

Ultimately, our role at the manufacturer level is to be a connector — to help potential and existing customers get where they need to be without taking the relationship away from the dealer. Striving for better marketing alignment across tiers and a more holistic view of these future customers are the keys to driving the future success of our brands.

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