

# On the Web

## Site upgrades

Update on the dos and don'ts.

BY SCOTT SOWERS

Used-car inventory lists, 360-degree vehicle views, and animated spokespeople are being added to Web sites faster than you can say “bigsales.com.” But will the upgrades really move more units? Some dealers say yes—but the tools you need most aren't necessarily the flashiest ones in the box.

### FLY PAPER

“You have to give customers something that gives them instant gratification,” says David Metter, president of marketing for MileOne Automotive Group in Baltimore. “It helps your closing ratio and keeps customers from flying off the [Web] page.” Cyberspace “fly paper,” he says, includes Web upgrades such as the ability to chat live online with a salesperson, have a trade-in evaluated, and get a credit check without leaving home. Sexier bells and whistles, like the talking spokesperson that pops up on Metter's site (www.mileone.com), can also boost the bottom line, adds Metter, by directing buyers to what they're looking for faster and providing a way to gauge response. “We found that by attaching sales and service specials to the spokesperson, we can measure it a lot better.”

### WHO SPEAKS FOR YOU?

So who should be your store's spokesperson? Visit www.troyaikmanford.com and you'll get a chance to listen to a pitch from the quarterback-turned-dealer himself. And Miami Dolphins Hall of Famer Dan Marino appears as a pitchman for AutoNation in South Florida (www.autoway.com).

But if you visit the site for Frank Griffin Chrysler/Jeep in Orange Park, Fla. (www.frankgriffin.com), you'll get regular dealer Frank. “If I see a celebrity spokesman, I know they've been hired to do that,” says Griffin. In his large, urban market near Jacksonville, Fla., he sees his online persona as a tool for connecting with buyers and “making it a bit more down-home.” And although he's seen huge growth in Internet sales, he modestly calls any connection

**Frank talk:** Dealer Frank Griffin is his own site's spokesman.

between his appearance on the store's Web site and higher volume “questionable.”

### HOLD THE FLASH

Industry experts have come to doubt that there's much cash in flash. “A few years ago it was all about image,” says Steve Stauning, director of Web solutions for Reynolds and Reynolds in Dallas. The complex images and graphics used in the past created confusion among buyers instead of sales. “We're now out of the flash era, and dealers are coming to us saying, ‘Help me capture more leads.’”

### THE SPECIALIST

In the past six months, Internet manager Pat Hayes of Hudiburg Chevrolet, Midwest, Okla., upgraded the company's Web site (www.hudiburgchevys.com) to include a talking spokesperson nicknamed “Neutral,” 360-degree car views, pop-up coupons, a virtual inventory, and online views of car interiors. Hayes says the efforts have doubled the store's Net business. But he credits people, not technology: “It's never just one thing—it's a combination of having a dedicated staff and an entire department. You still have to invite people in for a test drive.”

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