

On target

Auto Dealer App by Pulse is helping both dealers and their customers build stronger relationships while changing the way business is done

IT'S AMAZING HOW FAST things progress. Five years ago not many of us knew what an app was. Today, thanks to widespread smartphone and tablet adoption apps have exploded. In fact, research firm Gartner predicted that last year, 102 billion apps would be downloaded — a number that is only set to grow exponentially in the coming years.

“You can use an app wherever and whenever you want,” says Mohan Markandaier, President of Pulse Services, whose firm has developed its own Auto Dealer App. “This technology is currently at the stage the Internet was around the year 2000. In the next few years, we are going to see features and functionalities for apps that haven’t even been thought of yet.”

Markandaier originally trained as a mechanical engineer but as the technology boom unfurled in the 1990s, found himself working as a programmer. In 1996 he and three fellow engineers formed Pulse Services, a company specializing in telecoms solutions. A decade later, with mobile telecoms technology rapidly advancing and the creation of Apple’s iPhone, Markandaier saw the opportunity in creating mobile applications (apps) designed to work with the phone’s operating system.

SPECIFICALLY TAILORED

As a result, Pulse began developing their own apps, conceived to function with the new raft of smartphones and tablet devices. This included an app specifically aimed at automotive retailing.

“We had an opportunity to partner with a dealership on a mobile app,” says Markandaier. “That was when we understood there was a need in the automotive retail space to build a platform, so that is what we did.”

Markandaier says the goal was to provide a powerful tool to enable dealerships to increase sales and boost loyalty by retaining customers. “A mobile app can open the door to a much deeper relationship, allowing customers and dealers to stay connected in ways never possible before,” he says.

For Pulse, an important consideration when developing its Auto Dealer App, was to understand the value it provided for the end user, namely why a consumer would want to download a “branded” app, what they would use it for and how often. “Our objective was to have a tool that enabled you to do anything related to your vehicle, right from the app itself,” says Markandaier.

To that point, users can book a service appointment with their dealership, search for inventory and receive special deals and promotions based on their location. Media integration also enables these users to share information on these deals and promotions with friends. It also provides other services such as collision report capturing (gathering data and images from vehicle accidents), as well as a flashlight and parking

marker, all designed to promote frequent use of the app by the user.

POWERFUL TOOL

Markandaier says the real powerful aspect of the app, is that it allows customers to essentially “carry their dealership” around with them wherever they go.

For dealers, the ability to launch their own branded app to connect with customers and target deals and promotions based on specific customer profiles enables them to deliver an effective message to a captive audience like never before. “There’s no need to pre-plan,” says Markandaier “they can simply target and promote deals based on where the customer is, go in and push the deal.”

Markandaier says that the result is a win-win. It provides dealerships with a cost-effective way to market to their customers, while said customers receive promotional information that is relevant to them, when they need it. “It’s not just any old marketing campaign that is taking place,” explains Markandaier.



Mohan Markandaier

He says that dealers should understand the benefit in promoting the app to their customers in order to attract user behaviour and act on specific marketing or sales campaigns, based on the data they have available. “Those were the principles we had in mind when developing the app,” says Markandaier.

ACCESSIBILITY

Other considerations were the ability for the app to leverage a store’s DMS to ensure the right data is easily accessible, allowing dealers to target specific customers effectively. “We know that many dealerships have software solutions in place for specific tasks,” says Markandaier. He notes that inventory data is a good example. “The data might be contained within the DMS but the images — which are a requirement for the app — are not.” He says that’s why Pulse works closely with dealerships to determine whether the app requires direct



Pulse’s Auto Dealer App enables end users to “carry their dealership” with them on the go

integration with the DMS or that third-party data is readily accessible.

By providing a standard set of functionalities and the ability to customize brand requirements, the end result, says Markandaier is a model that proves cost-effective for dealers. “There are no setup fees,” he says, “only a monthly cost of \$250 and that includes any updates, such as the operating system, the device and software changes.”

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Launched in the spring of 2013, Markandaier says that dealerships who use the app, love it. “Feedback has been very positive,” he says. “Customers have told us they love the fact that it’s fast, that it’s convenient. Dealers like it because it makes them look very progressive.”

As the pace of technology advances ever more rapidly, Pulse continues to look at adding features that will provide additional value and benefits. “One feature we’re looking to add,” says Markandaier, “is a program where customers can refer other customers in order to earn points — in essence a digital loyalty card program.” Others also include real time chat with dealership staff, making service payments directly through the app, vehicle inspection reports, even advanced telematics.

It’s a brave and exciting new world out there but thanks to technology like the Auto Dealer App by Pulse, a world that for dealers, presents countless opportunities to improve the customer experience and grow their business. ■

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