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# ***UNPACKING BIG DATA:***

ANALYZING ONLINE SHOPPER BEHAVIOR BEYOND THE LAST CLICK

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*A study conducted in partnership with Groove Auto Group*

It doesn't matter how many people visit your website.  
**What matters is what they do once they get there.**

Analytics platforms alone don't tell you if visitors to your dealership's site are serious about buying a car. They show you how many people are viewing VDPs or performing searches, but that's where their storytelling capabilities end. They lack the power to differentiate motivated car shoppers from those who are just kicking tires online. So, Cars.com conducted a study to track car shoppers over their **complete** digital journey and uncover metrics that no reporting system alone could answer.

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**Which visitors drove website performance and engaged in activities that drove value for the dealership – and which visitors didn't?**

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Groove Auto Group, which operates four dealerships in the Denver metro market, understands that the shopping process is non-linear and that customers do a significant amount of research when deciding which dealership to choose. Because they're armed with these insights, Groove is actively pushing into big data to get beyond last-click web analytics.

Gabriel Montano is Groove's operations administrator and part of the dedicated team that manages their digital marketing. "Everyone has a dashboard, and everyone has analytics to offer you," said Montano, "but sometimes the information that's being offered is not always relevant."

Together with Groove and Dataium, we set out to find which dealership site traffic data points were valuable, how they told the story of shopper engagement online and what that said about their intent to purchase offline. Which visitors drove website performance and engaged in activities that drove value for the dealership – and which visitors didn't?

**Here's what we learned.**  
**NOT ALL CLICKS ARE CREATED EQUAL.**

Study findings showed that Cars.com shoppers (throughout this report, this term refers to Groove Auto site visitors who also had Cars.com in their recent browser history) displayed on-site behavior that was more indicative of purchase intent. Visitors who hadn't visited Cars.com weren't as engaged in the search process, thereby showing less intent to actually buy a car.

**ABOUT GROOVE**

Groove Auto Group operates four Denver-area dealerships representing five franchises. Established in 2009 and owned by Summit Automotive Partners, Groove prides itself on its

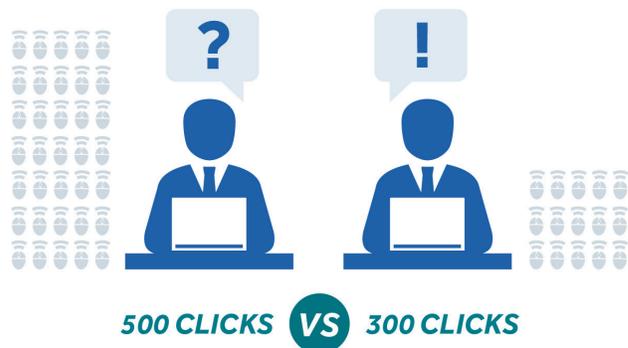


**GABRIEL MONTANO**  
Operations Administrator,  
Groove Auto Group

customer-centric approach and has a dedicated team of experts who analyze data, metrics and performance to help drive success for their dealerships. On a national level, Summit Automotive owns and operates 22 dealerships representing 19 manufacturers, and was formed by a group of automotive and business professionals seeking to change, through innovation, the way car dealerships do business – with their customers and as an organization.

**ABOUT THE STUDY**

Cars.com and Groove worked with Dataium to collect and analyze website traffic over a 12-month period, looking for trends that spoke to the overall quality of the Cars.com audience and how they interacted with Groove's dealership sites.



Visitors to Groove Auto sites who did not appear to have yet conducted independent research beforehand displayed less engaged behavior and had lower conversion rates. They:

- Conducted **41% fewer searches** on Groove Auto sites
- Were **46% less likely** to submit an email lead
- Viewed **38% fewer VDPs** on Groove Auto sites

*We would rather remove a source that is going to provide high quantity and low quality than one that's going to provide us 10 people, but nine of them are going to buy.*

- GABRIEL MONTANO

Don't mistakenly believe that the number of visits is what's most important. "We believe in the concept of quality over quantity," said Montano. "We would rather remove a source that is going to provide high quantity and low quality than one that's going to provide us 10 people, but nine of them are going to buy."

Shopper quality matters far more than how many eyeballs you get on a page. Because if those eyeballs aren't connected to engaged, interested shoppers, they don't matter when it comes to making a sale.

## CARS.COM SHOPPERS ARE HIGHER-QUALITY THAN SHOPPERS WHO HAVEN'T VISITED CARS.COM.

According to Montano, Cars.com visitors, on the other hand, displayed online behavior that showed they were intending to buy: "lower bounce rate, higher pages per session, higher time on site, higher inventory interaction" – all signs pointing to their being more ready to engage with the dealership than their non-Cars.com-using counterparts.

When compared to visitors to Groove sites who did not have Cars.com in their search history, once they reached Groove sites, Cars.com shoppers:

- Conducted **71% more** searches
- Were **85% more likely** to send an email lead
- Viewed **62% more** VDPs
- Had a **44% lower** bounce rate
- Were **nearly 50% more likely** to conduct a walk-in indicator (e.g., viewing a map or directions page)

What this means is clear: Cars.com helps to engage and motivate shoppers throughout the research process – and their behavior on Groove sites indicates they're thinking seriously about making a purchase. They've used independent research sites to do their homework and are visiting **your site** because they've deemed your dealership a trustworthy place to buy a car.

## GROOVE'S DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

*Along with a savvy digital marketing team, Groove Auto has a sophisticated system in place to ensure that they're always driving high-quality traffic to their sites, regardless of source. Cars.com helps them to take care of some of the heavy lifting – and gain even more insights into their traffic.*

*By being educated on digital trends, traffic and the industry as a whole, the team at Groove gets a holistic picture of their online shoppers, and they're eager to learn about what turns those shoppers into the customers who are signing contracts at the dealership.*

*And, Groove invests in its team, making sure they feel empowered to be digital marketing experts – and leaders. Said Montano, "It's been an amazing journey, and Groove has definitely made that possible and paved that road. They believe in you and they make it happen."*

These shoppers aren't casually browsing for a vehicle – they're displaying online behavior that can translate into sales for you. You need to engage them how and where they want to be engaged.

## UNDERSTANDING SHOPPER BEHAVIOR IS CRUCIAL.

“Consumers jump all over the place. Having a brand, exposing your brand and having a resource to do so is important for a dealership’s digital marketing strategy.”

- GABRIEL MONTANO

“Consumers jump all over the place,” said Montano. “Having a brand, exposing your brand and having a resource to do so is important for a dealership’s digital marketing strategy.” In other words, being in more than one place matters – a consistent, robust presence across the web makes the consumer feel confident in your brand, and it helps to attract shoppers who are ready to buy. And one of those places where it’s proven valuable to be is on Cars.com.

Motivated, ready-to-buy car shoppers do their research, and they visit multiple online sources to do it. That’s why the “last click” isn’t what matters most – sources that drive traffic to your site *indirectly* play a huge part in building brand awareness and connecting you with shoppers who are serious about buying a car. Most shoppers rely on at least three online sources to help them decide on what to buy, and they’re not immediately clicking over to your website from those sources.<sup>1</sup> The shopping process is non-linear, so those indirect referral sources matter. A lot.

According to Montano, Cars.com ranks among the top 10 sources for direct referral traffic to Groove sites – and is one of the consistently top-performing for indirect referrals. In fact, via both direct and indirect referrals, Cars.com drove **22.7%** of all visits to Groove.com sites – and **25.3%** of their SEO traffic had visited Cars.com.

Montano said it’s important to understand the ways in which serious shoppers are getting to dealers’ sites, and that dealerships need to have a presence where those shoppers are: The research shows that they’re on Cars.com. “Most technology focuses exclusively on either A or Z,” he said. “It’s single-source attribution; it’s only looking at the first or last click. The indirect referral is occurring somewhere between B and Y. But just because you didn’t see that doesn’t make it any less relevant or less important.”

You can’t sidestep partnering with an independent research site if that’s where the highest-quality shoppers are spending their time. Consumers view these sites as valuable in their shopping process; having no presence on them means finding yourself outside of these shoppers’ final consideration sets – and losing out on sales.

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## PROMOTING A DEALERSHIP’S BRAND ON INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SITES ENCOURAGES FURTHER ENGAGEMENT.

In this study, Cars.com branding tools proved to be critical in building trust in and affinity for a specific dealership, thereby making shoppers more likely to consider a dealership’s entire inventory and further engage with its brand.

<sup>1</sup> The Digital Influence: How Online Research Puts Shoppers in Control, Cars.com and C+R Research, 2014



What's more, even among Cars.com shoppers we saw different levels of engagement. Having your vehicles on Cars.com is a great way to promote your dealership, but to drive even further shopper awareness and engagement – and to reach the shoppers who are closer to making purchase decisions – additional branding tools matter. We found that the more branding and merchandising pages shoppers visited on Cars.com, the more engaged they were with Groove sites.

*We know it's occurring on Cars.com, but when a VDP view occurs on the dealer level, that's the equivalent of someone walking on the lot, opening the door and saying, 'Can I see myself in this vehicle?'*

- GABRIEL MONTANO

When compared to other Cars.com shoppers, those who viewed Groove's Special Offers, Reviews or Dealer Profile Pages on Cars.com conducted **3.3 times more inventory searches and viewed 2.6 times more VDPs** on Groove Auto sites. They were more actively building and narrowing their consideration sets. And, comparing shoppers who only viewed VDPs with those who further engaged with Cars.com branding tools, the group that had looked at Special Offers, Reviews or Dealer Profile Pages conducted **2.2 times more** inventory searches. And those are the people who are serious about choosing a dealership and buying a car.

Of particular interest to Montano was the lift in VDP views from Cars.com shoppers that took place on Groove sites. "We know it's occurring on Cars.com, but when it occurs on the dealer level, that's the equivalent of someone walking on the lot, opening the door and saying, 'Can I see myself in this vehicle?'"

After leaving Cars.com – particularly after engaging with Cars.com branding tools – shoppers arrived at Groove's dealership sites ready to shop that dealer and consider their whole inventory. Because Cars.com branding tools made Groove's dealerships stand out so far beyond the competition, shoppers established trust in the Groove brand and were more likely to shop those dealerships' inventories, rather than look for the same vehicle elsewhere.

### ADDITIONAL MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES ON INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SITES INCREASED ENGAGEMENT ON DEALERSHIP SITES.

Independent research sites offer products that build a dealership's online reputation and make shoppers feel comfortable about finding the right place to buy a car. For example, shoppers who had viewed Special Offers on Cars.com were **more likely to search inventory and view VDPs on Groove sites** – and, shoppers who viewed Groove's Dealer Reviews on Cars.com displayed **lower bounce rate, more inventory searches and more VDP views** on Groove sites.

"Going where the consumer is, that's your lifeblood," said Montano. "It's all about the consumer. It is all about creating an experience that the consumer feels comfortable in and that the consumer enjoys." Independent research sites like Cars.com offer the tools shoppers want on the sites they visit, guiding them through their purchase journey and keeping them motivated.

- CONDUCTED **3.3X MORE SEARCHES**
- VIEWED **2.6X MORE VDPs**



\* Cars.com Shoppers who viewed Groove's Special Offers, Reviews or Dealer Profile Pages vs. other Cars.com shoppers



## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The Groove Auto team believes that it's not just about analyzing one metric; **you've got to look at the whole picture.** "Increases in searches, increases in likeliness to send a lead, more VDPs, walk-in indicators – they're all important," said Montano. Understanding it all gives him – and Groove – the confidence to connect with the right audience of car shoppers in the best way. And connecting with that audience means partnering with independent research sites like Cars.com.

As Montano put it, these findings "confirm what Cars.com does for dealers, which is **providing a platform where we can expose our brand and our inventory and then be connected to a broader, qualified audience.**" And, Cars.com guides shoppers through all points of the process – from initial research, to building a consideration set, to choosing a dealership and walking onto the lot.

That qualified audience is full of shoppers who are highly motivated to buy – **and you need to be in front of them.** Understanding the source and quality of your website traffic, rather than just examining number of clicks, sets you up to better attract the right audience of car shoppers – and at the end of the day, that's what helps you sell more cars.

## RUNNING THE NUMBERS

Based on our study findings, let's take a look at the impact of leveraging independent research sites like Cars.com could make on a hypothetical dealership's bottom line.

Let's start with some basic industry benchmarks: a **1.7% email lead** form submission rate on a dealer's website,<sup>1</sup> a **15% sales conversion rate** from email leads<sup>1</sup> and an **\$1,800 gross profit** per sale on a dealer's website.<sup>2</sup>

If we pencil this out using Groove's lift in email lead form submission rate from visitors who have Cars.com in their browsing history (3.7%), the bottom line ROI impact is substantial.

Say this dealer's site receives 2,000 visitors a month. Using data from this study and our benchmarks, we see a model where the dealer's traffic who did not research on Cars.com prior to engaging with the dealer translated into 17 leads, three sales and \$5,400 in profit.

But, for shoppers who did visit Cars.com prior to engaging with the dealer, we see **37 leads**, seven sales and a **profit of \$10,800.**

### A HYPOTHETICAL LOOK



The numbers speak for themselves. Cars.com drives more qualified traffic and increases sales for your dealership.

<sup>1,2</sup> Source: Auto Dealer Monthly, January 2013



## **ABOUT CARS.COM**

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 allows 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 [dealers.cars.com](http://dealers.cars.com).

## **ABOUT GROOVE**

The Groove dealerships operate under Summit Automotive Partners, led by Chief Executive Officer and Partner Bill Carmichael. Summit Automotive Partners manages 19 franchises and 22 dealerships across the country, including Vista Auto in Silverthorne, Colorado. Groove and Vista Auto encompass nine of Summit's 19 franchises: Toyota, Scion, Ford, Mazda, Subaru, Chrysler, Dodge, Ram and Jeep.

The Groove Auto Subaru dealership is ranked among the top five in the country, and its other dealerships are consistently in the top three in the Denver metro market – that success is driven in large part by the 400-plus employees at Groove dealerships.

Groove Auto believes in "YES." That not only expresses the desire to meet a customer's needs; it also expresses positivity, passion and fun. It tells customers they can expect ease, they can expect to hear solutions and they can expect a can-do attitude from each and every Groove employee they encounter.

## **ABOUT DATAIUM**

Dataium is the world's largest compiler of online automotive shopping behavior. Every month Dataium observes over 20 million automotive shoppers across over 10,000 automotive websites and then aggregates, indexes and summarizes this data into intelligent insights. With its Cloud Intelligence® Platform, Dataium can predict future sales, prove advertising effectiveness, measure website performance and perform additional comparative analysis that helps its clients grow sales, lower costs and retain customers.