

# Advertising Age®

## Car Dealers Learning Art of Viral Video

**A Quarter Now Use the Tactic for Its Low Cost and Fast, Easy Measurability**

By [Jean Halliday](#)

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DETROIT (AdAge.com) -- You might expect that the last person to upload a video called "[The Seven Ways Dealers Screw You](#)" would be an auto dealer. But Norwood, Mass.,-based Clay Corp. is among the one in four U.S. dealers embracing web video as a marketing vehicle to inform, entertain -- and sell.

### By the numbers

**25%** Percentage of U.S. dealers using online video

**\$80** Cost of a vehicle-walk-around video

**\$7.8B** Amount dealers spent on advertising last year

**\$2,000** Starting price for a 30-second spot, which can run up to about \$15,000

Howard Polirer, director-industry relations for AutoTrader.com, estimated that 25% of all U.S. dealers now use online video. That figure is nothing to sneeze at, considering there are 20,800 new-car dealers in the U.S. that spent more than \$7.8 billion in advertising last year, according to the National Automobile Dealers Association. It may also come as a revelation to some, given that car dealers have are still portrayed by some agencies and automotive marketers as being interested only in "move the metal" TV commercials, rather than the broad array of digital tools they can deploy today.

"Video is exploding," said Larry Pryg, national marketing and ad manager for General Motors Corp.'s certified-used-auto business, largely because it can be created inexpensively (some videos cost less than \$100) and quickly and be easily measured.

Moreover, Mr. Pryg said when it comes to used cars, websites with video are twice as likely to generate calls or e-mails from shoppers to dealers than ones without. Cognizant of that, GM shifted out of traditional media and placed all its spending online for its certified-used products in 2006. The marketer recently approved Sister Technologies, Dallas, as a vendor to create used-

vehicle-walk-around videos for its U.S. dealers to use on their sites as well as on auto portals and YouTube.

For the most part, auto dealers are running video on their own sites. The videos generally consist of customer testimonials or personal introductions from the dealers, and showcase new or used models. Some repurpose TV spots. In addition to their own sites, some dealers upload executions to selling sites such as AutoTrader, which attracts 14 million new visitors monthly who check out its inventory of 3 million-plus

new and used vehicles.

### **Badgered**

A smaller number of dealers that have steered onto viral-video sites such as YouTube do so with wacky executions, such as North Carolina Hyundai and Kia dealer David Johnson's over-the-top "[Tired of Being Badgered](#)" spot starring a talking badger acting as a tacky, old-time car salesman. And the nearly four-minute video for Clay Corp.'s dealerships in Massachusetts shows a chunky salesman stripping down to his skivvies, promising to "show you everything," including the aforementioned seven ways. Neither dealer returned calls for comment.

Utah dealer Wes Johnson uploaded a video onto YouTube earlier this year to explain his shift from selling Dodge to Toyota. But he said the odds of reaching customers in a specific geographic area with videos on YouTube or Facebook are long.

"I'd rather spend our time in a place where we have a targeted audience," said Mr. Johnson's wife, Lila, director-marketing communications at Menlove Toyota. About six months ago, she started uploading customer testimonials on [menlove.com](#) and has seen increased traffic in the showroom.

The business hired O'Mara & Associates, a suburban-Detroit shop that handles dealer ad groups and individual dealers, for the video work. Founder Matt O'Mara said the cost to produce and upload a video of a vehicle walk-around is about \$80, compared with a 30-second spot, which starts at about \$2,000. The videos are especially helpful to prospects of used products but also help dealers showcase the models, he said.

### **More than TV ads**

"Too many dealers are taking the typical approach of putting their TV commercial online," said Wayne Ussery, director-internet marketing for a multibrand dealership chain in Marietta, Ga. Any videos for YouTube or viral sites need to be more interesting, he said.

His employer, Jim Ellis Automotive Group, which has seven auto brands, uploaded streaming video to some of its dealership sites about a year ago. VP Jimmy Ellis appears on the company's home page, [jimellis.com](#), inviting visitors to check out the chain's inventory in its "virtual dealerships." The business hired an independent videographer, not an ad agency, to handle the shoots.

Mr. Ussery said he can't equate video views with used-car sales because some cars that have been sold have received 30 video views, while some viewed 200 times haven't sold. But he said visitors to Ellis Chevrolet's site are staying longer -- an average of about four minutes, a minute more than before. Video, he said, "makes your site more sticky."

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