

86% Of Buyers Research Their Next Car In The Evening: Auto Trader Urges Dealers To Bolster 'Night Watchmen'

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Latest research from Auto Trader's Annual Buyer Behaviour Study¹ reveals:

- Mobile and tablet devices are generating two thirds of overall traffic to autotrader.co.uk; the majority of searches take place after 6pm
- 50% of used car buyers only visit one forecourt, but most will visit more than three dealer websites
- More and more franchise, supermarkets and independents see 'walk-ins' as first point of contact with a customer

Auto Trader has shed further light on the changing face of car buying, with a rise in evening research, fewer forecourt visits and more customers arriving on site without having made any prior contact with sales staff. So today the company is reminding all retailers to focus carefully on their 'night watchmen', the online points of contact that drive leads when doors are shut and when buyers are searching.

The second Annual Buyer Behaviour Study¹ conducted by GfK for Auto Trader, pooled the experience of 1,300 car buyers spanning a three month period into quarter one 2015. The sample comprised 16 dealers, four franchise groups (representing more than 250 dealerships with an even split between new and used car purchases), ten independents and two car supermarkets, making this one of the most comprehensive studies of its type in the industry.

Evening multi-screening is the new norm:

Two thirds of traffic to the Auto Trader site is generated by mobile and tablet and research shows that more are searching in the evening. 86% of consumers now search for their next car after 6pm.

While buyers do search at other times of the day, just 24% of desktop users, 18% of tablet searchers and 36% of smartphone users said they were most likely to search between the hours of 9 and 6pm when dealers' doors are typically open.

Half of buyers visit only one forecourt

50% of franchise customers visited only the dealer from whom they bought their car compared with 47% for supermarkets and 51% for independents. The decline in dealer visits contrasts with an increase in the number of referrals to online showrooms. Most people visit at least three as part of the buying journey, with the average standing at nearly five.

Increase in 'walk-ins' as first point of contact for your dealer

Walk-ins are now the first point of consumer-dealer contact in 58% of transactions. For franchise dealers, the research revealed a higher figure at two thirds or 66%, compared with 50% when asked the same question a year ago.

A slightly lower figure was reported for car supermarkets. 63% of customers made first contact through a walk-in while, for independents, the figure was much lower albeit still nearly half of all transactions (48%).

"This latest research continues to frame a buying journey where a forecourt visit is increasingly the affirmation of a decision made following extensive research online," commented Nick King, market research director. "In this new online environment things like full page ad views and a content-rich, responsive dealer website become key tools in driving leads. They are the night watchmen for your dealership, the professional face of your online business that drive leads out-of-hours, or in the absence of any active engagement with you or a member of your team."

Auto Trader will report further findings from the report in the weeks to come and will repeat the study annually.

Ends.

Note to editors:

1. The Annual Buyer Behaviour Study (previously known as the Dealer Sourcing Study) was set up to get a better understanding of consumer behaviour and journeys when buying a car through franchise, independent and supermarket retailers. The second study built on a pilot undertaken last year. Consumer sales data was supplied to Auto Trader by participating dealers. This was then supplied to research agency GfK. GfK conducted telephone surveys with 1,300 customers (624 franchise, 376 independents and 300 supermarkets) over a three month period, asking about their buying journey and experience.

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