

Internet Is Making Car Shopping More Efficient As Role Of Traditional Media Declines, According To A Polk Study Commissioned By AutoTrader.com

The results of the 2013 Polk Automotive Buyer Influence Study indicate that car buyers are spending less time shopping overall but are devoting more of their shopping time to the Internet.

ATLANTA, June 27, 2013 [PRNewswire/](#) -- According to a new study commissioned by AutoTrader.com®, the Internet is making car shopping more efficient. The 2013 Polk Automotive Buyer Influence Study revealed that the amount of time consumers spend shopping for a car has decreased dramatically in the last two years; however, the percentage of their shopping time that is spent online has increased substantially.

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First conducted in 2011 and then fielded again in 2013, the study showed that new car buyers who used the Internet in the shopping process reported spending 13.75 hours shopping for a vehicle, a decrease of 5.25 hours since 2011. Similarly, used car buyers who used the Internet during the shopping process spent 15.25 hours shopping, a decrease of 2.75 hours since 2011.

Although consumers are spending less time shopping overall, they are spending a greater percentage of their shopping time online than they were in 2011. Previously, buyers spent an average of 60 percent of their shopping time online, but that percentage increased to 75 percent in 2013 (77 percent for new car buyers and 73 percent for used car buyers). These changes were likely driven by several factors, including the improved quality and quantity of listings, as well as better merchandising online, greater use of mobile devices and also macro factors such as the continually improving economy.

"When we commissioned the first study a few years ago, the economy wasn't as strong as it is now, and we believe that shoppers were being much more cautious, taking longer before arriving at their final purchase decision," said Kevin Filan, vice president of customer marketing and industry relations at AutoTrader Group. "Now that the economy is stronger, buyers are taking less time overall, but they are devoting more of that time to shopping online. This is significant, as it points to the increasing influence of the Internet during the shopping process."

The study also revealed that the role of traditional media in the shopping process has decreased notably. Though all forms of traditional media showed decreases in usage, the biggest declines in usage of traditional media during the shopping process for both new and used car buyers were seen in print newspapers, television and direct mail.

- For new car buyers, use of television showed the biggest decline, going from 34 percent in 2011 to 22 percent in 2013. Close behind was print newspaper, which dropped from 28 percent in 2011 to 18 percent in 2013. Use of direct mail went from 16 percent in 2011 to 8 percent in 2013.
- For used car buyers, use of television also exhibited the biggest decline, though the decrease was slightly less pronounced. Use of television by used car buyers went from 18 percent in 2011 to 12 percent in 2013. Use of print newspaper went from 26 percent in 2011 to 17 percent in 2013, and use of direct mail went from nine percent in 2011 to 4 percent in 2013.

"While dealers, OEMs and their advertising agencies have shifted more money into online advertising, there is still a large imbalance in the allocation between traditional and digital mediums," Filan continued. "We know from the study that buyers who use the Internet are spending the most time on third-party sites, so dealers and automakers should ensure they are marketing their brands, their dealerships and their inventory where the active car shoppers are going online. And with continued double digit traffic growth and our largest traffic months in our history taking place in the first half of this year, AutoTrader.com is more relevant than any time in our 15 year history of making car buying and selling easier."

In addition to the key stats mentioned above, the study also found that:

- Three-quarters of car buyers indicate that they used the Internet during the shopping process, making it the most used source.
- Among Internet users, 62 percent of used car buyers and 47 percent of new car buyers indicated that the Internet was the primary source that led them to the dealership where they bought a car, which was more than fifteen times that of any other media source cited in the study.
- The rise in Internet usage was driven primarily by domestic and luxury buyers, who turned to the Internet in greater numbers in 2013 versus 2011.
- New car buyers use the Internet more to find special offers while used buyers look for actual vehicles for sale to a greater extent.
- Approximately two out of three of all car buyers do not contact the dealership prior to their first visit, with 62 percent of used car buyers and 67 percent of new car buyers citing "walked in" as the most common method of establishing initial contact with the dealer.

The 2013 Polk Automotive Buyer Influence Study, commissioned by AutoTrader.com, was conducted among over 2700 car buyers and ran from December 2012 through April 2013. Ninety percent of buyers who were surveyed purchased a vehicle in the six months preceding their participation. The study used a combination of online and offline survey methods, resulting in a large, random representative sample of online and offline car buyers.

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