

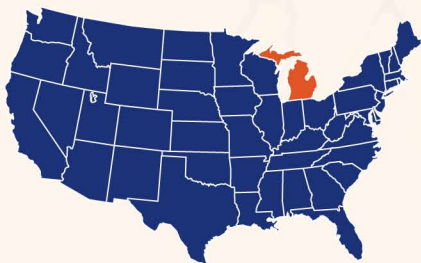
Using Third-Party Website Service Providers

By Garrison Wells

Back in the “old days” (think late 1990s) it was enough for a dealership to have basic website with its address, hours and maybe a few details on the inventory it carried. Not anymore.

Today’s consumer wants to be able to shop online 24-7 (probably on their smartphone), and they want to be able to view floorplans and features, to view online videos and sometimes to engage in live chats with dealership personnel. It can be a tall order to fill, which is why dealers in greater numbers are relying on third-party providers to help them keep current with the latest technology.

Recently, *RV PRO* connected with dealers across the country to find out how their websites are working for them.



Kristen Manninen,
general manager
A&S RV Center
Auburn Hills, Mich.

“Highlighting our RV inventory is the most important benefit of our website. We notice an increase in visits and time spent on the site when we have more pictures and new pre-owned inventory. Our rental pages also get a lot of traffic. We do sell parts online, but that is a small part of our online business.

“We designed and managed our website internally until 2007, which is when we first hired an outside company to manage it for us. This allowed us to integrate our inventory with our DMS and made it a lot easier to keep it up to date.

“About a year ago, our provider switched our site to a responsive site, so we no longer needed a separate mobile site. We have had great reviews on our newest format – customers frequently tell us that our site is very easy to navigate and I know it’s important to have this kind of website, especially with the large percentage of people accessing our site from their mobile devices and the recent changes in Google’s algorithm.

“**Amdia** is our current website provider. We switched to **Amdia** at the end of 2012, because we liked the features they provided and the tie-ins with the **Route 66 RV Dealer Network**, of which we are a member. They also manage our Adwords campaigns and do some of our social marketing, which is great because they can ensure that our website and advertising are all working together to have the most impact. They have been very reliable and responsive to anything we need.

“We do some of our own customization on the site, such as designing banners to advertise special events or new products, updating hours, adjusting rental information, and uploading pictures. For any major changes, we contact our provider. We managed our website

ourselves for a long time, but it’s just too time-consuming to stay up to date on all the changes in website design and search engine optimization, so we feel much more comfortable having a specialist manage it for us.

“A large percentage of our customers visit our website before visiting our dealership. They come in to our dealership knowing stock numbers, prices, and colors.

“Our customers are also able to set up an account and ‘watch’ units. If we make any changes to the unit, such as lowering the price, or changing the status to ‘sale pending’ or ‘sold’, the customer will receive an email. We always get calls after making changes like that – either customers ready to buy or disappointed they missed out on a unit they were watching.

“I think there is always more we can add to our site – more videos, tours, chat. I know a lot of those features are available, but we just haven’t added them yet.

“Having an up-to-date, user-friendly website is essential, but I believe it is more our Internet presence as a whole that has grown in importance over the last five to 10 years. Ten years ago, we only had our website. Now, we also have to focus marketing efforts on Google Plus, Facebook, Yelp, etc.

“We went online in 2000 – I helped design our original site with a friend while in college. Everyone was in agreement that we needed a website at the time (plus, two college kids came cheap!), but back then, our site mostly was an introduction to the dealership.

“As the website has become more important, the most difficult part has probably been figuring out the best way to handle Internet sales leads effectively. We want our salespeople to reply to every email inquiry as soon as possible and we have spent time experimenting with different ways to respond and then educating our salespeople on the best way to encourage a conversation with the prospect – and ultimately – a sale.

“At first, our salespeople were reluctant to spend time responding to email leads, thinking the prospects were not as serious as people calling on the phone or coming to the store in person. Now, our sales-

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people check for their Internet leads around the clock. It's amazing to see the complete change in attitude to Internet prospects over the last five to eight years."



Veronica Capiak,
owner
Bama RV
Dothan, Ala.

"The most important thing is having a website that showcases our inventory, has the ability to display plenty of photos of each piece of inventory, but is easy for customers to navigate. We have an online parts store hosted through NTP, but I have yet to see a single sale generated in 18 months.

"We changed to **Dealer Spike** website services about a year-and-a-half ago. Prior to that, we had built and managed our website in-house using eCommerce software. We wanted a more professional-looking site that was more interactive and user friendly. We noticed an immediate increase in leads when we switched and we always receive compliments on how nice our website looks.

"They (**Dealer Spike**) are designed for the RV industry – they have a great design staff and quick turnaround time. Any time I need changes they get them done quickly and they never charge extra for changes. Their price is also very reasonable.

"We do some minor customizing to the website (changing text on the 'About Us' page for example) and changing our banner on our home page and, of course, updating our inventory. Other than those items, we leave the rest of the customizing to **Dealer Spike** because that is what we pay them for and they are the experts.

"Most consumers shop online before they shop in person. Your website is your best chance to make a good first impression. Five to 10 years ago, it wasn't as common for people to shop a dealership's website prior to visiting the dealership.

"My husband and I were in agreement that we needed a web presence. However, he was difficult to convince that paying **Dealer Spike** for their services would be a well-spent investment. Once we made the switch, he was quickly convinced that I was correct."



Mark Magnacca,
general manager
Sprads RV
Reno, Nev.

"Around 70 percent to 90 percent of customers shop online first, so RV dealers first have to have a website that offers the same brand experience as the dealership. After you've published a clean, user-friendly website that echoes your dealership's core values, then I'd say an easy-to-use inventory search tool is probably at the top of the list.

"This goes for mobile, too. Many of our customers shop our units from their smartphones. I have recently begun experimenting with payment on my site rather than price. So far, this is exciting. **Cirrus Solutions** has an algorithm that will calculate my payments on the specific units I want payments for.

"Since we partnered with **Cirrus Solutions**, our website has grown by leaps and bounds. Today, we have a very clean site, which spotlights and makes it easy to search our units. Customers comment all the time about how easy it was to shop our site online. My web banner changes monthly and my site always looks fresh. Changing my site look and keeping current the month and season is as important to me as my lot set being fresh.

"We have used **Cirrus** for 18 months. These guys at **Cirrus** know what they are doing. The founder, Patrick West, told me when I first took his call that their custom websites and DMS were built specifically for RV dealers. Patrick also really worked with me on pricing. They have a lot of services, so we started with the website and DMS and now use them for online marketing. I'd say above all else among reasons we went with them is their responsiveness – they really try to take a consultative approach to ensure the dealerships sales and operational performance improves.

"We're a small- to mid-size dealership, so I don't have anyone dedicated to Internet marketing or big website changes. With **Cirrus Solutions'** help, I have learned how to make small changes, such as spotlighting specific inventory or service/parts monthly specials. For more complex changes, I just call our performance manager for assistance. In terms of Internet marketing, we rely on **Cirrus** to budget and drive those campaigns. We get a monthly marketing review to understand how our Google Ad Word accounts are performing.

"A website for parts and accessories is not that big of a benefit for us, but the surprising thing is the increase of service appointments online by customers. I would say we have seen a 20 percent increase in service due to the website, which in turn will sell more parts for the dealership.

"We do actively update our YouTube channel and blog section. We are looking to add a live chat feature and a CSI survey where customers can tell us about their shopping or delivery experience with Sprads.

"I definitely agree that websites are more important than five or 10 years ago. You'd better believe that customers looking to purchase an RV on our lot have done their homework online. I've also noticed a shift in the age of our buyers. Baby Boomers still make up the majority of our customers, but I've started to see a younger generation coming onto my lot, too.

"There was no disagreement that a website was necessary for us and we got our new site up right around the same time we implemented **Cirrus Solutions DMS**, which we love. But like anything else, change can be scary.

"I will say that **Cirrus** is the most responsive partner I have. I know I can call them up and talk to my performance manager about our website, DMS, marketing budget, newsletter or any major changes to the site.

"Our sales guys have picked up the system very quickly and really like the Electronic Stock Sheet offered in both Dealer Pro

and Dealer Pad, which are iPhone and iPad Apps. These Apps also make keeping the RV images up to date much easier, which helps us sell units quicker.

"I always struggle with new guys and new products. The specs of my units are always changing and pre-owned units are always a crapshoot. The Dealer Pro App makes my new guy as knowledgeable as my vets, as all the unit specs are at their fingertips. Stock Sheet with real-time inventory movement and pricing makes my team efficient. I add a unit, change a price, or add change to the status of the unit on the fly knowing my team is in the know."



Matt Frady,
co-owner
Southland RV
Buford, Ga.

"We have found that a great running website replaces your store hours

and location. Online, we are always open.

"Running specials on parts and getting the right pictures of the

right units at the right price draws the consumers to the dealership. Today's buyer is an educated buyer who will research both the unit they are interested in and the possible dealers they can work with. So they know what they want and they know what it should cost. They just have to find the dealer that works best for them.

"Our web team is always looking for a way to improve our online presence. Starting out, our website just offered contact information, pictures and prices of units on the ground and some key points about our dealership. Over the last few years, we've added a lot of upgrades.

"Our most recent upgrade is the capability to apply for financing right on the site. We were amazed with the results. On a weekly basis, we now get customers that we have never talked to (or have been to our physical location) who are applying for loans for the specific unit they want.

"The first time we talk to them on the phone, it's 'Congratulations on your new RV. When would you like to come in to sign the paperwork pick it up?'

"We use **Inful Web Service** out of Fort Collins, Colo. They have been our driving force for a little over two years now. They have done a phenomenal job working with us, not just on our website, but our web presence in its entirety.

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