

This Blog's For You

How can dealers use blogs, one of the fastest-growing online phenomenons? There are nearly 10 million blogs, also called web logs, with 40,000 new ones being created each day. Tens of millions of people read blogs regularly, says Pew Center Research.

A blog essentially is someone's personal opinions and observations published online. True, most blogs are drivel. But some have become insightful and professional looking. Even reputable corporations have started publishing their own.

Blogs that follow specific industries, such as automotive, are becoming more popular.



Blogging is so new, dealers have yet to start marketing on them. But ads for auto makers, such as General Motors Corp. and Volvo Cars, are on some auto-related blogs.

Internet marketing companies that work with dealers are looking at it, according to Denise Chuddy, head of automotive at Google, an expanding search-engine firm.

"It's a daunting task," she says. "How can dealers get in front of the customers who are reading the blogs?"

"At some point, dealers may be able to RSS ads directly into the blogs," she says. "The technology is there now to do that." RSS (Really Simple Syndication) allows for the distribution of content on the Web.

Brian Epro, marketing manager for iMakeNews, a company that publishes e-mail newsletters for dealers, foresees a day when dealers might have four or five blogs on their websites.

"We spend a lot of time asking ourselves how a dealer can use blogs," Epro says.

He says it can be an informal way for dealers to provide information about the brand, its products and the dealership to their customers.

Because blogging activity can be tracked, dealers can learn more about what interests their customers, which can help in targeted advertising.

An online search turned up only a couple of dealers with their own blogs.

One is Charles River Saab in Watertown, MA. Service director Pierre Belperron does most of the postings. He admits he does not consider the blog as a highly effective business tool.

He sees its value as being more indirect. "It's one of those small steps you can take to build loyalty," he says.

But blogs' future marketing potential could be big.

"The blog is out there waiting for the market to come around," Epro says. ■