

Wheels in motion

Working with a Google AdWords Premier SMB Partner, Rich Ford leads its region in auto sales



About Rich Ford

- www.rich-ford.com
- Albuquerque, NM
- Ford new car and truck dealer

Goals

- Expand their online presence
- Measure ad responses to enhance effectiveness
- Increase lead generation
- Achieve greater day-to-day control over messaging
- Control sales erosion in the face of a slow economy

Approach

- Worked with a Google AdWords Premier SMB Partner to optimize AdWords Campaigns
- Used AdWords reporting to monitor performance
- Managed and updated messaging on a regular basis
- Tracked online results by impressions, clicks, and clickthrough rate

Results

- Did roughly three times better than typical Ford dealer in controlling erosion
- Outperformed dealers in much larger metro markets
- Held onto #1 position in their 9-state region
- Significantly increased lead generation
- Moved up to 28th among all Ford dealers nationwide

For more than 48 years, the Rich Ford dealership has been a familiar part of the landscape in Albuquerque, New Mexico. “For almost all those years, we’ve been on the same corner of town,” says Vice President Darin Wade. With Rich Ford for 18 years, Darin now oversees the dealership’s growth and marketing efforts. And he’s got a lot to brag about: “We’re in a metro market of less than a million people in little ol’ Albuquerque. Yet last year we moved up to 28th in the nation in new car and new truck volume for Ford Motor Company. And we were number one in our region for the entire year.”

Acceleration

A big reason for that success is the addition of online advertising to the dealership’s media mix. Historically, Rich Ford has had a heavy schedule of radio and television advertising, with a small amount of direct mail to support a satellite showroom. “Being in this market for so long, we have some very prime radio and TV positions. We don’t want to give that up.”

But like any advertiser, Darin needed to make sure Rich Ford was spending its advertising budgets in the most effective ways. “There’s only so much you can do with target rating points,” he says. Darin sought to diversify into online advertising in part because he knew it was accountable. “The advantage of online is that you have a better tracking scenario than you do with any other media,” Darin explains.

However, Darin felt Rich Ford could benefit from expert help, and began to look for a group to manage his online campaigns. In January 2008, he turned to a Google AdWords Premier SMB Partner. The PSP came from a car sales background, which made the difference for Darin. “The advantage they have is that they were car people before they were marketers,” Darin says. “So they understand what the dealer’s philosophy is.”

The Premier SMB Partner set up an account for Rich Ford with Google AdWords™, Google’s online advertising platform. After working closely with Darin to develop the right messages and associated keywords that would connect with Rich Ford’s target audiences, the PSP then deployed the campaigns.

Traffic to the Rich Ford website immediately spiked, as did leads. “When we included AdWords and left our other media the same, we saw a huge increase in website traffic,” Darin recalls. “Within the last six months, our website is getting more and more leads. And I attribute most of that to the AdWords program.”

Navigating challenging times

Although Darin is optimistic about the results he’s seen, he’s had to adapt his approach to an economic downturn. When the economy is sluggish, a dealer’s success is often measured not in terms of sales increases, but in losses prevented.



Darin Wade, vice president, Rich Ford

"A lot of dealers are definitely struggling for survival," Darin explains. "In our own backyard, our top two Ford competitors were down 17 and 19 percent in volume. And the national numbers for that period were down 13 percent. But we were down only five percent—in other words, we were still selling about three times more cars than anybody else."

Darin explains their strategy: "The only thing that we did differently was to add this online spending piece to our traditional buy. Our lease volumes went up, our requests for information went up, and so did our overall sales appointments. Yes, I think you have to say AdWords made a difference."

Fueling success

For Google AdWords Premier SMB Partners, being in the program has a number of benefits. First, Premier SMB Partners can respond quickly to their clients' needs thanks to the flexibility of the AdWords platform. And clients such as Darin save precious time and energy by relying on an PSP to manage their campaigns and update their ads regularly.

Armed with training from Google, Premier SMB Partners can also incorporate strategies for targeting buyers. Using AdWords tools such as demographic targeting, they can pinpoint their client's audience and advertise the right product or service to the consumer segment most likely to buy.

In addition, Premier SMB Partners typically see clients' openness and trust increase once they join the program. As one PSP said: "By becoming part of the Google partner program, and making sure our team is Google AdWords Certified, we've been able to achieve improved credibility and relevance in a segment where our client base has not traditionally turned to us."

The road ahead

Offering advice to others in the automobile industry, Darin says "This is not the time for car dealers to stick their heads in the sand. As a matter of fact, this is the time when we should put more of our message out there. I see our online advertising increasing—that's just a given. I can also say, in a time when we're decreasing television and we're decreasing radio—just because we have to—we are not decreasing our digital spend at all. The reason is that I know it gets results."

