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Dealer Spike grows its industry presence

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June 11, 2012

Filed under Features

Marketing, advertising solution gains traction, especially with Harley dealers

Four years ago, Dealer Spike was a fledgling company, seeking to offer new, customizable marketing and advertising solutions to powersports dealers. Now, the company boasts hundreds of dealer clients, including 40 percent of the Harley-Davidson dealers in the U.S.

Dealer Spike's core services are web solutions, but it also offers services in paid search engine marketing, social media, online reputation management, lead generation, broadcast calling, enewsletters, print solutions and more.

"Basically, Dealer Spike is a digital marketing and advertising company for the powersports business, and our main strategy is to help dealers grow their business through generating more online traffic to their showroom, phone and Internet. Our strategy is really about how to increase revenue for all of our stores," said Jay Mason, president of Dealer Spike.

The company was formed in February 2008 with the idea that Dealer Spike could bring better solutions to dealers than what was offered at the time. Since then, Dealer Spike has blossomed, growing 175 percent in its first year, 381 percent in its sophomore year and 198 percent last year.

"I think this year we're on track to grow about 100 percent," Mason reported.

The growth has come purely from referrals from dealers who have used their service.

"The biggest thing is they've heard great things about us in the industry. They know another dealer that's come over to us, and it's really been just word of mouth. We don't do any advertising. It's really been an organic way of growth," Mason said.

The company's self-professed "biggest cheerleader," Jay Baldyga, director of marketing at Harley-Davidson of Folsom in Folsom, Calif., recommends Dealer Spike, even to his competitors. His dealership brought on Dealer Spike as a website provider, even though Baldyga, who had developed the dealership's former website, wasn't in the market for a new provider.

"They made it a little bit easier to do a lot more things for me, and my big thing is always communication. I want a customer on our website to feel at any time that they can just click and contact us — if they're researching, browsing, whatever. I thought I was doing that right, and I was wrong," Baldyga said.

Dealer Spike sites post about four contact buttons on each bike listed, and they use a lead generator that produces about 50 percent more leads per dealership after it's implemented. Other dealerships see even more success. Leads at Harley-Davidson of Folsom increased more than 500 percent after its Dealer Spike site was launched, and leads at Jim's Harley-Davidson in St. Petersburg, Fla., jumped 300 percent.

"We can provide very customized solutions that have generated better returns for our stores. Our average store sees about a 50 percent increase in leads, and we benchmark those leads. We track their progress and leads," Mason said.

When visiting a Dealer Spike website, one of the most obvious features is its simple look and feel. For most dealerships, all the content on the homepage is "above the fold," or visible without the user having to scroll down the page.

"We keep the navigation very consistent and simple because our goal is ultimately to get that person to submit a lead on the website," Mason explained.

To simplify customers' searches, Dealer Spike only offers four to five options for the primary navigation bar, but it also works with each dealership to create a site that looks unlike others.

"I think you'll see the layout of our sites are very consistent. They're very different, depending on what the dealer wants, but ultimately, they're very easy to navigate and find what you're looking for," Mason said.

Dealer Spike also focuses heavily on units, rather than parts sales. However, the company has integrated with ADP Lightspeed to update its websites' inventories of parts and units.

"Our main goal is selling new and pre-owned product, and we obviously sell parts, but 90 percent of the customers doing online are looking for new and pre-owned product," Mason reported.

Dealer Spike believes it's important for Dealers to have a solid Web presence to draw customers into its brick and mortar store. Mason admits that his company's website solution isn't the cheapest available. He says too many dealers invest millions of dollars into their physical stores, but only spend hundreds on their websites.

"Over 80 percent of people do research online before buying their next vehicle, bike, motorcycle, ATV, so really, their online dealership is really what I would call their virtual dealership, their virtual store," he said. "We're not the cheapest solution in the industry. We tend to be the most expensive from a pricing perspective, and we're OK with that because we don't want to be the cheapest. Being expensive allows us to do things we wouldn't normally do at a template price."

Despite the price, dealers are continuing to buy into Dealer Spike. Though most of its customers are Harley-Davidson dealers, any dealer is welcome to use Dealer Spike's services. The company represents every brand in the U.S. and Canada, and its position in the metric market is growing alongside its Harley-Davidson presence. Ride Now Powersports, a chain of more than 20 dealerships, added Dealer Spike as its website provider in November.

"We serve several hundred dealers throughout North America, and some of the large dealer groups. We are endorsed by Polaris, Victory and Indian, and we work with about 40 percent of the Harley dealers in the country," Mason explained. "We add probably 20 dealers a month to our program."

Dealer Spike has fewer than 50 employees, but the group is focused on constantly improving its services by focusing on the company's principles.

⁴⁰“We just have a talented group of people that talk through a lot of the solutions that we have and talk about how we can consistently improve and make the websites better,” Mason said.

In 2012, the company is planning to improve its service that allows dealers to more easily post inventory on Craigslist, and it will also be looking at other improvements as the year progresses.

"We're also bringing new products and new interfaces to help our dealers generate more leads, and we continue to work on a variety of products, so we have several products in our pipeline that we'll be releasing in the second and third quarters of this year," Mason said. "We've been really proactive, and we continue to grow at a rapid pace because I think dealers are hungry for something fresh."

So far, the company's proven solutions have helped it grow in the industry, and draw even the most discerning dealers to its services.

Dealer Spike services

- Website solutions
- Search engine marketing
- Social media
- Online reputation management
- Lead generation – An average dealership sees a 50 percent increase in leads with Dealer Spike, president Jay Mason said.
- Broadcast calling – This enables dealers to automate up to 10,000 phone calls in 30 minutes with a pre-recorded message to promote events, alert customers of recalls, announce sales incentives, etc.
- E-newsletters – “That allows you to track everything, from the open rate to the conversion rate, the click-through rate and search who clicked on the email and what links they clicked on,” Mason said. Audio can also be added.
- Craigslist solution – “That’s the No. 1 place people are looking for new and pre-owned product, primarily pre-owned, so we’re looking to enhance that this year,” Mason said. Jay Baldyga, director of marketing at Harley-Davidson of Folsom in Folsom, Calif., cites this as the No. 1 Dealer Spike service that makes his job easier.
- High-end graphic design and traditional print work – Dealer Spike can design business cards, brochures, billboards, etc.

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Harley-Davidson of Folsom added Dealer Spike as its website provider, primarily because it gave director of marketing Jay Baldyga the opportunity to showcase his vision for the site.