

What you need to know about the future of the online motoring marketplace

The annual AutoTrader Dealer Master Class, held at Radisson BLU Hotel Gautrain in June 2018, was a coming together of top players in the automotive sales industry.



Gareth Cliff, MC for the day of the Dealer Master Class. Credit: AutoTrader

Headed by a panel of experts, the goal was to identify and inspire further excellence in the industry.

According to George Mienie, AutoTrader CEO, today's auto consumer is ready to buy before he or she steps onto the shop floor as they have already completed extensive research at home. "The question we all need to be asking ourselves, then, is how to attract that already decided sale, when the internet allows total comparative shopping from the comfort of the consumer's home?"

Mienie's answer, one echoed by the various industry players in attendance, was direct: "In today's highly competitive online marketplace, with each page crowded with competing adverts, it is trust that is the key to making a sale."



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The AutoTrader strategy is centred on understanding the consumer, in order to provide and build that trust.

"For a consumer, buying a car is a journey, not an event," said Mienie. "Consumers are influenced by everything you do online, including the way you present yourself on third-party sites. The consumer is constantly asking, 'can I trust this dealership?' We understand that our every action is an opportunity to connect, and foster trust."

Different touch points online

"People looking to buy a car use 24 different touch points online, on average," said fellow panellist Lee Manning.

Manning is the founder of Armchair Marketing, an award-winning UK-based agency that offers targeted, online automotive advertising solutions. “Standing out as a dealer means understanding your customer, understanding that journey.”



Gareth Cliff, founder of CliffCentral and MC for the day, added that his solution to fostering consumer connection is to focus on quality, an element often lacking in today’s click-bait landscape.

“Advertising has become expensive and ineffective,” said Cliff. “The best way to get into people’s lives is to give them content they care about.”

“Instead of an audience huge in number, rather have an audience high in quality,” Cliff continued. “You can create trust and feeling in so many more ways now. You don’t have to talk to a guy in a suit to get that done.”



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Neil Smith, operations director for Imperial Cars, a UK-based dealership said: “It’s not just about retailing vehicles, it’s about how we retail them. We have a no negotiation policy, and that’s one way we’ve built trust. The price consumers see on our website is the price they will pay. Many people are put off by the haggle,” he commented.

“Consumers know you make a profit and they are ok with it,” said Mienie. “They want to know how you got to that retail price. Giving this info away, might be a good way to be transparent and build trust,” he said.

For AutoTrader, the steering of its brand from a previously print-only publication to becoming South Africa's go-to online motoring marketplace has been an exercise in repeatedly re-investing in their relationship with their customers.

"Everyone thought the internet was a lead generator – I'll slap on content and I'll get leads. It's not like that," said Mienie.
"Consumers think with feeling. The data means nothing without touching someone's heart."

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