

# Turning Visitors Into Buyers With Pictures And Video Tours

BY BOB MCCANN



In a world where consumers email pictures and videos from their cell phones in a matter of seconds, they have no patience for dealers who don't take the time to showcase their products with multiple, high-quality pictures and, ideally, videos. Today's consumers want immediate, complete information to help them make a purchase decision.

Think back to the last time you browsed the Web for a new home or a car. You probably didn't waste time on photo-less listings or those with poor quality images. You simply moved on to more detailed offerings. And why not, when there are plenty of other listings packed with complete information, as well as attention-grabbing photos and informative videos? The same goes for RV buying.

The Internet is a visual medium, so high-quality photos and videos play a critical role in merchandising your inventory and differentiating your dealership from the competition. Without something appealing to look at, potential RV buyers will bypass your listing, especially on classified listing sites such as RVs.com or RVSearch.com where the nearest competing model is less than a quarter-inch away.

If one picture says a thousand words, think what a powerful story you tell with multiple pictures and videos. Show off your RVs and sell the dream through a collection of eye-catching images.

## Offer a visual experience similar to a personal in-store tour.

Photos have become a prequalifier. They help you build a crucial emotional connection between buyers and their intended purchase. Your goal is to get prospects to imagine themselves in the RV and come in for a personal tour.



Joe Zurlo, webmaster at Stoltzfus RVs and Marine, West Chester, PA, videos units daily, bumping new arrivals and aged units to the top of the taping schedule.



"Multiple photos are essential to a high-quality listing," says John Worthington, marketing & information technology director, Driftwood RV Center, Atlantic City, NJ.

Worthington's requirement is 10 pictures per RV. "We use a standard system: The first round is a front three-quarter view showing the door side, followed by a straight-on front shot, then a three-quarter view showing off-door. Then we do the same from the back. After that, we take the interior pictures. All photos are watermarked

with our name and website, so if people print them out to compare models, they always have our contact information."

Steve Fretz, general manager, Fretz RV, Souderton, PA, uses a photo checklist when shooting RVs: multiple exterior and interior shots, key features such as floor plan and options, and any damage. "We want the pictures to tell a true story, whether it's good or bad, so there are no surprises when the customer comes in to see the unit in person," he says. Interiors are shown with multiple shots featuring the kitchen, bath, bedroom, and amenities. His listings also show views of odometer readings and running gear. "Our hits have gone up significantly since we developed listings according to this checklist," says Fretz.

## Try to anticipate – and answer – buyers' questions through pictures and videos.

The less work prospects have to do while browsing your inventory or your listings on classified sites, the greater the chance they'll stick around instead of moving on to your competitors.

"Today's used-RV buyers expect to examine every inch of a model from the comfort of their homes," says Mike

Pearo, general sales manager, Hilltop Trailer Sales, Fridley, MN. He believes most prospects contact dealers only when they find an RV online that looks acceptable.

Mark Eisenhart, marketing director, Tom Johnson Camping Center, Marion, NC, has seen a significant difference in traffic counts between RVs with multiple pictures and those with a single shot. "The more pictures, the more time prospects spend looking at the RV," he says. "We see increased traffic and high response rates on our

continued on page 22

## Social Media – It's Not Just For Schmoozing

By Mary Anne Shreve

**W**ith Google's announcement that it will include more posts from social media in its searches, having a strong presence on outlets such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter is even more important to your dealership.

Now when a browser searches a subject, the top results will include comments and posts from the browser's friends and connections. So the more friends, "likes," and connections your business has on social media sites, the more likely it is to appear, in turn, to those individuals' connections.

Material from sites like Facebook, Blogger, and Flickr is sought after because it's new and fresh. In the past, search results could produce items that were years old. "Social media content is extremely relevant and it's in real time, it wasn't done five years ago," says Ron Wheeler, president, Wheeler Advertising, Arlington, TX. Google and other search engines constantly scan for recent items, so putting new content on your site every couple of days will get it indexed faster, says Wheeler, sometimes within hours.

If social media is starting to feel like a second fulltime job, help is available. Social media management companies will do everything from setting up a Facebook page for your dealership and writing content for it to getting customer testimonials that can be posted on multiple sites. These companies can help grow a dealership's social network with campaigns to get individuals to "friend" or "like" the company. One example: linking a charitable cause to a drive for new connections. Wheeler ran a campaign that offered to make a donation to the local soccer team if the community helped expand the dealership's Facebook page by 200 people. The effort yielded more than 2,000 new names.

Wheeler also helps dealers develop testimonials by asking customers via email to "tell us your comments on your experience with us." If a response passes

muster, Wheeler posts it on the dealer's Facebook, Twitter, and blog sites, where it then gets picked up by other sites.

Building and maintaining social media sites is step one; equally important is monitoring your company's online reputation, says Sheril Vergara of RH Power & Associates, Albuquerque, NM. Disgruntled

customers and employees can post negative comments that the dealer may be unaware of until they're turning up regularly on search pages. No matter how proud a dealer is of his company's customer service, it's impossible to please everyone; sooner or later, you will be the victim of negative comments, she says.

Vergara monitors the store's Web reputation and alerts the dealer to negative posts and threads so he has the chance to investigate and respond. And dealers should always respond with comments showing they tried to resolve the problem, she says. That way, subsequent browsers "will be most impressed that your company was willing to work with the individual, and the dealership will look reasonable and professional."

Some negative posts are fictitious, says Vergara. In those cases, dealers should respond that "we've researched this situation and can find no record that you ever purchased a unit from our company, but if you'll contact us with the name you purchased under, then we can investigate your complaint."

"We can't stop those things from happening, but we can monitor for them, catch them, and respond positively," says Vergara. "That's how you counteract it." Dealing with problems online is no different from addressing issues that come via the Better Business Bureau, she insists. "Whether it's a walk-in customer or an online customer – a problem is a problem." ■





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continued from page 20

site and on third-party classified sites when we supply detailed photos.”

During RV shows, use multiple-picture listings and videos to present your full inventory online, since the number of models you can display on the floor is limited. You can also use them while pitching a prospect on the phone.

“Videos have been a very effective tool for our sales team,” says Joe Zurlo, webmaster of Stoltzfus RVs and Marine, West Chester, PA. Zurlo started shooting videos in June 2008. “I set up a schedule every week, rotating salespeople to shoot two videos a day, weather and schedule permitting. To date, we have produced 460 videos of new and pre-owned RVs.”

### Use your manufacturers’ professional photo stock for new RVs.

Manufacturers invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in professional photo shoots and offer the most affordable and accessible source of material for new models. They have extensive collections showing a variety of angles, lifestyle shots featuring family and friends, and detail shots of standard, optional and special features. Manufacturers often have dedicated sections on their websites (or a separate, password-protected dealers-only website) where you can easily download low-resolution shots ideal for the Web and high-resolution shots suitable for print materials.

## TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT

### *Make sure your photos tell the right story*

- **Set the stage.** Clean the RV and accessorize it with colorful towels, bedspreads, pillows, and kitchen accessories. “We remind the photographer of the importance of proper appearances, including made beds and a clean bathroom,” says Steve Fretz, general manager, Fretz RV, Souderton, PA. “All gear and personal items are removed before we start shooting.”
- **Location is everything.** Take the RV to a green, visually appealing location or create a park-like setting at your dealership with a picnic table and some chairs. “Lifestyle images stimulate the imagination of potential buyers and help them realize the fun and pleasure of RVing,” says Ken North, a general manager with Fraserway RV, a multi-store Canadian business.
- **Follow a list.** Take profile shots (ensuring there are no other RVs or clutter in the background), shots of extended slide-outs and awnings to show the model’s full potential, and detail shots of each feature. Storage space is critical to RVers, so open all storage compartments before taking pictures. “Online shoppers also want to clearly see what colors are on the RV, so take pictures in good quality lighting,” says Mike Pearo, general sales manager, Hilltop Trailer Sales, Fridley, MN. Group your pictures by interior, exterior, kitchen, bedroom, and bath.
- **Put it all together.** Organize your photos from wide angle to close shots, followed by a variety of lifestyle photos, then detail shots. The detail shots should be presented from front to back as if a salesperson was doing a walk-through highlighting distinctive features. Finally, to-the-point captions act as story tellers and information providers.

For customized interiors and exteriors, make some photos and videos of your own so you can present the actual RV. Full disclosure builds credibility for your dealership from the start.

### Upload your own photos and videos of used RVs.

Do not use OEM stock photos or images of a similar RV – that’s a sure way to make prospects walk or click away. Consumers aren’t interested in what the RV looked like when it was new!

Taking the time to accurately and thoroughly display a used product “creates a good first impression and begins to build trust,” says Pearo. “Most used-RV customers want to examine every detail of the actual RV from front to back and even down to the stitching of the upholstery.”

And Worthington says he makes sure to take pictures as soon as he receives a unit “so we’re not running around later trying to take photos for a prospect who may not be that serious.”

Today’s leading RV website solutions providers offer tools that can help keep your online inventory as consistently fresh and appealing as your showroom is. They can provide you with the latest OEM images and product specifications out of the box and don’t limit the number of pictures you can include with any given unit of inventory.



**John Worthington, marketing and information technology director, Driftwood RV Center, Atlantic City, NJ, uses a check list of interior and exterior features and takes at least 10 shots per RV.**

### It’s time to include videos.

Shooting video isn’t that complicated or time-consuming with today’s digital cameras and camcorders. Videos add depth that pictures can’t provide. “With video, we can talk about the aerodynamic shape that helps decrease wind resistance and increase fuel economy, or the welded aluminum superstructure that is lightweight and

*continued on page 24*

# The RV industry is growing again. Are you?



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extremely durable,” says Eisenhart. “That just can’t be done in pictures.” A proven website solution should allow videos to be easily embedded in a few clicks.

Start by assigning an individual to shoot the videos. Two categories should get priority: new units, so you can introduce them as soon as possible, and aged units that you need to move pronto. “I have a list organized from oldest to newest units in inventory, and I set my planning accordingly,” says Zurlo. “As new units arrive, I change the schedule to fit them in right away.”

Develop a checklist of what to shoot, starting with the exterior and followed by the interior. Combine a general overview with an emphasis on special features and benefits. “As long as the salespeople are experts in the unit we’re shooting and they address the camera as if they’re speaking with a customer, the video will be compelling,” says Zurlo.

Videos should be no longer than ten to fifteen minutes, including a wrap-up section where salespeople state their name and contact information, which appears as a scrolling caption. “Customers often walk in the dealership asking for that specific salesperson after watching a video tour online,” says Zurlo. “Videos can create a bond between the prospect and the salesperson before they meet in person.”

## Get another opinion.

Have coworkers review the listings, putting themselves in the shoes of a prospective buyer: Are all their questions getting answered? Does the listing entice them to go to the dealership for a personal tour?

Research your competitors’ listings for the same model. How do your listings stack up? Do you stand out in a myriad of Internet classified ads? “We go over the videos during our Saturday morning sales meeting,” says Zurlo. “It’s a team effort that helps us improve constantly.”

Successful RV dealers take the time to develop content-rich listings that hook potential buyers with a full, compelling story. Research shows that 30 pictures per listing is increasingly the norm in the auto industry. Multiple pictures and great videos give prospects more of the information they’re looking for up front, so by the time they call or email you, they’re closer to actually buying.

It’s also about creating a positive first impression, which often marks the beginning of the sale. Your inventory is your online showroom. Making it informative and eye-catching will drive high-quality prospects to your dealership and turn more visitors into buyers. ■



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