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## GM offers free digital marketing package to dealers

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General Motors is so determined to rev up its dealers' digital marketing that it is offering them a comprehensive package from the Cobalt Group — for free. GM expects almost all of its dealers to sign up.

The package is designed to drive more in-market shoppers — those who intend to buy within 60 days — to GM dealership Web sites and turn them into sales, says Mark Degnan, the automaker's director of local advertising and marketing.

GM launched the program April 1. The company won't reveal what it spent on the program but says it is significant.

About 6,500 — or 90 percent — of GM's dealers have signed up for the In-Market Retail Digital Marketing Package. Before this program, 44 percent of GM's dealers were already using a Web site built by Cobalt, of Seattle.

Ultimately, Degnan expects up to 98 percent will participate.

Given that consumers are shopping and collecting information on the Internet, "we feel it is part of our marketing commitment," Degnan says. "We've followed the customers. That's where they are, particularly when they are in-market."

### Driven to digital

Cobalt has expanded services to GM dealers.

- New Cobalt-built dealership Web sites launched April 1.
- Cobalt offers dealers marketing consultants and paid-search help.
- GM expects 98% of its dealers to enroll in the free program.

Source: GM, Cobalt Group

### 4 free offerings

"This is a way for General Motors to get all their dealers involved in the digital world and do it in a manner that is cost-effective to the dealer body," says Duane Paddock, dealer principal at Paddock Chevrolet in Kenmore, N.Y.

"At the same time, General Motors knows that it is going to see the results."

Dealers who sign up get four features:

1. A Web site that can be customized and has direct links from GM sites.
2. A consultant to manage the site's content, optimize the site for Internet searches and coordinate the dealership's online and offline marketing.
3. Search engine marketing, also called paid search, to drive local shoppers to the dealership's Web site.

Cobalt will buy search terms — such as the dealership's name and city — on the Google and Yahoo search engines, making it more likely that the dealership shows up prominently in search results.

4. Sales leads delivered from GM sites directly into the dealership's lead management software.

Cobalt CEO John Holt says the program will allow GM to better coordinate its national advertising message with its dealers' local advertising.

### Consistent message

Paddock, co-chairman of GM's national dealer council, says he initially was skeptical. But after six months of testing, he says, "they were right and I was wrong."

"I'm very difficult to please when it comes to marketing and results. I don't give GM or any outside company any leeway," Paddock says.

"I need to see measurable results. Without question, this is a great program both for GM and the dealer body." **AN**

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