

What Is IMC?

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AT CARS.COM



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1. Communicated the core value that Cars.com and our suite of solutions delivers to customers
2. Drove traffic and “staying power” to our booth and other Cars.com hosted events
3. Cut through the vendor clutter
4. Elevated our brand position as the automotive industry’s digital marketing leader

The overall campaign goal was to position ourselves as an innovator and leader in the space. Expressed through a campaign thematic called *Dominate Digit@l*, the core message was that when it comes to car buying, *Cars.com is the only way dealers can dominate the conversation, dominate the short list and dominate sales.*

WHAT IS IMC?

Whether it’s at a networking event or while talking to friends or family, I am often asked, “What exactly is Integrated Marketing Communications? You make ads, right?” I always smile and just say, “Not exactly . . . it’s a bit more than that.”

To me, it seems like such a simple and logical concept but to most folks — both marketers and non — IMC still seems a bit foreign. I define Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) as: “The comprehensive management of all communications to build positive and lasting relationships with customers and stakeholders — both internally and externally.” This means that all components of marketing communications are rooted in research and insights, and work together to deliver a single and consistent message.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

Organizations have a tendency to work in silos. While folks believe they’re doing what’s best for the company or their job, too often they are only focused on their function and immediate impact to their team or area of business. IMC requires cross-functional integration and helps to build awareness, alignment and accountability of strategic objectives. It provides guidance for messaging and communication to reach customers (B2C & B2B) and prospects at every step of the purchase process — before, during and after. IMC processes thus help present a coherent brand position by implementing synergy through all internal and external touch points.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

As with many things, the devil is in the details. One of my favorite campaigns in my tenure at Cars.com, and one that I take great pride in, is an IMC campaign we developed for the 2015 National Automotive Dealer Association (NADA) Convention & Expo. Each year, 22,500+ professionals from across the country attend NADA, the automotive industry’s largest tradeshow. But the challenge is always:

how do we break through this highly cluttered and competitive environment?

Let’s break it down into the key planning steps:

1. DEFINE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

In attending NADA, we set out to achieve the following business objectives:

- Drive revenue growth
- Capitalize on the opportunity to meet with key decision makers
- Build and nurture relationship with key influencers, media and partners
- Build Cars.com brand awareness

2. IDENTIFY TARGET NEEDS

In understanding the needs of our target audience, we worked from the insight that car dealers need to stand out and be everywhere car shoppers are to ensure a presence on the buyer’s “shortlist” for purchase decisions.

Our approach: we gave dealers a broad range of solutions via our products offerings with which they could target the highly engaged Cars.com consumer audience. Additionally, we offered access to our team of dedicated digital consultants and detailed reporting and metrics. All this gives dealers the power to not just take part in digital but to dominate it, so they can stay in front of customers and ahead of their competition.

3. ESTABLISH A CORE TEAM

To ensure functions were on the same page, a core working team met on a weekly basis. This team was responsible for internal and external communications to ensure that a singular vision and mission for the campaign was established across all stakeholder groups.

4. CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT

To achieve our business objectives, we developed a multi-channel campaign with tactics that:

5. CROSS-FUNCTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Cross-functional buy-in, commitment and resources was needed to successfully execute the strategy. With support from the product, operations and sales teams, we accelerated the development and launch of two brand-new, groundbreaking products, which led to record in-booth sales.

The team succeeded in owning *Dominate Digit@l* from all angles with a highly promoted appointment setting contest, insights-driven content, innovative paid and social media, advertising, PR and direct marketing. Dealers also enjoyed in-booth amenities and relaxed at our customer appreciation event. This theme acted as the cohesive thread connecting all of our marketing efforts with an intricate plan reaching dealers before, during and after NADA.

6. EVALUATING RESULTS

Cars.com succeeded in dominating NADA and San Francisco. The results connected back to our business objectives, far exceeded all expectations and set revenue records! This was all done in a truly integrated and collaborative fashion as one team with one goal.



Alice Marder is the senior manager of integrated marketing at Cars.com. She leads and unites cross-functional teams in the development, execution and measurement of key business initiatives in support of the organization’s aggressive growth strategy. Prior to joining Cars.com, Alice was the manager of marketing integration at U.S. Cellular and played an integral role in the development and successful implementation of the organization’s new integrated marketing approach. Previously, Alice held positions at various agencies including MindShare and DraftFCB. Alice is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned her M.S. in integrated marketing communications from Northwestern University.