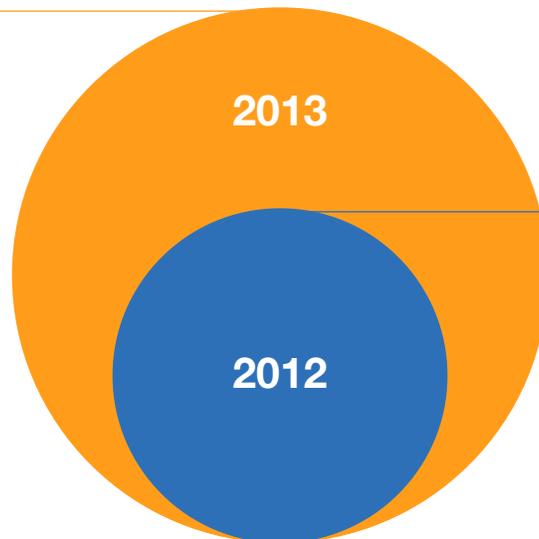


 **3.2 million**  
consumer chats



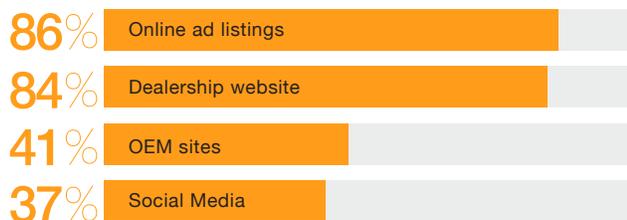
**2 million**  
consumer chats 

The volume of chats between consumers and dealers (facilitated via the Contact At Once! auto chat network of sites) rose 60% in the first half of 2013 compared to the same time period last year.

As automotive chat adoption grows with both dealerships and consumers, Contact At Once! recently asked dealership professionals for their opinions on several key points:

- **Does online chat help dealerships build relationships and bring shoppers into their brick-and-mortar stores?**
- **Are there discernible differences in communications preferences based on the age or demographics of the consumer?**
- **Does chat help dealerships sell cars?**

#### Dealerships Use Chat WebWide



Before we get into the data, let's dispense with the details. The 2013 Dealer Survey was conducted over a two-week period in June. The results are based on answers from over 1,100 professionals, from GMs to sales managers, Internet sales managers and directors, as well as salespeople. Participants were split almost equally between franchised and independent dealers.

As to sales volume, more than 8 in 10 participants say their dealerships move at least 60 cars a month, and almost half say they sell 120 or more.

The majority of dealerships in the survey use chat on their dealership websites and in online advertising. About a third say they use chat on social media sites and 4 in 10 report receiving chats from OEM sites, with another 17% saying they'd like their OEM sites to implement chat.

And now for the results. Let's start with how and why chat has evolved into an integral part of today's digital dealership.

## Chat & the Online Shopping Experience

It was all so much simpler when auto shoppers drove to a dealership to learn everything they needed to know about buying a new car. You shook hands and talked face-to-face, establishing a trust relationship on the way to a sale. My, how times have changed.

According to Google<sup>1</sup>, auto shoppers now consult an average of 18.2 sources while researching a new car purchase. And as Contact At Once! survey participants confirm, the majority of shoppers show up at the dealership with their “homework” done and, oftentimes, decisions made.

What does this mean for dealers? Price vs. dealership value takes center stage as the primary point of discussion, with less opportunity to establish a value proposition and an ongoing relationship.

### So How Can Chat Help Dealerships Get Back in the Circle of Influence?

Relationship-building, of course! Shoppers may have many more resources and be more in control of the buying cycle today, but for the most part, they still purchase cars in person, from a person. Chat gives dealerships the opportunity to get “face-to-face” with buyers earlier in the process, as they’re researching. Contact At Once! dealerships say that’s a key benefit of using chat.



Such connections work. As you can see, chat helps these dealers build relationships with online shoppers and capture Internet leads...probably because shoppers want to chat.

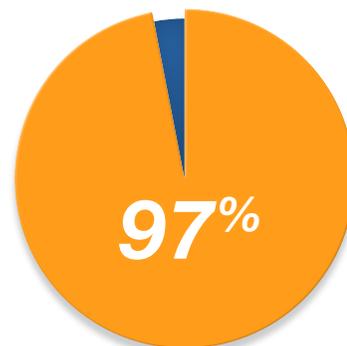
In a recent Accenture automotive study<sup>2</sup>, almost 7 in 10 shoppers said they would welcome the chance to chat with auto dealers. Chats in the Contact At Once! network (examples include online ad listing sites, OEM sites, social media, etc.) are expanding at a rapid pace, from under 2 million annually just 3 years ago to a projected 7 million in 2013.

1 Source: GoogleShopper Sciences, Zero Moment of Truth Study-Automotive, April 2011

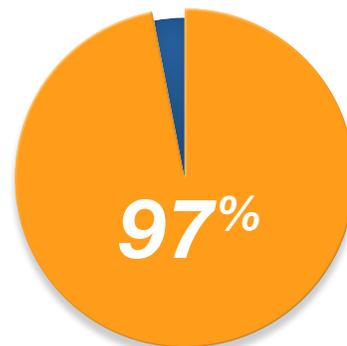
2 Source: Accenture Automotive Industry: Digital Marketing Survey, December 2012

## Did you know?

Contact At Once! is the only chat vendor with solutions that can be embedded in online advertising. (It even holds the patent for the systems and technology that enable two-way communications like chat and text in online advertising.)



*say chat helps us build relationships with online shoppers*



*say chat is an effective way to capture Internet leads.*

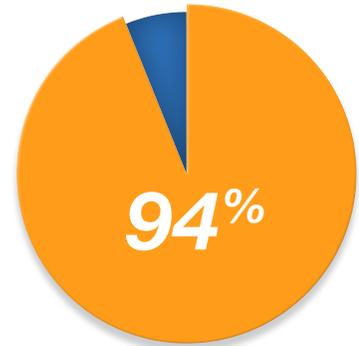
## Do Shoppers Who Chat Visit Dealerships?

The evidence in favor of chat is compelling, yet some dealers still wonder if online shoppers who chat turn into showroom visitors who buy or if they're just price-shopping. Contact At Once! dealers almost unanimously credit chat with helping them get online shoppers into the dealership.

Research does show that questions about pricing and payment options are common, which stands to reason: Shoppers who chat are often low-funnel and ready to buy. In one analysis of Contact At Once! chats from various OEM sites, 1 in 5 online shoppers actually bought the model they chatted about, most within 30 days.

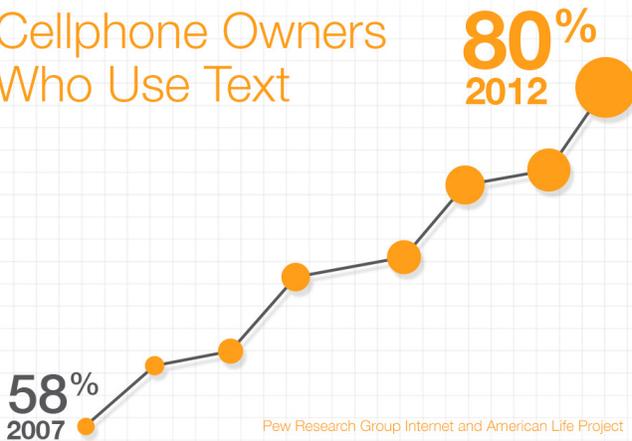
Chatting shoppers also often ask questions about inventory, showroom hours...essentially the same inquiries you'd get from someone who calls the dealership (if they were willing to pick up the phone).

But therein lies the modern dilemma: More and more shoppers are less willing to use the phone or email forms, while the growth of text-based communications continues to skyrocket.



*Chat helps us bring online shoppers into the dealership*

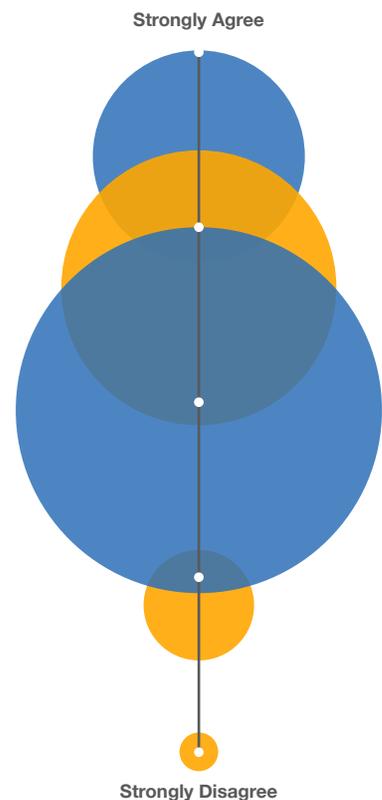
## Cellphone Owners Who Use Text



Take a cross-section of transcripts from the Contact At Once! Chat Receptionist team (our backup chat answer center) for example. One of the most frequent questions about pre-owned cars is the availability... and it's most often asked on Saturday mornings, as shoppers plan their dealership visits.

Would those same people pick up the phone if chat wasn't available? Maybe, but statistics from dealership websites in the first few months after chat is installed tell a different story: Their overall connections with online shoppers typically increase by 25%, suggesting that chatting shoppers are additive website conversions.

## Most Shoppers Prefer Chat Over Online Lead Forms



## The Competitive Advantages of Chat

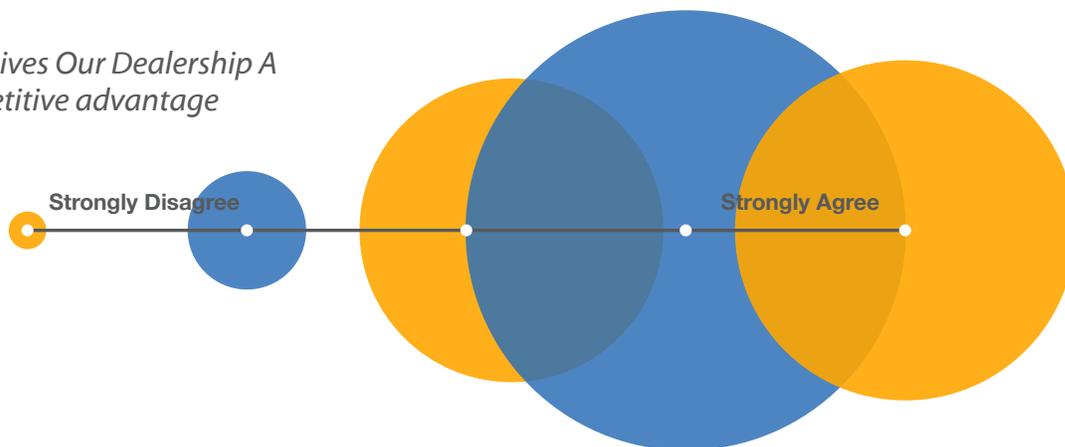
Think about that for a minute. Shoppers are making last-minute connections with dealerships on their way out the door (or on the way) to the dealership. Still not convinced you need chat? More than two-thirds of Contact At Once! survey participants said shoppers were actively using their smartphones **from** the dealership.

Dealerships with chat on their websites stand to have a distinct advantage with those on-the-go shoppers looking for instant answers. Contact At Once! dealerships validate the assumption, with 9 in 10 agreeing that chat gives them a competitive advantage.

Let's take that a step further. Does chat give a decided advantage within particular demographic groups?

We asked sales professionals to profile their shoppers who chat based on age. While it's probably no surprise that most say younger shoppers (18-34) prefer chat, over 40% said shoppers over 35 prefer communicating with text-based tools too.

*Chat Gives Our Dealership A Competitive advantage*



## Do Shoppers Who Chat Buy Cars?

If there's a question we hear more than any other, it goes something like this: "Yeah, I've heard about chat and I probably need to do something about it...but is it really going to help me sell cars?" The majority of survey participants agree that chat does indeed help them sell more cars... sometimes a lot more.

R.L. Polk completed the most extensive analysis yet on the question in late 2012. The results showed that cars were purchased in 1 in 3 households of identifiable shoppers who chatted, and they were low-funnel prospects who purchased in a 60-day time frame.

60% of participants who use Contact At Once! chat on their dealership websites say they sell 5 or more cars a month to shoppers who chat. 1 in 4 sell 10 or more per month.

You can do the math based on your own dealership, but many Contact At Once! customers say even 1 new sale a month would pay for their investment in chat. How about you? If you could sell 5 or more cars per month to online shoppers who contacted you via chat, would your profits justify the expense?

*Chat Cost/Month for an Average Dealership*

**\$650**

## How Do Most Dealers Implement Chat?

If you're ready to take the plunge, but aren't sure how to implement chat—and quite frankly, wonder if your salespeople can be successful at it—you'll be glad to know that 90% of salespeople in the Contact At Once! survey said that using chat is not difficult. When it's all said and done, it's a lot like texting, which we're all pretty adept at today.

There are multiple options for answering chats:

Chat Answer Model	Pros	Cons
<p><b>Do It Yourself</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs less</li> <li>• Immediate connection with shopper</li> <li>• Your people have up-to-the-minute info about inventory and can even chat while walking the lot</li> </ul>	<p>Missed chats</p>
<p><b>Fully Managed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never miss chats</li> <li>• Someone else trains and maintains chat professionals</li> <li>• Consistency in how chats are handled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More costly to answer chats</li> <li>• Doesn't leverage the staff you're already paying</li> <li>• Loss of immediacy with shopper—chatting shoppers become an email lead that may not get followed up on in time to make a sale</li> <li>• Additional costs to follow up on chat leads</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dealer Answer with a Backup Option</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never miss chats</li> <li>• Fully leverages your own staff.</li> <li>• When your staff can't answer, chats are automatically re-routed to chat professionals</li> <li>• Only pay for outsourced resources when you need them</li> </ul>	<p>When you're using backup, you'll lose the immediacy of a real-time connection with the customer; however, it's better than missing the lead entirely.</p>

- You can do it all yourself, which many dealers choose. It has the added benefit of using your existing staff and creating an immediate connection between the shopper and your salesperson; however, you'll have to accept some gaps in coverage when salespeople aren't available or your dealership is closed.
- You can choose fully managed chat, where an outsourced vendor (like the Contact At Once! Chat Receptionist team) answers all your chats for you. The benefit is excellent coverage, but it's typically at a higher cost than other options. You'll also sacrifice the "right here, right now" immediacy of chat if your salespeople aren't the ones to answer. Most outsourced teams will turn that chat into a phone or email lead that your salespeople have to chase down later. It's better than missing out on an opportunity, but not ideal when you consider the "right here, right now" attitude of today's shopper.
- You can combine the two, a hybrid option increasingly deployed by Contact At Once! customers. Your dealership team answers when they're available; and when they're busy, your chats automatically transfer to an answering center. You'll get more productivity from the people already on your payroll, only pay for outsourced resources when they're needed and still make sure that you don't miss chats and texts.

Speaking of texts, let's close with a word or two on mobile.

## Mobile & the Digital Dealership

In some ways, mobile feels like social media a few years ago—everybody is long on the opinion that you need to be doing something, but short on advice about how to actually take advantage of the opportunity.

Yet dealerships are eager to learn about how to get rolling with mobile. In fact, 3 in 4 Contact At Once! survey participants said they want to learn more about leveraging mobile chat and text.

### The Value of Mobile Chat Apps

Contact At Once! mobile apps allow your salespeople to receive and reply to chats on smartphones and tablets. Your mileage may vary, but the rules of the road are generally the same, making the learning curve minimal. Plus, they will love the freedom that comes with being able to send and receive chats on the go.

### The Value of Mobile Text

Texting is a little more complicated, largely due to privacy regulations that can land dealerships in hot water if the medium isn't handled correctly. Of course, the burning

question is just how many of your salespeople are already texting with prospects?

We bet it happens more than you realize, which presents two issues: They could be exposing your dealership to privacy violations, and your prospects—who you've spent time and money cultivating—are one step away from walking out the door in the pockets of individual salespeople.

Mobile texting products can solve most of the concerns around texting, while adding the ability to fully integrate text leads into your CRM. You'll have control over how your prospects are being handled, and you'll ensure compliance with privacy regulations.

If you haven't already done so, we recommend investigating mobile texting software, such as Mobile Text Connect from Contact At Once! With it, you'll be able to field texts from all the same places you can install chat buttons online, plus use text numbers in print ads...with all text and chat leads handled through a single platform.

## In Summary

- A little over half of the participants using chat on their dealership websites say they answer for themselves, but a growing trend is to use a combined solution of answering when they can and relying on an outsourced chat center to answer when their salespeople are offline.
- The majority of survey participants say chat helps them capture more Internet leads, build better relationships and sell more cars.

- The majority of dealer personnel are eager to learn more about leveraging mobile technologies in the digital dealership.

If you'd like more information about Contact At Once!, Chat Connect 360 (our chat solution), our Chat Receptionist answer center, or Mobile Text Connect, please visit [www.autodealerchat.com](http://www.autodealerchat.com).

**97%** *capture more Internet leads*



**97%** *helps build online relationships*



**60%** *sell 5 or more cars a month\**  
\*From dealerships using Contact At Once! chat on their website

