

Maus Family Auto adapts to a new auto market.

When Devin Stotts started working in the auto industry, half of Americans still weren't on the internet; and the other half were spending only three hours a week online. If someone wanted to buy a car, they'd drive from dealership to dealership to compare pricing. Nobody could have predicted how the internet and smartphones would transform the industry and consumers more generally.

Today, the average American spends about 24 hours a week online—eight times more than they did back when Devin got started. And it's not uncommon for people to complete most of the purchasing process online in 2021. We spoke with Devin, who's the Director of Online Sales at Maus Family Auto, about how he has embraced digital transformation to succeed in the auto industry.

Maus Family Auto is the Gulf Coast's premier pre-owned vehicle dealership with locations in Tampa, New Port Richey, and Homosassa, Florida. Devin is responsible for everything involving online sales and marketing at Maus.

"My day-to-day involves every store and multiple aspects of it between lead generation, CRM, responding to reviews, videos, social media posts..." Devin told us. "You name it. Whatever it takes to help us sell more cars is what I do."

Key Results

- 92% increase in reviews
- 17% lead conversion rate
- 5,454 subscriber opt-ins



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Adapting to a new kind of car buyer.

Two years ago, Devin noticed that prospects were starting to look much more closely at customer reviews. “The car business has changed dramatically in the last two years,” Devin told us. “And our reputation as a dealer is one of the biggest things that people look at.”

Devin realized that Maus would need to not only increase their average star rating, but also respond to reviews—both positive and negative—to show prospects that they care about their customers and will work to resolve any issues.

“You’ll have people look three, four, or five pages deep, find a bad review, and ask you about that situation,” Devin told us. “If you’ve responded to it, at least you are a human-based business that cares what the customer says and is willing to respond.”

In addition to all of his other responsibilities, Devin was trying to manage the online reputation of all four Maus locations. He needed to find a solution that would make gathering and responding to online reviews much easier. That’s when he came across Podium.



Maus Family Auto

4.5 ★★★★★



“If you look at most of our stores, we’re 4.3 to 4.5 [average star rating] across the board, which I can attribute primarily to Podium.”

With Podium, Devin’s team started sending out review invites via text to customers. In their first full month with Podium, they received almost 100 new customer reviews. But that wasn’t the most surprising discovery. Devin saw that his customers were not only leaving reviews, but also responding to those text messages, eager to provide feedback or even ask for follow-up services.

“[Podium] allows you to text that customer and try to resolve the situation,” Devin told us. “It opens up two-way communication to be able to resolve any potential issues.”

Doubling down on text messaging.

Devin recognized that his team could also use Podium to bring in new leads and respond to them almost instantly via text.

"Each store has an internet team that goes 'cradle-to-grave' [with their leads] if you will," Devin told us. "So the person that gets the lead handles it from start to finish. Podium gives us a second layer that we utilize to reach out to a customer by sending an introduction."

Devin and his team were sold on the power of texting. They were bringing in hundreds of new reviews and leads every month. They were turning those leads into customers at a 17% conversion rate. And they felt as though nothing could stop them. Well, nothing except maybe a global pandemic.

This is Devin with Maus Nissan here in North Tampa. I wanted to thank you for your interest in the vehicle you followed online. We're going to send you a quick video of that vehicle to show you that we're here to help.

Here's an example Devin shared for what that text introduction looks like.

Facing the challenges of COVID-19.

When COVID-19 started impacting the automotive supply chain and car prices spiked, buying at auction quickly became risky business.

"Right now, auction prices are through the roof. Dealers are paying retail. So to buy a vehicle at the sale and then try to retail it and get paid is almost ludicrous," Devin told us. "I mean, it's just the weirdest time in the car business I've ever seen."

Overnight, Devin and his team were handed a problem they'd never seen before. Maus wasn't bringing in enough inventory, and the cars they were bringing in had much lower margins than they did prior to the pandemic.



"So thinking through it, I'm just like, 'How can I market to customers quicker to be able to buy cars, or at least bring the awareness that we do buy cars?'"

Devin reached out to his CRM team and explained that they were in dire need of trade acquisition. Together, they started brainstorming creative solutions to get the word out to people that Maus was looking for trade-ins and was willing to work with customers on pricing. One thing they started doing was sending an email blast to customers letting them know they would buy their cars on trade-in. The results of the email campaign were less than ideal.

Finding the solution in SMS marketing.

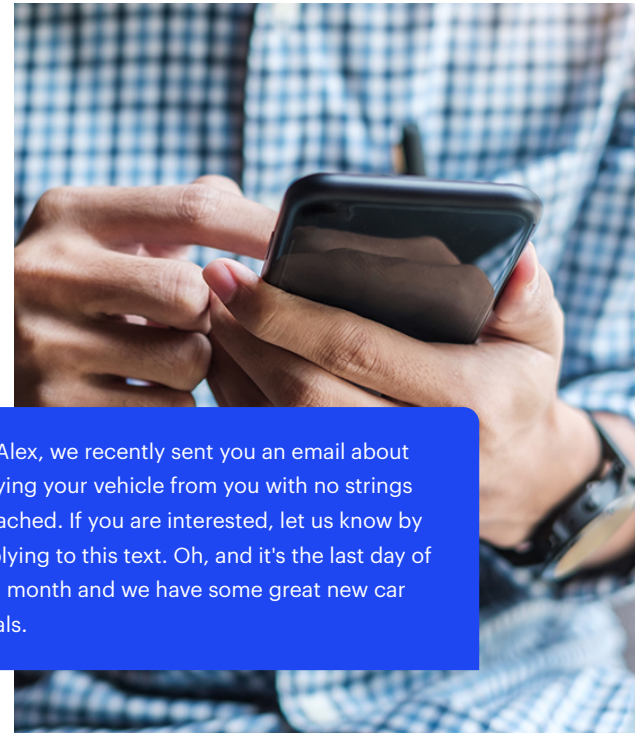
That's when Devin's account representative at Podium reached out to him about a new product called Podium Campaigns¹ which would allow Maus to use SMS marketing to bring awareness to customers and prospects via text.

"Let's face it, most people don't open emails on a daily basis," Devin told us. "Historically in the car business, text has been the best way to reach a customer in the moment."

Devin and his team immediately started using Campaigns to see the difference in engagement between text campaigns and email blasts. Here's what the text campaign looked like:



¹ <https://www.podium.com/campaigns/>



Hi Alex, we recently sent you an email about buying your vehicle from you with no strings attached. If you are interested, let us know by replying to this text. Oh, and it's the last day of the month and we have some great new car deals.

Campaign results:

- Total Subscribers = 2,967
- Response Rate = 3.88%
- Total Responses = 115

When Devin's SMS campaign outperformed his email campaign, he realized he could also use Campaigns to accelerate new car sales to reach their monthly sales quota. That's when he decided to run another SMS promotion with Campaigns to sell 10 new cars on the last two days of the month. Here's what it looked like:

Hi Sam, Maus Nissan of North Tampa family needs your help. We have to sell 10 cars between now and tomorrow night. If you or someone you know needs or wants a new car, reply to this so we can help!

Results from Podium Campaigns

- Total Subscribers = 2,898
- Click/Open Rate = 5.72%
- Total Clicks = 166
- Response Rate = 1.52%
- Total Responses = 44
- Cars sold: 8



"We got a good response," Devin told us. "At the end of the day, we were able to sell seven or eight more cars off that note in a 48-hour window. We bought a couple of cars too. Campaigns essentially paid for itself."

Devin told us he's planning to run a lot more SMS promotions in the future with Campaigns because the cost of retaining a customer is so minimal compared to the cost of acquiring a new car buyer.

"The cost acquisition of a new customer in the car business is what, \$600 to \$700?" Devin told us. "But once they're your customer, the cost of retention is minimal, right? I mean, if you have to take \$10 off an oil change to get that customer to come back to you versus going to a third-party option, it costs you \$10 to keep a \$600 customer. I mean, why wouldn't you, right?"



"I would definitely recommend [Podium]," Devin told us. "For the platform costs and what it does, it's probably one of the best for the money out there... Text and chat are where it's at."