





<input type="checkbox"/>  <b>Roberto Garcia</b> Sales Consultant 5.0 ★★★★★ (497 reviews)	<input type="checkbox"/>  <b>Michael Davis</b> Sales Manager 5.0 ★★★★★ (135 reviews)
<input type="checkbox"/>  <b>Suzanne Townsend</b> Internet Sales Consultant 5.0 ★★★★★ (305 reviews)	<input type="checkbox"/>  <b>Jack Sherman</b> Sales Consultant 5.0 ★★★★★ (111 reviews)

# How to become a 5-star team

A dealer's complete guide to  
building reputation-driven success.



# Build a team shoppers trust — and talk about

In today's market, your reputation isn't just important — it's why shoppers choose you. A strong team culture shows up in every review, every interaction, and every sale. And in a high-stakes digital landscape, that reputation is your most powerful asset.

## Today's market makes trust more valuable than ever:

- **Economic turbulence** from [tariffs](#) and rising interest rates are shifting shopper behavior.
- **Inventory slowdowns** mean [fewer vehicles](#) and longer buying cycles.
- **Savvier shoppers** research dealers as thoroughly as the vehicles themselves.
- **Authenticity wins** — generic messaging is ignored as consumers crave authenticity.



**88%**

of shoppers haven't chosen where to buy when they start their research<sup>1</sup>

## Where others compete on price, win on trust

When traditional competitive advantages like price and inventory are neutralized, reputation becomes a critical factor influencing purchase decisions.

With **88% of Cars.com shoppers undecided on where to buy** when they begin their search<sup>1</sup>, there's a massive opportunity for dealers to establish trust and credibility early in the process.



This playbook gives your dealership a blueprint to grow and protect your most valuable asset: **trust**. Inside, you'll find practical checklists, operational frameworks, and research-backed strategies to help your team deliver experiences that build loyalty, earn reviews, and win customers for life.

<b>Why reputation wins in 2025</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Make your first pitch count</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>AI is rewriting the rules of the game</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Scout your performance with the Experience Report</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Turn your website into a home field advantage</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Use trust to stand out from the competition</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Put your stars in the game</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Grow your fan base</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Fast, authentic responses matter</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Your 5-star team readiness checklist</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Ready to win with reputation?</b>	<b>15</b>

# Why reputation wins in 2025

Today's shoppers do more research than ever. Before they call, click, or walk through your doors, they're already comparing dealerships — scanning reviews, evaluating interactions, and deciding who they trust.

In this environment, your reputation isn't just part of the buying process — **it is the buying process.**

One negative review can drive away a ready-to-buy customer. But a strong, consistent reputation? That builds trust, attracts high-intent shoppers, and fuels long-term customer loyalty.

**"Dealers with standout reputations aren't just winning more business — they're winning it earlier, faster, and at better margins."**



**Jamie Oldershaw**  
VP, Reputation, Cars.com

## Consider this example.

Two dealers, same make, similar 2022 model, comparable pricing.  
Which dealer would *you* choose?

2022 Ford F-150  
**\$28,400**  
We Got Cars! 3.2 ★★★★★ (143 reviews)

- Recent reviews mention "pushy sales tactics" and "hidden fees"
- Customers express concerns about transparency
- Lower conversion rate despite competitive pricing

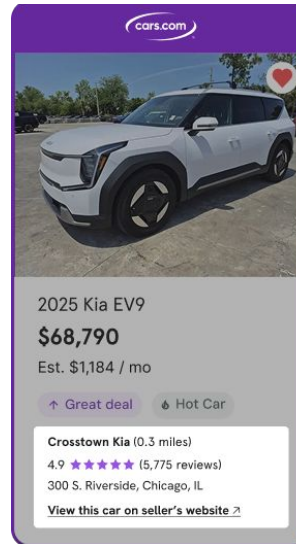
2022 Ford F-150  
**\$28,495**  
Neighborhood Auto 4.8 ★★★★★ (1,239 reviews)

- Consistent praise for "honest service" and "no-pressure experience"
- Multiple mentions of "fair pricing" and "trustworthy staff"
- Higher conversion rate and premium pricing power

## Make your first pitch count

The automotive landscape has shifted. A new [Clarivoy study](#) confirms **shoppers aren't starting on Google** — they're starting on marketplaces like Cars.com.

If your reputation is only showing up strong on Google, you're missing the chance to stand out and earn consideration from in-market shoppers right at the start.



**61%**  
of buyers begin their path to purchase on a marketplace like Cars.com.<sup>1</sup>



### Engaged buyers

averaged 62 online touch points in their path to purchase.<sup>2</sup>

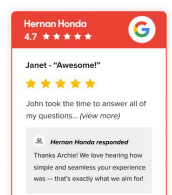
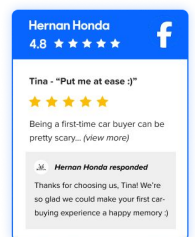
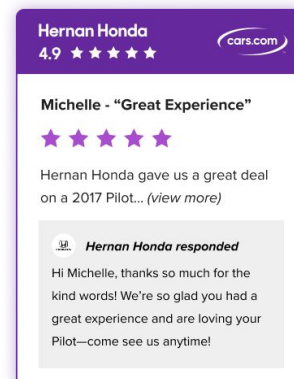
## Where shoppers are making decisions

Buyers aren't sticking to one platform — they're jumping between channels, comparing dealers the whole time. Reputation is now evaluated across:

- Third-party marketplaces
- Social media
- Review sites
- OEM websites
- Word-of-mouth referrals

## How to stand out everywhere that matters

Successful dealers take an omnichannel approach to reputation. They show up with strong, consistent reviews and helpful content across all the platforms shoppers trust — especially on marketplaces, where buying decisions often start and end.



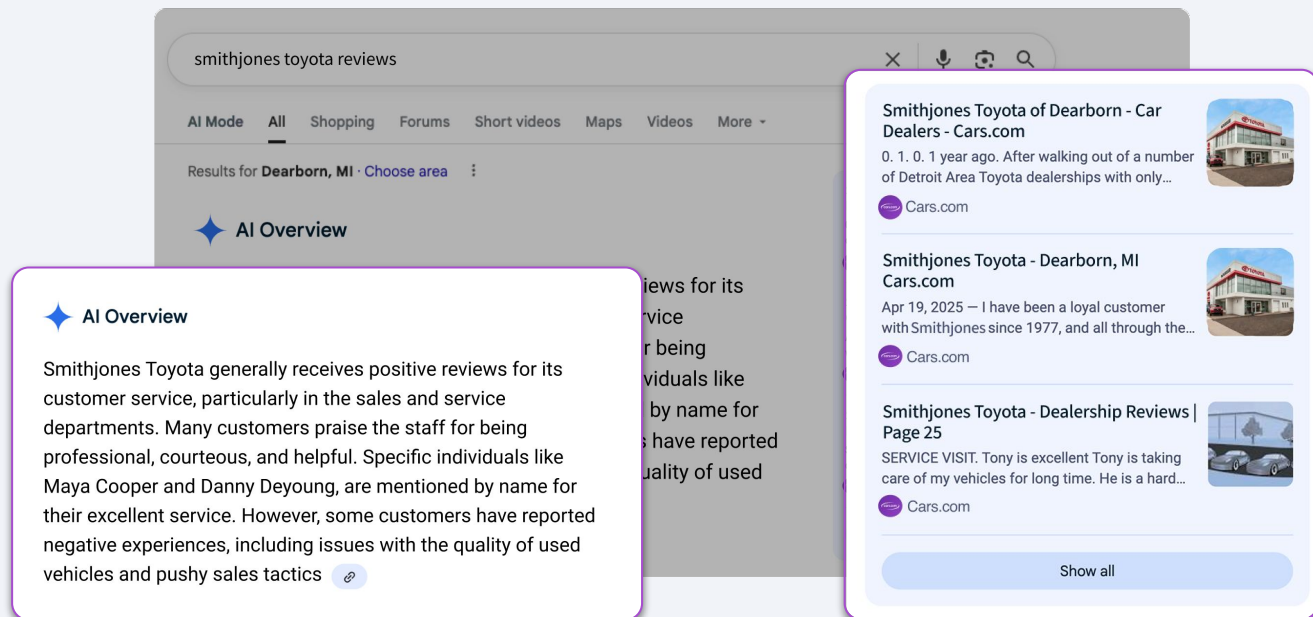


## AI is rewriting the rules of the game

AI-powered search tools are now scanning trusted sources to instantly answer questions like: ***Which dealership has the best reviews? Where should I buy?***

If your reviews aren't current or visible on the platforms these systems trust, your dealership could be overlooked — or worse — inaccurately represented.

The good news? You can get ahead of this shift by strengthening your review presence on Cars.com, which already ranks as a highly trusted source in automotive.



## Make your reputation work twice as hard

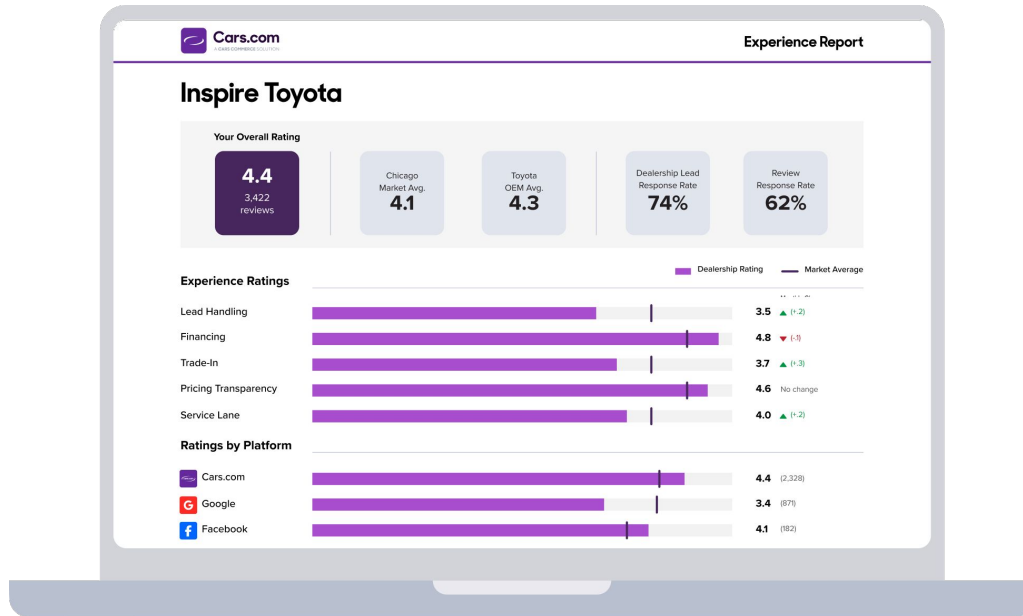
AI systems prioritize topic-specific sources with deep, credible content. Because **Cars.com has 15.1MM reviews<sup>2</sup>** (the most in the industry) it's more likely to be referenced by AI systems than general review sites.

That means every effort you make to improve your presence on Cars.com builds shopper trust *and* increases your chances of being recommended by AI in search results.

# Scout your performance with the Experience Report

The Cars.com [Experience Report](#) reveals how shoppers actually **experience your store**.

This is your strategic starting point to understand **how your team shows up online**,  
**how you compare locally**, and **where to focus next to drive more sales**.



Cars.com customers

[Log in to review your report](#)

Not a Cars.com customer?

[Request your report](#)

## Here's what to zero in on

- **Overall lead response rate** → How fast and reliably your team follows up with shoppers
- **Review response rate** → How consistently you acknowledge and respond to customer feedback
- **Market + OEM rankings** → How your performance stacks up against local competitors



### Make it a habit

Set a monthly Experience Report review with your sales, BDC, and F&I teams. Use it to track trends, celebrate wins, so reputation stays top of mind and tied to results.

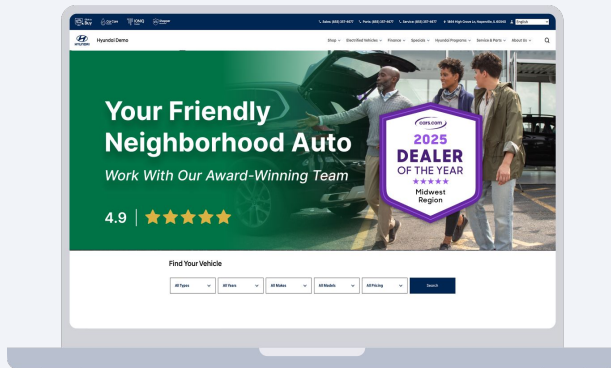
[▶ Watch how](#)

# Turn your website into a home field advantage

Your website should prove you're worth buying from.

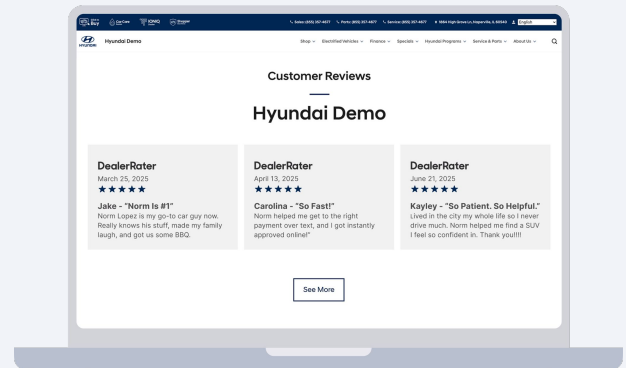
Shoppers who land on your site are looking for trust signals. Just like Cars.com validates your reputation with reviews and ratings, your site should reinforce that same credibility at every step of the journey.

**Make sure your reputation is clearly represented in these key placements:**



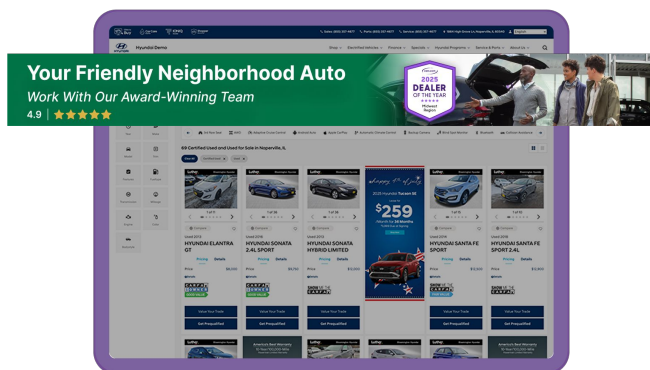
## Homepage hero

Use your top-rated customer quotes or recent awards as bold hero headlines. This is your first impression — make it count.



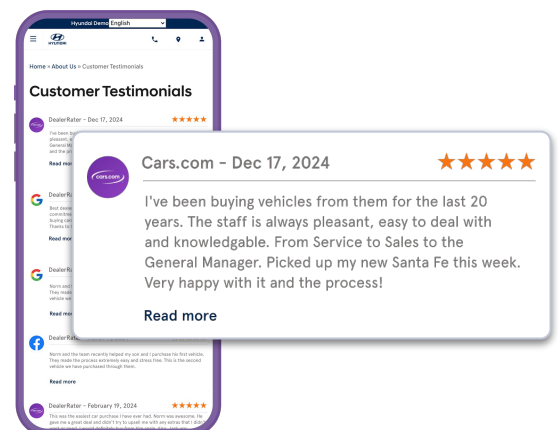
## Homepage review carousel

Display real-time reviews from all platforms like to showcase consistency and transparency. This keeps visitors engaged and reassured.



## VRP banners

Highlight your average star rating or satisfaction score in a banner above your listings. This reinforces trust before a shopper even clicks through.



## Integrated reviews landing page

Create a dedicated landing page that pulls in recent reviews, testimonials, and customer satisfaction stats — all in one place.



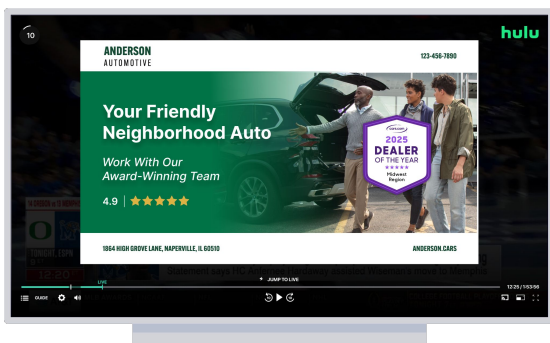
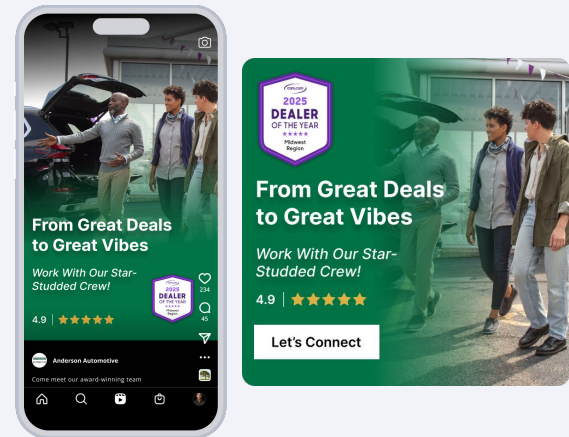
# Use trust to stand out from the competition

Your competitors may sell the same vehicles — but they can't replicate your customer experience. By consistently showcasing your reputation, you give shoppers a clear reason to choose you.

Here's how to use your reviews to power more effective marketing:

## Build awareness in your advertising

Incorporate real review quotes and your average star rating into your digital ads to build credibility. Whether it's Meta, Google, or programmatic display, trust-based messaging helps your store stand out.

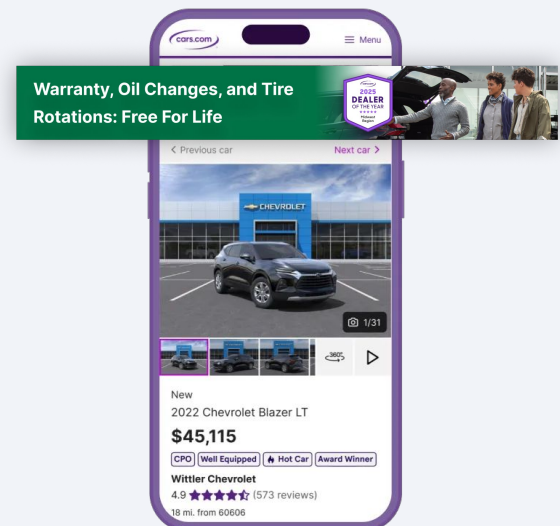


## Stars of the big and small screens

Build positive sentiment in your community through OTT and social video ads that grow long-term brand awareness and equity. It's a powerful way to stay top of mind — whether shoppers are ready to buy today or just starting to look.

## Show them “why you?” on Cars.com

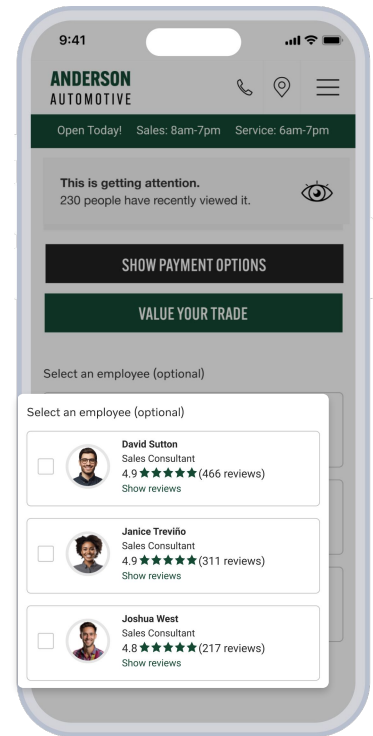
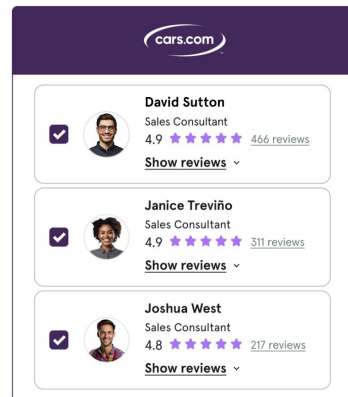
Your dealer profile and listings on Cars.com are prime real estate for “why buy” branding. Use creative that highlights what sets your store apart — and reinforces the story your reviews and ratings are already telling.



## Put your stars in the game

Trust is built one conversation at a time — and your sales team plays a starring role.

When shoppers connect with a standout salesperson, that personal experience often becomes the reason they leave a five-star review. Now, you can turn that individual trust into a dealership-wide advantage.



## Turn conversations into credibility

Cars.com lets shoppers tag their salesperson directly in their review — adding authenticity and helping future customers know who to trust.

These tagged reviews automatically power **Top Salesperson widgets** that can appear on your Cars.com and Dealer Inspire website VDPs



**Even better?** Shoppers can reach out directly to that salesperson — turning positive experiences into 1:1 connections that **drive more leads and faster deals.**

## Empower your team to drive more reviews

Turn review generation into a consistent, rewarding habit by:

- Creating a monthly **Reputation Leaderboard** that tracks ratings and reviews per salesperson
- Encouraging **friendly competition** to keep review efforts consistent across the team
- **Celebrating wins** with recognition and rewards for top performers

This not only amplifies your review volume—it reinforces a culture of service and accountability across your floor.

## Grow your fan base

To make your reputation stand out, **freshness matters just as much as stars do**. Shoppers don't care about the experience you delivered last year — they want to hear about the one you delivered yesterday.

By taking an active approach to review generation, you give future customers confidence that your dealership is delivering consistent, trustworthy experiences *right now* — making you the obvious local choice to buy, sell, or service a vehicle.

Use these proven plays to collect more reviews, more often — right when the customer experience is strongest:

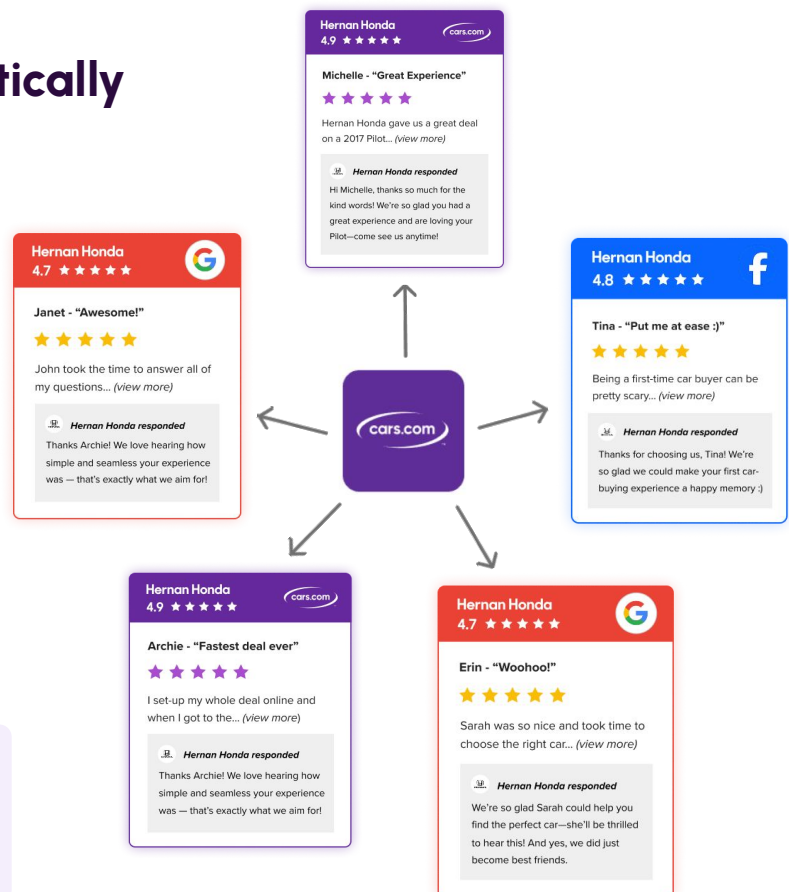
- **Review landing page:** A webpage that directs customers to your preferred review platforms
- **Text message campaigns:** Quick follow-ups post-sale or service while the experience is still fresh
- **Email nudges:** A friendly reminder that their feedback is welcome anytime
- **QR Codes everywhere:** At desks, doors, service counters — anywhere you interact with customers
- **LotShot delivery pics:** Send customers a photo of their new ride with a direct link to leave a review

## Build your highlight reel automatically

The best time to ask for a review is right after a great experience — and **ReviewBuilder** makes that easy.

Included with Cars.com Premium and Premium+ subscriptions, ReviewBuilder automatically follows up with your customers after sales and service, prompting them to leave a review on platforms like Cars.com, Google, and Facebook.

It's a simple way to keep your highlight reel fresh without adding extra work for your team — so your next great review is always just one experience away.



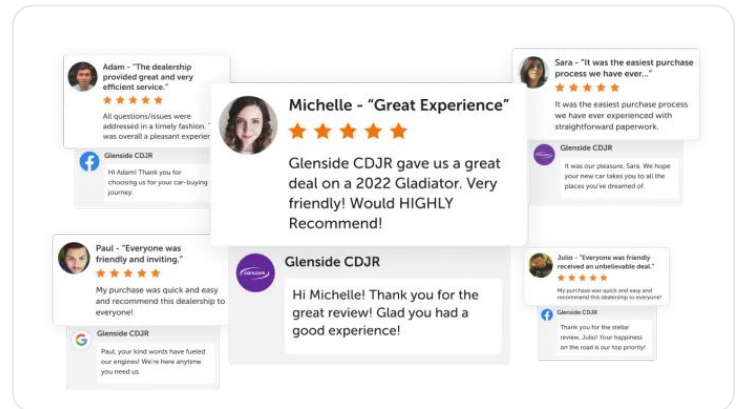
**4X** more reviews for dealers using automated review building<sup>1</sup>

## Fast, authentic responses matter

Responding to reviews isn't just good etiquette, it's a **strategic advantage**. Here's how thoughtful, timely replies can directly impact shopper trust and your store's reputation.

**89%** of consumers read businesses' responses to reviews<sup>1</sup>

- **Builds trust:** Shoppers see that you're listening—and that you value feedback, even when it's critical.
- **Boosts visibility:** Google rewards active engagement. Consistently responding to reviews can lift your local SEO rankings.
- **Protects your reputation:** A thoughtful response can neutralize negative feedback and turn a bad experience into a second chance.



## Best practices for review responses:

- Respond to **100% of reviews within 48 hours** — speed shows you care
- Sign responses with a real **Name + Title** — this builds trust and human connection
- Use positive language, **even for negative feedback** — show you're listening, not just reacting

Only  
**40%**  
of dealers respond to all of their reviews<sup>2</sup>



## Stay on top of every review without lifting a finger

**AutoResponse from Cars.com** delivers unique, human-sounding replies to every review on Cars.com, DealerRater, Google, and Facebook. Each unique response appears as if it came directly from your store. No repetitive templates. No missed reviews. Just the real, timely responses that gives shoppers more reasons to trust you.

*Part of the Premium and Premium+ Cars.com Marketplace subscriptions*

[Learn more](#)

# Your 5-star team readiness checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate your dealership's progress toward building a 5-star team and experience

## Foundation elements

- ☐ We actively review and apply insights from the Cars.com Experience Report
- ☐ Monthly team meetings include Experience Report analysis
- ☐ Action plans address identified opportunities
- ☐ Progress tracking shows continuous improvement

## Digital presence

- ☐ All VDPs showcase dealership rating and sales team profiles
- ☐ Store ratings are prominently displayed
- ☐ Top-performing salespeople are featured
- ☐ Trust signals are consistent across all listings

## Team empowerment

- ☐ Our sales team is trained to request and track reviews
- ☐ Review requests are delivered naturally, at the right moment
- ☐ Review generation is built into performance expectations
- ☐ Friendly competition or recognition supports review culture

## Website integration

- ☐ Customer reviews are featured across key website pages
- ☐ Homepage showcases customer testimonials
- ☐ Inventory pages include real customer quotes or badges
- ☐ Team member recognition is woven into the site experience



# Your 5-star team readiness checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate your dealership's progress toward building a 5-star team and experience

## Operational excellence

- ☐ Automated review building is actively driving follow-up requests
- ☐ Email and text campaigns are in place for sales and service
- ☐ Manual and automated review efforts are aligned
- ☐ Volume and consistency have increased with automation

## Response management

- ☐ Every review gets a timely, personalized response
- ☐ 48-hour response commitment is maintained
- ☐ All responses include real names and titles
- ☐ Tone is always professional, helpful, and on-brand

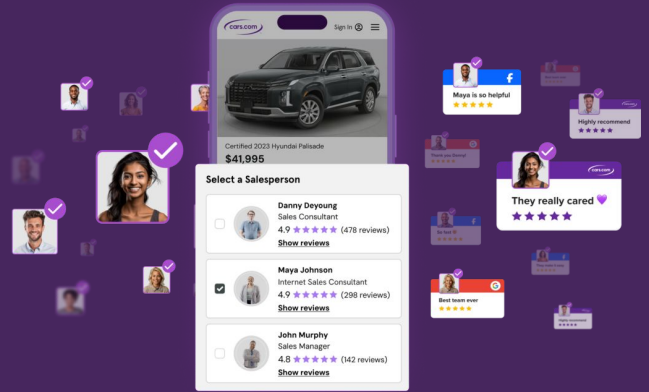
## Cultural integration

- ☐ Reputation is part of our daily, weekly, and monthly operations
- ☐ Daily team huddles include reputation highlights
- ☐ Weekly check-ins track individual/team review performance
- ☐ Monthly strategy sessions include review analysis and goals

## Success measurement

- ☐ Review generation volume is consistently tracked
- ☐ Business impact — including revenue influence — is measured
- ☐ Conversion improvements tied to reviews are documented
- ☐ Reputation data informs broader sales and marketing strategy

# Ready to win with your reputation?



## Showcase your stars on the biggest stage

Give your team a platform on the **#1 most recognized marketplace<sup>1</sup>** to meet new customers, create loyal fans, and become stars in your community from rave reviews. All you have to do is let them shine in front of local car shoppers actively deciding what and where to buy on [Cars.com](https://www.cars.com).

- **Dealership ratings on VRPs:** Instant credibility where shoppers first see your inventory
- **Salesperson profiles on VDPs:** Build personal connections before the shopper even calls
- **Store landing pages:** Showcase your values, culture, and commitment beyond just selling cars
- **Why buy branding:** Clearly communicate what sets your dealership apart
- **Automated review building:** Keep fresh reviews coming in with minimal effort
- **AutoResponse:** Ensure every customer gets a timely, thoughtful reply that shows you care

### Already a Cars.com customer?

Connect with your Cars.com representative to solidify your reputation game plan.

### New to Cars.com?

Let's connect. Discover how Cars.com can elevate your reputation and help you win more in-market shoppers.

**Get started**

