



VinSolutions Tests AI to Help Car Dealers Better Know Customers

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[Steven Finlay](#) | Feb 27, 2019

A company that provides customer relationship management software to dealerships is entering the realm of artificial intelligence.

VinSolutions is testing what it calls Connect Automotive Intelligence. It aims to help dealers use tracked data to better engage with customers. The company is part of Cox Automotive, which collects and stores massive amounts of data from its different business units including AutoTrader, Kelley Blue Book and Dealer.com.

“We pull our data together” using three new artificial intelligence-enabled tools, says Lori Wittman, Cox Automotive’s senior vice president-dealer software solutions. “People want a more personalized experience.”

She notes technology integration is a requisite for innovations such as AI to be fully leveraged.

VinSolutions' next generation of personalization across the customer vehicle-buying journey focuses on three areas: engagement strength, sentiment analysis and buying signals.

Engagement strength measures a salesperson's interactions with an existing prospect. Tracking the staffer's customer interaction—including frequency—highlights engagement trends and helps managers assess how much a salesperson uses the CRM software.

"It measures effectiveness," Wittman tells Wards.

The second AI tool, sentiment analysis, determines customer feelings, attitude and purchase intent by analyzing text messages and emails. This helps identify revenue opportunities and highlight interactions that foster satisfaction – and avoid dissatisfaction.

"It allows you to look at positive or negative information and whether there is a customer-experience problem that you should address," Wittman says. "The AI looks for certain words or word combinations. It is constantly learning."

The buying-signals tool captures, analyzes and distills shoppers' online behaviors to predict shopping patterns, preferences and levels of urgency to purchase.

The AI initiative is in contrast to leads coming into the CRM system without any context of prior online shopping behavior. The intent is to leverage known online traffic, speed up the buying process and build customer trust with the shopper, Wittman says.



The buying-signals feature also detects pivots during the customer journey. For example, a dealership customer may test-drive a particular vehicle but later shop online for a different model. That could indicate a change of mind. In that case, Wittman says, "Do you as a salesperson need to step back," rather than presume the customer has landed on a specific vehicle and act accordingly? (*Lori Wittman, left*)

The AI aids dealers, but doesn't take over for them. Wittman doesn't envision a day when AI does the deals on its own.

"Dealer clients I've talked to get the people part of the business," she says. "Connect Automotive Intelligence helps dealers personalize the customer experience."

Modern businesses today excel by being more consumer-facing, says Kevin Frye, e-commerce director at the Cincinnati-based Jeff Wyler Automotive Family. "For us, personalizing each customer experience is a high priority."

He expects Connect Automotive Intelligence "will allow us to deliver a more consumer-facing journey with timely, relevant and personalized communications."