

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As the Car-Buying Process Moves Online, Satisfaction Climbs to an All-Time High

- *Consumer satisfaction with the vehicle buying process increases sharply in 2020.*
- *In-person dealership visits and time spent at dealerships continue to drop.*
- *Nearly 70% of auto dealers added digital retailing tools last year due to COVID-19 concerns.*

ATLANTA, Jan. 25, 2021 – There was a time when consumers rated the car-buying process roughly on par with a stubborn root canal. But those days are passing into the rearview mirror now, as auto dealers move more steps of the retail process online resulting in consumer satisfaction hitting an all-time high, according to the new Digitization of End-to-End Retailing (DoEER) study by Cox Automotive.

With buyers spending less time at dealerships and benefitting from more efficient, digital retailing processes, those who were “highly satisfied” with the overall shopping experience reached 72%, up from 60% in 2019. The average vehicle buyer now visits only 2 dealerships in the vehicle buying process, down from 2.7 in 2016.

“According to our data, car buyers have never been happier,” notes Cox Automotive Vice President of Research & Market Intelligence Isabelle Helms. “Consumers have long asked for a process that is more efficient and requires less time at the dealership. With more steps moving online, that’s exactly what they are getting. And it is not just consumers who are benefitting. Dealers, too, are seeing the advantages of a more efficient, streamlined purchasing process.”

The Cox Automotive Digitization of End-to-End Retailing study was undertaken to measure and understand the shifts in consumer preference toward a more online purchase process. Beginning in August 2020, a total of 1,859 purchase intenders were interviewed, along with 462 franchised auto dealers that offer digital retailing tools. The results of the study are being released today.

Digital retailing is not new to the automobile business, and Cox Automotive, among the largest automotive services providers in the world, has been a proponent of the approach for years, offering both the tools and the know-how to help dealers move more of the purchase process online. Still, the Cox Automotive Digitization of End-to-End Retailing study shows that only 1-in-3 franchised automobile dealers in the U.S. offer all the purchase steps online.

The shift is on, though. In 2020, 69% of franchised dealers added at least one digital step due to COVID-19, and 74% indicated their customers have used digital retailing tools more since the onset of the global pandemic. Among the most popular activities for shoppers to complete online or at home: Finding information on incentives; calculating monthly payments; applying for credit; and finalizing the vehicle price.

Importantly, franchised automobile dealers know what the future holds. In the survey, 75% of dealers agreed that they would not be able to survive in the long run without adopting digital retailing tools and moving more of their sales process online.

Digital Retailing is a Win-Win for Consumers and Dealers

According to the study, 64% of shoppers want more of the purchase process to happen online, compared to the last time they bought a vehicle. But consumers are not the only ones that see the appeal – and the benefit – of the shift to digital retailing.

Sixty-one percent of franchised dealers note that digital retailing efforts are allowing them to spend less time on a sale; more than half believe it helps them improve the customer experience. Importantly, 75% of dealers agree that digital retailing provides shoppers a more customized experience, a key to higher satisfaction with the shopping process.

While interest in digital retailing continues to grow – and grew significantly in 2020 during the pandemic – Cox Automotive still believes that auto dealerships as physical locations play a critical role in the vehicle buying experience. To be sure, research consistently demonstrates that automobile shoppers still have a strong desire to spend quality time at the dealership, test driving the vehicle and setting up their new vehicle after purchase – both hands-on activities that are a lot more fun and informative than filling out paperwork and waiting.

Still, the future is digital, and the process is moving online, right down to negotiating the final purchase price. In 2017, research by Cox Automotive showed that 25% of buyers wanted to finalize the vehicle price online. By 2020, that number had jumped to near 40%. Dealers are taking notice: 80% of franchised dealers surveyed in the DoEER study indicated they plan to offer even more parts of the purchase process online in the next 1-2 years.

To learn more, [download the Digitization of End-to-End Retailing study highlights](#) from the Cox Automotive Newsroom or [register to attend Cox Automotive Experience](#) to hear Isabelle Helms present the full study findings during her session "[This is The Way Forward: Digital Retailing Insights to Drive Success in 2021](#)" on Monday, February 1 at 10 a.m. EDT.

Cox Automotive Complete Retail

Concurrent with the release of the DoEER study, Cox Automotive is launching Complete Retail, a revolutionary end-to-end digital retail experience that allows consumers and retailers to complete the shopping and buying processes from anywhere. Complete Retail, the first end-to-end retail experience to bear the Cox Automotive name, is underpinned by and serviced through a suite of the company's most recognized, trusted, and connected solutions: Autotrader, Dealer.com, Dealertrack, Kelley Blue Book and VinSolutions. [Read more information about Cox Automotive Complete Retail](#) on the Cox Automotive Newsroom.

About Cox Automotive

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