

Car Dealer Inventory Modules SEO Ratings Report

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Special Bulletin

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**Over 70% of
Dealer Inventory
Modules are NOT
fully optimized for
Organic Search**

SEO Vocabulary Primer

Short Tail Search – A short phrase, used in Google that does not constrain the search to a small result set.

If a consumer is looking for an Infiniti car their first search is normally a short tail search phrase like "Infiniti" or "EX35".

Long Tail Search terms – A longer phrase that limits the data set returned by Google.

Long tail searches are often the second search made by consumers if their broad search fails to deliver any meaningful localized data.

A long tail search would be "BMW X6 New Jersey" or even more specific "2009 BMW X6 NJ".

Evaluating Dealer Inventory Modules

The purpose of this article is to elevate the awareness of General Managers and Internet Sales Managers on the importance of an SEO friendly inventory management system.

There are over 50 providers of automotive website platforms on the market today. This number of choices makes it difficult for car dealerships to sift through the marketing hype and choose a strong marketing architecture for their brands.

The most important element of an automotive website marketing platform is the inventory module. These modules produced the bulk of the content and pages viewed on a car dealer website. Since the primary purpose of these web platforms is to sell cars, then these modules should also provide good visibility for the cars in stock when people search for cars in Google, yahoo and MSN.

The ideal inventory management module must be visually attractive and easy to use for online shoppers. We also contend that the inventory modules should also adhere to Google Webmaster Guidelines as well as general SEO community guidelines. Our search engine marketing checklist shows that many modules on the market today have flaws that can impact organic search results, especially for model specific searches.

The Pasch Consulting Group has reviewed the inventory module architecture of **over a dozen** popular automotive website platforms. We selected automotive dealers across the country and analyzed their inventory management modules on their live production website. We measured the inventory modules using the Pasch Consulting Group's **Automotive Search Marketing Architecture™** Checklist (ASMA).

This review did not score sites for creativity and design elements since we believe that is somewhat subjective. The scoring is limited to basic SEO criteria that can be validated using the public information displayed on an automotive dealership website.

Car dealers often have a choice of different levels of support and service from the website platform providers. If a particular platform did not score well on our ASMA™, please contact any vendor to see if they have a better offering available. Some of the websites reviewed in this report were taken directly from the vendor's testimonials pages. There is also the chance that a dealer in this review elected not to purchase a new inventory module from their software vendor, so please confirm our findings with your own research.

We did not ask the automotive software providers to submit website for consideration. We felt it more appropriate to research data from random searches on the Internet.

The Untold Story

The Pasch Consulting Group offers search engine optimization services to car dealers regardless of which web platform they are using. In most all consulting engagements we enter, the General Manager is not fully aware of how important a strong inventory module can be toward improving their website's organic search rankings and consumer direct sales leads.

The Pasch Consulting Group can provide ASMA™ compliant inventory management solutions that can work in conjunction with existing inventory modules.



New marketing ideas that are put into action will yield greater Internet visibility



SEO Vocabulary Primer (continued)

URL Page Name – the unique physical page address for any page on a dealer website. The URL will start with http://

HTML Title Tag – This is the text that is in the upper most portion of the Internet Explorer browser and is formed by the <title> command in the actual HTML page coding.

See example on the following page which identifies the location of the title tag.

META Description and Keywords – Two tags that can be added to every web page that can be used by search engines for indexing.

The META Description tag is often used in search engine result pages (SERP). Most SEO professionals believe that the keywords tag is no longer important for SEO in the major search engines.

Hidden Costs of Inventory Modules

If a car dealership's inventory module is only visually impressive and scores poorly on the ASMAC, the franchise may have to rely more heavily on paid advertising to get direct traffic for model specific, long tail searches.

If a car dealer's inventory module is not presenting unique, SEO compliant page data for each car in stock, it will be harder for Google to match long tail searches. Aside from increased advertising costs, there are also the lost opportunities that could have resulted in a quotation request if the inventory created better organic search visibility.

For example, if a consumer in Massachusetts is looking for a black 2008 BMW X5, they could easily want a local price quote. The savvy shopper might type into Google a long tail search like: "2008 BMW X5 Black Boston". Dealers with optimized marketing inventory pages will be on Google page 1 or 2.

If a car dealer does not have an SEO friendly inventory module, they will have to rely on getting on page one for the broader search of "BMW X5 Boston". Most dealers will still fail a broad search since it's much harder to be included on Google Page One and third party lead collectors normally appear on Google Page One for broad car model/city searches.

Car dealer website marketing plans should have a goal to appear in both BROAD and LONG TAIL searches. Since most dealers have a choice on inventory modules, they should be choosing one that is strong for organic search optimization: broad and long tail searches. We clearly understand that there are other elements involved in choosing a dealership website platform. This review is just on the search engine optimization design and its ability to be edited for optimal results.

The primary goal of a car dealer website should be about selling cars. As more and more consumers are car shopping on the Internet, a superior SEO architecture will always bring in more organic visitor traffic. A dealer may have a beautiful website with great reporting but fail to attract local customers due to its inventory architecture. In the end, it's the General Manager who has to decide what is more important and if they want to seek a platform that has both style and SEO power.

Where is the Problem?

There are a many technical and business reasons why car dealer platforms are not optimized for organic search. As car dealers become more aware of how organic search works, they will force providers of website platforms to provide better solutions for marketing their cars on the Internet.

In this bulletin we will mention three common themes that PCG has found from our automotive SEO consulting projects. These reasons are:

1. **Flash based inventory modules**, which by nature conflict with the basic principles of search engine optimization.
2. **Framed, Offsite or Ajax inventory modules** which hide the inventory tags and META data in an internal frame which the search engine do not credit to the landing page.
3. **Incomplete HTML modules** which have the potential to be successful in search engine optimization yet have not yet been implemented.



"The Pasch Consulting Group can create a targeted microsite to expand your direct car leads on a platform that you own and can maintain."

Think of the direct leads you could attract with a website name that was focused on your most popular car models!

Review the Basics

Before we review the common problems with inventory modules, refresh your vocabulary and understand some basic SEO terms used in this article.

HTML Page Title <title>

URL Name

Right Click on side area and select "View Source" to see META tags on page

In the photo above, we have attempted to identify some of the main webpage elements that will be included in this article.

The HTML Page Title <title> is the topmost text that appears in the Microsoft Explorer Browser. In this example, the HTML title is:

Acura Dealer MDX RDX RL TL TSX Car Prices - Boston Peabody Nashua

The URL name is the physical address that is associated with any webpage. In this example, the URL is:

<http://www.acura-dealer.com/>

Lastly, to see the META description and keyword tags, you need to "right-click" on an area outside the main boundary and select "view source" from a popup box that will appear. If you go to the URL listed above and right-click on the gray area, and view the source code you will see these important lines near the top of the page:

```
<title>Acura Dealer MDX RDX RL TL TSX Car Prices - Boston Peabody Nashua</title>
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="acura dealer, acura car dealer, acura rl, acura tl, acura tsx, acura mdx, acura rdx" />
```

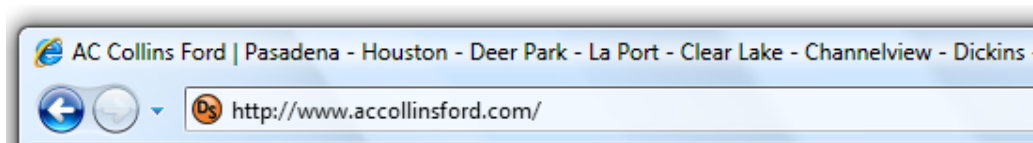
```
<meta name="description" content="Acura of Peabody sells the Acura RL, TL,TSX,MDX and RDX cars to the greater Boston Massachusetts area." />
```

Reason #1-Flash Based Platforms

Websites that have inventory modules that are 100% flash are not conducive for organic search marketing. In this example, as you select different cars from an inventory list, the page titles and page description tags do not change. This is a very common problem with flash websites.

Google claims that it can now read the text on flash pages; however it does not resolve the architecture problems. This means that even if Google can read the text, there are no unique page titles and descriptions. In a head to head test, an inventory module with unique HTML pages, titles, and tags should always beat a single page flash module in organic search.

If you visit www.accollinsford.com you can see a perfect example of a flash based inventory module that does not have unique page URL names and unique HTML page titles. If you click on their new car inventory menu choice and click on a few new cars in stock, you will see that the page Title in the browser bar stays fixed as well as the URL Name. This is what the <title> tag and page URL looks like for every car in stock.



Shown below is the actual HTML <title> tag on this webpage, which was displayed when I called up a 2008 Ford Edge, but as you can see it is cutoff in the Internet Explorer browser window only showing the partial spelling of Dickinson:

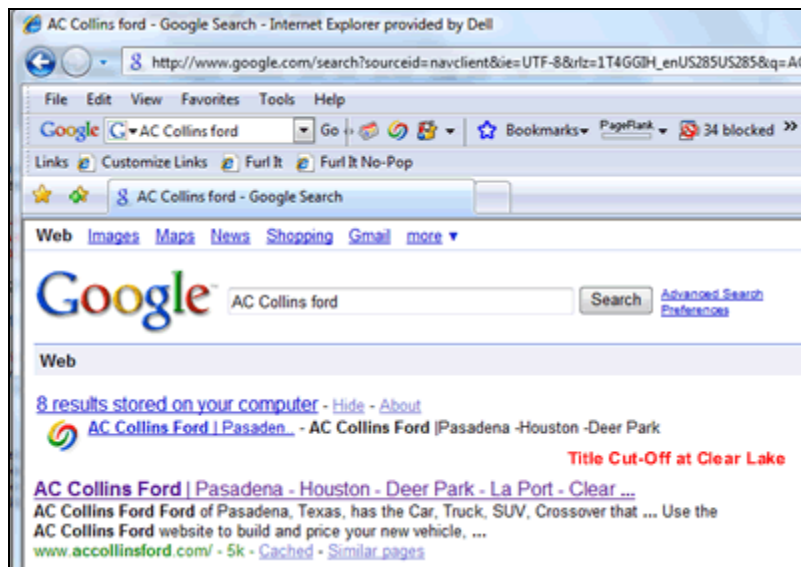
"AC Collins Ford | Pasadena - Houston - Deer Park - La Port - Clear Lake - Channelview - Dickinson - Webster - Alvin - Seabrook - Kemah | New - Used Car - Pre-Owned Ford Dealership | Texas"

According to Google Webmaster Guidelines:

"Make sure that your <title> elements and alt attributes are descriptive and accurate."

So, this <title> tag should really be about the specific car displayed on the page. It is also too long to be used on the web page as well as in a Google SERP. **If a 2008 Ford Edge in Ice Blue Metallic was called from inventory**, the <title> tag would be better formatted to read **"2008 Ford Edge - Ice Blue Metallic - Pasadena Texas"**

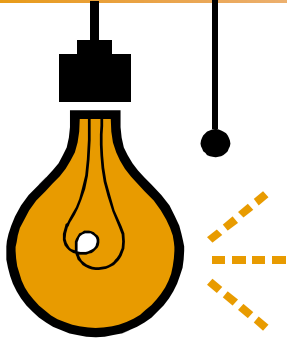
Having the same <title> tag for every car forces you to create a "one size fits all" tag which is what AC Collins Ford's website tried to create. It's inaccurate since this is a new car page and not a used car or pre-owned page. It's inaccurate since it does not mention the primary focus of the page's information. It's also too long and does not fit in the Google <title> display area.



Notice that since the HTML title is too long, the listing in Google get chopped at the word "Clear lake"

If a consumer is looking for a 2008 Ford Edge, there eye will be drawn to Google SERP's that contain those words. That is why we suggest unique page titles for car inventory modules.

Having a universal page title, like on this website reduce the chances that consumers will click on a dealer listing.



Reason #2 – Framed Inventory

On these websites, HTML coding is used for the outer wrapper of the website page, but the inside of the page, which is the car details, changes as different cars are selected by the shopper. This is often described as a webpage inside another webpage. A good analogy is a digital photo frame with the word “Family Photos” printed on the wooden frame. The frame always says “Family Photos” regardless of whether the photos being displayed are of a car wreck or famous celebrities.

Using this analogy, a framed inventory module has static page <title> like: “ABC Dealer - New BMW Cars in California.” When Google sees the page, all cars have the same HTML Title and Description tags. This can result in hundreds of website pages with the same titles and description which is in exact opposition to Google Webmaster Guidelines. In the worse case, it generates one page for ALL new cars in stock and one page for ALL used cars in stock, turning your dealer website into a few dozen pages in size.

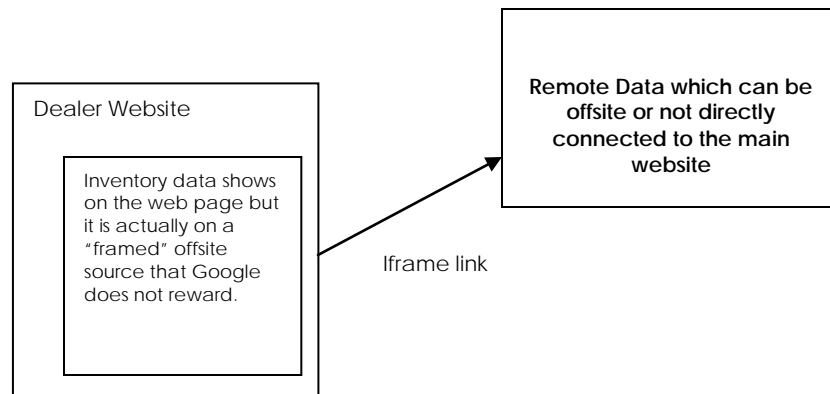
A good example of this is Marlboro Nissan, (www.marlboronissan.com) and you can click on any new car in stock and the page titles and page descriptions are all the same, pinned at:

```
<title> Marlboro Nissan | Marlborough Nissan Dealers | Nissan Boston MA | Nissan Cambridge MA | Nissan Worcester MA | Nissan Quincy MA | Massachusetts New Nissan Dealership</title>
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Marlboro Nissan, your Boston Massachusetts Nissan dealer. With Nissan cars, trucks, SUVs, and Vans for Marlborough, Boston, Cambridge, Quincy MA, Worcester, and Lowell Marlboro Nissan Where it's all about you">
```

Once again, the title is not specifically identifying the content of the page. As the consumer uses the inventory module, the outside frame stays the same and the inside changes. Unfortunately, Google reads the tags on the outside frame for tags associated with the URL page name.

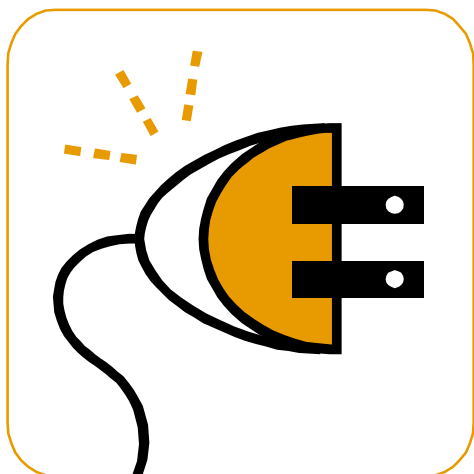
In this case, if Marlboro Nissan has 200 new cars in stock, Google will only see the outside framed page called <http://www.marlboronissan.com/New-Inventory.html> . Thus they will never have 200 individual car pages that are associated with www.marlboronissan.com, only one. They will never have 200 new car pages with optimized HTML <title> tags and META descriptions associated with www.marlboronissan.com. This reduces their ability to have exact matches for long tail searches like “2008 Nissan MDX Boston”



Reason #3 – Incomplete HTML Modules

In this last case, the dealer website platform has capabilities to produce optimized HTML pages for search but currently the module does not present website pages that we consider search optimized. There can be many reasons why this is the case including manpower to rewrite older code or the costs of updating clients to a new platform when clients are on a fixed monthly fee structure.

Summary: If your inventory module is not hindered by flash (Reason#1) or offsite inventory/iframes (Reason #2), then at least you have a fighting chance to pressure your software provider to make changes.



Inside Web Development

I am often asked “**Why did my website provider not implement a site that is compliant with Google’s Webmaster Guidelines?**”

I can’t speak for everyone but the awareness of how web page architecture affects search results is a relatively new discussion in public automotive marketing forums.

A few years ago, Internet Sales Managers were not

discussing strategy about page name, META tags and linking strategies. Today this is a mandatory discussion with their web providers.

With the growth of Google’s search dominance it has become a necessity to play by the rules that Google has set forth for Webmasters. Those who don’t will be penalized in Google search engine result pages (SERP).

Take a Look at Your Indexed Pages

One of the most eye opening checkups an Internet Sales Manager can do is to list all the pages that Google has Indexed on your website. For many dealers, this is hundreds of pages. The key is to scan through the listing to see if you have dozens or hundreds of pages that have the SAME TITLE. **If you do, take this as a warning. Get the matter fixed immediately!**

To see all the pages Google has indexed, go into Google and type: **site:www.yourwebsitename.com**

This is the **SITE** command and you need a colon and then your web address. This command also works on Yahoo. Google specifically warns in their guidelines that each page should have a UNIQUE page title. [Click to read their advice.](#)

A Better Mouse Trap

There are over 50 companies that offer website inventory modules. Of these, a few of the companies are getting closer to the ideal inventory module. For example, Chrome Systems Corporation*** has the copyright notice for the new car inventory module software used on www.billsullivan.com which is a Cobalt product.

Their inventory module has dynamically changing HTML <title> tags.

If you go to this page: <http://www.billsullivan.com/VehicleDetails/1115829624> you will see that the <title> tag is very accurate and descriptive however it is a bit too long. It reads:

2009 Buick Enclave CXL Black 4 Dr. Wagon. A Buick Enclave at Sullivan Buick Pontiac GMC Arlington Heights IL

The META tags are dynamic, which is very good for reaching long tail searches. The Chrome Systems software generated META tags are:

```
<meta name="description" content="A 2009 Buick Enclave CXL 3.6L 6 cyl Black 4 Dr. Wagon. This 2009 Buick Enclave CXL is available at Sullivan Buick Pontiac GMC in Arlington Heights IL. This Buick Enclave is a Black 4 Dr. Wagon with a Automatic transmission. The stock number is 5631 and VIN is 5GAEV23D59J130141. Call (847) 666-5973 for more information." />
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="2009, Buick, Enclave, CXL, 3.6L 6 cyl, Black, 4 Dr. Wagon, Sullivan Buick Pontiac GMC, Arlington Heights, IL, Automatic, 5631, Gas, %VEHICLE_STYLE%, Invoice, MSRP, Online, 2009, Buick, Enclave, CXL, Internet, Price, Sale, Research, Information" />
```

This inventory module is very good with one exception: the URL name is:

<http://www.billsullivan.com/VehicleDetails/1115829624>, and it should include the model information in the URL.

This is closer to the ideal platform, but in our opinion, this platform still leaves the ball on the 10 yard line. That said, this module is probably better than 50% of the dealer sites on the market today.



"To increase organic search visibility, your Automotive Digital Marketing campaign needs to include content development.

If your website landing pages have very little text and information in paragraph form, you will have a very hard time getting on Google page 1 or 2 for your inventory.

Effective Digital Marketing

The Pasch Consulting Group creates dealer owned microsites and digital marketing strategies that produce direct consumer sales leads.

We push third party lead collectors down in the search rankings and get your site placed for the best keywords in your market.

The combination of our SEO strategies and our SEO Microsites yield unprecedented results. Give us a call and we can demonstrate how.

We'll also give you a list of satisfied clients, your peers that can validate our claims and our success.

Automotive Search Marketing Architecture (ASMA)™

This chart compares the search engine optimization architecture of popular dealer platforms. Since we cannot evaluate all automotive inventory modules, we have picked companies that we have run into as a normal course of our work. In the chart below, the META keyword tag is believed not to be a factor in SEO today as it has been abused so much in the past. It is included in the chart anyway since many dealers still consider web page keyword tags important.

Platform	On-Site Hosted Inventory	Unique Inventory Page Titles	Unique Inventory META descriptions	Unique Inventory META keywords	Optimized URL names	Example Website
Pixel Motion	Y	N	N	N	N	www.irvinebmw.net
Dealer.Com	Y	Y	N	N	N	www.garbernissanhyundai.com
TK Car Sites	N	N	N	N	N	www.marlboronissan.com
Dealerskins	Y	N	N	N	N	www.accollinsford.com
DealerON	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	www.roncarterbuick.com
Cobalt	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	www.billsullivan.com
BZ Results	N	N	N	N	N	www.herbchambers.com
MJMI	Y	N	N	N	N	www.infinitiofedison.com
eBizAutos	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	www.ckautos.com
Reynolds Web Solutions	Y	N	N	N	N	www.ahford.com
Dealer Impact	Y	Partial	N	N	N	www.stewhansens.com
ecarlist.com	Y	Y	N	N	Y	www.amdallas.com
Pure Dealer	Y	N	N	N	N	www.circleinfiniti.com
ADP	Y	Partial	N	N	N	www.bellhonda.com
DealerConnection	Y	Partial	N	N	N	www.pasoroblesford.com

The only inventory platforms to get a perfect score were eBizAutos and DealerON.

The Pasch Consulting Group is not affiliated with any of the car dealer platform reviewed in this article. The Pasch Consulting Group has not been compensated for this research by any car dealer or automotive dealer platform.

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3 Topics to Consider

Stop Leasing Your Automotive Marketing Strategy.

Generate More Direct Consumer Leads With Your Own Microsites.

This Report Will Tell You If your Current Inventory Platform Is "Built For Success" in Organic Search Marketing

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.dealer-seo.com

In This Report

How Good Is Your Web Inventory Module?

Over 70% of car dealer inventory module platforms are not setup for organic search marketing.

How does your platform stack up?

An ASMA Compliant inventory module brings in more organic sales leads. See Our ASMA Compliance Chart in this report which scores over 10 of the largest vendors in your industry.

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