

## Chapter 4.5

# The Web Strategy Development in the Automotive Sector<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Especially in recent years, a transformation is ongoing: the Web, besides being a means of information sharing (internal-external), becomes a powerful tool for saving costs, reducing the distribution structure, initiating distance transactions, and ever more, becomes a mechanism of integration with the external environment and a catalyst of experiences for all stakeholder. Starting from the identification of the key elements, potentialities, and of the impact of the Internet on firms' performance, competitiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency, this chapter is focused on the changes in the automotive sector due to the integration between business strategy and Web strategy. Therefore, starting from the consideration of a clear identification and subsequent sharing need of strategic goals, a research work will be presented exploring, on the basis of an interpretative model, the Internet potential in the automotive sector in order to achieve the identification of an optimal path definition and development of Web strategy. This objective will be developed through

a desk analysis focused on the strategic positioning of the current businesses in the automotive sector (i.e., complexity evaluation of the presence on the Internet, strategic architecture, quality, and effectiveness of this presence).

### INTRODUCTION

I need a new car!

Centy, as I affectionately call my old car, is gasping its last breaths. The "poor thing" has really had it, but then, it is really old; 10 years have passed from that happy day it made its entry in our family.

However, I am not so sure I like the idea of searching for a worthy successor. I am not an automobile fan, and my knowledge of them is rather limited. I am, however, sensitive to environmental problems, and I try my best to reduce the impact of my own person on the ecosystem as much as I can, considering its balance has already been seriously damaged.

What bothers me most is the idea of the long search ahead of me. I do not have any particularly difficult requests, but I want to consider such an

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important purchase very carefully, avoiding hurried decisions. I need a sensible family vehicle, with a good balance between performance, consumption, and above all cost. I need to acquire information, but just the idea of going from one dealer to another puts me in a bad mood. I can not stand having to waste time on this, and above all, having to pollute for a car I do not even own yet!

Also, interaction with the dealers is more often than not rather uncomfortable. At times—especially the more prestigious brand dealers—they treat you with a presumptuousness as if you were a nuisance, a matter that needs to be settled as quickly as possible. Other times, for the more sporty brands, they give you so many figures and acronyms, that they make you feel like “you did not do your homework” as in your school days. Lastly, with some there is feeling of a lack of transparency, something like “tell ‘m everything but not really the truth.”

Of course I do not want to demonize all car dealers. These are only impressions, and on top of that, only personal ones. But I do believe that, at least once, we have all felt the uneasiness I described above, either completely or in part.

I am holding the yellow pages in my hands, ready to copy my city’s car dealers addresses on a piece of paper, but then a question just comes to mind, popping up almost unconsciously: “Why not use the Internet?”

I do most of my work nowadays through the Web: I keep in touch with my friends scattered around the world, I keep my bank account, book my holidays, buy music, and lately I have also taken care of my physical well-being using the telemedicine services offered by my city’s health department. But then I say to myself: “But for a car it is different!” But is it really? Why would the Internet not have brought about the same changes in life style, in the way of thinking, of buying, in the automotive sector as it did in other areas?

I start my Web search by typing the word “car” into the search engine. Promptly a long list appears with sites specialized in online car sales.

I am starting to question my beliefs. Some sites only offer general information, deferring the sale to a moment of real interaction. There are some sites though that are true virtual car dealerships, and allow you to get through the whole buying procedure on their site, with even a home delivery service of the newly purchased car. So after all I would not spend too much time, as I did with Centy.

However, I do not feel ready for an online purchase. I have identified the model that seems right for me, but I need some extra information. Through the faithful search engine, I reach the Web site of the car manufacturer. I am welcomed into a very sophisticated ambient. I click on “Product Range” and I find myself in a virtual car dealer showroom.

The models are well-presented, with clear 3D images. The technical features provided are exhaustive for each model. I discover the “car configurator,” a very interesting tool that allows you to configure your car by choosing the color, the interior, the optional features, and, once the final price has been determined, to have access to another service that allows one to request personalized financial options.

It is also possible to print out a customized brochure showing the specific car model with the chosen color, interior, and optional extras. I find out that the site offers me the possibility to not only get to know my local dealer, but also book a test-drive at my pleasure.

And there is more! The site offers a whole series of services that I would never have imagined that go well beyond the usual general information about the manufacturer. I realize that the contents vary according to the phase of the purchasing process: when the customer is in the process of choosing a car, the customer can benefit from tools that compare the models and optional extras, and that allow people to create the car that is closest to their expectations. Afterwards, some gadgets that make the car look closer and more real, can be downloaded (pictures and videos). Once the

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