

INSIDE AUTOMOTIVE

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Auto Reviews Drive Consumers to NYTimes.com/autos Consumers and advertisers drawn to expanded content

By Jennifer Streisand

To make researching a car faster and more revealing, NYTimes.com has partnered with three trusted names in automotive information: ConsumerReports.org, J.D. Power and Associates and New Car Test Drive.

When searching for a make and model on NYTimes.com/autos, users will find reviews from ConsumerReports.org and New Car Test Drive alongside the review from NYTimes.com and Power Circle Ratings from J.D. Power and Associates. The Power Circle Ratings assess such items as manufacturing quality, design quality and the use of accessories in the vehicle.

Because consumers do much of their research online long before they step into the dealership, NYTimes.com set out to make this part of the buying process more seamless.

“We decided to combine our reviews with content from other sources to make it more of a full experience to do your research,” said Ira Silberstein, vice president, classified products at NYTimes.com.

Information from other sources includes premium content and commodity-based data, he added.

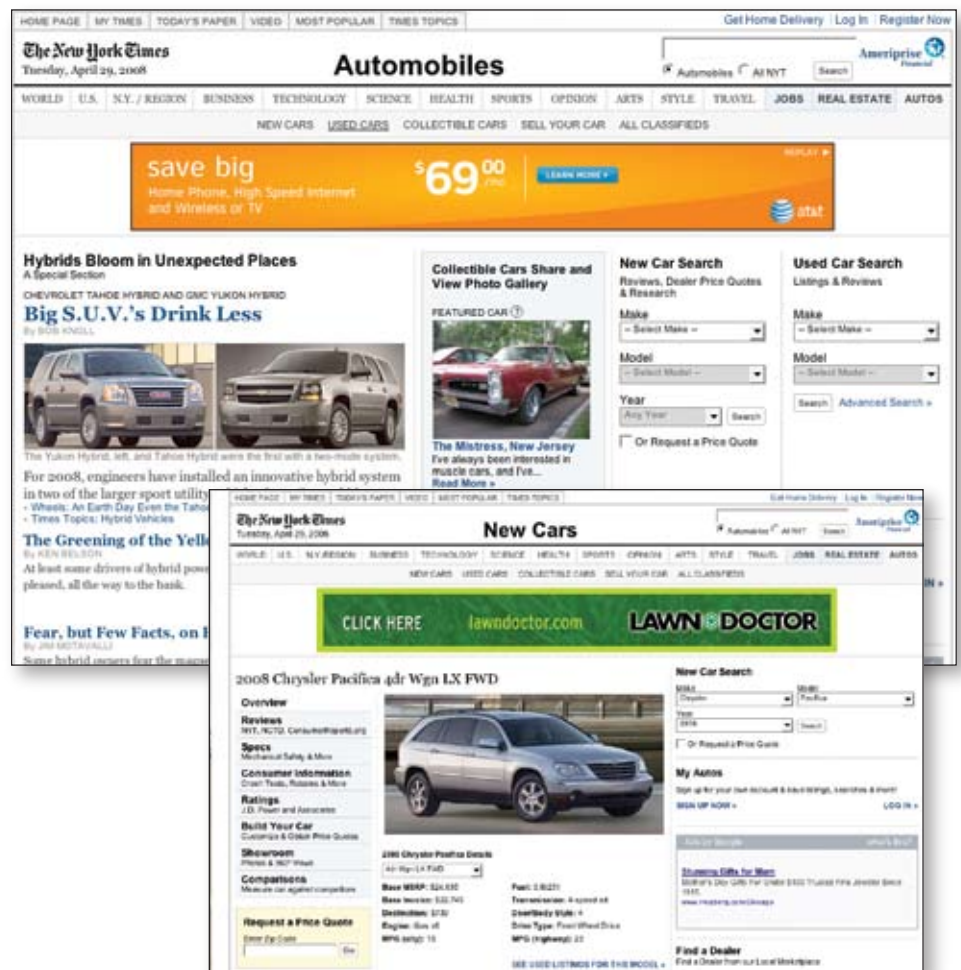
“It could be photos, it could be specifications about that car, including how fast it goes from 0-60, the type of brakes and the type of different models offered,” he said.

Not every make and model has all of this content because there are about 150 new releases each year, making it difficult to cover every car, he noted.

Adding content

NYTimes.com started including the additional content soon after a redesign of the site in 2007. The idea was to build the site to maximize traffic from the search engines because that generates more page views, and more page views makes the site appealing to advertisers who want their products seen by as many eyes as possible.

The site is designed so relevant and credible content from outside sources can be added easily, maximizing the chances for more page views and strengthening the users’ research experience.



“Making the site attractive for the search engines was one of the key drivers with the redesign. It’s great for users, obviously, but behind the scenes, what users don’t see, is how you build those pages that makes them accessible to the search engines,” Silberstein said.

The dynamic of trying to increase page views is similar to the way ratings determine how advertis-

ing is sold in television. However, the Web site must be carefully constructed so that users getting results from search engines will click on the site, which is why adding the content from J.D. Power and Associates, ConsumerReports.org, and New Car Test Drive was important, Silberstein explained. It’s now more likely that NYTimes.com will appear on the results list when

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someone does a basic search for a make and model on Google, Yahoo! or any search engine.

Traffic to the site is measured not only by how many people click on it directly from a search engine, but also how many clicks or page views are counted within the segments of NYTimes.com/autos.

The careful construction of the site has yielded excellent results, said Silberstein. Traffic to the site in April had skyrocketed with a 250% increase from the same month in 2007.

"It's a pretty steep curve," he noted.

The partnerships have benefited the participating organizations with increased branding and revenue.

JDPower.com

Providing information where consumers are navigating on the Web is the main goal, said Jessica Migdol, senior manager of business development at JDPower.com. The arrangement doesn't detract users from JDPower.com because there are links back to the J.D. Power site from NYTimes.com.

"We're trying to provide information to consumers at the point at which they're looking for it. NYTimes.com does have an automotive research section, so it makes sense to enable consumers to view those ratings at that point," she said.

Another benefit to J.D. Power is that the organization receives a licensing fee from NYTimes.com in order to post the ratings on its autos site, which means added revenue for J.D. Power. Also, the logo for Power Circle Ratings appears on the NYTimes.com/autos site, which provides good branding and exposure for J.D. Power, Migdol said.

The Power Circle Ratings is a consumer initiative for J.D. Power, which focuses on syndicated studies of consumers who purchase vehicles. The word "syndicated" is used because J.D. Power and Associates funds the studies as opposed to an auto manufacturer or a dealership, explained John Tews, director of Media Relations at J.D. Power. Therefore, the published results are from an objective third party, he added.

"We send consumers questionnaires at various points in the ownership process; typically, the first one would be after 90 days of ownership. We also sample people about their sales or service experience at the dealership as well," Tews said.

For a vehicle dependability study, J.D. Power surveys consumers three years after they have purchased the vehicle to find out how the car is working at that point.

"We question them at various times throughout the vehicle's life cycle, and it may not be the same person that gets every survey," Tews noted.

The screenshot shows the NYTimes.com website interface for a car review. At the top, there are navigation links for 'HOME PAGE', 'MY TIMES', 'TODAY'S PAPER', 'VIDEO', 'MOST POPULAR', and 'TRIED TOPICS'. The main header includes 'The New York Times' logo, the date 'Tuesday April 29, 2008', and the section 'New Cars'. Below the header, there are various menu options like 'WORLD', 'U.S.', 'N.Y./REGION', 'BUSINESS', 'TECHNOLOGY', 'SCIENCE', 'HEALTH', 'SPORTS', 'OPINION', 'ARTS', 'STYLE', 'TRAVEL', 'JOBS', 'REAL ESTATE', and 'AUTOS'. A prominent banner for 'New Cars' features a quote: "Renting an apartment is the most economical way to enjoy a stay." - Robert Post. Below this, there's a search bar and a 'New Car Search' section with dropdown menus for 'Make' (Chevrolet) and 'Model' (Malibu), and a 'Year' dropdown (2008). A central image shows a red 2008 Chevrolet Malibu. To the right of the image, there's a '2008 Chevrolet Malibu Details' section listing specifications like '4dr Sdn LS w/1LS', 'Base MSRP: \$16,345', 'Base Invoice: \$14,281', 'Destination: \$650', 'Engine: Gas 4-cyl', 'MPG (city): 22', 'Fuel: 2.0I16', 'Transmission: 4-speed at', 'Door/Body Style: 4', 'Drive Type: Front Wheel Drive', and 'MPG (highway): 30'. There are also sections for 'Overview', 'Reviews', 'Specs', 'Consumer Information', 'Ratings', 'Build Your Car', 'Showroom', 'Comparisons', and 'Request a Price Quote'.

In addition, J.D. Power will recommend experts to be quoted in NYTimes.com reviews when contacted by a representative of the newspaper's editorial staff, as consistent with standard journalistic practices.

ConsumerReports.org

The partnership between ConsumerReports.org and NYTimes.com/autos has been mutually beneficial as well, noted Carol Lappin, director of business development at Consumer Reports, a brand that is top-of-mind for researching new products because of its long history of scientific and objective product analysis.

"We provide a selection of our extremely valuable and trusted new car test information and pricing to NYTimes.com as part of the partnership," she said.

The ConsumerReports.org results are generated from extensive vehicle testing that is done at a 327-acre test track in East Haddam, Conn., Lappin explained.

"Our Auto Test Center is staffed by a team of experienced engineers and test personnel who conduct more than 45 individual tests ranging from emergency handling, acceleration, braking, fuel-economy measurement, noise-level evaluations and bumper-impact," Lappin detailed.

The outcome of the partnership with NYTimes.com has been successful so far, Lappin noted. ConsumerReports.org does not have similar types of arrangements with any other newspaper Web sites at this time.

"ConsumerReports.org is able to make a greater brand impact, garner brand impressions on the Times site, and get links back to our site as well," she said.

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