



# Net lures tire-kickers but very few buyers

TAMARA GIGNAC  
CALGARY HERALD

**T**he ritual of shopping for a vehicle involves trekking to a multitude of dealerships, listening patiently through sales pitches, haggling prices and comparing warranty options.

It's a complex, draining experience that few people relish.

The rules, however, are being redefined — both for consumers and car dealers — thanks to the Internet, which is tipping the balance of power into the hands of buyers.

Savvy shoppers can research a particular vehicle online, determining in a matter of minutes the cost of the car before any markup from the dealer.

Taking into account any extra features, be it a sunroof or CD player, it's not difficult to ascertain how much the sticker price should be — and whether a particular dealer is offering the best price.

"When it comes to looking at pricing information, the Internet gives everyone the ability to march into a dealership fully armed with information," says Wendy Muller, the managing director of Toronto-based Internet advertising firm Doubleclick Canada.

"In the past, unless the individual was a real car hound, they never really knew what the cost of the car should be," Muller says.

"The dealers are in a brand new world because they have very educated people walking through their doors."

Women, in particular, are using the Web as a research tool before buying their next vehicle.

In a survey conducted by New York research firm J.C. Williams, Doubleclick found that 70 per cent of female Canadian car shoppers are entering dealerships armed with specific information they hope will help them land a good deal. "I don't think it empowers men quite the same way," Muller says.

"Women often feel intimidated when buying a new car, and the Internet provides them with negotiating power they might not otherwise have had."

Web-savvy consumers across North America may be turning to the Internet for research purposes, but only a paltry one per cent are buying cars online.

One immediate reason is Canadians are still required to physically visit a dealership to sign the purchasing papers.

But more importantly, says Muller, people are not prepared to spend \$25,000 without the ability to kick a few tires and take their dream car for a test spin.

Marianne Helm, Calgary Herald

Maury Marks' company, Quorum Information Systems Inc. of Calgary, has developed software for car dealerships that automates the sales, service, parts and accounting departments. It's part of a move by car sellers to build customer relations and increase their Internet presence.

SEE BUYERS, PAGE C9