

The Power of Partnerships: Developing the SmartPath and Monogram Digital Retail Solution

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Across industries, consumer shopping habits are constantly in flux, with more people choosing to make purchases online than ever before. To better adapt to the changing retail landscape, Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) created SmartPath (Toyota) and Monogram (Lexus) — TMNA’s digital retail solution — to allow customers to move seamlessly between the online and in-dealership shopping experience when researching and purchasing Toyota and Lexus vehicles.

“When we started this retail transformation effort, the writing was on the wall,” says Tim Bliss, general manager of Retail Transformation at TMNA. “Our guests were wanting to do more of their shopping and buying experience online, then come into the dealership to finalize their purchase — a seamless experience. And that’s what we set out to build for our guests.”

According to Bliss, developing SmartPath and Monogram was a group effort, brought to life through years of collaboration between TMNA, Toyota Financial Services (TFS), their dealer partners and their business partners, with the shared goal of delivering an exceptional and memorable experience to Toyota and Lexus customers.

“In order to create that solution and knowing our dealers use a multitude of different dealer management systems (DMS), customer relationship management systems (CRMs) and web providers, it was essential that we partner with all of the key providers and develop integrations with all of them,” Bliss says.

Since the program’s official launch in April 2020, SmartPath and Monogram have been adopted by more Toyota and Lexus dealers than any of the third-party alternatives. To date, 165 dealers are using the program and 300 more are forthcoming.

“Today’s consumer is demanding an easier, transparent experience, and they don’t care how many different systems are running in the background to make that experience come to life,” says Bliss. “They simply want a great experience that is seamless and respects their time and effort.”

Meeting the Market

SmartPath and Monogram work hand in hand with dealerships across the country to integrate online and in-store retail, allowing customers the flexibility they want in how they lease, finance or purchase a new Toyota or Lexus vehicle. Designed to serve a changing marketplace, the solution continues to evolve and adapt based on customer needs.

Consumers are familiar with shopping online for almost everything, says David Foutz, vice president, Enterprise Client Management of Cox Automotive. Buying a car should be no different, he adds, it should be an easy and transparent online transaction.

“OEMs and dealers need tools to connect a buyer throughout their journey and avoid duplicate work for consumers and dealerships alike,” says Foutz.

Tim Mills, director of Operations at Dealer eProcess says he’s noticed that customers prefer to examine their options from the comfort of their homes before coming into the showroom to finalize their purchases. While so much of the buying process has moved online over the last decade, the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the shift.

“While we believe the market was shifting this way already, COVID-19 really made online retailing a necessity, and it’s become a vital part of a car dealership’s website,” says Mills.

The SmartPath and Monogram Difference

On average, people spend 18 hours searching online before selecting a dealership and the right vehicle for them. SmartPath and Monogram guarantee that the hours of research guests put in online will be honored in-store.

“Because it integrates directly with Toyota and Lexus, it has benefits that no other tool can provide,” says Mills. “Nothing is more frustrating for a customer than researching and applying online, only to have the dealership come back with a different price.”

Compared to other third-party platforms that batch updates overnight, SmartPath and Monogram pricing loads into dealer websites within minutes. But for many of TMNA’s partners, what makes the program stand out from other digital retail solutions is that it’s built by TMNA, for Toyota and Lexus.

“SmartPath and Monogram are different from other digital retail programs because they were built and supported by Toyota [TMNA],” says Drew Adler, director of Operations at DriveCentric. “This allows for unique insight into trends, wants and needs, ultimately allowing the program to grow in a way that supports the dealer and the consumer.”

The collaborative nature of the SmartPath and Monogram solution means that the system is built to be mutually beneficial for both customers and dealers.

“This collaborative program brings together Toyota, Lexus, their retailers and our Retail Management System to implement an experience that consumers are craving,” says Chris Walsh, president of Reynolds and Reynolds. “The experience is memorable because the consumer chose it and made it their own.”

The Next Level of Retail

While dealerships have been using digital retail solutions for years, SmartPath and Monogram streamline the process, meaning dealers only need one in-store and online solution to create an easier experience for guests.

For Michael Alf, CEO of St. Charles Toyota, a family-run dealership outside of Chicago, the SmartPath solution was an obvious choice. Alf, who majored in computer science in college, designed the dealership’s first CRM system decades before digital solutions became commonplace. But the St. Charles program was really a tool for inside the showroom and had no web presence, he says. So, SmartPath’s ability to carry the website right over to the showroom made all the difference for Alf’s employees.

“Digital tools were part of our culture, so it was an easy shift over to SmartPath,” says Alf. “Toyota built it for Toyota dealers, so it’s really customized to what we’re doing. That made our decision to go to SmartPath a no-brainer.”

And those benefits extend to larger dealerships. Paxton Gagnet is the general manager and managing partner at John Elway’s Crown Toyota in Ontario, California, one of the country’s top 10 dealers in terms of volume. Crown Toyota is unique because the store is One Price, meaning there is no negotiation for sales or service. As a dealership that prioritizes the ease of the transaction, Gagnet says SmartPath was a perfect match.

“Your experience on your digital showroom has to match your physical showroom, and now ours does,” Gagnet says. “We’re very time conscious people. When a customer comes in, they pay what everybody pays, there’s no duplication or retyping anything anymore, no back-and-forth. People love that part of it.”

Walsh, of Reynolds and Reynolds, says what’s really exciting for dealers and partners is how flexible the program can be. The single system allows dealers to retail from anywhere while allowing the dealer to stay at the center of the transaction.

“Allowing dealers to have a single, seamless process for the customer no matter where they are: online, in-store, or more likely, a combination of the two, provides a tremendous value,” says Walsh. “And to be able to deliver that experience without sacrificing what’s important to their business— control and profitability of the sale, the accuracy of the transaction, and efficiency of employees — is only achievable by a single system and seamless process.”

Current Providers with SmartPath and Monogram Capability

DMS Providers with RTI:

- CDK
- Reynolds and Reynolds – ERA Platform
- Reynolds and Reynolds – POWER Platform
- Dealertrack
- Auto/Mate
- DealerBuilt
- AutoSoft
- Tekion
- PBS
- Dominion

CRMs Providers:

- CDK – eLead CRM
- VinSolutions
- Dealer Socket
- Reynolds and Reynolds – FOCUS
- DriveCentric
- UDC Momentum (*coming May 2022*)

T3 Web Providers:

- Dealer.com
- Dealer Inspire
- DealerOn
- Dealer eProcess
- Fusion Zone
- Dealer Fire
- Dealer Venom (*coming April 2022*)
- Fox Dealer (*coming May 2022*)