

Questions for a Website Tool Vendor

Automotive websites have no shortage of third-party tool integrations. Choosing a trade tool, credit app, chat program, or service scheduler may seem routine, but a hasty decision can have far-reaching ramifications. While many dealers have a basic idea of the questions they want to ask about a tool's performance and features, the ultimate success in any tool implemented is in the finer details of how each specific tool functions. Here are some questions you may not think about asking a new provider that could affect your decision on what third-party tools to use:

Performance:

A fast website means a happy user, all other things being equal. Think of the volume of third-party tools that dealers add to their websites these days: live chat, trade-tools, service schedulers, "text us" widgets, online shopping tools. There seems to be no end in sight! Each one of these typically makes numerous calls in your browser to off-site scripts, and if not configured or optimized correctly, can significantly slow down your entire website, driving that ever-important site traffic away from your site instead of converting on your site.

Make sure your vendors have a basic answer for the following:

Q: How have they worked to optimize the performance of their tool?

They should be focused on minimizing browser calls, minifying their scripts, and optimizing their images at a minimum. Have they inlined any code? Have they combined their scripts where possible? When you look at their script in a browser, is there white space in between lines, and if so, why?

Q: Are any of their scripts render-blocking?

Some scripts or resources are necessary to load before customers are able to see your content or pages. Are any of the scripts in the proposed tool required to load before other items, causing a delay in content delivery? If so, can they move any of that content into the page body itself?

Q: Have their scripts been minified?

Minification is the removal of all unnecessary characters from the source code. Removing white space from Javascript and HTML/CSS results in a much smaller file size. Google Page Speed Insights checks for this explicitly. You can find more information on minifying here:

[Minifying CSS](#)

[Minifying Javascript/HTML/CSS](#)

Q: Do they have an efficient cache policy?

Caching ensures users don't need to re-download files every time they connect, instead, utilizing the already-downloaded or "cached" version. Making sure resources that may be utilized frequently, but updated infrequently (i.e., logos or program banners), are cached

will ensure we keep our user's downloads to a minimum.

Reference on an efficient cache policy

Q: Are the images provided by their tool optimized and lazy-loaded?

Images are often a much higher resolution than necessary on the web. There are ways to programmatically make reductions to image size that is nearly imperceptible to the human eye. Lazy-loading allows images to wait to be downloaded until they are needed, which means that images not seen on the screen do not download upon page load, instead, wait to load until you scroll to them. This makes for a much faster page load. Proper lazy-loading makes such a performance impact that Google recently added native support to Chrome 76.

A Fantastic Guide on Image Optimization

Q: How does their tool effect page speed?

Page speed is greatly affected by outside tools. Do they have an idea of what impact you can expect? Make sure you check before and after implementation!

Q: What pages will the tool be on? Is the script on any other pages?

Do they load their tool only on pages where it is needed? Or is it on every page because it's easier to install that way? By loading only on the pages the tool needs to be on, you limit their access to your user data and ensure that they have minimum effect on overall performance.

Security

Allowing a third party to install code on your page means they can execute code in the browser of every user who visits your site.

Q: What user data will they be extracting from your customers?

Having Javascript access on your website means the vendor has access to everything that happens on your site, and by whom. What are they using that data for?

Q: Are they storing customer data? If so, How?

If they are collecting data, ensure its business use is to benefit your dealership directly. How long do they store that data? Does the data include Personally Identifiable Information? Are they storing your customer's data in a secure, encrypted fashion?

Q: What do they do with that customer data?

What is the business's purpose for collecting customer data? Are they using this to create data/cookie pools for marketing? Do they sync cookie data with any third parties?

Q: Do they resell any customer data?

Reselling your customer data has vast implications for your business, both legally and commercially. Customer data privacy is at the forefront of a lot of business conversations recently, and attention will inevitably turn to the automotive industry sooner rather than later. Ensure you know what your vendors are doing with any data they collect and make sure it's in line with your business goals and values.

Q: Does their tool have any outside dependencies?

Are they counting on data from another vendor? Where do they get their trade data? Do they employ the staff for live chat, or are they hiring out to another service? If they are using outside software libraries, do they link to a (CDN) Content Delivery Network version? This allows the tools to load from a central repository with a cache, allowing them to use a local copy if they already have loaded the script. How often do they check for updates on outside libraries?

Q: How often do they update your tool?

On the internet, there are new exploits for technology found every day. As such, best practices are regularly updated, toolsets are replaced with better versions, and new features are added. Look for a tool with a regular update schedule. If they have online patch notes or changes listed, that's even better.

Q: What is the process for updates?

Do scripts need to be replaced? Will you replace the existing link, or add a redirect to the new link? Some tools currently out there have five or six redirects before reaching their destination. This can have a detrimental effect on performance. Try to estimate what additional commitments that will be required to maintain the new tool.

Q: Are all their resources/links sent via https?

Making sure they only provide SSL encrypted https links will ensure you do not have insecure content warnings and are able to maintain customers' encrypted web sessions.

Accountability

Q: What mechanisms are available to track utilization and effectiveness of the tool?

Do they provide custom reporting? A custom dashboard? Do they send leads to my CRM? Do you have a way to check how many leads they sent versus how many you received? Can you export their data to use in other analysis tools like Google Data Studio or Google Sheets?

Q: Does your tool send events to Google Analytics?

Being able to track engagement alongside your other analytics is important to understand how the tool is being utilized and if it's effective. Are you getting a lot of chats, but they are not turning into leads? Are people bailing out on your form before completing it because it's too complicated?

Q: What insights can I see from your tool in my Google Analytics?

If they can report in Google Analytics, what do they show? Are they using event tracking with granularity, or are they relying on thank you pages and goal completions? What data can/do they send, and how do you map that to your attribution path?

Q: Have they had a security evaluation done on your tool by an outside agency?

Do they have an outside, third-party doing independent code audits and application security tests? This should be the standard for any tool that will have access to your website and stores/processes customer data.

Q: Does their tool have any conflicts with any other vendor tool or website platform?

Every website platform is built differently, and it is not uncommon to use outside scripts and libraries. Sometimes, these can result in shared libraries, variables, or incompatibilities. Do they currently have clients on your website platform? Ask to see examples from these clients and engage with the tool. Does it work across your machines and browsers?

Q: Does their tool work natively on mobile, both Android and iPhone?

It's likely that a large amount of traffic on your website these days is coming from mobile. It's important that their tools work on mobile, and at a minimum, you should check them against the two most popular operating systems, Google's Android and Apples iOS.