

AUTO US: DISRUPTION

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Key Findings

- To compete with third-party sites, 73% of Index brands include comparison tools on vehicle information pages. However, over the past few years, brands have cut competitors from these tools, instead only comparing their own models.
- Competitive ad buying on Google search is rampant among auto brands, but savvy brands realize that showing up in first-page results for their competitors' keywords is only half the battle. These brands also build out comparison site content and tailor the language of their ads to directly address competitor keywords.
- About a fifth of Index brands pay for visibility against their competitors on YouTube, understanding that video content provides a clear and compelling medium for comparison and disruption.

What Brands Should Be Thinking About

- **Owning the Conversation:** Become a research destination for shoppers by building out comparison content and then leverage this content to cast your lineup in a favorable light — or risk customers defecting to third-party sites.
- **Teaming Up:** Coordinate with Tier 2 and Tier 3 search marketing efforts to maximize budgets and overwhelm competitors on Google search with multiple competitive ad listings.
- **Investing in the Next Step:** Build out site and video content to serve as landing pages for competitive ads on both Google and YouTube to knock customers out of competitors' purchase funnels and into your own.

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Gartner L2 research is based on data-driven analysis. Our findings, rankings and recommendations are objective, unbiased and independent of membership.

Introduction

The process leading up to a new car purchase can span months and involve hundreds of touchpoints across digital channels.¹ These touchpoints are a double-edged sword for brands, as they provide a host of opportunities to reach consumers but also allow brands to be intercepted by competitors. Vulnerabilities persist in the initial research stages, through comparison tools on third-party and brand sites, and in the later stages, through competitive ad buying on Google search.

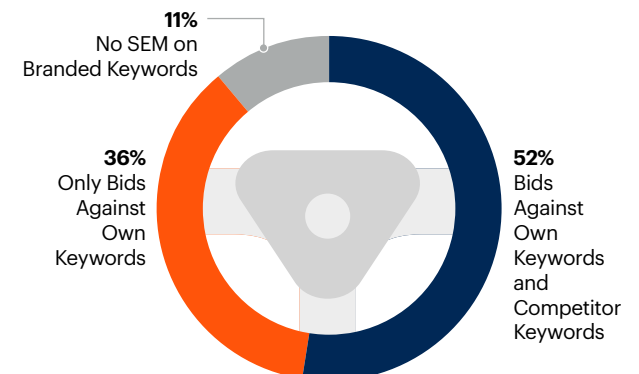
On Google search, competitive ad buying has become the status quo in the auto industry. Brands use this offensive tactic to poach new customers from competitors. Meanwhile, on the defensive side, brands must defend their highly contested brand terms to retain interested customers. In the *Digital IQ Index: Auto US 2019*, the majority of Index OEMs (52%) have adopted this two-pronged approach. But sophisticated brands pull ahead of the competition in the next steps by marrying tailored ad listing language with strategic click paths and bespoke landing pages. Index leader Ford, for instance, uses comparison language in its listings and links to dedicated head-to-head comparison pages, pitting its model against the competitor model that was the initial subject of the Google search. This content delivers more specific messaging to audiences. In the best-case scenario, it can also propel a positive feedback loop, where putting spend behind ads on high-traffic competitor keywords and linking to comparison pages can cause this content to surface organically against competitors on other channels like YouTube, diminishing the need to spend in the first place.

1. "The Car-Buying Process: One Consumer's 900+ Digital Interactions," Think with Google.

Auto US: Share of Brand OEMs Adopting Given Paid Search Strategy on Google

December 2018-January 2019
n = 44 Brands

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.
Source: Gartner L2 Digital IQ Index: Auto US 2019.



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