

Detroit company helps auto dealers rate Internet sales leads. LOCAL SPOTLIGHT 2C

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Local spotlight

## Firm teaches dealers science of Web sales

■ Urban Science says it can show clients how to pick most-likely buyers among online shoppers.

BY NEAL HALDANE  
Special to The Detroit News

**DETROIT** — Jack Bowen's firm knows a looker when they see one.

The chief marketing officer at Urban Science also knows a buyer and his firm can help automotive and other clients differentiate between people who are ready to purchase and those who are just browsing.

For example, a customer shopping for a car on the Web who selects a metallic color and includes more words in the comments section is more likely to purchase a car than someone who chooses a non-metallic color and is more reticent when it comes to remarks, said Bowen, formerly general director of General Motors Corp.s' customer relationship management organization.

By mining through a wide variety of data about a customer, Urban Science uses scientific, statistical modeling to determine whether the customer is more likely to buy even before the person finishes the session on the Web site.

"By the time you're done with the session, the dealer knows whether they should contact you or not," Bowen said.

With about 70 percent of car buyers using the Internet for research, the Web has become one of the most influential sources of information, said Jeremy Anwyl, president of Edmunds.com.

But Anwyl is leery about focusing on only a few online prospects.

"Any lead coming off the Internet is valuable," he said. "If I've been in the marketplace, by the time I fill out a lead form, I'm a



Robin Buckson / The Detroit News

Jack Bowen of Urban Science, left, meets with Bob Kim of Audi North America at the Rochester Hills dealership. Urban Science is working with Audi to gauge how many dealerships they need and where.

### Urban Science

■ What: Retail sales network consulting firm

■ Headquarters: Detroit

■ Founded: 1977

■ Employees: 450

■ Offices: Long Beach, Calif., Spain, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Australia, China, Mexico and Japan.

■ Information: [www.urbanscience.com](http://www.urbanscience.com)

pretty good prospect. The danger would be to devalue leads that are pretty valuable. I'd be concerned about discounting any of them. Some may buy tomorrow. Some may buy a month from now."

Instead, Anwyl would like to see salespeople continue to get more involved in the process. Five

years ago, many Internet leads were ignored. Today, it's better but still not vigorous enough, Anwyl said.

"Ideally, we need to get salesmen more in the game today," he said.

But Bowen said salespeople are reluctant to respond when only about 6 percent to 8 percent of Internet leads develop into a sale. Urban Science can improve that rate, he said.

"We can provide what we call high-priority leads, and that group closes at a rate that exceeds one in four," Bowen said.

While this customer-targeting process represents a small portion of Urban Science's revenues today, Bowen expects it to produce a third of company revenues in 20 years. Most of the privately

held company's revenues come from helping clients optimize sales in a market area and finding the best locations for dealerships, retail outlets and other facilities.

Dealer location is one project Urban Science has been working on with Audi, according to Bob Kim, network development general manager for the car company in Auburn Hills.

"My team uses Urban Science's demographic, shopping pattern, and registration analysis to assist us in developing our long-range planning with regard to where and how many dealership locations we need in the placecountry-regionUSA," Kim said.

Neal Haldane is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.