

# How Social Media Can Help Toyota With Its' Recall

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**Author:** [Dan Chambers](#)

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TORRANCE, Calif., January 26, 2010 - Toyota Motor Sales (TMS), U.S.A., Inc., today announced that it is instructing Toyota dealers to temporarily suspend sales of eight models involved in the recall for sticking accelerator pedal, announced on January 21, 2010.

“Helping ensure the safety of our customers and restoring confidence in Toyota are very important to our company,” said Group Vice President and Toyota Division General Manager Bob Carter. “This action is necessary until a remedy is finalized. We’re making every effort to address this situation for our customers as quickly as possible.”

Automobile recalls are not new. But there has never been a recall this size for any automobile manufacturer. And for Toyota - a brand that prides itself on quality, dependability and reliability - it is almost unimaginable. Sales of eight models, including Corolla, Avalon, Camry, Highlander, Tundra, and Sequoia have been suspended at every dealership in the country. An additional recall of 2.3 million vehicles was announced above and beyond the cars that were recalled last fall.

The problem was exacerbated when Toyota made the announcement only after ABC News told the Japanese automaker that it was going to air a report about more Toyota sudden-acceleration problems, according to the Christian Science Monitor.

The millions of dollars that Toyota will lose in sales and service is nothing compared to the huge image problem they have to overcome. It is a marketing and public relations nightmare but it is not the end of the world. Many corporations have faced serious brand image problems before; the Tylenol cyanide scare in 1982, the Domino's contaminated pizza crisis last year, to name a few. Toyota has some major repair work to do and it's not under the hood. It begins with open and honest dialogue with the public and this is how social media can help.

To understand what social media can do for Toyota, you have to understand what social media is. It is about making friends - not money. Even social media marketing is more about customer relations than selling a product. Toyota Corporate addresses the recall on their website but the dealerships are on the front line and only a few of them are doing anything about it. Here are some ideas to help a dealership with the problem.

1. Social media gives a customer peace-of-mind. Whether it is a blog, forum or a network like Twitter or Facebook, social media is a two-way dialogue that doesn't sound like a slick Madison Avenue PR pitch. Social media networks have proven to be a much more trustworthy and credible form of communication than traditional mediums.
2. If you are a Toyota dealership who already has social media tools in place, use them. Jim McNatt Toyota in Denton, Texas, is a good example. They are writing blogs about the recall and updating people about the latest news on their Facebook page.
3. If your website just sends customers to the Toyota corporate newsroom, this is the time to do more. This is the time to

engage in social media. It is inexpensive. It is measurable. It is very popular - and it is believable.

4. Be open. Be honest. WIS-TV in South Carolina reports that a Toyota dealer refuses to answer questions about the recall. This only adds to a customer's anxiety. History has proven time and time again that during a corporate crisis - honesty is the best policy.

Social media is not going to fix Toyota's sticking accelerator pedal. Only time will heal a problem of this magnitude.

However, the way Toyota and Toyota dealerships handle it is critically important. Remember the old Toyota slogan, "I love what you do for me, Toyota?" Let's see if they can live up to that slogan and make the public love them again.

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