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How can motor show traffic be converted into qualified leads and sales?

Europe's major motor shows have regained a commercial role that many thought they were losing. Special pricing conditions, remote sales processes and order forms signed on site are once again part of the experience, and brands are committing budgets that reflect what they expect in terms of image, but above all, short- and medium-term sales.

This shifts the question for new-car marketing teams: it is no longer whether a motor show generates sales, but how far its potential can be leveraged. And the same limitation appears from one market to another: a motor show generates contact volume more than customer knowledge. We know how many people came; we know far less about who they are, what they drive and when they will change cars.

In Insight #21, we showed that some future buyers were already sitting dormant in manufacturers' CRM databases because the data was not fresh enough to reactivate them. A motor show creates the same issue one step earlier: the contact comes to you, which is rare, but there is no guarantee that anything useful will remain once the event is over. One piece of data changes everything: the vehicle the visitor currently owns. Its make, age, mileage and trade-in value can be collected in seconds and remain actionable long after the show.

The visitor knowledge a stand never captures

Across Europe's main markets, a motor show remains the year's largest physical gathering of automotive buyers.

1.3 M

visitors in total across the three most recent major European motor shows (Brussels, Munich and Paris), i.e. nearly 450,000 people per event, in just a few days.

Source: European motor shows, industry bodies and automotive media

And this audience buys: the Brussels Motor Show alone accounts for nearly 30% of annual new-car sales in Belgium, and even more for some brands. At the Paris Motor Show, Volkswagen recorded 1,200 orders in 2024, while BYD generated 500 orders from 1,600 leads.

Competition has never been so intense. Nearly 70 brands are announced for the 2026 Paris Motor Show, compared with 48 in 2024, while Brussels brings together 67 brands, representing 94% of the Belgian market. In a single day, visitors can compare what once required weeks of research, and their attention is divided between established brands and new entrants. Knowing who stopped at your stand and what they drive is no longer just a footfall metric: it is vital commercial information.

Yet this is precisely the information that is missing. A named ticket provides an identity, contact details and sometimes a stated intention: it is a real starting point, but it describes a visitor rather than a motorist. The car parked outside says much more than the badge around their neck. It reveals their current brand, vehicle age, segment, implied budget, while its trade-in value indicates the amount they may still need to finance. A contact form provides none of this information. A valuation provides all of it in under two minutes.

7 out of 10
valuations completed through a brand's trade-in journeys
come from drivers of that same brand

Source: autobiz, European average, all markets combined

Online, a valuation therefore measures loyalty first and foremost. At a multi-brand motor show, that proportion should reverse. In either case, a visitor who stops at your stand and values their vehicle sends a strong signal, whether they drive another brand and are not yet in your database, or are already known to you.

One valuation touchpoint, two uses

On a stand, an advisor has a catalogue, a configurator and a finance simulator. One variable is missing to move from simulation to offer: the value of the vehicle the visitor parked outside. A new-car customer rarely thinks in terms of list price; they think in terms of the amount left to pay. As long as the trade-in is unknown, any proposal remains indicative. Once it is valued, the proposal becomes firm, and the visitor can compare it with the offer from the stand opposite, which may not have valued anything.

We have observed this for years across the more than 100 manufacturer journeys autobiz operates on a white-label basis. In Europe, more than 75% of new-car buyers need to sell their current vehicle, and new-car leads backed by a trade-in offer convert at more than 7%.

Yet conversations cover only a fraction of stand traffic. Most visitors will speak to no one, and designing a stand on the assumption that they will is neither realistic nor desirable. A kiosk, a QR code on the windscreen of a displayed vehicle, or a link sent by SMS: with these tools, visitors can value their vehicle themselves, leave their contact details and walk away, while you still capture the information.

From footfall to sales

Projection for an exhibiting brand, based on the 2024 Paris Motor Show.

The two journeys do not deliver the same outcome: one supports a sale already in progress, while the other generates leads by capturing high-intent visitors passing through the stand.

The traffic-to-action rates are illustrative assumptions and should be recalibrated using actual stand footfall.

508,000 motorshow visitors

Paris MotorShow 2024

50,000 stop at the stand

Assumption: 10% of visitors

With an advisor

2,000 conversations leading to a valuation
Assumption: 4% of stand visitors

≈ 1,700 priced offers
Assumption: 85% of projects include a trade-in

≈ 425 supported sales
Assumption: 25% conversion rate on these assisted sales

Self-service

2,500 QR code scans
Assumption: 5% of stand visitors

≈ 625 qualified leads
Assumption: completion rate based on internal autobiz data

≈ 50 additional sales
Assumption: conversion rate based on internal autobiz data

On the left, sales that the valuation helps secure without creating them; on the right, incremental sales generated through effective lead capture. The two journeys are independent.

Three details determine whether the solution will actually be used on the stand:

- Data entry must take no more than thirty seconds, registration number or VIN plus a few questions about condition. Beyond that, visitors drop off and advisors give up.
- The value must be accurate and realistic; otherwise, no meaningful calculation of the amount left to pay is possible.
- Finally, the lead must be transferred into a CRM together with the value, which can then be confirmed by a dealership advisor.

Before the show opens, one decision remains: what happens to each valuation? A trade-in concluded on site, a lead sent to the network for dedicated follow-up, or a database entry integrated into a post-show contact plan. The last option is the most underestimated: even without an immediate purchase project, the contact remains a dated profile with an identified vehicle and a known value: exactly the information usually missing from renewal campaigns.

Conclusion

European motor shows have once again become full-fledged commercial events, and their limitation is no longer attendance but what brands retain from it.

A dedicated entry point connected to existing tools does not require rebuilding anything: it qualifies the audience, gives the advisor the variable that turns a simulation into an offer, and captures visitors who will speak to no one.

Above all, it leaves behind data that outlives the event and a vehicle renewal timeline that can be estimated.



Learn more

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