



## THE COBALT GROUP USES GOMEZ TO OPTIMIZE AUTOMOBILE DEALERS' ONLINE PRESENCE FOR INCREASED RETAILING EFFECTIVENESS



The Cobalt Group, North America's leading provider of automotive marketing services, is in the business of helping automobile dealers and manufacturers increase their retailing effectiveness and profitability. Cobalt provides marketing services to nearly half of the automotive dealerships in the United States, as well as automotive dealers in Canada and Mexico. Its marketing services are endorsed by two-thirds of the world's major automotive manufacturers.

### Making Websites Work for Dealers

Because most consumers today leverage the Internet for researching and purchasing vehicles, websites have become the cornerstone of Internet marketing for dealers in the automotive industry. Dealers rely heavily on their websites for merchandising their brand and inventory to attract more buyers into their showrooms.

Committed to creating and converting opportunities in automotive retailing, Cobalt creates, hosts and manages high-performing websites designed to connect dealers with in-market buyers. These websites and their associated applications reinforce dealer brands, provide a steady stream of referral traffic from manufacturers' websites, and incorporate advanced organic and paid search capabilities to achieve top result rankings on leading search engines.

Customers count on Cobalt to optimally manage their online presence. That's why the company continues to invest in the most advanced technology to ensure that its dealers' prospects and customers enjoy the best possible web experience. It was this commitment to continuous improvement that led Cobalt to take advantage of on-demand web application experience management and quality assurance solutions powered by the Gomez® ExperienceFirst™ platform.

### Ensuring Websites Look Good before They Launch

Cobalt hosts websites for approximately half of all automobile dealers across North America, which in aggregate attract millions of unique visitors each month. Because visitors are viewing the websites from a wide variety of different browsers and platforms, Cobalt needed a way to ensure that the websites it creates look consistently good when viewed across multiple combinations of browsers and operating systems. After evaluating available options, Cobalt decided

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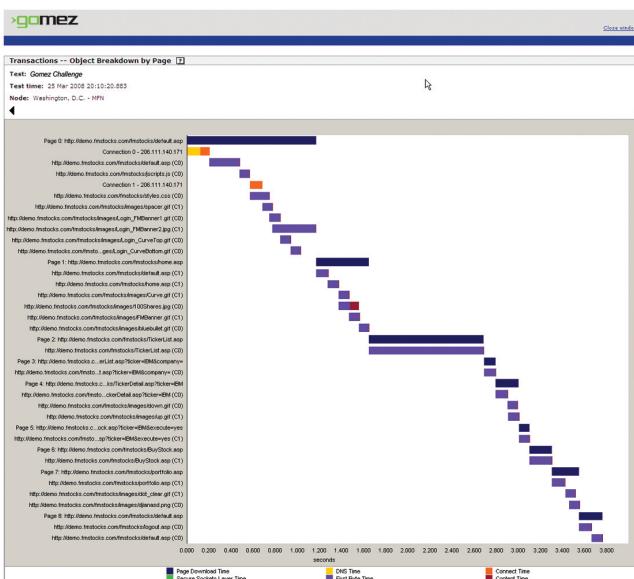
— Mark Moore  
Director of Quality Engineering,  
The Cobalt Group

to use Gomez's Reality View XF<sup>SM</sup> cross-browser compatibility testing solution to see — on demand — how a representative sample of dealer websites render in all the major browsers and operating systems.

"We're using Gomez Reality View XF to check that dealer websites look good across a range of browsers before we go into production," said Mark Moore, director of quality engineering for Cobalt's Applications Business Unit. "Reality View XF makes it easy for us to make quick comparisons across unique combinations of browsers and operating systems — without having to expend time and effort setting up those configurations ourselves."

Reality View XF's waterfall graph feature has proven to be particularly helpful to Cobalt. The diagram captures and displays technical detail about the order in which objects download during the page rendering and their associated performance, helping to identify which objects might be causing bottlenecks. Cobalt's IT operations, enterprise architecture, and development organizations use this valuable data to continually refine the company's applications and websites.

"The waterfall graph has helped us drive best practices regarding the sheer number of assets we deliver on our websites as well as the size of those assets," said Moore. "We can now present hard data from Reality View XF to suggest why including certain components might compromise the end user's web experience."



Example of a Gomez Website Object Waterfall

## Delivering on Availability and Performance Promises

Soon after Cobalt started using Reality View XF, the company decided to take a look at Gomez's website performance monitoring services as well. While Cobalt has always done extensive performance testing on the servers at its production facilities, the company wanted to extend monitoring beyond its local capabilities to drive even higher levels of website performance. Gomez's Active Network XF<sup>SM</sup> offered the ability to capture and report real-time website performance monitoring data — complete with trending — from multiple Internet backbone locations to ensure a fast and consistent web experience for Cobalt's dealer customers and prospects throughout the continent.

"When we release new code or make significant infrastructure upgrades, we can go into Active Network XF and immediately see how the websites are performing — not only where we host our applications, but also at various points across the Internet," said Jon Owen, Cobalt's director of IT Operations. "This real-time feedback helps us ensure that we deliver on the availability and performance standards we set and better manage the performance of all our web applications from the outside in."

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Cobalt typically conducts website performance monitoring from three consistent locations: Seattle, New York City, and Dallas. However, if the company is monitoring the website of a dealer located in an area well outside these standard locations, it will add that dealer's city as a testing node. This way, the company can get an external perspective of the end user's website experience and take proactive steps to optimize response time, availability, and consistency of single pages or multi-step business process transactions.

"The typical consumer logs onto the Internet, conducts a search for a particular vehicle make or model via one of the leading search engines, and receives results that drive him or her to a dealer's home page, or in some cases, to a new or used inventory page deeper within the website," said Owen. "As a result, Cobalt uses Active Network XF to monitor the home page load time and the vehicle search for a representative sampling of dealer websites. If the results show that these response times are consistently fast across all testing locations, we can be confident that end users are having a positive experience interacting with the websites."

## Taking Performance Monitoring to the Next Level

Cobalt is in the process of establishing an intelligent, state-of-the-art Network Operations Center (NOC), which will enable the company to take its industry-leading quality, service, and performance to the next level. Gomez Active Network XF and its intelligent alerting feature will play an integral role in NOC operations, enhancing Cobalt's ability to monitor and optimize website and application uptime and performance for dealers and OEMs.

Cobalt's IT organization is looking forward to leveraging Gomez's dynamic, configurable monitoring alerts that will warn the company in real time as soon as web performance falls below pre-established thresholds.

"It will be helpful to receive a warning at the first sign that a performance incident may be occurring," stated Owen. "The Gomez alerting capability will enable us to be even more proactive in ensuring that our websites and applications deliver exceptional performance and provide optimal business value to our clients."

## About Gomez

Gomez, Inc. is a leading provider of web experience management services, which businesses use to test their web applications while in development and to monitor their web applications after deployment. More than 2,000 customers use Gomez's on-demand services to improve the quality of the web experience in order to increase their revenue from web applications, reduce their operating costs, and extend their brand reputations. For more information, please visit [www.gomez.com](http://www.gomez.com).