AutoTrader redefines car search - thanks to big data

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Big data has been a business opportunity source for decades, but the number that have tried and failed to harness its use, reflects the complexity required to translate this commodity into collateral.

The South African motor industry is among some of the industries that have been crippled by unstructured and incomplete data sets, having suffered from the ineffective collection and use of VIN data since inception.

Now, in an unparalleled move locally, AutoTrader, the country's largest online motoring marketplace, has created South Africa's first ever comprehensive vehicle database that captures and organises VIN data down to feature level.

"As a local industry, we have been consistently hamstrung by one crucial failing, a weakness shared by every South African car marketplace – unstructured VIN data, captured accurately to variant and feature level and stored in one easy-to-access database," comments AutoTrader's CEO George Mienie.

He believes this problem has plagued the local motor industry for decades with the data historically held by multiple third parties in proprietary code and description files. For AutoTrader, South Africa's largest online motoring marketplace, this inadequacy has created far-reaching challenges including the inability for the industry to allow consumers to accurately search past the level of make and model.

"The reality is the high variation in both variant and feature level data across makes and models, which produced unnecessarily complicated search results. South Africans searching for their next car faced endless amounts of wasted time clicking through different pages to find the car they were looking for," explains Mienie

Mienie warns the industry-wide challenge of undocumented and unstructured VIN data could have led to losses for sellers too. "If a car's features have not been captured accurately, sellers can find themselves selling higher spec'd vehicles with specialised features, at base level prices," he explains.

A new dawn

Mienie says it was "a monumental undertaking" to create the comprehensive database that the auto giant started more than five years ago. Vehicle by vehicle, over 11 million VIN numbers, using over 4 million pieces of metadata were cleaned and captured into its databases.

The value this vehicle taxonomy wields is far-reaching and demonstrates, like never before, how big data has become the new capital. AutoTrader now has a vehicle taxonomy database that not only solves their search problem, but, when paired with other data sources, can also provide influential market information to their dealers.

#SearchJustGotLit

This new vehicle taxonomy and vastly improved search capability, gave AutoTrader the ability to re-imagine car search and revamp their website. The new website and its industry leading features are being promoted under the campaign *#SearchJustGotLit*.

Mienie says website users will be oblivious to the many years of hard work conducted behind the scenes.

"They won't consider the process of vehicle taxonomy and data we own and use – or the mammoth task of

accurately and consistently capturing this information. However, the benefits will be immediately apparent as buyers benefit from the vastly-improved search functionality that makes seeking your next car even quicker and easier," he explains.

AutoTrader's **AutoFuzion** product already uses this information to benefit of its dealers, specifically in terms of live market car valuations. "By combining the vehicle taxonomy data with other critical information like transactional valuation data, retail price data and market supply and demand data, AutoTrader is uniquely positioned and provides accurate, live market information to its customers," he notes.

AutoTrader's move starkly outlines the rest of the industry's current shortcomings. Mienie says the company now offers the South African car buyers and sellers something "truly unique".

"Like many leading companies all over the globe, we are constantly exploring ways of using big data in better and more efficient ways. We are certainly on the journey to achieving this now – and we believe this gives us an unparalleled competitive advantage in the market as a result," he concludes.

To view the new site and try out the new search features, visit: **https://www.autotrader.co.za/**

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