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Home » [Accelerating Sales](#)

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PAYLESS CAR SALES

Accelerating Sales

by Amy Keller

Six years ago, Mike Harley took a gamble on the internet. As president of Payless Car Rental, he ramped up internet advertising and watched as his discount car rental business blossomed into a real competitor ["In the Driver's Seat," November 2002, FloridaTrend.com]. Now, Harley is applying a similar internet-focused strategy to Payless Car Rental's sister company, Payless Car Sales, a chain of used-car dealerships he presides over.

Web traffic translates into foot traffic, says Harley, and splashing Payless Car Sales' name all over the internet helped the company realize \$240 million in sales last year. "We optimize our (web) sites by inventory. We're getting over 100,000 unique visitors every month."

Payless Car Sales has nearly 60 dealerships in 16 states and Puerto Rico. Its strongest market is south Florida -- 12 of its 15 Florida dealerships are between Port St. Lucie and Miami. Its Miami franchise for the second consecutive year made it onto Auto Dealer Monthly's "Top 100 Internet Dealers." Franchises cost \$30,000, and dealers pay the company a royalty fee of \$125 per vehicle sold.

Harley, president of Payless parent St. Petersburg-based Avalon Global Group, which is owned by a Taiwanese group, is about to go international, with franchises in Canada, Mexico, Europe and the Middle East. The expansion, says Harley, is made possible as much by the company's name as anything else: "Pay less means something everywhere. Alamo doesn't."



FAST LANE: In less than five years, Mike Harley has grown Payless Car Sales to almost 60 dealerships in 16 states and Puerto Rico. [Photo: Tom Berndt top]

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