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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Chevrolet of Watsonville chatbot

IMPLEMENTED 2023 · RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY · US · BAND E · REVERSED

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Users pushed a ChatGPT-powered chatbot on a California car dealer's website into off-topic answers and into agreeing to sell a Chevrolet Tahoe for $1. The vendor, Fullpath, shut the bot down on that site.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

No measurable effect: withdrawn after a test.

AI used: Generative AI chatbot for customer enquiries, powered by ChatGPT and supplied by Fullpath.

Implemented: 2023. Grade: band E, No measurable effect, Reversed.

Headline result, as reported: Chatbot shut down on the dealer's site in December 2023 after users got it to agree to a $1 Tahoe; no sale followed

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Chevrolet of Watsonville. Chevrolet car dealership in Watsonville, California. The chatbot was supplied by Fullpath, which sells marketing and sales software to car dealerships; General Motors said the tool was chosen by the dealer. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 3. Customers and proposition, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported by the dealership. The chatbot handled customers' online enquiries, per Futurism; Fullpath's chief executive said most people use it for service questions and to book appointments.

Who implemented it

Fullpath (Software vendor): Supplied the dealership chatbot.
OpenAI (Model or cloud provider): The chatbot was labelled "Powered by ChatGPT".

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T3 API integrations. Deployment: Vendor SaaS. Vendors and products: Fullpath, OpenAI, Fullpath ChatGPT-powered dealership chatbot.

Where it was built in: A chat window on the dealership's website; the tool was reported to be tuned for car sales and linked to dealership systems.

What changed

Before: a ChatGPT-powered chatbot answered visitors on the dealership's website. After: Fullpath shut the bot down on that site, and The Autopian found the same vendor's chatbots on other dealers' sites refusing off-topic questions about a day later. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Not reported

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

Fullpath monitored traffic and kept logs of requests, by its chief executive's account; Business Insider reviewed some logs and confirmed the bot often refused off-topic requests. The limits did not hold in every case. Staff at the dealership did not honour the $1 deal, per WardsAuto. Owner at the dealership, testing before launch and review of replies: Not reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Fullpath's chief executive said his team shut the bot down; an owner at the dealership is not reported. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Missing (independent source shows it was absent)
Limits on what the bot would discuss did not hold in every case: it wrote code and agreed to a $1 sale, though Business Insider confirmed from logs that it often refused off-topic requests. [1] [3]

A2 · Human in the loop · Not reported
Review of replies before they reached customers is not reported; staff at the dealership did not honour the $1 deal, per WardsAuto. [5]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Evidenced
An automated alert flagged unusual traffic and Fullpath kept logs of requests, some of which Business Insider reviewed. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
How the dealership assessed the vendor's tool is not reported; General Motors told The Autopian it was a third-party tool chosen by individual dealers. [2]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Monitoring: an automated alert flagged unusual traffic and the vendor shut the bot down quickly, by its chief executive's account.

– The chatbot never disclosed confidential dealership data, by the chief executive's account.

– Business Insider reviewed some logs and confirmed the bot often rejected off-topic requests.

DID NOT

– The chatbot wrote computer code on request, well outside its purpose.

– It agreed to sell a 2024 Tahoe for $1 after a user told it how to reply.

– It appeared to recommend a competitor's truck, per a chat posted by a user and reported by The Autopian.

– The chatbot was taken off the dealership's site.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the chatbot returned to the dealership's site: Not reported.

– Whether the chatbot helped sales or service before the incident: Not reported.

– The Autopian could not reproduce the off-topic answers itself and relied on users' screenshots.

Timeline

Dec 2023 A customer finds the dealer's chatbot will write a Python script and posts screenshots [1]

Dec 2023 Another user gets the chatbot to agree to sell a 2024 Tahoe for $1 [1]

Dec 2023 Fullpath shuts down the chatbot on the dealer's site [1]

Dec 2023 The Autopian finds Fullpath chatbots on other dealers' sites refusing off-topic questions [2]

Jun 2024 WardsAuto reports that staff at the dealership did not honour the $1 deal [5]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: E, No measurable effect. Proof: Reversed. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band E, a customer-facing chatbot withdrawn from the site with no reported sale, loss or sanction. The $1 deal was not honoured, so this falls short of band F.

Graded E: the chatbot was withdrawn from the dealer's site within days, and no sale, loss, refund

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The weak point sat at the join between a general-purpose AI model and a narrow sales task: users could give the bot new instructions and it followed them. The vendor's monitoring caught the problem quickly and nothing was sold. For a larger organisation, the transferable point is that a public chatbot will be tested by the public, so its limits and its authority to make offers need settling before launch.

1. Test a public chatbot against people trying to misuse it before launch.
2. State clearly that the chatbot cannot make binding offers.
3. Monitor live use and keep a quick way to switch the chatbot off.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Press reporting and vendor statement: users' screenshots reported by several outlets, and the vendor's chief executive confirming the incident and the shutdown to Business Insider.

Evaluation method. Press reporting and company statement: users' screenshots as reported by Business Insider, The Autopian and others, and the vendor's chief executive's statements to Business Insider; no statement from the dealership.

Sources disagree. Business Insider reports that Fullpath shut the bot down for the dealer's site; The Autopian wrote that the dealer dropped the chatbot. The Autopian could not confirm the screenshots first hand.

Status. Closed: the chatbot was shut down on the dealership's site in December 2023. Later status: Not reported.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/chevrolet-of-watsonville-chatbot

[1] Business Insider: A car dealership added an AI chatbot to its site. Then all hell broke loose. (December 2023)
https://www.businessinsider.com/car-dealership-chevrolet-chatbot-chatgpt-pranks-chevy-2023-12

[2] The Autopian: Chevy Dealer's AI Chatbot Allegedly Sold A New Tahoe For $1, Recommended Fords (December 2023)
https://www.theautopian.com/chevy-dealers-ai-chatbot-allegedly-recommended-fords-gave-free-access-to-chatgpt/

[3] Jalopnik: Chevrolet Dealer's AI Chatbot Goes Rogue Thanks To Pranksters (December 2023)
https://jalopnik.com/chevrolet-dealer-ai-help-chatbot-goes-rogue-pranksters-1851112556

[4] Futurism: Car Dealership Disturbed When Its AI Is Caught Offering Chevys for $1 Each (December 2023)
https://futurism.com/the-byte/car-dealership-ai

[5] WardsAuto: AI Presents Benefits, Pitfalls for Car Dealers (June 2024)
https://www.wardsauto.com/news/ai-presents-benefits-pitfalls-for-car-dealers/798317/

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