

Difference Makers

By Carlos Alvarez



Every day, there are new challenges faced in the business office. Some of these challenges are controllable and some of them are not. As dealerships throughout the automotive industry continue to move in a positive direction, the need for the business office to recover becomes greater.

It is time to make a difference.

The big question is, "How?" Without being able to give one simple answer, there are several great solutions that can make a difference. To begin, business managers need to focus on growing the income level in the business office. Aside from the traditional methods, now more than ever, a business manager has to think outside the box. One thing that comes to mind is finding more customers to buy the products and services offered. But where do you find these customers?

Have you considered your own customers? That's right, your own customers! Even the top producers in the business do not run 100% penetration on the sale of any product, unless it is a complete give-away product. Even then, it may be a give-away to the customer, but not the dealership. Someone must incur the cost. Think about it. There is not a better opportunity than contacting current customers. These customers have a good relationship with the dealership and are more likely to be receptive to receiving product information.

Next comes the phase where preparation and organization are key. In many dealerships, business managers attempt to send out letters to customers whose manufacturers

limited warranties are about to expire in an attempt to try to sell them a service contract. Very rarely will a customer walk into the dealership and ask to purchase a service contract. Most often, there is the customer in the service department that has a large repair bill. The service advisor tells the customer that he/she should look into purchasing a service contract to protect against future or further unexpected repair costs. At this point, the customer is then turned over to the business manager.

The problem lies from within the follow-up process itself. There is little to no consistency with the effort being placed on capitalizing these opportunities. It is a one-shot deal, just as if the customer was sitting in the business office during the delivery of the vehicle. Here is where preparation and organization will pay off in the end. To make a difference, consider these options:

1. Obtain a report that lists all of the dealership's unsold customers. This list should include customers that did not buy all the products that were presented to him/her during the delivery of the vehicle. It also includes customers that have purchased a vehicle from the dealership within the last 24 months. It is surprising how many opportunities are available.
2. Upon reviewing the list, consult with the service manager and find out when the last time the customer brought his/her vehicle into the service department for any type of repair or maintenance. Remember, the business manager is controlling how this part of the business will succeed. A good place to start is with customers who are still utilizing the dealership's service department.
3. Put together a written game plan that lists which customers to contact first. It is important to do this in order to be consistent with the follow-up process.



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4. Write a variety of follow-up letters that cover specific products such as service contracts, scheduled maintenance programs, and one that focuses on ancillary products. The best way is to have enough letters prepared to cover most situations. Be creative and create need in the letters.

5. Determine the most effective way to deliver the message to the customer. In today's society, most customers communicate via e-mail. As a cost-cutting measure and time-saving opportunity, send an e-mail to the customer. Be sure to include the message in the body of the e-mail rather than as an attachment. Make it a point to enter the customer's e-mail address into the DMS system so that this information can be accessed in an easy-to-read report. If the customer does not have an e-mail address, mail him/her a copy of the letter.

The key to this entire follow-up process is for the business manager not to sell himself/herself short by only focusing on service contracts or one particular product. Include everything. You do not know what may have changed since the customer took delivery of his/her vehicle. The customer may have shown no interest at the time of delivery because it may not have been in the budget. The customer may not have been sold because he/she did not see the need or value in the products offered. The business manager has the opportunity to change that now. Make a difference with your customers today!

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