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Getting Ready for the Market to Come

By Adrienne Reilly

We're all painfully aware the auto industry has been in a storm the last two years. We also know those who weather the storm will have the opportunity to come out stronger than before. But this isn't just a matter of sitting back and waiting for the storm to pass. To survive, we'll need to develop good habits that can lead to long-term success.

Examine Your Dealership

Begin with a comprehensive evaluation of your dealership. No nook or cranny should go unchecked; a goldmine of unidentified or misused resources can be found. We recently helped a dealership save \$8,000 a month by examining outsourced initiatives and suggesting work-arounds with their current technology in just two hours. Who knows what would have been found if we had dug in deeper?

Start your examination with any of the following questions:

- Where am I spending money that can be consolidated or eliminated?
- How well am I prioritizing my spending?
- Can I consolidate vendors and do I effectively track my expenses?
- Can I measure my advertising spending and track results?
- How can better system utilization improve productivity and increase my profit?
- How well am I using my database to reach current customers?
- How can I find out why customers didn't buy?

After you answer these questions, create a plan of action that will eliminate areas of waste and neglect. Include in your plan any expense that is draining profit from your store. If you need help developing a strong course of action, seek professional assistance.

Make Changes

The final challenge is implementing your plan. Implementation may be an arduous task and perseverance is vital. If your business gets stuck, you may need to call for help. A second set of eyes can help set up processes and execute fixes, enabling you to implement your plans, month after month, and create good habits. How will you get ready for the coming market and keep your head above water? It starts today with asking the important questions that uncover and undo bad habits, replacing them with a sound plan of action, and then executing that plan until it is complete. The storm is set to pass. What are you doing to get ready?

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Adrienne has worked in the automotive industry for more than 20 years, with 10 years experience in automotive consulting.

Reynolds Consulting Services, one of the most skilled and knowledgeable consulting groups in the automotive industry, offers dealers a fresh perspective on common challenges. Experience proven results from over 25 unique process improvement projects, specially designed to focus on specific departments and drive results for your dealership.

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Are You Making the Most of Your Service Write-up Process?

By Joe Coli

When I visit dealerships, I naturally wander back to the service drive. Having spent most of my life in the service department, as a technician and a service director, I am constantly amazed at what I see, and in some cases, what I don't see. Frequently, I witness service advisors who only walk up to the customer's vehicle, get the mileage and VIN number, and then turn right around and go back to their desk to write the repair order. In today's automotive economic turmoil, this baffles me.

When I was a service director, I constantly worked with my advisors on their write-up technique. As with any action worth doing, it takes time to build a good service write-up process. Without a solid process, potential revenue is overlooked, customers experience inconsistent service, and opportunities to do business are reduced.

Wherever you first encounter the customer, whether it is on the service drive or in the service office, direct the customer back to their vehicle and consider this process:



Joe Coli
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- Sit in the vehicle, get your mileage from the odometer, and examine the interior for any potential needs.
- Start the car and pop the hood.
- Turn the wheels to one side and turn off the engine.
- Get out of the car and do a WALK AROUND with the customer.
- Make a note of any body damage, uneven tire wear, or something as simple as a worn wiper blade.

Joe has over 30 years of automotive industry experience in fixed operations, and has been with Reynolds Consulting Services since 2004.

The point is: how much money are we leaving on the table by not spending a few extra minutes examining the vehicle with the customer during write-up? There is much to be gained in terms of profit, customer service, attentiveness to the customer's complete vehicle maintenance needs, and overall increased awareness by doing something so simple, easy, and profitable.

An effective and efficient operation is based on a good process, and a good process sets the stage for profitable business. What are some simple steps you can take to make your dealership more profitable? You'll never know until you take a look.

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Maybe It's Time to Get Back to the Basics

By Tom Wittkamp

Remember the good old days, when your showroom was full of eager customers ready to buy? At the time, it was easy to become complacent. Even if your selling process was less than perfect, you could turn a profit. Unfortunately, we no longer enjoy that luxury in today's economic climate. Now is the time to revisit some of the fundamental principles of the selling process and get back to the basics.

Can You Spot the Lost Opportunities?

Several weeks ago, I started the process of purchasing a new vehicle. As I shopped, I decided not to mention my Reynolds' connection and see what a typical car-buying experience looks like in today's troubled economy. I made three visits to two dealerships and one Internet request in my search for a new car. As you read, see how many sales basics were missed.



Tom Wittkamp
Instructional Designer
Reynolds Consulting Services

Tom is an instructional designer for Reynolds Consulting Services; with over 30 years of experience in education and 6 years of instructional design in the automotive industry.

Visit 1 – I explained to each salesman that I intended to purchase a new vehicle within the next month, was interested in comparing a model from two different manufacturers, and I would be back later for a test drive. In both cases, I was shown the model of my choice. At one dealership, I received a product demonstration with a vehicle in the showroom. In the other, I was shown several vehicles on the lot and could look in the windows (the salesman didn't have the keys). I was not asked for contact information or interviewed in either dealership.

Visit 2 – I returned for a test drive. In both cases, the salesmen accompanied me on the drive, took my contact information and recorded what vehicle I tested. Neither called me back during the next two weeks to get my impressions, discuss availability, or bring me back into the showroom.

Internet – Since I was nearing negotiation, I submitted an Internet request to a third dealer to get some idea of what discounts were available. The request included my e-mail and phone numbers. No one from the dealership replied.

Visit 3 – I decided to talk numbers with both dealerships and make my final choice. One salesman told me they couldn't find the vehicle I wanted, said he was sorry, and offered no alternative. The other salesman was 20 minutes late for the appointment.

What Basics Were Missed?

- **Guest Survey** – Getting as much information as possible when the customer visits the showroom is an important first step in the sales process. It sets up future contacts, helps ensure the customer is looking at the right vehicle, and provides opportunities to highlight dealership services that fit customer needs. How much information does your sales staff collect when a customer first visits the showroom?
- **Product Demonstration** – A good product demonstration includes showing both interior and exterior features, getting the customer to sit in the vehicle, and highlighting things that set it apart from the competition. How well does your sales staff know your vehicles, and do they take the time to conduct a thorough product demonstration?
- **Internet Response** – When a lead is received, it should be answered in a timely fashion, with personalized information answering the customer's questions. Include price information, availability, and several alternative vehicles. When

was the last time you mystery shopped your dealership on the Internet?

- **Demonstration Drive** –The route and the talk track should be pre-defined. The route should show off the capabilities of the vehicle while the talk track should get additional information about why customers are looking at that vehicle and what special needs they may have. This will give you a better chance to react to a changing sales situation. Do you have a pre-defined route for the demo drive and a standard talk track to use with customers?
- **Follow Up All Visits** – All showroom visits should involve a follow-up phone call, e-mail, and letter or postcard. This shouldn't involve a "hard-sell" approach, but it should give customers the impression that the dealership is interested and eager to meet their needs. *Do you know what percentage of your showroom customers get a follow-up phone call?*

In this economy, no dealership can afford to lose sight of basic sales practices. Often, the staff becomes so accustomed to "the norm," that they fail to see how far they have strayed from essential customer relationship practices. This is the perfect time to have seasoned professionals from an outside organization examine your sales process and help your staff get back to basics.

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Offer of the Month

Owner Loyalty Event Consulting

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- Set up the event and coach your staff.
- Begin the sales process with your customers.

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