



# ACCELERATE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CENTRAL FLORIDA AUTO DEALERS ASSOCIATION

Pub Yr 2 | Issue 3



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RAJ ALEXANDER

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GETTING TO KNOW  
JASON KIRKLAND

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100 Weldon Boulevard  
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Phone: 407.708.2780  
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4049 South Highland Drive  
Millcreek, Utah 84124  
855.747.4003 | 801.676.9722  
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**Evelyn Cardenas**  
President/CEO  
Central Florida Auto  
Dealers Association

## President's Message

*Thank you for all that you do for our communities and your customers. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I did. I enjoyed reading each dealer's unique and serendipitous journey.*


**W**elcome to our latest edition of our Accelerate Magazine. To start, I want to share with you information recently released about the future of Orange County. According to the Orlando Economic Partnership, Orange County is "projected to grow to 5.2 million by 2030, surpassing the D.C. Metro area." (2022). Central Florida specifically perseveres as the center of innovation, expansion, and phenomenal growth. Our region is not only experiencing a population explosion, but a business expansion, mobility innovation, and the introduction of robust new technologies and technology visionaries. Wages are rising, wealth is increasing, and customers are plentiful. Currently, Florida is second in the country for EVs!

In Florida, we are growing our multimodal transportation options. Our governments are collaborating with our electric companies and tech partners to create smart cities, and interconnected roadways, expand last-mile transportation, grow the high-speed rail, and provide the necessary infrastructure for EVs and autonomous vehicles. To help shape our mobility future, CFADA has been asked

to be part of Orange County's EV task force. I do not know about you, but I feel blessed to live in this state.

As automobile dealers, you have become part of a greater smarter mobility ecosystem that helps keep our communities moving and thriving. The naysayers advertise that our cars will become obsolete. The reality is that cars will continue to be a key if not the main mode of mobility; what is shifting is that, in our large state, consumers finally will have other viable options to supplement their mobility needs.

We have come a long way from Henry Ford's time and the idea that all that people wanted was a faster horse. What we all want is to get to our destinations and to live our lives to the fullest, with the least effort and the most convenience- and our cars do just that.

Thank you for all that you do for our communities and your customers. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I did. I enjoyed reading each dealer's unique and serendipitous journey. 

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# OUR LEADERSHIP:

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**Evelyn Cardenas**  
President/CEO  
Central Florida Auto Dealers Association



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# GETTING TO KNOW RAJ ALEXANDER

*Raj Alexander is an active new member of CFADA, and he is also the managing partner at two dealerships, Porsche South Orlando and Central Florida Lincoln.*

*We recently talked with Raj about his life, his work and his experiences in the industry.*

**Please tell us about your childhood and education.**

I was born in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India. I was an only child. My mom and I moved to the U.S. when I was 11 years old. We were very blessed to have a close family, which is normal in our Indian culture. My mother worked long hours in retail to provide for us, and I grew up in an extended household with my grandparents, uncle and aunt, who all had a hand in raising me. Growing up, I wanted to be a doctor; in our culture, it's looked at favorably if one pursues a career in medicine, computer sciences or business. I had an affinity for math and sciences, so becoming a doctor seemed a natural choice. I played football and focused on my academics, which helped me attend Rutgers University to pursue my career in medicine.

During my studies at Rutgers University, I lost my motivation to pursue medicine and steered my attention to pursuing Business Management/Finance.

**What interested you as a child and young man?**

I loved anything related to cars. I remember going for haircuts with my grandfather, and he would buy me matchbox cars to add to my collection each time. In my

teens, I would love car shows and detailing cars. In my 20s, I loved tuning my cars and going to the race track.

**When did you become interested in the dealership industry?**

After Rutgers, I started a management training career path with Circuit City; I quickly realized I excelled at sales in each department I was assigned to. A friend working in a car dealership convinced me to try my sales talent in the automotive world. I started out as a Top Sales Rep in my first month, soon was selling 30+ cars a month and already was focused on moving to the finance manager position. I found it easy to make friends with prospects, and I quickly earned repeat and referral sales from customers who became clients for life.

**What happened next?**

I migrated to South Florida and started at Braman BMW in West Palm Beach, Florida. I spent the next 18 years there growing in responsibility. I held positions as a sales adviser, finance manager, sales manager, general sales manager and director of sales and ultimately became the general manager of Braman Porsche West Palm Beach.



After that, I had an opportunity to become the general manager of Mercedes-Benz of Palm Beach, which had a pathway for me to become the VP of the Florida dealership in the automotive group. As each year passed, my dream of owning a dealership by the time I turned 40 was fading until January 2020, when an opportunity came via an unsolicited phone call, ironically on the morning of my 40th birthday. I remember it like it was yesterday. It was a Saturday morning when the opportunity to become a Managing Partner on the brand I hold close to my heart (Porsche) became a reality.

Looking back, it proved to be the best move of my career. Now I just acquired my second dealership, Central Florida Lincoln, and I am looking forward to additional dealerships in the future.

### **Why is Orlando a great market right now?**

Florida continues to lead the nation in growth. Over 1,000 people move to Florida each day, motivated by favorable taxes and a booming real-estate market. And who can complain about our weather? Central Florida has a vibrant hospitality industry and is a hub for medical and technical companies. I see tremendous growth potential in Central Florida over the next 10-15 years.

### **Please tell us about your mentors.**

My greatest mentor in life is my mother. She is my hero and my best friend. She is my biggest fan, and from a young age, I always wanted to make her proud. She has worked in the sales industry for many years, and I learned everything I know about sales from her. She has a work ethic to this day that I admire, and I love that she has always followed her heart in all that she does. My grandfather, uncle, stepfather and countless other managers I have worked for over the years have had a profound impact on the person I am today.

### **Why did you join CFADA, and how have you been involved in it since then?**

CFADA has a vested interest in supporting dealers. Evelyn Cardenas recently helped me plan an event that would allow us to get more empowered women involved in our community to our dealership. We are also planning some events for the annual CFADA auto show to engage the people who attend.

### **Why is membership in CFADA important? What are the benefits?**

CFADA builds relationships with legislators and protects dealer interests. The leaders and staff can answer legal or business questions and advise you about investing in your business or growing more effectively. CFADA also invests in helping dealers recruit and educate younger people about opportunities in the auto business. It creates

pathways into the industry for people, especially young people.

### **What is your biggest career accomplishment so far?**

I am proud of the culture we have in our dealerships. We share our passion with our clients and stay involved in giving back to our local community. It is important to me that we help our employees have balance in their lives. They are my number one resource, and I never lose sight of that. Without them, we have nothing.

### **What are the three most valuable career suggestions you would give someone you wanted to mentor?**

1. To be successful, do what you love. Be passionate and engaged.
2. Stay true to your values and your principles.
3. Be patient enough to learn but impatient enough to take risks.

### **What has been the secret to your success and growth in the industry?**

I learned early that I could only go so far on my own. So I surround myself with the best people, pay them well, and remove hurdles so they can succeed.

### **Tell us about your family?**

I have a son (12) and a daughter (10). They are amazing young people who are smart, kind and faith-driven. My daughter loves animals, and my son loves the arts. I push them to do what they love; there is no do-over in life.

### **What do you enjoy doing when you aren't working?**

I don't have as much free time being a dad, and my business commitments take up most of it. However, I enjoy golf and racing cars on the track when I can fit them in. Most of all, I love my family time with my children.

### **What is your favorite car? Also, what are you driving now?**

My all-time favorite car is the Porsche Carrera GT. It's a V10, manual transmission supercar the likes of which will never be made again. I would love to have that in my collection someday. I currently own a Porsche 911 Turbo S Cabriolet. I believe it's the ultimate daily driver that is also a supercar.

### **Do you have any last words for those reading your article?**

I love what I do. There isn't a day I don't wake up that I feel so humbled and blessed for all the opportunities I have had, the people I have met and the dedication I have seen. The last 22 years in the automotive industry have been a dream come true. I look forward to all that is ahead for us all, with incredible hope for a better and brighter future. 🌈

# GETTING TO KNOW JASON KIRKLAND

*Jason Kirkland has been in the retail automotive industry for 30 years, and he has worked at Jenkins Honda of Leesburg for 26 of those years. Jason has been a general manager there for seven years and currently serves as a director on the CFADA board.*

*We recently talked with Jason about his life, his work and the industry in general.*



**Where are you from, and what's your background?  
What interested you as a child and young man?**

I was born in Clearwater, Florida, and raised in the Fort Lauderdale area of South Florida. I went to private Catholic school, grade school through high school, and played many sports while growing up, but my favorites were baseball and tennis. However, now I play golf because I injured my knees when I was younger and had to have two ACL replacements.

**Tell us about your education.**

I had one year of college at the University of Tampa. After turning 22 and getting into the car business, I made too much money and had too much fun to think about going back to school. I don't have to go to work: I get to go to work.

**When did you become interested in the dealership industry?**

I knew a kid when I was growing up whose father was in the car business. His house was impressive. I asked him, "What does your dad do for a living?" He said his dad was in the car business.

I thought that was pretty cool, but I didn't think about it for myself until I met Mr. Jenkins when I was 18 years old and working at the Harbor Island Athletic Club in Tampa, Florida. He was a member there and would always talk. Mr. Jenkins persuaded me to work for him five years after the conversation with my friend. I was 22.



### **How did you become the general manager at Jenkins Honda of Leesburg?**

When I first started working for him, Mr. Jenkins was the general manager at Courtesy Pontiac GMC. He started me out in sales, and after a year, I went into finance. I've worked for him all but four years since then, and I've been a general manager for him for 13 years. I've worked as the general manager at Jenkins Honda of Leesburg for the last seven years.

When I wasn't working for Mr. Jenkins, I was helping my dad out with some little private lots he had. But Mr. Jenkins and I always communicated with each other even when I wasn't working for him.

### **Why did you join CFADA, and how have you been involved in it since then?**

Glenn Ritchey is a general manager in Daytona and the vice-chair at CFADA. He called me because he was looking for a Honda dealer to join the association.

### **What are the benefits? Why is membership in CFADA important?**

Belonging to different groups is important because it gets your name out there and creates more business. Associations like CFADA put great minds in the same field together, and the relationships that members make with other members give them an advantage over everybody else.

In addition to CFADA, I'm also a board member for the Chamber of Commerce in Leesburg, Lake County.

### **What is your biggest career accomplishment so far?**

I don't know that I've done it yet. I'm 52. I hope my biggest accomplishment is still ahead.

### **What are the three most valuable career suggestions you would tell someone you wanted to mentor?**

1. Learn from other people's mistakes.
2. Stay in one place. Don't jump from place to place.

3. You've got to balance your work-to-home-life ratio because you'll lose personal relationships that are important to you if you don't. I've been there and done that.

### **Supply chain issues have been a huge challenge for everyone. How are you solving them at your dealerships?**

New car volume is down, grosses are up, and we've switched our focus to CPOs (Certified Pre-Owned) and used cars. I think the problems will get worse by the end of the year. Last year, we had supplies on the ground; this year, we don't have what we had last year. However, the supply chain should start ramping up by the middle of 2023, going into 2024.

### **What is the biggest challenge facing dealerships in the next three to five years? How can dealers successfully deal with it?**

We're making record gross profits, and some managers think they created all their success. But it's not always them creating it; it's the market.

Dealerships need to be training the sales staff. Dealers who don't will have a hard time continuing to succeed when things get back to normal because their sales staff will have forgotten how to sell cars.

We train our staff the same way we did two to three years ago.

### **What do you enjoy doing when you aren't working?**

I work six days a week, so I don't have much free time, but I play golf and spend time with the family. There's a huge lake in Florida where we like to go, and we just got back from visiting my wife's family in Pennsylvania.

### **Tell us about your family.**

My mother is living with her husband in South Carolina. She is a retired nurse in her 80s and is doing

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well. My dad was living near me, but he is 83, has Alzheimer's and has been in the hospital. I have two siblings. My half-brother lives in Australia, and my half-sister lives in Texas.

My wife is Amy, and she is awesome. She's very creative. It's hard to buy her gifts because she prefers gifts from the heart. She sells Pampered Chef and loves it. We're going to need a bigger kitchen because we've bought so many of their products for ourselves.

We have five children combined, ages 13-28. One daughter is about to turn 16, and I also have three older boys.

**Do you think any of your children will follow in your footsteps?**

None of the older ones have asked about it, but I wouldn't oppose it. The way things are now, you can't be in this industry if you aren't a good operator.

**Do you have any last words for those reading your article?**

What a wonderful time this is to be in the car business!

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# Weighing In on EVs and the Value of Dealerships

By Mike Stanton

**O**n Jan. 5, 2022, The Washington Post published an op-ed article by Liam Denning entitled “Car Dealership Laws Aren’t Fit for the Electric Age.” On Jan. 13, 2022, NADA’s president and CEO, Mike Stanton, responded. The following sections contain a summary of the op-ed and Mike Stanton’s response.

## **An Admittedly Biased Summary of Liam Denning’s Article in The Washington Post**

The op-ed begins with Liam Denning’s view of the auto dealership world. It isn’t pretty. He sees dealerships as no more than a revolving door for products. (Isn’t that what any good retail store tries to be?) The

pandemic and supply chain issues emptied lots, then kept them empty. He saw the dealerships’ response to the pandemic as an opportunity to raise auto prices as volume fell. To support that claim, he said volume for 2020 was 7% less than for 2019, but that gross margin almost doubled, making their response to the pandemic nothing more than a chance to raise prices while volume fell. He then notes that dealers have a “growing challenge” as they move forward.

How accurate are his claims? They are misleading. Although he doesn’t talk about auto manufacturers or

➤ [continued on page 12](#)



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other industries, they too had unexpectedly profitable years after the pandemic shutdown. And although net profit was up for U.S. dealers, net profit included net operating profit and incentives paid by automakers to dealers who exceed sales targets. Also, chip shortages meant manufacturers focused on building SUVs and trucks because they have higher margins than small cars. Higher net profit is to be expected for everyone under those circumstances.

The article then moves to an admiring analysis of EV manufacturers, with Rivian Automotive Inc. and Tesla Inc. mentioned by name. He says nothing about how direct sales affect EV profits, but he does say EV manufacturers are highly valued at the moment. He then talks about how the current system came to be. State laws passed decades ago were designed to prevent predatory behavior by big U.S. automakers and force them to use independent franchises for vehicle sales and service. After the history lesson, he claims that the current market is different from the 1950s market.

Why?

He says three U.S. brands no longer dominate the market. The current market, he claims, is too competitive to allow a repeat of the same issues that caused legislation to be written in the first place. Really? Tesla dwarfs all other EV manufacturers. And although Elon Musk has plans to fill the global market with Teslas, Denning ignores Musk's gigafactories in Berlin, Shanghai and Texas.

Even though Denning names Rivian and Tesla as two important companies in the developing EV market,

citing sky-high valuations, he is wrong there, too. The three largest EV manufacturers are Tesla, VW and General Motors ... not Rivian. Rivian is riding on expectations, not accomplishments. But since newcomer Tesla is the EV manufacturer currently dominating the EV market, why would anyone conclude states should throw away hard-earned legislative protections? Remember, too, that Musk – who is admittedly brilliant – will never remind anyone of the late Fred Rogers.

Next, Denning says that high dealership margins come from selling vehicles and then taking care of them. He implies that EV sales departments meet several times with buyers while educating them about their potential purchases and that franchise dealers are all about the hard sell. Since EVs have fewer parts, though, he suggests service departments will be much less profitable in the future.

It's hard to know what to address first. Selling is selling, and doing it right means building a customer relationship. That's why the best dealers have always made a point of helping their communities prosper. There are even many dealerships where the customers and employees are multigenerational. Dealerships like that do not fit a "hi, bye" model, especially in small communities. Dealerships have to care about customers, or they don't last. And "less service" is not the same as "no service." Tesla, in particular, has skimmed so far on building up the service side of the business. As sales volumes increase, that's going to be a problem.

Denning then turns his attention to Michigan, Florida and New York. Yes, the market is changing, which means the way autos are built and sold will also change. Yes, dealerships have invested a great deal of time and



*When 20,000 future EV buyers demand for dealerships be a big part of their EV purchase experience, it is clear that the franchise dealership model works just as well for EVs as it does for traditional vehicles.*

energy working with legislators. Yes, Rivian and Tesla valuations are high and are affecting the market.

None of that somehow makes dealers dishonest or irrelevant.

That's our summary of Liam Denning's article. Read on for Mike Stanton's excellent response, with which we fully agree.

### **How NADA's Mike Stanton Responded**

Dear Editor:

*Liam Denning's piece on car dealerships (Car Dealership Laws Aren't Fit for the Electric Age, Jan. 5) uses decades-old tropes to make the case for direct sales as the best path to EV adoption. But he misses the mark by failing to grasp what is actually involved when average Americans buy or lease a new vehicle.*

*The truth is, America's 16,500 dealerships and million-plus highly skilled product specialists and technicians are essential to achieving the government's goals for broad EV adoption. Here's why:*

*The next stage of EV adoption won't mean getting affluent buyers into \$100k+ luxury or performance vehicles. It will mean getting average consumers into mass-market vehicles they depend on every day to get to work and manage family life. It will mean helping those customers figure out how to finance their vehicles and how to handle their trade-ins. It will mean educating them about the differences EVs present. And it will mean keeping these vehicles on the road when inevitable repairs and recalls happen – without long wait times.*

*Today's EVs are great vehicles – but they're not perfect. It's possible that EVs may need less service in the*

*future, but in 2021 the data shows they require more service and repairs than ICE vehicles. Tesla's recent recall of some half million vehicles and GM's recent recall of some 100,000 Bolts suggest that EVs are not immune to safety issues that must be fixed.*

*Because local dealerships compete for customers on sales and service, the result is that pricing is competitive, and service is plentiful – from multiple same-brand dealers. It means you can always get a dealer on the phone, and you can always get a local appointment, with no waiting or frustrating 1-800 calls. With new complex new products like electric vehicles, personal service and education is needed more than ever.*

*EV buyers agree. In the largest and most comprehensive survey ever conducted of future EV buyers in the U.S., the analytics firm Escalent presented future EV buyers with a factory sales model and a franchise dealership model. Only 20% preferred the direct approach. Twenty-three percent were neutral. And a full 57% chose the current dealership model.*

*When 20,000 future EV buyers demand for dealerships be a big part of their EV purchase experience, it is clear that the franchise dealership model works just as well for EVs as it does for traditional vehicles.*

*America's car and truck dealers are all-in on EVs and raring to get going in promoting them. Our best environmental policy is to leverage the network of America's 16,500 dealerships to help America successfully make the transition to EVs. 🌱*

*Sincerely,  
Mike Stanton  
President and CEO  
National Automobile Dealers Association*

# Auto Buying Preferences

**T**he auto industry is starting to undergo a massive switchover from ICE autos to EV autos, and there's no shortage of people to tell you EVs are going to have a big impact on the industry. What's less clear is how that implementation will occur. Many people expect direct retail from manufacturers to expand, but fewer people ask what customers want and like.

Escalent is an analytics advisory company that focuses on business disruptions and transformations. The company conducted a survey, May 5-June 16, 2021, of 1,248 new-vehicle buyers from a global database. Those who responded were selected based on age (18-80), gender and location, and the survey's demographics were weighted to reflect actual vehicle sales based on the vehicle segment. The survey was done on an opt-in basis as part of a panel.

What were the results? It wasn't the slam-dunk for direct retail you might have expected. The majority of those surveyed (57%) prefer traditional car buying. Only 20% prefer direct retail. If you think the older segment skewed that result, think again: 94% of those less than 30 were satisfied with dealerships. Overall, 87% were satisfied.

What about a hybrid buying experience? Again, the preference was for being in-person at the dealership for at least part of the transaction:

- 75% for purchases
- 60% for financing
- 85% for taking delivery versus home delivery
- 79% for repairs and services versus having a technician come to a customer's home

The obvious takeaway is that most people, including younger customers, want to conduct business at the dealership. In particular, 63% want to take EVs for a drive before buying them. Test drives got a higher approval rating than any other source of information. However, they are less interested in getting information from a dealership salesperson; 31% said a salesperson would be a primary information source.

The 2021 Global Automotive Consumer Study, conducted by Deloitte, confirmed these survey results. Approximately 71% of customers want to buy their autos in person, and 64% are uncomfortable buying 100% online. When asked why they preferred going





*Buying a vehicle by using a hybrid process gives customers convenience and speed. It also allows them to see their vehicle in person and test drive it before making a final decision.*



to the dealership, 75% said they wanted to see their vehicle before buying it, and 64% thought a test drive was necessary. Only 38% wanted to negotiate in person and face-to-face.

That doesn't mean they wanted to spend a lot of time there. They didn't want to be at the dealership for more than an hour. That's probably why car buyers also preferred doing online research and paperwork, including the financing portion. They wanted transparency and time while evaluating decisions such as buying extended warranties.

For decades, consumer pain points have included the following:

- Disliking long waits
- Evaluating financing options while under pressure
- Meeting too many people
- Having too much paperwork

Those pain points were a fact of life before the pandemic. Less than 2% of all vehicles were sold online. The pandemic changed that: 30% of U.S. new car sales in 2020 were sold online. But there's a difference between doing something because you have to and doing something you want to. People like going to dealerships. But they don't want to be there for hours.

Buying a vehicle by using a hybrid process gives customers convenience and speed. It also allows them to see their vehicle in person and test drive it before making a final decision.

As a dealer, the key to understanding these survey results is reducing the pain of buying a car and increasing the convenience. Seeing a car and taking it for a drive is not a pain point and can only be done in person. People are always going to want that part of the auto-buying experience. But there's a great deal that can be done to make other parts of the experience more pleasant than they've been in the past.

Dealerships aren't going away. However, changing business practices to include better selling methods won't go away, either. And that's a good thing. 🌟

# The Pandemic has Changed the way Dealerships Do Business

**E**ven though it has been over two years since the pandemic shutdown of March 2020, the divide between pre-pandemic life and post-pandemic life has not closed. The future has very few certainties, but that doesn't prevent you from making educated guesses. There are specific areas that could affect the future of your dealership. Those areas are the ones where you should focus your decisions. Here are a few general subjects you should consider to get you started, but everyone's situation is different. There might be others you should add, too.

## Cyberattacks

The digital cloud is important for a couple of reasons: convenience and security. The cloud makes it possible to access information somewhere other than a physical store, and it also protects that data by using security protocols.

Although the cloud's convenience is an obvious benefit, security aspects are important, too. Automotive dealerships have a high volume of data, and much of it is sensitive because it involves personal and financial information about customers. Security patches and updates for cloud-native systems can be installed whenever necessary, and cloud record backups prevent you from losing important information if or when someone hacks your business. If you don't already have a cloud-based DMS, you should consider getting one.

## Digital Advertising

Websites, including social media websites, are an opportunity to help potential customers find you. You can then let them know about any special offers you might have. That becomes doubly important at a time when many people are still avoiding brick-and-mortar stores.

## Mobile Services

Sometimes people don't want to bring a vehicle in for service. Some



*One advantage of cloud-based software is the way it allows employees to work remotely. If you set things up correctly, employees working from home can set up deals, offer different payment options, schedule service and test-drive appointments and allow customers to set up contracts and payments digitally.*

dealerships have met that need by expanding their services; more specifically, they offer mobile services. They can pick up a vehicle from a customer's home, rotate the tires or change the oil, and then return it. Suppose you are considering offering similar services at your dealership. If so, you will need a DMS that can work off-site without a VPN.

### Online Shopping

Most potential customers now prefer to do some or all of their shopping online instead of at a dealership. Thanks to the internet, they can conduct in-depth research and become well-informed before making their final buying decisions. According to an online article on the Autolist website that appeared in May 2021, people spend more than nine hours researching vehicles. Going to the dealership to buy a vehicle often takes about three hours. That time might be spent looking at vehicles, talking to the sales staff, test driving, negotiating the purchase price and trade-in price, and signing paperwork.

The shift to online research and paperwork that has been filled out in advance allows you to improve efficiency. If customers start the buying process from home, that means you can often shorten the time needed to finalize the sale. As people do more paperwork at home, the sales process becomes easier, and customers are happier about their vehicle-buying experience.

What is the ideal amount of time? A Car and Driver article by Jack Nerad published Jan. 4, 2018, said customers wanted to spend 45 minutes to an hour finalizing their purchase. Although that was more than four years ago, the pandemic has increased people's expectations about buying goods quickly and easily.

The 2022 Deloitte Global Automotive Consumer Study contains results from a survey of 26,000 people in 25 countries. It found that people still prefer buying in person from an authorized dealer. However, online purchasing was also attractive because those surveyed thought it would be easier and more convenient.

You don't have complete control over how long it takes someone to buy a car, but you should make buying as easy as possible whether customers are online or in your store. Online, you might want to consider having a virtual sales manager.

### Payments

It has become increasingly important to take payments securely online. That way, customers can pay at their convenience and avoid crowds. Your DMS can do more than enable online payments; it also allows you to track them.

### Remote Work

One advantage of cloud-based software is the way it allows employees to work remotely. If you set things up correctly, employees working from home can set up deals, offer different payment options, schedule service and test-drive appointments and allow customers to set up contracts and payments digitally.

The pandemic pushed the entire world forward technologically when it became necessary to shut down public institutions and ask people to isolate themselves. That was hard, and it continues to be hard. But companies also became more efficient, and what used to be considered a concierge level of service became mainstream. As a result, you can deliver a better experience to your customers than ever before. That's always good for business. 🌟



# The Ins & Outs Of Dealership Communication

By Dominion DMS

**C**ommunication within your dealership can make a world of difference for your customers, your employees, and your staff. Even if you believe your dealership is great at communicating inside and out, improvement is always possible.

**Working toward more effective communication can mean:**

- **Increased Revenue** – Do your service technicians spend a lot of time walking back and forth to the parts back counter to discuss and retrieve parts needed for a vehicle? Are you service advisors waiting for customer authorization on services? How long do customers need to wait at the dealership to get updates on their vehicles and pay? This time adds up to fewer cars serviced, fewer cars sold, and money left on the table.
- **Happier Employees** – Businesses that present more transparency and communication improve employee morale. This means more engaged team members. In fact, according to the McKinsey Global Institute, effective communication can improve productivity in any workplace by up to 25%. Happier employees also mean reduced turnover.
- **A Fulfilling Customer Experience** – Put yourself in the shoes of a customer for a moment. Which sounds better: spending the day in a dealership waiting room, or going about their day with the trust that they know their car is in good hands? People are known to take better care of their cars over their own health. Your customers want to take their vehicles somewhere where they will be frequently updated on services.
- **Transparency in Your Dealership** – If you communicate better and more frequently with your

employees they are more likely to communicate better with you. This means problems are solved quicker, your staff is more relaxed, and your customers come back.

If one or more of these would be beneficial at your dealership, now is the time to start.

## **Barriers to Effective Internal Communication**

If communication is lacking throughout the dealership, there might be a physical or psychological barrier causing it. The cause may be deeply rooted or something easily fixable.

## **Do any of these sound familiar?**

### **A Lack of Transparency**

There could be any number of reasons why staff members might not be in sync. Often it's because nobody understands the goal. For example, if you expect your dealership to service 1,200 vehicles a month, does everybody in your service department focus on that? If so, are they aware of how they are performing? Not being transparent about information like expectations or even the vision of the business can get in the way of meeting goals.

Clearly defined goals set the right expectations. There should be a process or tool to help maintain an easy flow of internal communication.

### **Unclear Direction from Managers**

An easy mistake a manager can make is to point out an issue without involving employees in finding a solution.

Let's say a service manager received complaints from customers about paint scratches on serviced vehicles.

Relaying this to the service staff without a prevention plan going forward may not help. Reminding employees to be careful with vehicles is reasonable, but what if the vehicles were damaged prior to arriving at the dealership? Your team may suggest implementing a more consistent check-in inspection of the vehicle's condition upon arrival. This inspection could actually lead to higher service revenue in repairs to these damages along with more trust from the customer.

### Employees Can't Ask Questions

Do you remember the old saying, "There are no stupid questions"? Is that what your employees actually believe? Fostering an environment where your team feels comfortable speaking up will strengthen your dealership. Creating a habit where experienced employees are encouraged to mentor others will improve their morale and allow new employees to get up to speed more quickly.

### Not Recognizing and Celebrating Good Work

Staffing issues can mean that teams are stretched more thinly than before. With everyone so busy, it is easy to forget to show appreciation. The perception of being unappreciated can lower morale and lead to burnout. When employees feel recognized and seen by managers, they feel more open to voicing their ideas. Satisfied employees are far more likely to provide superior customer service and productivity.

### Stressful Training

The more difficulty new employees have with their training, the less likely they will be comfortable asking questions or communicating well with others. According to a 2016 study by the National Auto Dealers Association, 28% of dealership terminations occur within an employee's first 90 days. Starting a new job often demands learning a lot of information. Investing in effective training programs can pay dividends in quicker new hire productivity while reducing turnover.

### How to Improve Dealership Communication

There are several ways a dealership can implement to increase and improve communication between departments. These tips can break down many of the barriers listed earlier that prevent good communication within the dealership.

### Start with Yourself

You are in charge. This means you influence a lot of what happens at your dealership for better and for worse. Create a culture of good communication. Set up ways to promote transparency in your dealership. Spend more time with your staff to create a comfort level for employees to ask questions, understand expectations, and feel more recognized. This should

result in better goal attainment, a happier workforce, and more satisfied customers.


### Communicate Digitally

It is hard to beat a face-to-face conversation, but that is not always possible or efficient. Digital communication is better than none at all. There are paid and even free options available for sending messages between departments. It may even be functionality that is already available. Using an internal chat tool can provide quick answers to keep your business running at its peak.

### Create One Source of Truth for Information

A dealership typically invests in many different types of software, with different and sometimes redundant sources of information. Between your DMS, your CRM, and other tools in use at dealerships today, it can be confusing and inconsistent. A best practice is to choose one system to be the source of truth that all employees rely on. This will make transparency easier, and provide the foundation to communicate across departments.

Between all of the benefits, barriers, and tips discussed, there is one overarching theme: effective internal communication is important for a successful dealership, and it starts with you as the manager. It offers many benefits and prevents a lot of potential problems. Overall, it can improve productivity, boost profitability, and create a positive employee and customer experience.

If you are unsure where to start, take a look at your dealer management system. See what features are available that may make following the tips provided easier. As a DMS provider ourselves, we strive to make important processes like internal communication easier for you with dashboards, chat features, and collaboration tools. 



help dealers meet today's rapidly-changing market. Explore more of our resources at [VUEDMS.com](http://VUEDMS.com).

We encourage you to visit our website and browse more of our content by scanning this QR Code.



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#### Training – help keep staff trained & industry ready

- Technology & IT Security
- Digital Marketing
- NADA Dealer Pro Series
- Legal and Regulatory Information
- Employment Law

#### Networking- to collaborate with industry partners

- Member meetings & socials
- Industry Partners – associate members offer training, education, services, and sponsor events.
- Epilepsy AutoClassic Golf – Columbus Day

#### Giving- to strengthen our communities

- Epilepsy AutoClassic Golf – Columbus Day
- Student automotive tech scholarships
- SSC Foundation Scholarship & Dream Gala vehicle raffle
- Valencia scholarship

- Other local charities – Boys and Girls Club, Florida Citrus Sports Camp, etc.

#### Industry News – stay informed regarding industry changes impacting your business model, sales, and profitability

- Email newsletter with industry updates, tools, & news
- Websites News – members only area & public articles on important industry topics
- Members only page where you can pay dues, register for events, and update member information
- **Accelerate** is our association magazine that educates, informs, and spotlights dealer members

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