

You Created Your Competition. Now They're Charging Your Customers \$1,000

Why Dealers Are Losing Control of the Conversation and How to Take It Back

There are companies right now, like Delivr — you've seen them on TikTok or Instagram Stories — charging customers \$1,000 just to help them buy a car.

Not to finance it. Not to transport it. Not to warranty it. Just to help them buy it.

A thousand dollars. And he doesn't hide it. He says it right up front. Customers are not complaining. They aren't pushing back. They are paying it.

That should bother every dealer in the industry.

Here's the truth. I do not knock these companies — they don't exist because customers want to pay an extra thousand bucks. They exist because we create the need for them. We create the confusion. We create the friction. We create what a BDC rep in one of my training sessions said perfectly this week: virtual speed bumps. And every time you create one, you lose control. You slow the process

down. You frustrate the customer. You make it harder to do business with you. So they go find someone who makes it easier.

That should be us. Too often, it is not.

THE BATTLE STARTS EARLY

The mistake many dealers are still making is believing the battle starts when the customer walks into the showroom. It does not. The real battle starts much earlier, on the phone, in the text thread or in the internet lead response. That first conversation determines whether the deal ever has a chance to exist. If we mishandle that moment, the customer may never show up. And if they never show up, the quality of the showroom experience does not matter.

This is where dealerships are losing control. A customer calls and asks about price, and the rep goes straight into numbers. Out the door. Back and forth. Payment guesses. No direction. No leadership. No value. The conversation

becomes purely transactional within seconds. Once that happens, the dealership is no longer guiding the process. It is reacting to it. And when you are reacting, you are losing.

INFORMATION BOOTHS VS. PROFESSIONALS

The problem is that too many stores have turned their salespeople and BDC reps into information booths. The customer asks a question, and the rep answers it. The customer asks if the vehicle is available, and the rep confirms it. The customer asks for a number, and the rep sends one. That is not selling. That is customer service at best — and a help desk at worst.

Customers already have access to information. They can find inventory, pricing and reviews on their own. What they cannot get from a search engine is guidance from a professional who knows how to help them make the right decision.

That is why the phrase "in my professional opinion" matters so much. We need to start sounding like professionals again. Not evasive. Not defensive. Not robotic. Professional. If a customer asks about pricing, answer it directly. Tell them you are transparent. Tell them your dealership always provides full out the door pricing with no hidden fees. Then lead the conversation where it actually needs to go.

"In my professional opinion, you're only looking at half the deal." That line changes everything, because now you are not just answering a question. You are bringing value into the conversation.

UNCOVERING MOTIVATION

Once you do that, you can help the customer understand what really shapes the deal. Not random numbers. Not generic discounts. Programs. Rebates. Loyalty. Structure. Trade. These are

the areas where a professional helps a customer make sense of the deal. That is what creates confidence. That is what earns the appointment.

And that brings us to the most overlooked part of the conversation: the why.

Most dealerships are far too quick to answer the customer's first question and far too slow to uncover their motivation. Why this vehicle? Why now? What are they driving? What do they like about it? What else are they considering? Those answers are not small talk. They are the foundation of the deal. Without them, you cannot build value or properly position the visit. You are just reacting to isolated questions from someone you do not understand.

SELLING THE APPOINTMENT

The real sale is not the car. The real sale is the appointment.

The appointment is the moment the shopper becomes a buyer. Before it is set, the customer is still browsing and drifting from one option to another. The second they commit to a specific time, the psychology shifts. They begin planning the visit. They begin moving toward action. That shift is enormous, and too many teams underestimate it. The appointment is not just a calendar entry. It is commitment.

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Managers need to stop blaming the leads. The leads are not the problem.

The process is the problem. If managers are not listening to calls, reviewing text conversations and coaching their teams every day, they do not actually know what is happening in their dealerships. Too many managers focus on the deals that make it into the store while ignoring the far larger number of opportunities that die before the customer ever arrives. ■



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