

Back office brainstorming

Real-life problems and creative solutions for managing time, money, people and paper flow in the dealership office.

ID the real customers

Robert Mitchell, Manager Internet and Business Development, BMW Gallery in Norwood, MA and Norwell, MA

“Since late February, we’ve been using the IMN (iMakeNews, Inc.) Loyalty Driver e-newsletter service and have seen increased Web traffic on our site and more buzz in our showrooms. The service allows us to develop deeper relationships with customers. By contacting our customers every month with content that they enjoy, we are staying on top of their mind, and reminding them to come to us for their next car.

“One feature about Loyalty Driver that really excited us is its new ‘Buy Signal Service.’ This powerful service builds on the capabilities of Loyalty Driver e-newsletters—which help us keep customers’ attention with lifestyle and product articles. We include articles on driving vacations, car care tips, and new models, for example. We add in coupons, time-sensitive information and special promotions to drive customers more quickly to our Websites or showrooms. And we use the analytical capabilities of Loyalty Driver to find out what customers are reading, how far they drill down for further information, if they are looking at time-sensitive offers more than once, and so forth. Whenever customers read an article, click through to related materials, or request additional information, they are sending us ‘Buy Signals’ that we want to track.

“The Loyalty Driver ‘Buy Signal Service’ goes even further, though. It takes a giant leap forward over any other service I have ever seen by providing real-time leads from the people who are easiest to ‘close’—our current customers. Here’s how it works: We now have the capability to place buttons and other ‘calls to action’ within each article so readers can

contact us for more information. For example, within an article on the new BMW 3-Series, there might be a button that says ‘Click here to schedule your test drive.’ When a customer clicks that button, an e-mail goes immediately to a designated salesperson to notify him or her of a ‘Buy Signal.’ All relevant customer information, including name and phone number, comes to us in that e-mail, and we can get back to the customer right away. The ‘Buy Signal Service’ pushes us leads so we can follow up and make a sale while customers are still ready to buy. It preempts customers from going to another dealer for the same BMW.”

“We just published our first e-newsletter issue and saw great results from it. Within two hours, we received ‘Buy Signals’ for both sales and service. Fifty percent of our customers opened the e-newsletter (far surpassing the marketing industry norm of 27 percent). A good portion of them spent several minutes reading an issue. Two weeks later, many customers were still opening and reading, so we know the lifestyle content has been engaging them. We also know that the most popular article in issue one was on the BMW M6, so we may invest more in marketing that vehicle. All in all, we have a clear view of how our e-newsletter is helping us sell more cars and more service.”

In addition to providing brand and region-specific lifestyle and product content, IMN distributes it via a dealer-branded newsletter to customers and prospects. They can manage lists by adding new subscribers with every issue and filtering out old e-mail addresses. They offer subscription links so visitors to dealership Websites can sign up for an e-newsletter. In addition, IMN embeds links in the e-newsletter itself that will take customers and prospects directly to specific pages on dealerships’ sites that feature new vehicle inventory, pre-owned inventory or service scheduling information.

Managing a dealership accounting office is a multi-tasking marathon. If you’ve found ways to trim operating expenses, reduce paperwork problems, strengthen communication with co-workers or customers, beef up internal controls, implement new regulations, use technology more efficiently, or anything else, we’d love to hear about it. E-mail J. Michael Causey at jmcausey@aol.com or send a fax to 1-800-314-4770. Got questions on how to improve any process or problem? Send us those too and we’ll help you find an answer.