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THE MOTOR DEALER REPORT FROM AUSWILD & CO
PO Box 527 Kogarah NSW 1485
Chartered Accountants and Dealer Management Services

Website: www.auswild.com.au
Telephone: (02) 9588 0100
Facsimile: (02) 9588 7865

SERVICE ADVISOR OR SERVICE WRITER?

Much has been written in **ausCAR** over the years about the importance of fixed operations in the profitability of dealerships and its relationship to the development of customer loyalty in today's automotive market. We make no apologies for this because if any two departments have the potential to drive profitability in your dealership, they are your service and parts departments. For many dealerships, these two departments have been the difference between red and black ink on the bottom line of their financial statements in recent times.

For many of your dealership's customers, the purchase of a vehicle is a single event in their relationship with your dealership – but their relationship with your service department (and to a lesser extent, your parts department) is, hopefully, ongoing. Your fixed operations personnel – in particular, your service advisors, see many more customers each day than your vehicle sales people. They have the opportunity to make you a lot of money and ensure that customers return to your dealership to buy their next vehicle.

So, why the distinction between service advisors and service writers?

In our opinion, service writers merely do what is expected of them to maintain their livelihood. They are no more than order takers, and sadly, many service advisors in dealerships are simply that. That is, in simplistic terms, they take the customer's order – no more, no less. They stand at the counter, wait for the customer to walk in the door and wait for the customer to tell them what it is they want, and then they write up the repair order. In today's competitive automotive market, simply taking orders is not enough! They need to have the appropriate training and the necessary skills to "sell" service to your customers.

On the other hand, service advisors consider their job to be a career. They are willing to go far beyond expectations to achieve the goals of that career.

There was a time when you could rely on your customers coming to your dealership at regular intervals to get their vehicles serviced. Today, vehicle quality has improved to the point where the service intervals are getting further and further apart, and so are the warranty periods. In addition, you now also have to worry about aggressive competition from the independents, customer service index and customer retention. There is also the worrying statistic that says many customers are not returning to dealerships for vehicle servicing once the warranty period expires.

Today, you need every single customer you can get and you need trained service salespeople to maximise opportunities.

Your service department is a gold mine – it is a key profit centre for your dealership and is an important element in the customer relationship and retention process that eventually brings your loyal service customers back to your dealership for future vehicle purchases.

So, when was the last time you held a sales meeting with your service advisors? Our guess is that you have never had such a meeting. Now you probably hold a weekly (or monthly) sales meeting with your vehicle sales people – so why don't you set aside a day each week (or month) to meet with your service advisors? At these meetings you may wish to set aside some time to coach them on selling skills eg how to identify and overcome objections, how to answer the phone, how to up-sell. Just remember, selling is selling – whether it is vehicles or service or parts. You don't need to have specific service skills to do this. Your service advisors would appreciate the fact that you are involved and interested in their department.

Turn your service writers into service advisors.....and watch the dollars flow in!

Five steps to help your Service Advisors become true Service Professionals:

- Develop the ability to listen to what the customer is saying. Pay full attention when the customer is describing his or her needs, concerns & problems.
- Make sure you understand completely what the customer is saying. Do not assume that you know what the customer's concerns are. Ask questions to verify the information you have gained.
- Use your knowledge and expertise to search for different ways to solve the customer's problems and resolve their concerns.
- Make the customer comfortable with your recommendations. Unless the customer is comfortable with you as a service advisor or problem solver, they won't feel comfortable with the solutions you recommend.
- Accept the fact that service writers sell for today, while service advisors are professionals who build long-term relationships with customers that lead to repeat sales.

Source: Dealers Edge Service Advisor

For additional information, please contact your
Auswild Dealer Management Services Team

Vincent Choy Greg Jepsen James Dick Lee Payne

(02) 9588 0100

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