

# CUSTOMER RETURNS

## Could Your Fixed Ops Department Benefit From A Full-time Retention Manager?

By Andrew Wolfe

**W**hen we're surrounded by iPods and WiFi, it's hard to imagine there was a time when computers were just for geeks, not essential tools of business. In our industry, it's no secret we were a bit slow on the draw to incorporate PCs into our business models. E-mail? That was a whole other ballgame.

Almost a decade later, it's amazing how tech-savvy dealers have become. They were always interested in customer service, be it claim checks that double as business reply postcards or CSI surveys, even full-blown business development centers. The hodge-podge approach of getting customers to return to your showroom and service bays works... but taking retention seriously is going to become a full-time job, if not its own department. Mark my words.

Here's a paradigm shifting idea - consider employing a full time Retention Manager (RM). The job posting might look something like:

"Dealership seeks candidate with customer service training and marketing experience. Qualified applicants should be technology savvy and quick on their feet. Think concierge." A concierge at a hotel is one-stop shopping for everything a guest needs, from restaurant recommendations to directions to the theater. Most dealerships don't have a person employed with this skill set. Sure, everyone in your dealership is friendly and accommodating, but who is calling on first-time buyers to make sure they are satisfied and then, might refer a friend?

Each customer needs an advocate; someone to hold his or her hand and make sure the process of buying or servicing a vehicle is pleasant. Maybe they need more than

a phone call or a letter in the mail. The ideal RM isn't afraid to think out of the box to make customers happy. As a dealer, you might consider them to be the "new idea person."

The RM would be in charge of working with all of the departments at your dealership to come up with a plan that touches on every part of the business; they are the ringleaders. Having one person work with all of your managers will provide economies of scale and get everyone talking about how sales affect service and how service affects accounting. No matter what department, customer retention will soon become a vital ingredient in your recipe for success.

The RM would also be responsible for making sure each one of your department heads is doing what they do best... and incorporating retention, as a goal, throughout. Whether you run the books, create the marketing strategy or write service invoices, the RM will be with you to make sure that throughout those processes you are keeping the customer, and his or her return visit, in mind.

Anytime you can get your employees to focus and become a specialist rather than a generalist, the results and productivity will be greater. Next time you sit down for a company meeting, make sure you ask your Owner, GM, GSM, SM, PM, LM, FOD & CFO to discuss the idea of adding a RM ASAP.

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