



Menu Selling Ain't No Joke

Menu selling of F&I aftermarket products has taken the automotive industry by storm. Indeed, menu selling has become the standard and is now practiced in dealerships of every kind, from New York to California and from North Dakota to North Carolina.

Why?

There are a number of reasons, really. Most importantly, menu selling encourages F&I managers to give the same presentation to every customer, without prejudice.

I was changing channels recently and came across an old episode of the "The Cosby Show." In it, Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable, portrayed by Bill Cosby, and his TV son, Theo,

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played by Malcolm Jamal-Warner, try to conceal their family's financial circumstances to get a better deal on a new car. They are unshaven and wear old clothes. The truth is, they look just this side of homeless.

The idea, of course, is a negotiating ploy designed to elicit the lowest possible price on the vehicle, which by appearances the customers couldn't afford. As is the case with all classic sitcoms, their plan goes awry and hilarity ensues.

The reason the award-winning comedy enjoyed eight seasons on network television was its reality-based humor. Credit bureaus aside, don't think consumers won't do whatever is necessary in their minds to get the best deal possible — and that includes dressing down when the occasion calls for it.

Giving the same menu presentation to each and every customer encourages a consistency that pays huge dividends on the back end. All car salespeople and F&I managers have stories similar to that "Cosby Show" episode.

There are, of course, additional benefits to the menu presentation that are equally important and are worth their weight in gold, platinum or other similarly named aftermarket options.

Correctly prepared menus shield dealers from litigation by consumers who claim they weren't offered the valuable protections the dealerships sell. The menu provides proof that the dealer's array of products was indeed offered, and either accepted or declined. It also fully discloses the prices of the products, a huge advance over such ethically and morally questionable practices as, "It's included in the price." The litigation protection alone makes the menu a tasty choice.

However, it's not just the dealerships that benefit.

Customers who have spent hours negotiating their deal are often worn out by the time they reach the finance office. They are looking to complete their transaction as quickly as possible, and using an F&I menu certainly expedites the process. Furthermore, customers learn exactly what they are paying for — the costs and the coverage — so they can make an informed decision. By keeping time- and value-conscious customers happy, dealerships are increasing their CSI ratings.

And that, in turn, makes dealers happy.

To take advantage of this latest dealership trend, software and aftermarket companies, along with training schools and seminar instructors, have developed an abundance of products and techniques to maximize the effectiveness of this approach. These include a variety of computer-generated, multicolored charts and forms, word tracks, objection-handling procedures and other ancillary aides. In fact, the F&I menu has generated its own cottage industry, as any search of Yahoo! or other search engines will attest.

F&I Management & Technology applauds the menu presentation for providing benefits to both the dealership and the consumer. When that happens, the industry moves forward in a positive manner.

And that, my friends, is no laughing matter. ■