



SERVICE CENTER WITH DAVE SKROBOT

ACCESSORIES: FINAL FRONTIER

Consider this: New and used cars selling well, finance & insurance making decent grosses, fixed operations consumer satisfaction scoring high CSI and labor sales rocking.

What's left for a dealer to do? Hit the golf course? Tempting. But work challenges and new opportunities keeps us fresh. That's why one dealer principal I know has a new challenge this year. He wants to take his accessories business to new heights.

Many dealerships overlook that side of the business. Sure, the occasional running board, bug deflector, and headlight guards get sold. But overall there's plenty of money left on the table. Too often, it goes to specialty shops, truck outfitters, jobber stores, Pep Boys, Wal-mart and such.

New-car buyers spend an average of \$600-\$800 on accessories, according to the Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association (SEMA). Truck buyers average \$1,000-\$1,700 on their rigs. We're not just talking about gun racks and Confederate flag decals.

Considering the number of parts and accessories out there, the opportunity list is endless. So how do the dealerships get more accessories sales?

Here are some suggestions:

- Involve the F&I department.
- Motivate service and parts department employees to move those products.
- Get sales staff to sell accessories.

Let's look at the pros and cons.

The best way to sell accessories (or anything for that matter) is to show and tell.

Some forward-thinking F&I managers have a display wall where they showcase things like bug deflectors, headlight guards, 3M paint guard, running boards and bedliner (mock ups) as well as remote car starts and the like.

A few displayed accessories, especially smaller ticket items, smoothes the transition from first meeting the customer

to getting them to say "yes" to accessories, according to Dave Richardson, financial services manager at Charlesglen Toyota.

Once the customer says "yes" to accessories, it's easier for them to say "yes" to extended service contracts and accident/disability insurance and the other F&I products.

But there's a problem with relying on the F&I department to sell all the accessories. By the time the customer is finished in the F&I office, he feels his wallet is emptier than a Rave party at a senior citizen center.

The best way to sell accessories is to show and tell.

Some dealerships rely on the parts and service departments to sell the accessories. Traditionally, dealerships have a small accessories display area in that section of the store to show a few faster-moving items.

Whoopee. The problem is that some dealerships have displayed the same mud flaps, floor mats and bug deflectors since Lee Iacocca was with Ford.

This is why some fixed operations departments have established a new position: an accessories manager. His or her responsibilities are to merchandise and sell accessories.

Some of you are thinking: "We do not have the resources nor the sales to justify one dedicated person to staff such a new department."

Sunridge Nissan in Calgary considered that before the dealership created such a position. So they "multi-tasked" that one person. That person is also in charge of delivering the sold new and used vehicles as well.

There can be numerous job-sharing positions for an accessories manager: telephone follow up, customer development,

maintenance reminder administrator. I like the idea of that person delivering the vehicles. It's a good fit.

A bad fit is the showroom salesperson selling the accessories. Most sales people's primary focus is to sell more vehicles.

Generally the mark up isn't big on accessories. So heavily "greasing" the salespeople for such tasks is not financially prudent. Besides, a lot of sales people will tell you it's hard enough selling the car, let alone accessories.

Assume that the showroom salesperson is delivering the new car, and during the middle of that, one of his "come-backs" arrives.

The delivery process is now rushed so that the new owner does not have any idea that the manufacturer running boards when installed at the dealership are covered by the full manufacturer's three-year warranty in contrast to a year warranty from aftermarket stores.

If you're lucky, the customer has another opportunity to become aware of the breadth and depth of parts/accessories available for that "spanking new vehicle."

At customer car clinics which some dealerships sponsor, new buyers should be made aware of the accessories and how they benefit and add resale value to their new purchase. If not, then your staff is missing a huge opportunity to educate a captive customer.

To capture more of the accessories business, a dealership should dedicate one staffer to this area, whether that position is full or part time.

One person should be responsible for all accessories. If it's left up to everyone to look after something like that, then sometimes everyone assumes the other guy's doing it. If that happens, the final frontier of accessory sales becomes unreachable. ■

If you would like to find out how effective your dealership is at promoting service contracts through the service drive, fax 403-283-4188 or email skroby@aol.com.