

Reaping the Benefits of Selling to Women

Part 1 - Question your actions - or lack of them

by Gerry Myers

Like most dealers, you are probably interested in selling more successfully to women and think you are doing everything you can to attract, recruit and promote women within the dealership. But is there more you could be doing?

While dealers spend millions on advertising, little is directly spent to bring more women into the dealership, either as customers or employees. If you aren't getting your share of the multi-billion dollar market segment, perhaps you should refocus some of your time and dollars. Your first steps are:

- Evaluate your dealership.
- Assess your current situation.
- Decide how successful your current strategies are.
- Accept the power and size of the women's market.
- Acknowledge what needs to be changed.
- Determine willingness to allocate the resources necessary to make those changes.

Now answer the following questions:

Are you being proactive?

Review your last 12-18 months. Have you done anything to enhance your recruitment of women as sales and services advisors? Have you done anything to promote women to managers? Are you training your staff to respect women and to sell to them more successfully and, more often, rather than just once? Is the appearance of your facility appealing to women? These are all important aspects of having a culture that is female-friendly.

Is the women's market a priority in your business plan?

When you write your business plan, whether it's for six months, a year or five years, you should set goals in the area of the women's market, just as you would with any other business item. Managers need to be held accountable to meet the goals outlined in the plan on the hiring and promotion of women, as well as selling to women.

Is talking about the financial impact women can have on your business a regular part of your sales meetings?

When you talk about increasing business, learning new sales techniques and useful tips, do you point out specific information on how to sell more successfully to women? If not, perhaps you are not conveying the importance of this market to your staff. Try using some statistics about the women's market to grab their attention. Then provide information about the best way to greet female customers, negotiate with them and close the deal with women.

How many women work in the sales and service departments?

If the number is small or zero, what are you doing to change that picture? Have you had women in sales before, but don't now? Why did they leave? Is your culture female-friendly, including flex hours, team selling, facility appearance, sales and service peoples' acceptance, mentoring, education, etc.? Perhaps you need to give bonuses or some type of incentive for leads to recruit females. Another terrific source is asking current customers for referrals of potential sales and service advisors.

How many women managers do you currently have?

If the answer is none, as most dealerships would answer, how can you change that? Do you have women you can promote from inside the organization? Are you aggressively recruiting women so that the pipeline to management is always full, rather than always empty? Setting goals to make your dealership better reflect the populations you sell to will increase business. This includes minorities as well as women.

What steps are you taking to hire and promote more women?

Are you advertising in newspaper sections women read more frequently, rather than just the classifieds? If you place recruitment ads, be sure it states that you are looking for a few good women and men, with women being listed first, but ads may not be the best way to reach women. Tell your current employees and customers what your goals are. Solicit their help. Use Internet ads that mention women. Think about inviting women to interview who provide you great service at restaurants, are friendly receptionists, or personable, smart employees of other facilities you frequent.

Participate in high school trade fairs and let both men and women know the wonderful career opportunities and the financial rewards available in the automotive industry. Having the right personality and attitude is more important than product knowledge, initially. Thinking outside the box increases your success. Providing proper training and a congenial and supportive atmosphere increases her success.

What percentage of your general budget is being devoted to this effort?

Like any other business activity, successful recruiting and training of both men and women requires time and money. Hiring the right people, creating an employee friendly work environment and providing a positive culture doesn't just happen. Allocate a reasonable amount of your budget to promotions that will attract women to your dealership. Then ensure success by funding recruiting efforts and training sessions. If done properly, the money spent should be returned multiple times in happy, successful employees and customers.

In Part 11 in the next issue the following questions will be addressed.

1. If what you have done in the past isn't working, are you trying new things?
2. Is your advertising appealing to women?
3. Does your facility appeal to women?
4. How female friendly is the service department?
5. Why would I want to shop at your dealership or refer my friends?
6. Is your sales staff professional, knowledgeable and interested in increasing its customer base with women?

http://www.dealer-magazine.com/articles.asp?article_id=719

7. Do women customers feel special? Do they know you appreciate them?

If you have additional questions, recommendations for fellow dealers or comments, please let me know.

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