

Reaping the Benefits of Selling to Women

Part II - Question your actions - or lack of them

by Gerry Myers

In my last column, Part I, I addressed the following questions regarding your dealership's commitment to selling to women. Let's review:

1. Are you being proactive?
2. Is the women's market a priority in your business plan?
3. Is talking about the financial impact women can have on your business a regular part of your sales meetings?
4. How many women work in the sales and service departments?
5. How many women managers do you currently have?
6. What steps are you taking to hire and promote more women?
7. What percentage of your general budget is being devoted to this effort? Your marketing budget? Your recruiting and training budget?

This month, for Part II, let's dig further into these matters. Answer these questions:

If what you have done in the past isn't working, are you trying new things?

The old saying, practice makes perfect isn't true. Practice makes permanent. And as Dr. Phil would say, if you are doing the same thing and getting the same results, what does that tell you? If you are continually losing women customers, or she nixes the deal that he wants, you need to re-evaluate your techniques.

Is your advertising appealing to women? Is your web site?

Both web sites and advertising play to the visual senses. Advertising should entice customers into your dealership, not turn them off. Ads that show dad with the kids, moms in a favorable light or as professionals all grab women's attention. Ads that make dads look competent as well as the women in the ads are better received than ads that show men as brainless creatures. Web sites can be a great resource for women doing their homework, as well as a great lead-generator for you. Make sure your dealership has a web site that is easy to navigate, informational and has someone whose job it is to respond to e-mails within a matter of hours.

Does your facility appeal to women?

Curb appeal is as important in dealerships as it is in houses. But the real test is inside. Making some simple and inexpensive changes in the look of the facility can increase your business. Is your facility clean, open and inviting? Replace plants that are half dead and droopy with lush, beautiful foliage, demonstrating that the dealership provides good care and attention to little things. Is the ladies restroom clean and fresh looking? Add an extra feminine touch with fresh-cut flowers or other niceties. Is the salesperson's desk and office neat and orderly or cluttered with out-of-date literature, coffee cups and ashtrays? Is there an area for children to safely play?

How female-friendly is the service department?

Do your sales consultants regularly introduce customers to a service advisor when the car is purchased or delivered? Does the service area offer complimentary coffee, magazines that appeal to women, and laptop connections? Do you schedule appointments? Is she quoted a fair price and the work done on time, on budget and correct the first time? Like many customers, some women are unfamiliar with the details of auto service and repair. Is the service advisor pleasant and helpful, putting a woman in her comfort zone, without being condescending?

Why would I want to shop at your dealership or refer my friends?

To put it bluntly, would your wife, mother-in-law or daughter do business with you if they weren't related? The answer to this important question should be because of the dealership's reputation and the relationship and rapport your sales and service staff have established by respecting her, being knowledgeable about your products, showing her integrity, building trust and answering all her questions completely, but without unnecessary technical complexity.

Is your sales staff professional, knowledgeable and interested in increasing their customer base with women?

Why not give them the tools, expertise and motivation to succeed? Provide ongoing training at regularly scheduled sessions to keep the value of women customers paramount. Give tips on selling to women at each staff meeting. Let top producers in this area share their best practices and insights. Make it a company goal, with incentives and rewards for good work. Make it important to you, so it is important to the sales and service people.

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

All customers like to be appreciated and women are no exception. Have a Customer Appreciation Day annually and include all your customers, not just the ones who bought during that year. Send customers thank you notes when they buy, and remember them with birthday, anniversary and Thanksgiving cards and discount coupons throughout the year. Your diligence in keeping in front of them will bring them back when they need service or want to purchase or lease another vehicle. The feeling associated with buying a vehicle and servicing it with you should be a pleasant experience. Tell women you appreciate their buying from you and you look forward to serving them again. Respect, courtesy and a sincere thank you build goodwill and good customers.

Take time to really look at what is happening in your dealership. Question your sales and service associates. Make sure you provide them tools that will drive your business with female buyers. Pay attention to small details.

Take actions that will attract more women customers and employees. Provide what women want not because it is a politically correct action, but because it is a sound business decision. And like other sound business decisions, increasing your customer base with loyal women customers will advance your profitability for years to come.

Tips on Selling to Women

1. Listen to what women want.
2. Treat women fairly.
3. Provide exceptional service.
4. Be sincere, honest, trustworthy, knowledgeable and professional.
5. Understand that men and women relate differently to the same situation and treatment.
6. Know that women usually value considerate treatment more than the performance of the engine.
7. If a woman customer is happy with her sales and service experience, be sure your consultants are asking for referrals.
8. Support organizations, issues and causes important to women.
9. Realize the economic clout women have and the impact they can have on your bottom line.
10. Make sure no one, including the receptionist, calls her honey, dear or sweetie.
11. When selling to a couple, talk to both. Either one can kill the sale.
12. Invoke the Golden Rule. Treat each customer, especially women, like you would like to be treated. In fact, as you would like your mother, wife or daughter to be treated.

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