



### **“Walk a mile in the Internet Manager’s shoes”**

Whenever I work with dealerships to improve an Internet department I ask the Internet manager if their dealer understands the role of the Internet within the dealership and what is expected of the Internet manager. The answer comes back in multiple forms but generally suggests that the Dealer understands an Internet department is a necessary part of their business but is not familiar with how it all works and how to help the Internet manager be more successful and get “good results”. The “good results” typically mean vehicle sales and profits. Both the dealer and the Internet manager agree on this overarching goal but the confusion seems to occur in how the department should work and why the results don’t happen in a predictable fashion.

In exploring this situation time and again I’ve found the most basic of explanations; the dealer has never experienced the role of an Internet manager. This sounds too simple but a typical Dealer works in various departments during their climb to the dealer position and are able to integrate their first hand experience into being a better leader. Dealers have generally been sales people and sales managers but the Internet role was not even available when they came up through the ranks. The same situation occurred when finance departments first started and many dealerships had to integrate these new profit centers into their sales department. Since the automotive Internet started coming of age in the late 90’s most present day dealers were in more typical sales management positions and did not develop these departments first hand or manage Internet leads.

This is a bigger concern than you might initially think. When you manage your dealership staff you can think back to when you were in the role and offer support based on experience. I often hear sales managers say “when I was on the floor....” or Dealers say “when I was the used car manager.....” which gives them and their sales team the comfort of experience. I can only remember a few instances where a sales manager said “when I was the Internet manager.....” Why is this lack of operational experience with the Internet an issue? Well, for one thing it means that the Internet manager is typically working blindly to set up or improve a department. To their credit I find them very active in trying to read everything they can get their hands on to soak up the best processes and practices. Secondly, the Internet manager does not have a supervisor that knows how to judge a good or bad performance or whether progress is being made except by the most basic standard of selling vehicles. Imagine how nice it would be for the Internet manager to hear “relax, this will all come together just fine – I remember when I had a similar issue when I was running this department”.

When a dealer gets involved and supports a department the manager and the department usually operates at a high level. The opportunity to work with your Internet manager first hand is available to you and your managers each day. I recommend working a few leads, responding to some emails and making some calls. When we first started our dealership’s Internet department I handled all the leads myself just to find out what we would need as we tapped into this growing opportunity. This was the best possible experience for me and allowed me to help shape a very successful department. Selling over the Internet is something we all need to experience and one I think you’ll find quite enjoyable.

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