

Rethinking the Showroom Generation Gap

THE MAGAZINE'S NEWEST CONTRIBUTOR SAYS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OLD CAR DAWGS AND NEW-AGE TECHIES DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TUMULTUOUS.

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By Scott Bergeron



It happens in virtually every dealership: There's a war between veteran salespeople who were brought up with four-squares, sales boards, production-based commissions and tenacious closing skills — a.k.a. old car dawgs — and the iPhone 6-wearing, social media-following, email-quoting, unaggressive new-age techies.

Old car dawgs look at the techies and see clerks, while techies look at the old dawgs and see dinosaurs. Whether your sales team includes more dawgs, more techies or an even mix, you know each generation brings a unique talent to your sales floor and your bottom line. By combining the best of both worlds, you can really make a positive impact on performance and profits.

Customer Preferences

Think about today's typical car shopper. Armed with ample resources to research pricing, quality and reliability before visiting a dealership, this shopper tends to be much more savvy and well-informed than in years past. This shopper also wants to be "enrolled" in the car buying process, not hard-sold.

That said, today's car shoppers still have a strong desire to meet an expert who can answer questions and guide them through the process. Mere order-takers aren't going to fulfill expectations, and the same goes for the salesperson more interested in hard-selling than listening.

That's why the best solution is to combine the tools and techniques utilized by dawgs and techies. Somewhere in the mix is the right blend of listening, providing information and offering solid guidance — all in an environment in which the prospect feels heard, respected and comfortable.

There's a lot of opportunity in today's marketplace and countless ways for customers to reach your dealership. This ultimately gives you more options to create unique processes and cultures in your store, close more deals and add market share.

The challenge I've seen in most dealerships is that dawgs and techies spend too much energy battling each other, typically with little intervention or direction from the higher-ups. Both sides are left to their own devices, ultimately costing everyone more deals. It's totally insane that all this energy is spent internally rather than being used to improve performance storewide.

And that's where you come in. You are their leader, coach and mentor. You know that each sales type has unique talents. If you can create a culture and processes to marry the two, you can create an atmosphere of productive focus, accountability and teamwork.

Veteran Presence

If you're a young dealer or manager, take a moment to consider the state of today's auto industry from the perspective of your old car dawgs. For years, all they needed was a pencil, a worksheet, a little common sense and personality, and a desk man who knew how to work the deals. Veteran salespeople have talent and experience, and they know how to close. So they are far from being dinosaurs.

But today, more than 80% of all prospects are researching and sometimes even purchasing through the Internet. What's a talented and tenacious old car dawg to do? The solution is simple: Combine their experience and talent with the techies' digital acumen. Not only do the techies get to learn new (OK, maybe old) techniques, but the old dawgs can learn a thing or two about embracing new technologies and techies as a whole. Here are four key points to keep in mind:



1. Today's customers need space, but they still need to be closed. Fewer than five years ago, the average customer visited as many as four dealerships before he or she bought. Today, customers will visit fewer than two stores. Do the math: If a prospect is in your dealership and is not taking delivery, you won't get a second chance, no matter how good your follow-up efforts are. Hence, an old, nasty term called the "turnover" is making a huge comeback, especially with big dealer groups. I'm not talking about the TO to F&I; I'm talking about the act of introducing a prospect to a second, more experienced salesperson who can keep the deal moving forward. It's an old-school concept that is proving highly effective for those who are employing it.

2. Put first things first. As a sales manager or dealer, you must honestly assess your sales team. We know nobody wants to be pigeonholed or put into a category, but each salesperson has strengths and weaknesses. And each leans one way more than another. You need to decide who is more experienced, who is less experienced and who you think would be able to help his or her peers with setting more appointments, learning more technology and, yes, even taking a turnover when he or she is available.

3. Split deals still equal one whole deal for the store. Create a workable marriage between the two distinct sales types and you can develop several two-person teams that can help each other when they most need it. I'm not advocating teaming everyone up for every deal; just when they could use the help. In addition to ramping up units and gross, the high-profile example of this type of teamwork can quickly become standard practice.

4. Implement a no-exception TO policy. Once your team sees how successful a proper turnover can be, they'll adopt it, and the dollars added to their commissions or paychecks will ensure they'll never abandon it. After all, the primary motivator is money, and this is a solid way to make more of it.

A long-term goal for every dealer and manager is to help their sales teams work together in increasingly effective ways. Convince your old car dawgs and new-age techies to step outside their traditional roles and embrace a hybrid approach that's both timeless and timely. Nobody wants to split a deal, but when the choice is between securing the deal or no deal, it's your store and your rules. Your salespeople will ultimately thank you for the boost in their commissions.

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