

"Interview Customer to Raise Sales and Profits"

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Are you interested in raising sales and profits? Of course! To do so, first realize that our number one role as F&I managers is to control the sale and get the vehicle delivered. In order to accomplish this, we need to see every customer at the point of commitment and conduct an interview. First let's look at why, then we'll look at how to most effectively accomplish this.

Think of the times when you have had a lender call you back requesting more information on a deal. How about when a customer has been allowed to leave the store and they return with a cashier's check because they arranged their own financing? Sometimes you spot-deliver a customer and for now we'll assume you have all of the data you need on them. How about the ones you don't spot-deliver? Why didn't you deliver the vehicle? Poor credit score? Short job time? Lack of equity? Will any of these things change between now and when the lender calls you back? Then let's put our best foot forward by interviewing the customer and getting all of the information up front.

The first reason to see the customer at the point of commitment and conduct an interview is to research all of the information before you submit the deal to your lenders. The best way to get a loan approved is to present your best case on the initial submission. By researching and documenting information, you'll be ready to discuss and sell the deal when you speak to your lenders. Your credibility is enhanced when you can relate first hand information rather than depending on the salesperson to follow up and get it right.

The second reason you should conduct an interview is to be sure you can structure the deal correctly before you submit it. This will reduce the number of "re-hash" calls you have to make, which makes your job easier and improves your lender relationships. Remember, the lender should never know more about your customer than you do!

The third reason you should always interview the customer is to build the credibility with your sales team. When you pull a credit report and decide not to spot the customer and telling the salesperson to have your customer check back in a couple of hours, you have made two critical mistakes. One, you gave up control of the sale. Two, you will probably have questions after they leave and you'll have trouble getting the answers quickly.

Now let's talk about how to do the interview. You see, one of the biggest reasons F&I managers resist conducting the interview is their fear that they will have to disclose financial information too soon. The reality is that if you don't conduct the interview, many of these customers will not make it to delivery at your store. Oh, they'll end up driving a vehicle, just not yours! Here are a couple of tips:

1. Take charge of the interview by asking the questions and following up with questions. Be frank that we are still in the approval process so interest rates, terms, and payments are still to be determined. Then ask another question to control the flow of the conversation. Let your sincere desire to help the customer come through and they will be open to your questions.
2. Don't take the credit bureau report out and review it with the customer. This may violate the agreement you have with the credit reporting firms and isn't necessary. Instead, ask broad, open-ended questions and encourage the customer to talk. In most cases they will.
3. Conduct the interview away from your office so you don't have immediate access to your computer and lender information. This also gives you a reason not to divulge terms too soon.

The bottom line is you will sell more vehicles, hold more gross, and improve your approval ratios with a customer interview. Give me a call at 877-651-1032 or e-mail me at mike.boolos@assurant.com and let me know what impact these key steps are having for you.