

Protect Your Dealership From Theft

By Scott Ferguson

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After securing the main gate shut, the dealership owners leave with peace of mind knowing the inventory is safe. When they return the next morning, the gates are wide open and damaged. The thick steel pipe protecting the gate has been cut, and a vehicle from the inventory has been stolen.

This is one of many techniques thieves are utilizing to steal cars from dealerships. While some thieves are more apt to using this method and sneaking in once the dealership empties of salespeople and prospective buyers, other thieves have devised bold, risky plans. Here's another example: With a partner in hand, a thief will ask to test drive a vehicle. The partner assumes the role of distracting the salesperson as the test driver slips the spare key from the ring. After explaining to the salesperson that the car does not meet their needs, they drive away. At this point, they go to the nearest hardware store and make a copy of the key. As soon as a few hours later and in broad daylight, the thieves return and simply drive off the lot with the car. On a busy sales day, this can go unnoticed.

Another way this type of theft happens is at dealerships that don't require a salesperson to accompany a prospective buyer when test driving a vehicle. While the salesperson thinks the buyer is checking the breaks and testing

the speed, the prospective buyer is meeting up with their partner to have a duplicate key made.

The list could go on and on with all of the creative ways car thieves operate, but when it comes right down to it, all that matters is keeping your inventory safe. The following is a list of scenarios to look out for, and suggestions to help better protect your dealership from auto thieves.

MAKE A COPY

This may seem redundant but many dealerships have relaxed on this very basic rule of thumb. Before allowing a prospective buyer to test drive a vehicle, ask them for a valid driver's license. Be sure and check that the person in the license is the same person preparing to drive off the lot with your vehicle. It wouldn't hurt to ask for two forms of identification and make copies of both.

MANAGE THE KEYS

Do not keep a spare key on the same key ring that you hand over to the prospective buyer. Make sure to safeguard spare keys in a lock box and limit the number of people who have access to them. It would be helpful to keep a login of all the people who check out keys.

Fifteen minutes is all it takes for a thief to drive off the lot

NO TEST DRIVING ALONE

It is important to send a salesperson with a prospective buyer on a test drive. Fifteen minutes is all it takes for a thief to drive off the lot, meet a partner to duplicate the key, and return to the dealership with just enough time to tell you they're not interested in the car.

SAFEGUARD LOT ACCESS


Make it more difficult for the thief by installing an extra lock or alarm system on the gate. Having security guards monitor the dealership overnight also is a precaution worth taking. Be sure to regularly check your dealership's security cameras to ensure they are monitoring the correct areas of the dealership. Dealership owners have a variety of options available to them in the way of modern security cameras. First, a basic security camera can be programmed to only monitor and record the high-risk areas of the dealership. Other cameras

are set-up to sweep the lot regularly as well zone in on areas triggered by motion detectors. More advanced security systems allow users to view live or recorded video via the Internet. Some convenience features include notifying users via e-mail if a motion alarm is triggered.

INSTALL GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEMS ON YOUR INVENTORY (GPS)

This may be a more expensive method to protecting your inventory, but it is effective in locating your cars once they've been taken off the dealership lot. There are several different options available. There is the basic GPS system which attaches anywhere on the car and can trace the car's location via satellite technology. Other GPS products allow drivers to map their car via the Internet. For instance, drivers can monitor their vehicle online and in the event of a theft notify police of the car's location. Some GPS systems have service providers that track the vehicles for them. Other GPS systems offer convenience features such as geo fences and Quickfence™ notification. This means a dealer would be notified immediately via a text or e-mail if any of the cars were moved from the dealership.

Keep in mind, theft does not always mean the car is stolen. In some cases, dealership employees will borrow a car for a weekend getaway and return the car to the dealership unnoticed. GPS systems with Quickfence™ notification capabilities provide protection from this by notifying the dealer immediately via a text or e-mail if the car strays too far from the dealership.

The best advice available and supported by organizations such as the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators (IAATI) is to take every precaution within your dealerships' reach. If you make the thief's job more difficult, they'll be less inclined to take the risk. Keep current on security options and inform salespeople of scenarios to watch out for. If you've been a victim of theft before, take the time to reevaluate the security you currently have in place and troubleshoot the issues. There's never a guarantee to protect theft, but these tips will reduce the chances your inventory leaves the lot without your consent. 

Scott Ferguson founded Inilex in 2003 after more than 15 years of experience in marketing, operations, and product and revenue management at several self-started companies.