

Ordering Off the Menu

by : Sandi Jerome

When I was an F&I manager, it was easy. The vehicles came with a 12-month warranty and I only had the extended warranty and credit insurance to sell. I would enter the deal and write down the three payment options on a scratch pad before the customer came in. It was an early version of the current high-tech menu software. We all know menu selling is the way to go in the F&I office. But as with any great process, it is an ever-developing entity. Today with at least a half-dozen options, the effective F&I managers are embracing electronic menus. Unlike a one-dimensional paper menu, electronic menus allow for a truly interactive experience with the customer.

Menu systems such as National Auto Care's 400% Solution, create a unique environment in which the customer feels engaged during the entire F&I process. In addition to a complete presentation of products, features include audio/visual presentation tools, product rating and contract submission. Furthermore, the dealership is able to achieve and prove 100 percent F&I sales compliance with powerful reporting tools that also aid in sales training. New technology products such as NAC's 400% Solution are so streamlined and easy to use that the F&I manager simply can do their jobs and let the customer "order from the menu."

Moving into the service department another menu tool showing promise is Service Driver, available through both CIMA Systems (www.cimasystems.net) and Management Consulting Services (www.simmonsmcs.com). Service Driver helps dealerships provide online manufacturer recommended service menus based on a vehicle's specific model, year and current mileage, as well as pricing based on the dealer's labor rate and parts pricing or the dealer's desired price. In addition, online audio/video clips of selected recommended repairs are available to the consumer. When Service Driver is combined with CIMA's other tools, a customer is able to go through the process and then schedule a service appointment online, all without the need of additional service department involvement. Because Service Driver automates the estimate and scheduling process, customers come to their appointment well-informed and aware of the total cost of service, increasing CSI scores for the service department.

Here's a quick example of the way the system would work in your dealership: You send the customer a notice that their vehicle is due for service along with a link to your web site. Once they go to your web site, they click on the "recommended services" link and are connected to the Service Driver menu. From there, your customer can review what needs to be done to their vehicle, how much it will cost and a video of the procedure. Once your customer feels comfortable, they can schedule an appointment with your service department online. It doesn't get any easier than that. To find out more about Service Driver, visit CIMA Systems or MCS at the web addresses shown earlier.

As always with new technology, the aim is for your staff to make more profit with less effort. All technology involves a learning curve and I know that it is hard to get employees to change. Hopefully you'll attend my NADA workshop in San Francisco next month or the spring Digital Dealer Conference & Exposition where I'll be discussing new technology and help you get through the maze of products. I haven't developed a menu for your choices yet, but let's hope your customers will be ordering everything from the menu!

Sandi Jerome is a former controller, CFO, system administrator, F&I, assistant GM, and fixed operations manager with over 20 years experience in the automotive industry. She is the owner of Sandi Jerome Computer Consulting.