

# Addressing F&I's Internet Problem



BY RON REAHARD

A frustrated F&I manager poses an increasingly common question: How do you sell protection products to customers who demand the final price by phone and then show up with a bank check?

**This month's question comes via email from an F&I manager who wishes to remain anonymous, which might even save me a YETI.** He (or she) writes, "At our dealership, we sell a ton of cars online to people from out of town. Typically, these customers will call to get the final numbers before coming to the dealership. So the first time I see them is when they come to pick up their car, usually with a check from their bank or credit union in hand. How am I supposed to sell these people my products?"

This situation is challenging for any F&I manager, because rarely will you get the customer to take that check back to the credit union and finance through you. Selling intangibles also requires the use of visual aids, which is impossible to do over the phone. And retailing numerous vehicles per month outside of your normal trade area is also becoming a regular occurrence in most dealerships.

Customers now begin shopping for a vehicle online, just like they do for every other product. Jeff Bezos has become a billionaire by making it easy for all of us to sit at home in our La-Z-Boys and shop online. It's what our customers want and expect to be able to do as well — a quick, easy, Amazon-like buying experience.

When a customer requests final numbers online or over the phone before coming to the dealership, you and the sales manager must already know what to do. This is a common, everyday request. That's why I'm amazed at how few dealerships have a process in place to handle it.

The sales manager can determine the reason the customer needs that information. If the customer commits to buying the vehicle over the phone and asks that it be held until he arrives, the sales manager should request a deposit. However, it should be the F&I manager who gets the customer's credit card information.

If the customer needs the total amount for his bank or credit union, only the business manager should be allowed to calculate the sales tax, title, and license fees to ensure they're all correct. This also creates a valid reason for the customer to talk to the F&I manager, since he hasn't actually committed to buying the vehicle.

This introduction should be done while the customer is still

online or on the phone. Now, your initial customer contact is critical. It requires a smile in your voice, a sincere appreciation for the customer's decision to purchase from your dealership, and a "How can I help this person?" mentality. Realistically, it may be the only opportunity you have to convert an outside finance customer and sell your products.

Since you're limited on time, you must have a very precise process for discovering the customer's intentions. You need to know exactly which open-ended questions you want to ask and when you want to ask them during the conversation, such as "How

are you going to want the vehicle titled?" and "Who will the lienholder be?" At this point, the customer only wants to provide the minimum information necessary to get what he wants: the final figures. So the entire process has to be perceived as expediting the delivery of the vehicle once the customer arrives.

If you determine the customer is requesting final figures so he can go to his lender, you can either attempt to convert the customer or at least delay the customer from making a final decision until after he comes to the dealership. Because we work with multiple finance sources, we may be able to arrange more attractive terms that better suit the customer's needs. Plus, there are options and accessories he may want to consider once he arrives.

At some point, we still have to determine which F&I products the customer needs, and why he needs them. Any needs-discovery questions will have to be interspersed throughout this brief conversation at the appropriate time.

Regardless of how a customer chooses to buy the vehicle, the easier, and the more enjoyable and more valuable we make the F&I experience, the more products we will sell and the more money we'll make.

If you have a question you would like answered or an objection you struggle with, send it to me. You'll get it answered and receive a free YETI with your name on it. Because it's also a beautiful day to help a customer — or an F&I manager! ■

**"WHEN A CUSTOMER REQUESTS FINAL NUMBERS ONLINE OR OVER THE PHONE BEFORE COMING TO THE DEALERSHIP, YOU AND THE SALES MANAGER MUST ALREADY KNOW WHAT TO DO. THIS IS A COMMON, EVERYDAY REQUEST. THAT'S WHY I'M AMAZED AT HOW FEW DEALERSHIPS HAVE A PROCESS IN PLACE TO HANDLE IT."**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Got a question or objection for Ron? Use your mobile phone to record a brief video (shot landscape style!) of your question and upload it to [go-reahard.com/ask-ron](http://go-reahard.com/ask-ron).