

# A questionnaire to help start 2007 with perspective and focus



BY CHRIS SCHULTHIES

January gives companies like yours and ours the opportunity for a fresh start. With the holidays behind us, our focus turns to the upcoming year and the opportunities that lie ahead. With New Years' resolutions and a rested, alert mind, now is the perfect time to assess your variable operation with a critical eye and a positive outlook.

The following questionnaire asks some thought-provoking questions about your dealership's sales departments. Your answers to the questions may assist you in prioritizing your focus as a dealer principal or general manager with regards to your 2007 plans for these departments.

- Do I have a well-thought-out monthly and annual 2007 forecast based on history, current market conditions, current staffing, salesperson input and closing ratios?

- Have I shared the forecast with my management team and sales staff in detail?

- Have I created and shared my vision of my sales departments goals with my sales managers and sales staff?

- Is my sales department properly staffed to meet — or exceed — my 2007 forecast. Am I under-managed?

- Do I have an on-going recruiting program for salespeople using various methods that will attract quality salespeople?

- Are my pay plans simple, attractive, and competitive in the market place.

- If I were selling cars in my own dealership, would I work for my own pay plan?

- Do our salespeople set their monthly sales objectives? Are they reviewed one-on-one with a manager? Are the salespeople held accountable for their forecast? Are there incentives for meeting or exceeding their forecast?

- Are these my sales manager's priorities: coaching salespeople during the sales process; work deals by offering options and solutions for customers to help close deals; diligent follow-up on unsold customers; set up well-planned sales meetings; coach sales staff?

- Do my management team and I offer an upbeat, positive work environment?

- Do my management team and I strive to keep the sales staff motivated throughout the day, the week and the month or just at sales meetings?

- Do I provide structure and pro-

cess in the form of a dealership sales procedure on the showroom floor? Is it effective, have a good closing ratio. Is it profitable, achieving both volume and gross? Is it modern and customer friendly?

- Is our sales procedure documented, posted and enforced, or do we simply pay lip service to it?

- Do we provide consistent and modern professional training? Do salespeople and managers attend?

- Do we monitor the effectiveness of our sales procedure, sales people and advertising by consistently examining customer traffic counts and closing ratio?

- Do I know what our closing ratio is?

- When working a deal, do we consistently make the customer a proposal that offers various choices of finance and lease payments?

- Do we make it easy for a customer to buy a car or are there too many barriers. Do I find myself refusing to look at a deal from a customer until we have an offer and a deposit. Do I find myself saying "We're not in the appraisal business! We don't give numbers"?

- Are my sales managers always aware of and involved in the deal-making process when showroom guests are with my salespeople or are they managing administrative tasks?

- Do we want our sales managers involved during the sales process or do I want my salespeople to work autonomously with little involvement by sales management?

- Would our salespeople agree that my sales manager is approachable,

positive, enthusiastic and creative when assisting them to close sales?

- Do we consistently try for high gross when working deals or do we sometimes take the path of least resistance?

- Do we consistently try for high volume and high gross or are we satisfied to achieve one or the other?

- Does my dealership have an effective procedure in place to deal with sales calls, e-mail enquiries and follow-up of unsold customers?

- Does our dealership have a sales procedure in place to follow-up and mine my existing portfolio of lease, finance and cash customers?

- Does my dealership have a sales procedure in place to mine customers from my service department and orphaned customer list?

- As a dealer principal or general manager, am I willing to learn, be trained, coached and critiqued, even by those under me?

- Am I receptive and proactive to change — truly?

- Am I receptive to new tools and technology?

- Am I liked and respected by my sales and management team?

- Am I a great boss? Would I enjoy working for me?

Score yourself out of 30. How did you do?

*Chris Schulthies is a senior partner with The Wye Management Group. Wye Management trains salespeople, F&I managers, used-vehicle managers and sales managers throughout North America. He also speaks at dealer conventions and 20 Groups.*

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### STARS, CONTINUED FROM COVER

Front and side-impact tests performed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in the United States don't accurately represent real accidents, he said. According to Davis, manufacturers "tune" vehicles to do well in the specific tests, but some vehicles might not do well in a real-world crash.

"I'm not sure that we would agree in principal that we would provide information to consumers," he added. "There could be some level of comfort that would be misconstrued."

Starting in September 2007, crash test ratings from the NHTSA must be posted on the window spec sheets of new cars sold south of the border.

The requirement is in response to a regulation proposed by Ohio Republican senator Mike DeWine.

Unlike the NHTSA in the United States, Transport Canada does not have a program to obtain crash safety data.

"It's quite an extensive program," said Davis. "The U.S. is much larger than us, so they can purchase the vehicles, do the crash testing."

However, he wouldn't give details regarding Canada's potential to obtain the safety data from the NHTSA through a special arrangement. He said Transport Canada wouldn't always agree on the current test methods.

Patrick Saint Pierre, a spokesper-

son for VW Canada, agrees. He said the tests are performed on American-spec vehicles, so the results wouldn't reflect the performance of models sold in Canada.

"It is a U.S. rating on U.S. products. Unless we would move and do Canadian-like tests on Canadian vehicles, there would be some differences," he said.

For now, consumers will be left in the dark about a vehicle's safety unless they do research on a vehicle's ratings. GM Canada spokesperson Tony LaRocca thinks the average customer will.

"I don't think consumers are naive to the fact that some cars are safer

than others," he said. "The consumers that do research before they go out and shop for a car will know which ones do better than others."

Hyundai spokesperson Tom MacPherson admits it would probably be harder for sales people to sell vehicles with lower crash safety ratings had similar legislation been passed in Canada.

Hyundai, however, has been working to improve the safety ratings of its vehicles, he said, adding that the vast majority of his lineup has obtained five-star ratings.

Davis points out vehicles are becoming safer as more automakers make stability control a standard option.