

2016/2017 TRENDS

Taking the Business Office Online

It's time to give consumers a virtual sneak peek into the F&I process, along with information about the products available.

In the scramble to get F&I products online, manufacturers are working with their dealer partners to keep everything consistent and seamless.

And that may involve a little co-operation, technology-wise. "Many of the OEMs have basic compliance standards for their dealer websites," says Elisa Kruppen, Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator at EVOLIO. "Sometimes there's a template that we need to follow for the F&I pages. They may have standards around security, FAQ or terminology."

But at Ford of Canada, there are no rules "set in stone" around how dealers present their F&I offerings online. "We do supply about two-thirds of our dealers with their public facing websites," notes Max Farley, Digital Engagement Manager, Ford of Canada. "One of our goals is to make sure that any information that's out there is very transparent to the end customer. We also want to



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Max Farley, Digital Engagement Manager, Ford of Canada

ensure that it's compliant with legal requirements from regulatory bodies such as AMVIC and OMVIC. We're aware of those and want to ensure everything is disclosed very clearly."

Latitude

Dealers can embed the Ford credit app into their site, as well as accessories through tools like "build and price." The Tier 1 build and price configuration tool that includes information,

including MSRP around accessories, is available to all our dealers," says Farley.

Since the Ford of Canada site has the same build and price tool, if a consumer has already configured their vehicle on that site, it's easier for the dealer to come up with final numbers in the business office.

"If a customer configures a vehicle and asks the dealer for a quote, the dealer knows up front what the customer is interested in, for example, if

they want a bug deflector on a truck," notes Farley. "So it's a win-win for the customer and the dealer to know that."

However, the Ford Protect extended service offerings are not listed online. "We leave that to the dealer's discretion, to have that conversation with the customer," says Farley.

In other words, Ford dealers are given a fair bit of latitude. "We can supply an entire digital suite of tools called Dealer Digital Direct or D3," says Farley. "But we thought it was very important to give dealers the choice of using our platform or one of their own choosing. It can be a very personal decision for a dealership."

Dealers who don't opt for the D3 still have the ability to embed tools like build and price as well as the Ford credit apps. "It keeps things consistent, we know if it's coming from us that it's secure, and it keeps us as the manufacturer in the loop."

A Different Dynamic

Don't treat your online shoppers the same way you'd treat a walk-in. If you do, you'll lose them long before you ever meet them.

When a dealer meets a car shopper online, it can change the whole dynamic of the relationship—especially when it comes to F&I products.

"The online car shopper wants to be spoken to differently," says Christine Rybas, Executive Vice President, Marketing at LGM Financial Services. "She's just signalled that she's not walking into your store. It's not an old fashioned sales process, it becomes something fluid and dynamic."

Once the shopper has picked out her car online, before she comes into the store, the dealer can email her an online menu with links to some product videos or a needs assessment tool. "If you know she's got three kids and a dog, she may be interested in appearance protection," says Rybas. "If she's amortizing the vehicle over 84 months, introduce warranty protection beyond the basic powertrain. There are so many ways to bridge that conversation with the shopper."



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Tailor content using analytics

Even if a dealer doesn't have sophisticated technological tools, they can still establish an online virtual retail process. "If the internet manager is speaking to the consumer either by emails or text, they can start bridging over to the financial services manager," says Rybas. "Your internet manager should be educated on finance and insurance products. They should be thinking about the turnover to the F&I office. Meet the consumer where she shops."

More progressive dealers are taking advantage of sophisticated

technology with analytics that follow the car shopper as they're clicking through their site. "You can tell from your analytics exactly who's coming to your site, their demographic information and what they're looking for," says Trish Rowsell, Director of Client Services and Marketing, Strathcom Media. "You can now tailor your F&I content to those shoppers with hyper targeted information about your F&I products to market them properly."

Rowsell reports that many of her dealer customers have personalization built into their website, with

responsiveness that reacts to a shopper's behaviour. "Their clicks and site behaviour might indicate this person is in the market for something very specific," she says. "You can show them information for a certain F&I product that's going to be relevant to what they're looking for, and also let them know why it's better than my competitor."

The consumer may have gotten a sense that a product exists from researching other websites. "If a dealer can show why you need GAP or why you need paint protection or tire and road hazard, and be very specific about details, the consumer sees you're on top of it," Rowsell says. "It builds rapport and allows them to understand that this dealership has their interests at heart. You're getting them to mentally commit to the fact that your dealer is the expert. You've provided all this great relevant information that will encourage that conversation. It builds an edge for you in this market."