



The Vision of F&I Sales Process

Selling F&I products can best be summed up as the transfer of enthusiasm for the products that we have to the customer.

By Ron Martin

If I told you there is a proven method to high F&I profits and customer satisfaction, would you be interested in hearing how? What if I said that it was going to require more time and effort on your part to prepare yourself?

It seems we are always trying to find quick fixes to how we sell to our customers in the finance office. Don't get me wrong; I'm all for saving time, but shortcut methods won't get the results we're looking for. We rely upon the method to sell our products, and forget to remember the key to being a successful F&I person.

Why do people buy? Do they buy for our reasons or their reasons? The answer is simple, isn't it? So then how do we present our products in such a way that we allow the customer to make an informed decision?

If we try to be too assumptive, spend too much time telling stories, or simply give them a list of alternatives without them experiencing the value of

their purchase, are we accomplishing long-term success? I'll leave that question for your customers to answer.

TRANSFER OF ENTHUSIASM

Selling F&I products can best be summed up as the transfer of enthusiasm for the products that we have to the customer.

Transfer of enthusiasm isn't acting in an excited way; it is having a genuine belief in what you're doing and transferring that message to the customer. We do this by approaching the customer in a way that gains their attention, presenting our products to uncover what will make them make the purchase, welcoming the objections that we hope they'll have, then getting them to make a decision.

Along the way we ask them the right questions. Some are designed to get them to give us the information we need to sell the value that we know our products have. Others we hope will give us the magic word we're looking for: "Yes!"

This method does require more effort. You need to believe in the products yourself to transfer that enthusiasm. Just understanding the benefits of your products isn't enough.

You also need to understand the value of the competing products. For example, how does credit insurance stack up against regular term insurance, or whole life?

I suggest that all F&I people buy the products if you finance an automobile that you would offer to your customers. They say, "All of them? That can cost 40 to 50 dollars extra!" I say, it will be the best \$40 you will spend this month. Now you can look every customer in the eye and say, "Here's why I have the product."

Whether they or you choose to follow my suggestion, the point I'm making is you need to have a fundamental belief in what you're offering. Otherwise, your sales presentation will be like driving your automobile with the emergency brake on.

An effective F&I sales presentation is a four step planned-method.

- Approaching the customer
- Presentation of the products
- Overcoming the customer's objections
- Closing or getting the customer to make a decision.

APPROACHING THE CUSTOMER

The first objective we have as F&I managers when we meet the customer is to break their preoccupation. They have probably spent hours, maybe days, making the decision to buy an automobile. In most cases their primary purpose is to get in their vehicle and go home.

If we're going to be successful we must first get their attention. We can do this with a question. It must be designed to get the customer to think, "Why must I listen to you?"

You might approach the customer like this. "Mr. or Mrs. Doyle, my name is Ron Martin. I will be taking care of all your delivery paperwork. First, may I ask you a question? Now that you have purchased this new vehicle is getting the best possible financing important to you?" (This situation assumes that the customer intends to secure their financing themselves.)

My intent with this question is to get their attention, so that I can begin my conversion. Another example of a preoccupation-breaking question is, "How would you like to prevent having to pay most any future repair bill?" Of course, this question leads right to my service contract presentation.

The first minute a customer meets you they decide if

they don't intend to buy from you. They, of course, don't make the decision to buy quite as quickly. (If we could only figure out how to do that!) But they do make the decision on whether they intend to really listen to your offer. That's why it is important that you pay careful attention to:

- Your appearance
- Your voice
- Your attitude

Your appearance means that both you and your surroundings are ready to conduct business. You personally should be well groomed and neat.

That doesn't mean you have to have a coat and tie, or a suit for the ladies. It means you have a professional look to you, whatever that requires at your store. Your surroundings should always be well organized. Yes, that means you need to remove that mess from your desk!

We don't want any distractions to the customer, or to appear to be unorganized. We need their total and complete attention.

Your voice needs to come across as confident and with a passion that your offer is sincere and worthy of their attention.

And then of course, **your attitude** is positive. The customer will pick up immediately if you are in a bad mood or unhappy with the salesperson. Remember that the customer doesn't know that the salesperson was not supposed to bring them in your office without warning.

PRESENTATION OF THE PRODUCTS

What is a presentation? First, what is it not? It is not a performance. It's a process to qualify the customer to buy. Since the customer buys for their reasons, it is our job to uncover what their reasons are — that is, if we plan on being successful.

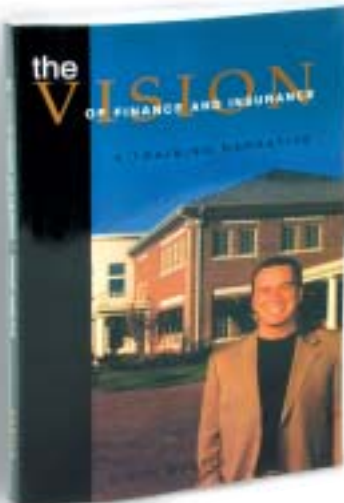
A performance is when an F&I manager presents all the benefits of the product without getting any feedback from the customer. They get to the end and they say, "Well, what do you think?" The customer then responds with, "I'm not interested." Now the finance person has little room to maneuver.

An effective presentation is one that involves getting feedback from the customer as we are presenting. This is done by giving the customer some information, asking a question, and then listening. If you listen, the customer will tell you what will make them purchase your product.

You should have planned questions throughout your presentation to encourage feedback. Examples are:

- "Have you had any major or minor mechanical breakdowns or have you been lucky so far?"
- "Don't major or minor breakdowns come at the most inopportune times?"
- "Do you need your vehicle on a daily basis?"

Before beginning your presentation you need to have established a rapport with the customer. This is a tough one in our profession. It is amazing to me that a customer will spend hours or days to make an automobile



buying decision, but will have five minutes to sign the financial paperwork. That is an exaggeration, but it sure seems that way sometimes.

We can't dispute, though, that our customer's time is important to them so they usually don't want to spend 10-15 minutes talking about their families and interests with us so we can establish rapport.

I use a quick and reliable method to establish rapport. It involves using customer satisfaction as my lead-in. With new vehicle purchases, I actually use the customer satisfaction survey to do this. On pre-owned vehicle purchases I use the same

"Did the salesperson take good care of you?"

"Was the vehicle available for you when promised? Was it cleaned and filled up with gas?"

End with this lead-in to your presentation of the products: "The last part of the survey is about the financial process; that's what I do. I would like when you leave here that you feel I was straightforward, answered any questions you may have, was prompt and efficient, but most importantly that I have described all the financial benefits that are available to you. I'd like to take a couple brief minutes of

When an objection comes up, first make sure it is the only objection, or the real objection. We do this by saying, "In addition to that is there any other reason why you wouldn't go ahead with it?"

Take for example, if they said the price was too high for the service contract. Upon further investigation, you found that they had one before but it didn't cover anything (they probably bought it through the mail or over the Internet).

If you tried to respond to the price objection, never knowing about the other objection, you would be spending all your time trying to justify price while they're thinking, "These service contracts don't cover anything!"

Another good way of handling objections is the "Feel, Felt, Found" method.

"That service contract is too expensive." "Mr. Doyle, I understand how you feel. I have had other customers who initially felt the same way, but they found it was easier for them to spend just \$20 per month than to have to pay \$3,500 to replace an engine unexpectedly."

Remember: objections show interest. The next time you get one, instead of thinking, "Oh, no! They're not interested!" think, "Alright, I've got a hot one!"

CLOSING OR GETTING THE CUSTOMER TO MAKE A DECISION

This usually separates salespeople who are mediocre from salespeople who are superior performers. It comes down to one word: REJECTION. Our ability to deal with rejection from customers might just be the difference of our success.

I can prove this conclusion to you. Suppose we at The Vision of F & I, Inc. have come up with a mailer that was developed scientifically to ensure that everyone that comes in to buy a vehicle from this mailer would buy every product that we offer them. That's right, they would all buy service contracts, credit insurance, guaranteed auto protection, or any other product that we offer them.

Let me ask you a question. If you truly believed in the authenticity of this mailing, how long would you work that day? How many of your products would you offer them? How enthusiastic would you be with your presentation? You see, you would have no fear of rejection. You



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approach, only the questions are on behalf of the dealer, instead of the manufacturer and the dealer.

The presentation begins like this. "Mr. and Mrs. Doyle, we really appreciate you buying your vehicle from us. We know you could have chosen another dealership, and it is our intent to keep you as a customer.

"We and the manufacturer have found that not only is the quality of the vehicle important when a person decides where they purchase their next vehicle, but also the experience they have while they were here is equally important. For this reason, in three or four weeks the manufacturer is going to send you a survey asking just how that experience went for you.

"Not only is it important to us that you fill it out and send it back when you get it, but we want you to be able to answer that you were completely satisfied with our dealership. I'd like to take just a few minutes of your time prior to signing your paperwork to make sure that is the case.

"Are you satisfied with the vehicle you picked out? It is a very nice automobile.

your time to do that."

With this I lead right into my product presentations.

I find this approach is very effective at establishing rapport with the customer in a very short period of time and I do it caring for their needs. They are then much more attentive to my offer. Now both the customer and I feel comfortable with the offer.

OVERCOMING THE CUSTOMER'S OBJECTIONS

An effective F&I manager understands that objections are something to welcome. Why? They show interest.

If we don't get an objection, we typically get something like, "I'm not interested," or "I want to think about it." This gives us no room to maneuver and is really the customer saying, "How can I get rid of you?" If we get responses like, "The price is too high," or "I have plenty of insurance," we have something to respond to. The customer is just saying to us, "Show me how I can afford it," or "Why should I buy more?"

would offer them everything you had, stay late, and with a high degree of enthusiasm. How effective would we be if we just thought everyone wanted our offer?

Our main objective each day is to get people to make decisions. I didn't say get everyone to say yes, did I? That would be the preferred response, but if I can get every customer to make a decision I will be successful. Sure, I'm going to get some "No's," but I'm going to get a whole lot of "Yes's" along the way.

Effective closers ask questions that help the customer make a decision.

Sharp Angle Close: "If I could get it within your budget would you take it?" Now just show them how they can afford it, i.e., longer term, less coverage, longer retro period, and lower price.

Relevant Story Close: "I spoke to a person just like you a couple of months ago and here's what happened to them..."

Alternative Close: "Would you like to pay cash or include it in your monthly payment?"

Instant Reverse Close: "That's exactly why you should take it! If it's difficult for you to afford \$18 a month while you're working, how difficult will it be for you to afford \$350 per month when you are not?"

Can't Afford It Close: "I understand, but have you thought about, if it's hard for you to afford \$10 per month extra now, how hard it will be for your wife to afford to pay this loan off if something were to happen to you?"

These are a few of the closes I like. They are all designed to get the customer to do one thing: Make a decision! While they are thinking, I prefer they feel only two kinds of pressure. The pressure that I did such a good job of explaining the value that they don't want to say "No" to me, and the pressure of the ... silence.

CONCLUSION

The Vision of F&I sales process is just the beginning. We need to apply the principles to all of the products that we present.

That means breaking preoccupation when necessary, knowing the right questions to ask for each product that we show the customer, understanding each objection that might come up with a product, and then being able to bring the customer to a decision with an appropriate closing

question.

Today's customer wants to deal with a professional who understands his or her profession and doesn't use a shortcut method to promote the benefits of the products. They want an efficient description of the value of the product, their questions answered by a knowledgeable person, and then brought to a decision in a comfortable manner.

I'm not saying this is the easiest way. I'm only saying it's the best way to promote aggressive F&I sales with the highest customer satisfaction. ■

Editor's note: Ron Martin's company, *The Vision of F&I, Inc.*, conveys his vision through seminars and consulting to dealers around the country. To learn more or to order his book, *The Vision of Finance and Insurance: A Training Narrative*, contact *The Vision of F&I, Inc.*, at (219) 637-2796 or visit www.thevisionoffandi.com. ■