

Auto Dealer Monthly

YOUR DAILY OPERATIONS MAGAZINE

Where Custom Begins Aftermarket Accessories

Avoiding the Year-End Rush



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War Room Secrets From Ted Britt Automotive

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The Value of Vehicle Displays

Automotive design, sophistication and luxury have made quantum leaps in the past 30 years. However, of this there can be little doubt: The design of the systems used to display one of the most expensive purchases a consumer will make has changed very little, if at all. Dealers have had to use their wits and business savvy to make their inventory more appealing than the dealers across the street or down the road.

Manufacturers have spent millions helping dealers improve brand image at the store level. They've helped, even forced dealers to create more engaging, modern, luxurious and kid-friendly environments. Getting their dealer bodies to agree to have a more consistent customer experience has been a real chore for some. Corporate image directives often include purely aesthetic changes to the interiors that have cost dealers a small fortune, with no direct benefit to the bottom line. Many dealers forced to undergo image makeovers debate if it's actually improving customer satisfaction or sales.

Auto manufacturers also spend hundreds of millions of dollars researching and developing new products using very sophisticated market research techniques. They then create entire marketing campaigns around that research in order to reach their target groups.

Whether we like it or not, everything they do is geared to reaching the right people at the right time and place with persuasive messages and imagery that will inspire them to visit your store.

Branding is vital to the success of any product, especially the auto manufacturers' and their dealers. Not taking advantage of manufacturer research is to your own detriment. Millions are spent testing consumers, yet dealers still do their own thing. Balloons, flags, tents and poster cards under open hoods may catch the eye, but what does it say about you? Old fashioned? Typical? Lacking creativity? Is it any wonder many communities across the country ban such ploys as a "distraction to motorists". The truth is: It's more a matter of being a "blot on the landscape." In Zoning Board lingo, it's considered having a "deleterious" effect on neighboring properties. Coming up with your own creative ideas to generate business, if not done professionally and consistently can confuse people. Ask yourself if the message you're sending is conflicting with the perception the manufacturer is paying to create. If it is, it could actually be driving business away.

Case in point. Imagine going into a grocery store without colorful, attractive and

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easy-to-understand point-of-purchase displays? It would be an entirely different shopping experience to say the least. Anyone remember the generic brand marketing failures of the early 1980s? Exciting visuals are essential to promoting new products. Color combinations and graphics are thoughtfully chosen and designed to both capture attention and stimulate your senses so customers put that new product into their shopping carts. You should be aware of the amount of research, science and thought behind the most successful franchise retail store displays, no matter if it's a grocery store promotion or window dressing at Victoria's Secret. Both are specifically designed to be inviting and seductive in different, yet effective, ways.

Comparatively, little has been done to help you improve your image with respect to your storefront, your front line at the street level. In real estate sales, curb appeal is especially valuable to the sale of a house or commercial property. Why would it be any different to sell the image of your dealership?

Arguably one of the most important aspects of a dealership is your front line. A store may have the best sales people, offer the best warranty or present the greatest value, but if that front line doesn't facilitate those messages with a clean, crisp, modern and

inviting look, your results may be mediocre at best. For more than 30 years, dealers have had limited choices when it comes to vehicle displays unfortunately. If today's modern, stylistic vehicles are packaged atop rusty angle iron ramps it diminishes the brand of the vehicle and that of your dealership simultaneously.

Market researchers for RAMP-BOSS-USA, an international vehicle display manufacturer, found an incredible number of dealerships trying all kinds of wild ideas in order to circumvent using antiquated display technology. These ideas have been met with varying degrees of success. There's no substitute for placing eye-catching, popular vehicles up higher in order to break the plane of the front line. Dealers need to find ideas or a system that compliments a vehicle's attractiveness, not detract from it. Regardless of the kind of display system you use, it should go without saying those need to be free of rust and regularly painted, but surprisingly, many are not maintained even regularly. If you do, colors should be dark color in order to help keep the focus on the vehicle and not what it's sitting on. Front line vehicles need to be detailed to a high standard and the parking lot surface has to be clean and acceptable in terms of wear and safety from the consumer's perspective.

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