

The Auto Dealer's Original Fixed Operations Resource

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DO YOUR CUSTOMERS KNOW YOU SELL TIRES?

WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?

THE TEAM YOU BUILD SAYS EVERYTHING
ABOUT YOUR DEALERSHIP

BY J. CLAIRE GARSTKA

As a dealership, communicating your brand position is key to the success of any Sales or Service program. This position should be representative of everything you want a consumer to think of when they see the name of your company.

Everyone on your team should be speaking the same language in order to communicate the message consistently and that message must be strong and repetitive so that it makes an impact. Communication on your lot is step one, before you even begin to consider external communication of the message.

Your employees and the vendors you trust are more influential than you may realize. Being certain that your trusted inner circle delivers a positive reflection of your dealership is extremely important. These influential players can make or break the messages you are hoping your customer receives. Training your staff and truly knowing your vendors will ensure that your dealership is making the most of these relationships.



External Communication Starts From Within

A dealership is responsible for controlling the brand position that it wants communicated. The presentation of your dealership and its environment are the basics of internal communication. This includes the facility itself, internal promotional pieces and the customer experience.

This is done internally by training staff and choosing appropriate vendors. It's controlled externally by marketing efforts.

Your staff is the first line of external communication but also an extension of your internal communication. Your team holds a huge opportunity for the dealership. These team members communicate with customers on and off the lot daily. You can control this group and begin to move your message past the front door.

So, you have all of your staff sharing the same message. They are on your team, believe in your position and are sharing it

with customers. Next, you have to consider who else may be carrying that message on your company's behalf.

THE PEOPLE IN YOUR
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Looking at Your Circle

Your customers, partners, family, friends and vendors would all be considered part of your circle. This is the second group of people carrying your brand position out into the world. Have you taken a good look at who is in this group?

This circle interacts with you and your brand on a daily basis. More important, those in this group interact and communicate with the rest of the world! You need to be absolutely clear that you are informed about who makes up your circle.

The people in your circle are the most important part of your dealership. Without them, you don't have a functioning business. They make sure your Service drive program is operating on a daily basis and that all of your customer's needs are being met efficiently. It's essential that you are choosing people who can help enhance the quality of your business, whether they are performing or receiving service from you.

Your selections have an opportunity to define your business and success. These people are the heart and soul of the dealership. They are ambassadors for your brand. As with anything else in business or life, you want to surround yourself with people who can help convey your message in the most positive ways.

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Your Circle Affects Your Finances

Because the people in your circle are a part of your business, you want to be sure you are doing all that you can to make good investments in them so you see strong results in your finances.

Choose vendors and partners who offer rates that are smart and affordable for your dealership. Select supplies and parts based on their value and reputation, not just because they are the cheapest options available. By selecting things with the best value, you're making sure that your customers are being provided with long-lasting parts for their vehicles. You are communicating with your customers through excellent service and ensuring they will continue to come back to your dealership.

Providing proper training and education to your employees is also essential to the operation of your dealership. Whether you offer monthly classes to your Technicians or train the in-house staff on new systems for your internal computer database, they should be up-to-date with all the operations at your dealership.

Staff should also be well-educated on the vendors and partners considered part of the circle. Employees need to understand the role of each vendor and how that vendor fits into the brand message. By having employees who are knowledgeable and efficient, you're creating a strong environment that will function well on a consistent basis.

Direct Reflection on Your Dealership

The circle (that key group of people carrying your message into the world) is a direct reflection of your dealership. You can only control what this circle does to a certain point, but you should control as much as possible. Because the circle is the second line of external communication, you want that message to be a positive reflection of your brand position.

There are several key factors to consider when working to control the message in your circle.

1. Do they clearly see and experience your brand position while on the lot and when communicating with your staff?

2. If they know the position, are they a good representative?

3. Are the right people part of your circle?

Your circle will be made up of customers, friends, family and vendors. But your vendors are the only ones who can completely be controlled by you. Other circle members should want to communicate your message, but this group can only be influenced by internal communication and experiences. Key factor number one is the most crucial element with this group of people.

All car dealerships work with vendors and partners. These circle members include everything from office supply delivery people to reconditioning technicians. Everyone who can be seen by your customer or associated with your brand should be considered part of this circle. Considering each key factor becomes extremely important in reference to this group of circle members. As the dealership management team, you can "control" the message conveyed by vendors and partners.

Vendors and partners should know the brand position from the start. Ground rules should be laid out so that these team members are communicating the same message. Be certain that the message is reinforced by other circle members, the dealership environment and staff members.

Another question to consider: Is the circle member a good representative of your brand position? If your brand wants to represent a professional look, that circle member should be in uniform, well-groomed and using clean equipment.

If the brand focuses on customer service, these vendors and partners should be friendly and outgoing when interacting with customers. Being eco-friendly is another example. Dealerships that claim to be eco-friendly should be working with vendors who represent that same standard.

Finally, are the right people in your circle? The look and service provided by these vendors and partners is a direct reflection of you. Their actions (or non-actions) are

viewed as though coming directly from the dealership itself. When a vendor shows up to work on the lot in dirty clothing or is loud and unfriendly, the consumer doesn't know if they are part of your team or not. (But they probably assume that they are.)

**WHEN YOUR DEALERSHIP
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When your dealership says it's committed to families, yet the cleaning vendor doesn't wipe the changing table, the brand mes-

sage is being undermined. If one of your partners or vendors cannot meet your brand standard or communicates something differently, they probably are not someone you want in your circle.

Be sure to choose your circle carefully. Control it as much as you can and use it to your advantage. This is not only your second line of external communication — it's the backbone of your company. It's a powerful group of people that represents your brand on a consistent and daily basis. Be sure this opportunity is utilized by all the right people and that you can take pride in your circle and the benefits that come from it.



Claire Garstka is the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Colors on Parade and an advisor to the Women in Automotive Association International. She has over 14 years of marketing experience. For over two years, Claire has enjoyed serving as a leader at Colors on Parade, a national mobile paint and dent franchise system with 28 years' experience servicing dealership and retail customers.

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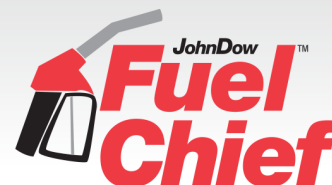
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