

# Follow-up Road Map

## The route to sales growth

BY BOB MCCANN



I'm loyal to my bike guy, Brian. He's always ready for me when I roll into his shop, greeting me by name with a big smile. He always does a great job on my bike, and occasionally he even throws in a few free tweaks. I could save money buying parts and accessories online, but I wouldn't get the same level of service Brian gives me. Brian has my business for life.

Brian is all about relationship marketing, which begins with a genuine desire to understand and meet the customer's needs. This bond is fostered over time, fueled by excellent customer service, and generates repeat business. You, too, can create this ideal customer scenario with an organized, consistently executed follow-up strategy.

### When opportunity knocks

When prospects first raise their hand for more information, you must answer immediately. Your goal is to meet their initial needs, make a positive first impression, and secure an in-store appointment. Whether you're responding to an online lead or talking to a new prospect over the phone, answer questions directly and promote your dealership's long-standing reputation. You're not selling an RV as much as you're selling yourself, along with a positive buying and ownership experience.

Tom Johnson Camping Center, a two-location dealer-



The RV buying process can extend over a long time frame, so Mark Eisenhart ensures that he and his sales staff stay in regular contact with prospects.

ship in North Carolina, uses a lead management system to make a professional impression. An auto-responder confirms the dealership has received customers' inquiries and includes links to the "Why Choose Us?" and "Testimonials" sections of the dealership's website. "The first impression prospects receive is why we think we're the only place to do business, a statement supported by customer testimonials," says Mark Eisenhart, director of marketing.

Driftwood RV Center, Clermont, N.J., builds credibility with a simple philosophy: "RVing isn't just about

## Phone follow-up best practices

### Know who and why you're calling

Keep a note with each person's contact info about where you left off during the last communication and what the next step should be. Ask yourself, "How can I serve this customer?" The answer is the reason for your call.

### Use a script

Begin with a brief introduction and your reason for phoning. Say just enough to answer their unasked question, "What's in this call for me?" Your talking points should be

no more than a breath or two long. If you have to inhale several times to get all the words out, you're making a speech.

### Make it a conversation

Keep your purpose in mind, but let customers' responses guide the conversation. Their choice of words reveals underlying needs and concerns, if you listen closely. Focus on learning, not teaching.

### Ask for the next step

Before hanging up, be sure you and your contact know what will happen next. That could mean an appoint-

ment, an e-mail with additional information, or another call. Whatever it is, be clear about it and get the customer's approval.

### Serve instead of sell

Shift your focus from selling to helping. If your intention is to serve people instead of selling to them, making follow-up calls will be easier and people will appreciate your attitude.



hitches and machinery, it's about connecting with your family," says John Worthington, marketing & information technology director. The dealership emphasizes that it's family-owned and operated, with owners who understand RVing and RVerS.

Example: Many prospects, especially first-time RVerS, may be anxious about using an RV, so the dealership offers a free, two-day stay in its adjacent campground for their first trip. "That way, our staff is on hand to answer any questions or concerns," says Worthington.

With online leads, your first response should set the stage for a phone call, not press for an appointment. If the e-mail inquiry includes a phone number, mention that you'll call shortly to answer any further questions. If it doesn't include a phone number, say you'd like to call to assist in their research and offer your number as an alternative. If you've been given a phone number, you must pick up the phone to create a connection, rather than rely on the convenience of e-mails.

Eisenhart says a phone interaction is crucial to securing appointments. "It's a much clearer form of communication than e-mail, and once we engage potential buyers via phone, we're more likely to keep them interested in our dealership."

Customers new to RVing may not even be sure what their needs are, says Worthington, and a phone conversation can help clarify what they're looking for. "E-mail just doesn't allow you to pick up the context clues, such as tone of voice and shades of meaning, that a person-to-person conversation can."

On the phone, your goal is to convince customers your inventory can fill their needs and to create the desire to visit your showroom. Tom Johnson Camping Center salespeople ask open-ended questions to identify prospects' needs and lifestyles and to remedy potential trade or financing issues. "Our sales call techniques currently generate a 25 percent lead-

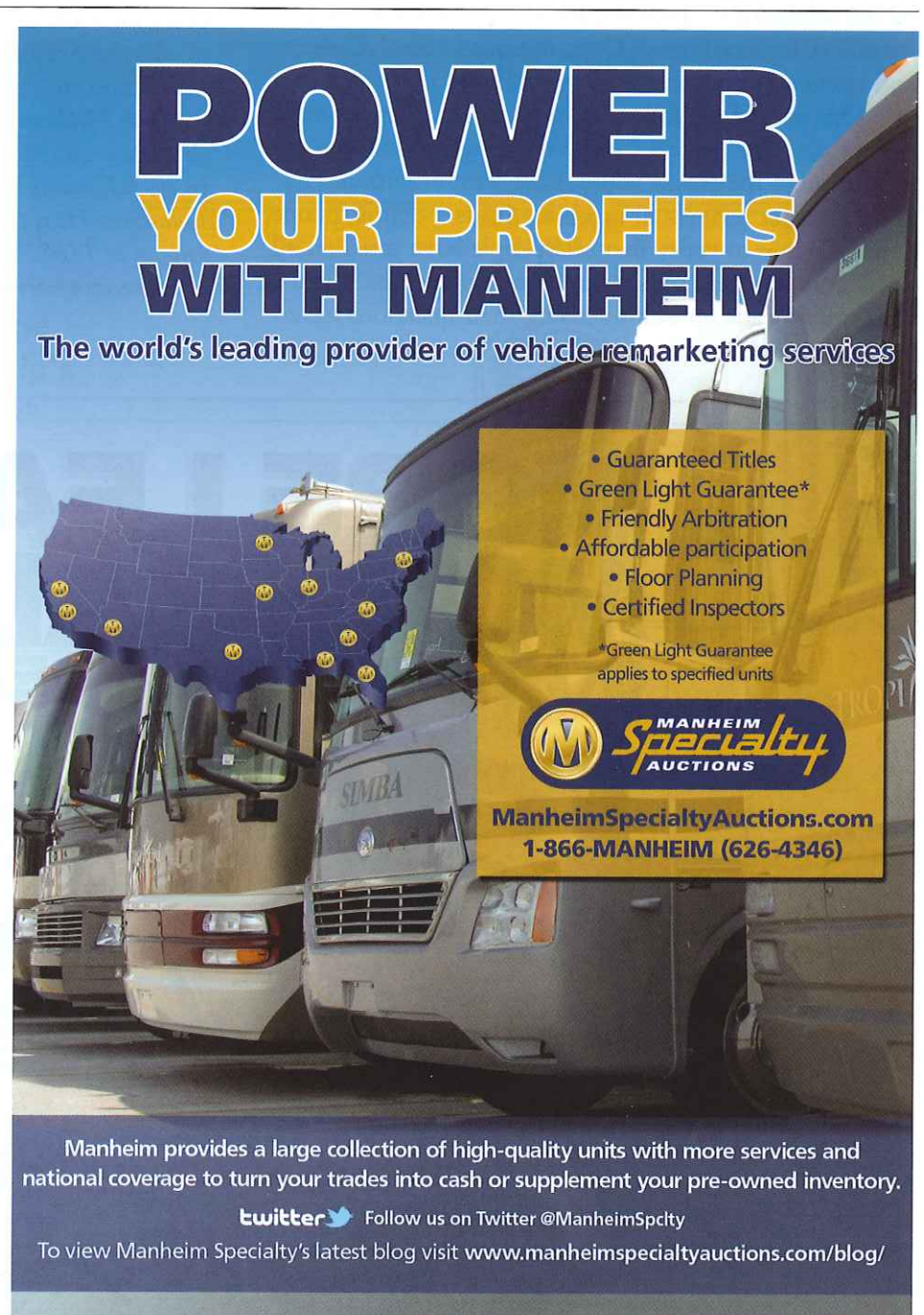
to-appointment ratio, based on the performance-tracking reports from our business development center," says Eisenhart.

Try asking, "Were you planning to visit the dealership sometime this week or over the weekend?" You'll either uncover potential objections or get the prospect to commit to a time. Remember to confirm the appointment via e-mail several days beforehand, then by phone 24 hours prior. If the appointment is scheduled for the next day, send an e-mail confirmation as soon as you hang up.

## "No" doesn't mean "never"

Some prospect appointments don't lead to sales – not surprising, considering RVs often have a long purchase time frame. That's why planting and watering seeds for the future is so important. The minute unsold prospects leave the showroom, the salesperson should e-mail them a thank-you that includes a link to the RV of their dreams and sets the stage for a call the next day. That call's

*continued on page 26*




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purpose is to get them back in by offering to answer additional questions they may have.

Next, the sales manager should mail a letter 24 hours after the showroom visit. This letter should generate calls that re-engage prospects and bring them back to the showroom. "Our sales manager follows up with e-mails, letters, and phone calls – whatever makes the most sense based on the status of the process and the prospects' preferences," says Eisenhart. "About 80 percent who set an appointment buy on their first visit."

Then, have a third party conduct a follow-up customer satisfaction survey by phone. This encourages prospects to share information they might not reveal to the salesperson and lets you uncover objections. Use feedback to determine what kept them from buying. Was it how they were treated by the salesperson? That the RV didn't meet their requirements? A financial issue? Offer options to resolve issues and try to schedule another appointment.

This part of the follow-up is "possibly the most vital part of the sales process," says Worthington, and one that falls through the cracks without constant attention. His sales manager reviews all incoming leads – online, phone, and walk-in – to verify that salespeople have acted on all initial inquiries and subsequent communications. Then he calls recent leads himself to ensure their questions have been answered.

After the second appointment, follow up weekly for 30 days; then keep in touch monthly with seasonal promotions, show specials, finance options, maintenance tips, special events, useful articles, and holiday greetings. Tom Johnson Camping Center's monthly e-mails always provide information useful to customers, says Eisenhart. As a result, they have an average open rate of 19 percent and produce a 92 percent click-through rate.

Ensuring these steps are followed with every prospect requires a written policy. Driftwood RV Center developed a print and PowerPoint training program, "The Road to the Sale," which all new salespeople are trained on. Techniques are refreshed during weekly group meetings. Not only are all salespeople required to adopt the principles in the handbook, says Worthington, "we stress that everyone at the dealership is part of the sales team – it's everyone's job to make customers feel at home."

In the September issue I'll discuss the final follow-up procedures in "Sold' is the First Step to the Next Sale."

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