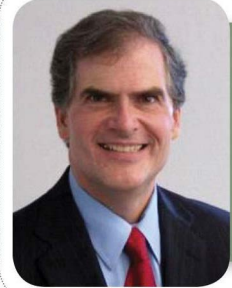


Timing F&I



BY RON REAHARD

Feeling pressure from management to shorten time spent in finance, a producer from California asks the magazine's resident F&I pro how to shorten the needs-discovery portion of his process.

This month's question comes via email from Jeff in El Cajon, Calif., hometown of seven-time NASCAR Sprint Cup champion Jimmie Johnson. Jeff writes, "There is a lot of pressure at my dealership to get the customer in and out fast. Asking a lot of questions stretches out the process. I understand why needs discovery is important, but is there a way to shorten it up?"

Jeff, thanks for your question. I certainly understand your dealer not wanting customers to spend any more time than necessary in F&I. And according to J.D. Power, completing the final paperwork in a timely fashion has a significant impact on the customer's satisfaction that the customer's time clock for completing the final paperwork begins the moment he (or she) agrees to buy. So an even more important driver of CSI is the time the customer spends waiting to sign the final paperwork.

Once in the F&I office, did the customer feel like the time spent there added value to his purchase experience? If so, it doesn't really matter how long it took. See, if the customer feels like all you did was try and sell him a bunch of products he had no interest in, 10 minutes is too long.

Now, there are only two ways to shorten the needs-discovery process: You can do more of it before the customer enters your office, or you can become more organized in the way you do it. The key is to be sure you don't waste the customer's time before or after he has entered your office. That's why I recommend interspersing your needs-discovery questions throughout your time with the customer.

Now, to be effective, you have to know exactly what to ask your customers and when. And the sooner you get involved in the sale, the more time you'll have to discover your customers' needs. Plus, you won't need to ask all your questions at once. That's one of the reasons we need to review the customer statement and credit bureau prior to submission to a lender. Not only do we have the responsibility to do that, this quick step represents the perfect moment in your process to ask needs-discovery questions.

Make sure, however, you have several easy softball questions you can ask when you first meet the customer in the showroom, such as "Congratulations, who's getting the new car today?" (to ID the primary driver), "So what made you decide to get a new car today?" (to uncover problems with their last vehicle, a new job, or more drivers), or "Where are you going on your first trip in your new car?" (to illustrate the value of roadside assistance).

As you confirm their address and review their credit application, you might ask, "So do you have room in the garage for the new car, or where do you normally park?" (to uncover the need for environmental protection, GAP or theft), "Which wheels did you get?" or "I see you work for ABC Corp. What route do you take?" (to introduce tire-and-wheel).

While confirming the insurance information, you can ask, "What is your insurance deductible?" or "Have you or anyone in your family ever had an accident?" We want them to relive the experience so they recognize it could happen again.

Jeff, as an F&I manager, your performance is judged primarily by three things: your paperwork, your CSI and the dollars you generate — not the time customers spend in your office. In my experience, if your paperwork is clean, your CSI is great, and you're averaging \$2,000 per copy, time spent in the F&I office is a

non-issue. The way to achieve outstanding performance in F&I in the least amount of time is to know the questions you want to ask and when and where you want to ask them, so you can then quickly explain how your products will help.

Jeff, thanks for your question. Don't forget to submit your own video for a chance to get your question answered and a free YETI. Because it's a beautiful day to help a customer, or be a NASCAR driver! ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Got a question or objection for Ron? Use your mobile phone to record a brief video (shot landscape style!) of your question and upload it to go-reahard.com/ask-ron/.