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+ Leadership Insights From Across the Industry

Brandon Mantz
Adaptive Athlete
page 30

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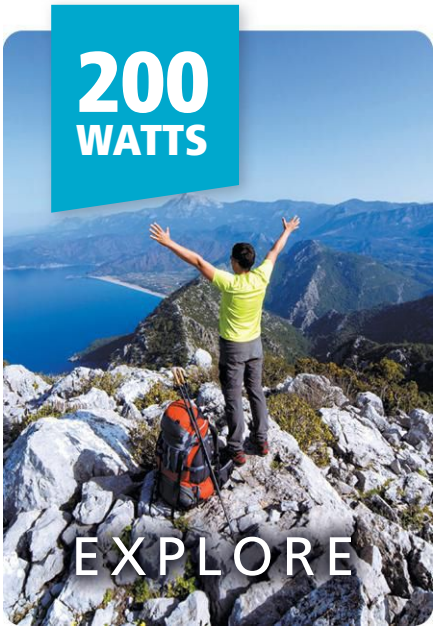
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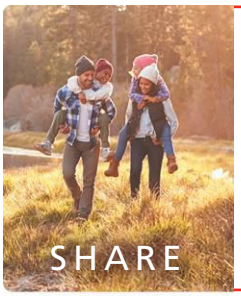






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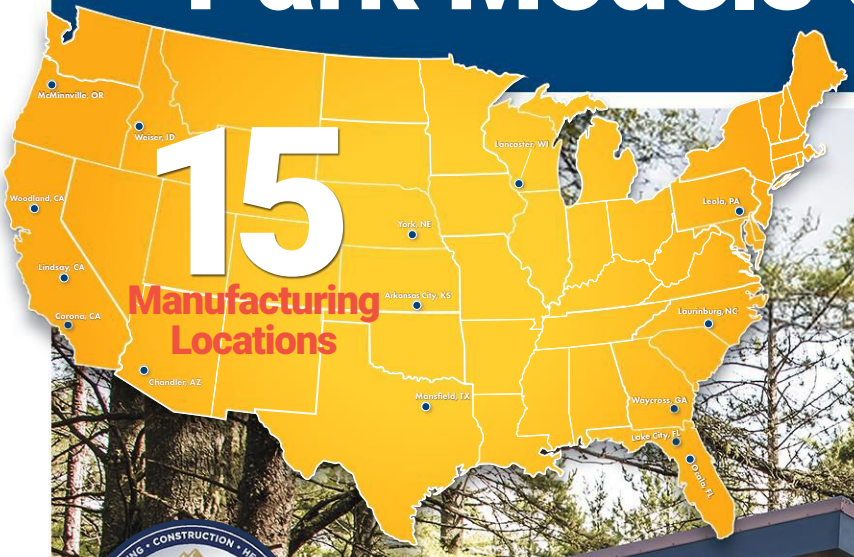
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Adaptive athlete Brandon Mantz. *Photo courtesy of Brandon Mantz.*

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A recent article in Forbes magazine says the five characteristics every successful leader needs are:

- Confidence
- Resilience
- Humility
- Charisma
- Courage

I don't dispute that any of these characteristics are wrong, but I think they missed one important ingredient: Empathy.

According to Merriam-Webster, empathy is "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experiences of another."

As a leader in your organization, do you think you have empathy toward your employees and coworkers?

In an article published last fall, Harvard Business Review (HBR) said what many leaders get wrong is confusing empathy with sympathy. It's not expected to truly understand how someone else feels — in fact, while your intention may be good, you may come off as inauthentic or patronizing, the HBR article says. The article quotes a study that found among 1,000 employees in the United States, 52% felt their company's efforts to be empathetic were dishonest.

Getting empathy right can help build connections and develop trust among a team. The HBR article says that "for a manager, it means you can put yourself in someone else's shoes to understand where they're coming from, share that you understand, and thoughtfully respond to their feelings, thoughts and circumstances."

Creating an environment where employees have "psychologically safe spaces" is key to fostering mutual respect and improving productivity and job satisfaction, the HBR article says. There are four suggestions that HBR makes to achieve the right kind of empathy for your employees:

1. Actively listen and be curious. Acknowledge that the employee's situation is difficult and try to understand how you can help. "This response will help foster deeper trust and give them a more authentic sense of belonging."
2. Know that you don't have to have the answers. Sometimes people just need to talk and feel like they're being heard.
3. Avoid an autopilot response. "You can't use the same cut-and-paste language for every member of your team. It's best to take in all the information coming from the other person before formulating your response."
4. Always make the time. Follow through with your employee so they understand they are a priority to help build the foundation of trust you want to form.

Ideas of what makes a good leader abound, but we have some of the best examples of great leadership right inside the RV industry. In this issue, check out the Leadership & Inclusion section with insights from Grand Design's Don Clark and Debbie Brunoforte of Little Dealer Little Prices (pages 36 and 40). We also have an inspiring piece by Managing Editor Jordan Benschop, who spoke with Brandon Mantz about the life-changing accident that opened him up to a world of possibilities in a seemingly hopeless situation. Read his thoughts on increasing accessibility in the outdoors on page 30.

And in an article from Fran Zeuli, who spoke at this year's RV Industry Association Leadership Conference on making work — and leadership — fun, we learn why "fun is good," especially for business. Turn to page 44 to read.

Finally, a personal note from me: My husband recently experienced a medical emergency that landed him in the hospital for a few days. Thankfully, he is on the mend, and our daughter, Penny, and I are so grateful to have him home and feeling healthy again. Just as Brandon Mantz learned, things can turn for the worse in the least expected moments. I encourage us all to take advantage of every minute we can to express our love to those important to us, and to get out and enjoy the things we love — like the beautiful outdoors!

As always, thanks for reading!

Jennifer King



Editor Jen King with her daughter, Penny, and her husband, Jermaine, at EPCOT in November 2023.

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A Heritage of Craftsmanship

Newmar Corporation spotlights a new brand, engineering shifts and ongoing manufacturing initiatives in Colorado Springs.

BY RV PRO STAFF

The theme for Newmar Corp.'s 2024 dealer meeting — A Heritage of Craftmanship — referenced that even in uncertainty, the manufacturer has "a lot to be proud of."

The Winnebago Industries subsidiary brought its dealer body to the iconic Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in late March.

"It's an appreciation meeting more than just a selling and dealer meeting," said Newmar President Casey Tubman in an interview with RV PRO. "One of the things I learned in my first year here is that friendships are built at these meetings, and they last for years."

The annual event kicked off with a luncheon and keynote address from Tubman, Vice President of Sales Matt Ellinger and Director of Engineering Paul White. Attendees represented more than 50 of Newmar's 55-plus partners nationwide.

TOP 10 DEALERS FOR 2023

Blue Compass RV (San Marcos and Palm Desert, California; Albany and Buffalo, New York; Sonny's and Charlotte, North Carolina; Tampa, Florida; Manteca, California; Appleway, Washington)
Campers Inn RV (Jacksonville, Florida; Tom's River, New Jersey; Clarksville, Indiana)
Demartini RV Sales (Grass Valley, California)
General RV (Winter Garden, Florida; Wixom, Michigan; Richmond, Virginia; Draper, Utah; North Canton, Ohio; Huntly, Illinois; Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania)
Holiday World RV (Alvarado, Katy and Willis, Texas)
Lazydays RV (Phoenix, Arizona; Woodland, Washington; Milwaukee)
Midway Motor Homes (Grand Rapids, Michigan)
National Indoor RV Centers (Lewisville, Texas; Lawrenceville, Georgia; Las Vegas; Manassas, Virginia; Lebanon, Tennessee)
North Trail RV Center (Fort Myers, Florida)
Transwest Truck Trailer & RV (Frederick, Grand Junction and Fountain, Colorado; Belton, Missouri)



Casey Tubman

Dealers got a first look at the company's newest models, including a brand reveal from Ellinger of the Northern Star — an entry-level-priced diesel pusher set apart from its predecessor, the existing Kountry Star line.

"We want to make sure that people recognized it as a completely new brand," Tubman said. A different towing capacity, redesigned cockpit and updated interior including new fascia, flooring and backsplash are all featured in the new lineup.

Ellinger revealed other new floorplans and a life cycle change to the Mountain Aire brand. On the engineering side, dealers learned about Newmar's shift from two-dimensional prints used in design processes to three-dimensional, computer-assisted design (CAD) software.

"People are really receptive to the new products and changes," Tubman said. "We redid our electrical wiring for reorganization [available in all but a select few layouts]. So, you can open it up and the panel is nicely laid out, cleanly labeled, easy to diagnose and easy to access."

Model year 2025 will also see debuts such as a new Starlink option across all 13 of Newmar's brands.

"We used to have a very wide spectrum of cabinet doors, colors and finishes — it was very complex," Tubman said. The company recently streamlined its 13 interior options to five wood colors and three clearcoat finishes. Newmar's multiplex systems will also appear in fewer places throughout the units.

"The feedback from dealers, in general, is very positive. They like the two-tone cabinet option, something we didn't offer in the past. And we got great feedback on the Onyx package — that's the blackout package that we're bringing in for the Dutch Star up to the King Aire."

Other initiatives include boosting safety measures and improving internal quality prior to shipments. During the event, Newmar's Vice President of Marketing and Strategy Ryan Buurstra highlighted how the company will seek feedback from current and prospective Newmar owners across multiple touchpoints.

"We have a story to tell like no one else, and we have to make sure it's getting out there," Tubman said. "And we find we have ambassadors. Lots of companies can hire an ambassador, but we have them without paying them anything — they'll just tell you their story about their coach, why it's so great and why they've owned seven Newmars."

Looking ahead, the company's hurdles are no different than the industry's at large, Tubman said. It's interest rates and uncertainty — tackled by understanding dealers' pain points and supporting their retail sales, customer service and new products.

"We know it's a tough time in the industry right now, but we're going to be ready when an upswing comes," he said. "Kevin Bogan talked about changes to our manufacturing site and our campus. Improved quality, improved safety and improved efficiency are in the process." RVP



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EXPLORING CLASS As: INSIGHTS Into CONSUMER BEHAVIOR



Since 2020, Class A RVs have remained within the Top 5 most popular RV types, with THOR Industries, Forest River and Newmar dominating the Top 3 spots year-over-year.*

Top Class A Makes by Search Results on RV Trader

1. **Newmar**
2. **Tiffin Motorhomes**
3. **Thor Motor Coach**
4. **Winnebago**
5. **Fleetwood RV**

Top Class A Make/Models



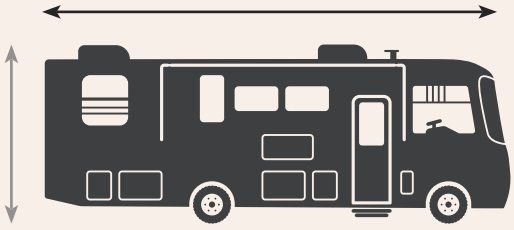
Newmar Dutch Star has grown over the past two years to be the top Class A make/model, experiencing an 8.13% growth in searches on the RV Trader marketplace.

New vs. Used Class A RVs

There was a **5% increase in used** Class A units over the past year on RV Trader. Used Class A units rose from 63% to 68%.

When it comes to Class A RVs, there is a growing consumer interest in **Newmar** as a manufacturer, specifically searching for the Newmar **Dutch Star** make/model. Buyers are also seeking out used Class A RVs with an **even number of sleeping accommodations.** By understanding what a consumer favors, dealers can take advantage of these trends and provide premier Class A models that meet these criteria to attract more buyers.

Top Length Searches for Class A RVs



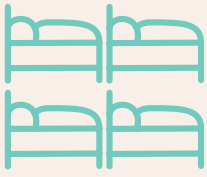
The following are the top length searches for Class A RVs from January 2024 through April 2024 on RV Trader:

1. **40 feet**
2. **45 feet**
3. **36 feet**
4. **35 feet**
5. **34 feet**

Top Class A Sleeping Capacity by Search Result Impressions

Class A RV consumers are most interested in units that have an even number for sleeping capacity.

1. **4**
2. **6**
3. **8**
4. **5**
5. **3**



The data on Class As from RV Trader is pulled from January 2024 – April 2024.

**Data from Statistical Surveys, Inc.*

About RV Trader
RV Trader, a part of the renowned family of brands and owned by Trader Interactive, is a marketplace for advertising RVs, motorhomes and campers. With an average of 6.5 million monthly visitors, RV Trader offers innovative tools to help manufacturers and dealers make connections with customers, increase sales and maximize profits. For more information, visit RVTraderMediaKit.com.

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The Heart of a CHAMPION

The Michigan-based park model maker's geographic designs are leaving a mark on the industry, and there's not a state it can't reach.

BY JOHN MCCURRY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAMPION HOME BUILDERS

Champion Home Builders has become a dominant force in the U.S. park model market, garnering a market share in 2023 of more than 25%. The Troy, Michigan-based manufacturer has grown steadily since its founding in 1953. Its parent company is Skyline Champion, created in 2018 when Skyline Corp. and Champion Enterprises Holdings merged.

"Our forecast for this year is about an 11% upsurge in our retail network," says John Tuyo, the company's director of park model sales. "We are looking for a stronger year in 2024 than we had in 2023. The first month's numbers (of Champion's fiscal year, which begins in March) have come in, and we are off to a good start. We are right on track."

High interest rates have slowed sales somewhat, but Tuyo notes Champion's typical buyer isn't that concerned about interest rates. He describes Champion's mix of customers as being composed of 65% "residual income folks, regardless of age." About one-third put their park models on private property, or in parks where they like to go camping.

"We have 15 manufacturing centers building park models across the country," Tuyo says. "Our main portion of our business comes from the retail network. Some are large organizations who own 250 to 500 communities. Our retail network, actually what we know as street retailers, are probably only about 10% of our business. The remainder is in communities and campgrounds."

Champion has grown over the years in part due to acquisitions. Tuyo says the company kept the nameplates the market knows. Different styles, based on geographic location, are offered.

Altogether, Champion operates about 50 manufacturing sites for its manufactured housing and park model business. That's a good number, Tuyo says, adding the company will open additional production at its existing plants as needed. Champion emphasizes quality control in its manufacturing process. RV Industry Association (RVIA) inspectors are at each manufacturing site to support quality control measures already in place.



COAST TO COAST

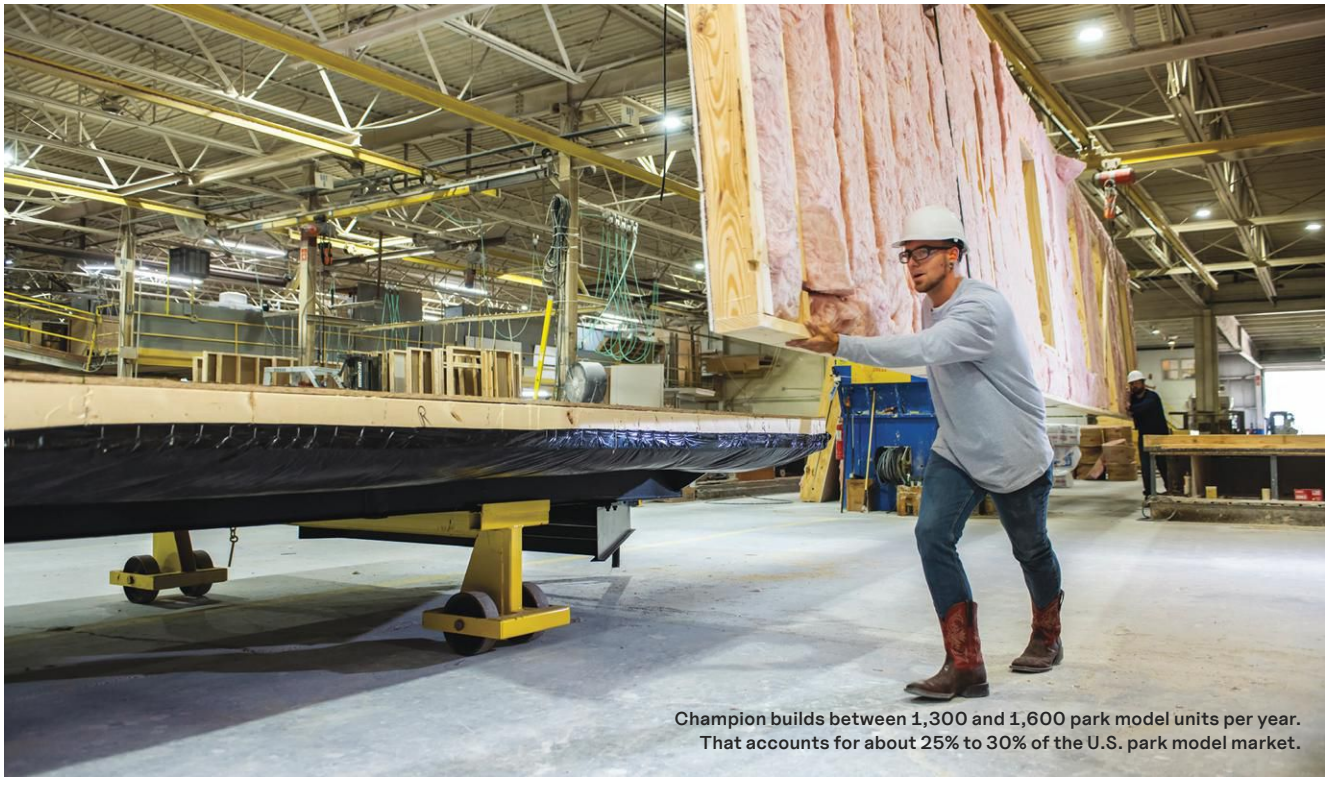
Champion's top park model markets are Florida, South Carolina, Arizona and California. The company isn't currently building in Canada, but Tuyo notes that possibility is on the near horizon, saying there is a need in Canada for the company's products.

"Generally, buying a park model is a one-time purchase, unless you are talking about a community that is renting them out," Tuyo says. "Then, periodically they may sell off the park models they have rented and bring in fresh models, so that return customers can have new models to stay in."

Overall, Champion builds between 1,300 to 1,600 park model units per year. That accounts for about 25% to 30% of the U.S. park model market.

"More people are becoming interested in park models,





Champion builds between 1,300 and 1,600 park model units per year. That accounts for about 25% to 30% of the U.S. park model market.

especially with the cost of gas and diesel so high," Tuyo says. "People are more willing to go back to the same area and not have to drag a fifth wheel or RV if they don't have to. They can go to a community or campground and purchase one and keep it there, or buy private property in their desired area and visit yearly."

Park models offer an attractive, affordable alternative to buying a second home, Tuyo says. Units range in price from the mid $50,000s to the mid $150,000s, according to Tuyo. He says Champion's strengths are the quality of its products and service, and available options the market demands.

"We have price sensitive units all the way up to the most elaborate units you could imagine," he says. "Our manufacturing centers are from coast to coast. We have them in the north, south, east and west. There is not a state we cannot reach, including Hawaii. We can ship them to the ports. We are



Champion upgrades its park models every quarter, paying special attention to regional differences in floorplans and color palettes.



working for a community in Hawaii right now, as a result of the unfortunate fires they had last year."

Tuyo says in the current era of housing shortages, manufactured homes of various types can be an extreme value, whether used recreationally or as a full-time residence.

REGIONAL DESIGNING

Champion upgrades its park models about every quarter, building on models of the Shore Park and Athens Park lines.

"Then we have derivatives off of that, based on regional requirements, from a floorplan standpoint and a color palette standpoint," Tuyo says. "Our colors in North Carolina, for example, generally are not the same as what we have in Texas, because of regional differences.

"On the East Coast, we do a lot of the coastal colors, like the light blues, teals and bright whites. In the central states, we do a lot more metal roofs and darker colors. In Arizona and Idaho, many customers prefer the cabin-feel park models, with more wood interiors. Out West, we sell a lot of brighter colors, but it is a different color configuration than in the East."

Inspiration for model upgrades comes from a variety of sources, he says. Important input comes from current owners and retailers. An internal Champion Design group is responsible for creating color palettes and crafting floorplans.

"We have registration cards for feedback from the customers," Tuyo says. "We gather information not just on location, but we request information about what we can do better from the retailers, and what new things people are looking for, whether it be color or features in the park models."

Trade shows have become increasingly important, he says, and Champion plans to participate in more events this year.

"The market demands that we show in different parts of the country," Tuyo says. "This is what we do as the nation's largest park model and cabin builder. Our presence from an online perspective, as well as from a show perspective, is going to be larger in 2024 than it ever has been before. The big ones would be the Louisville show, (Louisville Manufactured Housing Show), the Florida RV SuperShow, the KOA show, the Glamping Expo in Colorado, and we go to nearly every state's campground association shows yearly."

Competition in the park model sector is keen, especially with new companies entering the field. The growing popularity of tiny homes is a factor.

"Our goal is to maintain and increase our market share, even with new manufacturers coming into the market," Tuyo says. "Tiny homes, which are not regulated through RVIA code 119.5, they are coming in. They are not listed as a park model, but the tiny home market is gaining some ground. The park models are a coded temporary housing option in every state in the country. Tiny homes are unregulated and not part of the RV industry." RVP

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Historical Park Model Builder Captures Young Fans

A rise in a new camping demographics leads to higher-end finishes and a wide range of price points from Kropf Industries.

BY JENNIFER KING

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KROPF INDUSTRIES

Industry studies have shown over and over that a younger demographic has entered the RV market in recent years — and that's also true for park models.

"I think historically, park models have been sold to an older demographic — couples that have reached retirement, have been camping most of their lives, and desire a home away from home," says Liz Wogoman, designer at Kropf Industries, Inc. "[They] have established the place they love and know how they like to experience it. We are continuing to see that; the majority of our customers are still retirees, but we're seeing an increase in younger couples. Many have been drawn in by the appeal of glamping. Glamping is a relatively new concept and a very trendy term that encompasses a huge portion of the camping and outdoor hospitality market. Ultimately, the popularity of the term has helped to educate a new audience on an upscale camping experience they didn't know was possible. We have provided that for years and are anxious to show customers what camping in a Kropf can feel like."



Trevor Kropf

Wogoman says Kropf's Canvas or Lakeside models are a great fit for a younger demographic to enter the park model market at an attainable price. General Manager Trevor Kropf — the founder's great-grandson — agrees.

"If you've seen all the research that has been done in the past couple years, the overall age for the RV industry is down into the mid-30s. We've seen young families gravitate toward the Canvas and the Lakeside Series because they are a little bit more price-friendly for families that have younger kids."

The Canvas series is an 11-foot by 36-foot park model with three floorplans. The series features laminate countertops, a 54-inch fiberglass shower, stone/tile backsplash, 18-cubic-foot

Kropf Industries, Inc.

Goshen, Indiana

1946

A building contractor, Solomon Kropf loved camping and wanted to take his wife and four kids. He decided to build his own trailer and bought a frame, built walls of Masonite, stretched a canvas and coated it for a roof. A nearby dealer asked if he could buy it and said he'd buy as many as Solomon could make.

1949

After three years, Solomon's business was ready for expansion. In 1949, he purchased a farm north of Goshen – a former dairy barn that became a production facility.

1952

Solomon's son Robert (Bob) married Dorothy Simmons, and the couple received the first 10-wide as a wedding present – this was the company's first Eldorado.

1960s

Kropf Manufacturing was now focused on high-end, custom mobile homes and modulars.

1962

On Jan. 19, a fire destroyed much of production facility. The company continued business at a rented facility, and then, within a year, they had a new building to operate from.

1964

Solomon's second son Vernon (Vern) was sent to Sarasota, Florida, to oversee the first retail sales lot.

1970s

Florida lot sees introduction of new recreation park trailers.









refrigerator, sleeper sofa, full metal underbelly, and residential siding and shingles. "I know a lot of dealers and customers like the price point, but they also like the openness they feel as soon as they walk into it. They get to decide how to customize and fill that space after their purchase."

"The bones of our build have not changed," Wogoman adds. "We have merely simplified and streamlined to make our Canvas Series more attainable. The Canvas name was chosen in homage to the humble durability of a material Solomon Kropf used in his first trailer.

"Our product development team wanted to meet the demands of the cost-conscious segment of our market and that led us back to our young, frugal founder. Our great-grandfather saw the first days of RV manufacturing in Elkhart County. Sol wanted a vessel for family adventures and memories but needed to do so on a tighter budget. Seventy-eight years ago, he started a DIY project in his backyard that launched a business four generations strong. Now we get to see customers utilize their own DIY skills as they personalize our entry-level model as their 'Blank Canvas.' We think Sol would be proud of that connection."

The Lakeside series is also 11 feet by 36 feet with seven floorplan options. Standard features include the same items as the Canvas, but more upgraded options are available in the Lakeside series.

1976

Solomon retires, and sons Bob and Vern become the new owners. Vern oversees the Florida location and Bob oversees manufacturing in Indiana. Brother Charlie leads engineering/design, and brother-in-law Sam is the purchasing agent. Bob's wife, Dorothy, joins the team, and their children also work in the office or production floor. Vern's daughters work the Florida sales lot. Bob's son Donald joins as a plant manager.

1981

Final model home came off the line as the company transitions to park models.

1985

Son-in-law, Curt Yoder joins as sales manager

1998

Kropf Manufacturing is purchased by Donald Kropf and Curt Yoder; name changed to Kropf Industries.

2010

Trevor Kropf joins his father, Donald, at the company.

2014

Brian Wogoman, Solomon's great-grandson, joins the company as Director of Product Development.

2021

Curt retires from Kropf Industries; Trevor becomes general manager.

2022

Eldorado reintroduced 70 years after first Eldorado produced

2023

Introduction of the Kropf Canvas



THE RETURN OF THE ELDORADO

In 1952, Kropf Industries' founder Solomon Kropf built the first Eldorado as a wedding gift to his son Robert and his bride, Dorothy. In 2022, the company reintroduced the Eldorado as its top-of-the-line, luxury model. The size varies from 11.5 feet by 35 feet to 12 feet by 35 feet across the six available floorplans. The Eldorado offers upscale residential finishes for the exterior and interior.

"I think the Eldorado has been such a success because a portion of our market is looking for high-quality, customizable options in a turn-key unit. During our 2023 open house, we introduced Diamond Kote siding and the reception has been amazing. Customers notice the Eldorado's exterior differences immediately. They know this product will stand the test of time and are pleased to see the same quality finishes extend throughout the interior," Wogoman says.

"I think the Eldorado is often for the graduated buyer; they have gone through the process of 'roughing it' and are now interested in all the comforts of home that a park model can provide. We've gotten a good response in the United States and in Canada," Kropf says. "For the past two Toronto shows, one of our dealers has taken two Eldorados each and they both sold during the show. I think the Canadian market likes the luxurious feel of the Eldorado."

Standard features in the Eldorado include solid surface countertops, 60-inch walk-in tile shower, premium siding package, standing seam metal roof, residential front door, soft-close cabinets, full height stone/tile backsplash, 48-inch fireplace, apron sink with accessories, 22-cubic-foot refrigerator, washer/dryer hookup option, leather upholstery, under-mount sinks, wood blinds, shiplap feature walls, Viewrail loft railing, 65-inch TV with surround sound, a king-size bed and smart thermostat.

While the Canvas and Eldorado provide options at either end of the spectrum, Kropf says the Island series is their "bread and butter."

"Island series orders still comprise about 60% of our business. It's a little bit price-friendlier than the Eldorado but still allows for

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a lot of the customizations." The Island starts at 11.5 feet by 35 feet up to 12 feet by 35 feet and comes in 14 floorplan options. With dozens of upgrades available, standard features include an upgraded insulation, laminate countertops, 54-inch fiberglass shower, optional shake siding, staggered cabinetry with toe-kick, stone/tile backsplash, 18-cubic-foot refrigerator, wood blinds, and a queen-size bed.

STILL SOLD FOR CAMPING

Despite the recent rise in popularity of tiny houses, Kropf says their park models are still sold as a secondary dwelling for camping adventures. They are not intended as a permanent residence.

"We are governed by RVIA [RV Industry Association] and build to ANSI [American National Standards Institute] code, which assures consumers that appropriate qualifications are met in the construction of every Kropf unit. To carry the RVIA seal, park models must be marketed for recreation rather than a permanent residence. Owners in warmer states have been able to use their vacation spot for a lengthened season, but more and more owners wish to have access to their park model year-round. Sourcing new materials allows us to exceed code, improve insulation offerings and provide year-round usability. Now customers in northern states and even Canada can extend the bookends of their camping season."

Kropf has always offered plenty of customization options, the general manager says. In fact, he recently came across an advertisement from 1980 that touted the company's willingness to work with the customer to create exactly what that person wants.

"All these years later, lots has changed in the market, but what we strive for has remained the same: quality, versatility and providing what the customer wants," Kropf says. "I think that's why we've been around so long." RVP



TAKING THE RISK & REAPING THE REWARDS

Princess Craft RV in Texas evolves from truck camper sales to a burgeoning business that prizes well-trained employees.

BY MIKE HARBOUR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRINCESS CRAFT RV



PJ Buerger (left) with Teri Krauss and Clint Sandberg on her podcast, RV Small Talk.

Evolve or die is a fitting motto for Princess Craft RV.

The Texas company, founded in the late 1960s as Pfluger Craft Manufacturing (it became Princess Craft shortly after), built inexpensive truck caps and campers when Richard and PJ Buerger took over in 1996. Things wouldn't remain the same for long, and the reason was simple.

"By 1997, I just said 'Yeah, we can't make any money manufacturing. We've got to do something.' So we took on Shadow Cruiser truck campers, because truck campers were all we knew. I knew nothing about the RV industry at all," says PJ Buerger.

Indeed, Buerger didn't even want to be a business owner. She had already been her own boss by the time the opportunity to take over Princess Craft — the manufacturer — presented itself. Buerger preferred to work for someone else and take it easy.

"It was not a plan to have a dealership. In fact, I remember telling my husband, 'OK, I decided we're going to be a truck camper dealership.' He looked at me funny and said, 'You know that's not a thing, right?'" she says. "I said, 'Well, then we will go out of business as a truck camper dealer.'"

Thankfully for customers throughout the Lone Star State and beyond, Buerger stuck with it. Today, Princess Craft — the dealership — not only sells and services RVs, but also hosts annual rallies geared to truck campers and "tiny trailers," maintains several popular YouTube channels (plus the aptly named RV Small Talk podcast), and even opened a second location in Houston two years ago. It employs more than 30 people and offers units from more than a dozen manufacturers.

While the dealership's early business was built on truck camper sales, Buerger's been selling lightweight towables since the early 2000s. Last year, 80% of the 750 units sold by Princess Craft had wheels, and according to Buerger, it all started thanks to a persistent Aliner representative who insisted she try offering five of the iconic A-frame travel trailers.

"I think it was kind of like, 'I'll just do something. You know, what could it hurt?'" she says. "Once I got licensed for Aliner, then I popped up on people's radar. Then every manufacturer who had some weird little thing that no dealer would take came to me. Seriously, that is what happened. Small trailers weren't a thing. Aliner was trying to be a competitor to the canvas pop-ups. The problem is it didn't sleep as many people and it was a real problem. They had a very strong following. So we did really well the first year and even better the second year. By the second year, I think we sold 58 because I didn't know any better. And one person said, 'Hey, you want to come to our rally?'"

ROLLING WITH THE UPS & DOWNS

Buerger, who naturally took an Aliner to the event, arrived late and tired, she recalls, and even slept soundly through an overnight thunderstorm so threatening the other attendees rode it out in a shelter.

"So the next morning at seven o'clock, they knocked on my door and said, 'People need to leave, so you have to come out and talk to them.' I got up in my pajamas, which I think was probably sweatpants and a sweatshirt," she says. "I wandered through 50 or 60 Aliners one by one until two in the afternoon, so every single person could show me their Aliners and all the things they had done to them."

Despite having a less-than-perfect start, Buerger, who didn't grow up in a camping family, believes the event was definitely worth it. "What it did was it got me connected to the Aliner community," she says. "So from then on out, I sold tons of Aliners."

Princess Craft's big test came during the recession when, in Buerger's words, the world fell apart.





The dealership was still in Pflugerville, a growing Hill Country city north of Austin, when the economy took a turn for the worst. In addition to truck campers and Aliners, Buerger also offered TAB teardrops, then a Dutchmen RV product. Space was at such a premium, Princess Craft inventory had to be spread among multiple blocks downtown plus a field.

"It was brutal," she says. "So we scaled back to a handful of employees and I was back to repairing trailers, driving a forklift, answering the phone and selling truck campers in 2008 because everything shut down."

Unlike some dealerships, Princess Craft managed to make it through the recession, thanks to lessons learned from 9/11. Space remained an issue because there wasn't enough of it in Pflugerville. A solution was needed quickly, and Buerger's salvation showed up in 2012 when a 10,000-square-foot bowling alley in Round Rock, seized by the Internal Revenue Service, caught her eye.

Converting the building, constructed in the 1970s, to a dealership took six weeks, she says, as it contained not just bowling lanes but also a full-service kitchen. Practically everything that wasn't hauled away by creditors — there were 17 liens on the property — was torn down and removed before new walls and a door could be added to separate the new offices and showroom from the shop.

INVESTING IN TECHS

Like Princess Craft's truck camper origins, their shop is unconventional, too. It's not divided into bays like a typical RV service center, Buerger says, but is instead a large, open space capable of holding up to 12 units at a time. It's staffed with six technicians; two are dedicated to PDI (pre-delivery inspection) work.

"Our service techs are split between PDI and service. Our service techs are good, solid techs and most of them have been here a long time. In fact, the man who was working at the Princess Craft Manufacturing when I started there is still a tech for us," she says. "He taught me everything I know about RVs, so I'm glad to have him here."

Buerger runs an hourly shop, and technicians with RV Technical Institute Level 1 certification can earn an additional $9 per hour, depending on efficiency. All her technicians hold Level 1 certification (some hold Level 2), while her parts staff also is Level 1 certified, as she is; her service managers are Level 2 certified.

The achievements are an important part of being a good employer, according to Buerger.

"One of my jobs is to make sure technicians are as skilled, as talented and as certified as they can be, so they can be as employable as they can be. Now I'm not helping them get a job somewhere else, which I realize is a problem and a fear for a lot of dealers, but that comes down to culture and pay. That doesn't come down to making them a valuable employee," she says. "I think as an employer, my job is to make sure that they are a sought-after skilled person if they end up on the job market for any reason."

In addition, certification also shows initiative and promotes customer confidence, according to Buerger, who believes there's no real reason why more dealers shouldn't be onboard with the process.

"Maybe the downside is that it takes some time away from their work or that it costs the business just a little bit of money, but if you're doing a pros and cons list, let's be serious," she says. "It doesn't make any sense not to, in my book, and then when you're looking at entry-level people or





lower skilled technicians, they need all the help they can get. They need resources, they need connections and they need certifications, too."

Princess Craft also has a different approach to parts.

"The majority of our counter parts are sold on walkthroughs. And you know, those types of sales are really 90% based on who's doing that walkthrough and who's explaining to the customer about the parts," Buerger says. "When we're looking at the mix of business today, I would say at least 50% of our customers are fairly new to the RV industry. They don't know what they need, or they need some help to understand. The other half maybe have been camping, but they just know the basics. So we have somebody spend time with them, walk through our parts department, and show them, 'Here is what this is and this is why it's really important, and I want to be sure you understand that.'"

By using a technician to conduct walkthroughs, Buerger says parts sales have probably quadrupled.

"When so many people have driven a long way to get here, they have some confidence in the Princess Craft name. They think we're going to help them out, get them well on their way. I think not only giving them a good walkthrough but also giving them a good parts tour is important. They feel more educated. They feel more capable. And it just doesn't feel like this huge unknown of what camping will be like. So that is a serious part of our process," she says.

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Buerger admits her store will never be mistaken for a typical RV dealership, but it goes beyond bare essentials.

"We have a moderate amount of parts. It's not overflowing, but it's not a minimalistic, 'Here, we've got a sewer hose and some toilet chemicals,' either," she says. "We can talk to you about everything from portable toilets, satellite dishes, solar and lithium upgrades to inverters, Wi-Fi, generators and all the parts in between."

One thing that makes her parts operation a little different is the way it's presented.

"I am not big on having reps come in and set up a planogram because a planogram really works if you are a destination," she says. "We have some of that, but not a tremendous amount. We have what we need to repair the units in the service bay. We don't have a spot for every widget you might ever need in our parts department out on the floor because it's not interesting for customers to shop and it's not going to turn fast enough.

"We try to look like a fun and interesting store, but we have every serious piece that an RVer would want to know about. [But] we probably don't have every widget that they would need to fix a little burner tube on their 10-year old-water heater," she says.

Since customers will go to Amazon if they can get an item cheaper, Buerger makes certain her inventory is priced reasonably.

"We also give them a voucher when they buy from us to get them started buying things," she says. "It's only $25, but it piques their interest. So they're more attentive when they're looking through parts on their walkthroughs."

It's a successful strategy, as Buerger says her parts and service department today contributes about 20% to Princess Craft's gross profits; that number has been as high as 50%. With a pending expansion at the Round Rock store, she hopes to add more technicians since service work is in such high demand.

"I don't think I'll be able to grow my staff fast enough to take care of all the service that we would be able to bring in. It's coming in faster than we can manage. Every dealership is having that same problem," she says.

When another RV dealership in Houston closed its doors a couple of years ago, Buerger saw a perfect opportunity to expand the Princess Craft footprint.

"That one kind of fell in our lap, and Houston is one of the main markets in the country. We have so many customers in Houston," Buerger says of the dealership managed by daughter Sue Ann Smith. "One of the reasons that we took that location is because we could immediately keep Aliner and Lance there."

The only downside is the facility itself, she says. While it's on the access road of busy I-45 south of downtown, it's located behind an outlet store, so access is difficult with longer RVs. Buerger says a move is in the works and the new site will be announced soon. RVP

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SMART RV TECHNOLOGY

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What to look for when offering customers smart RV technology.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS BY GO POWER! | DOMETIC



DAVID PEREIRAS - STOCK.ADOBE.COM



RVs have transformed from simple vehicles into advanced, mobile living spaces. Travelers are no longer satisfied with basic facilities. Life on the road has to include a maximum of conveniences and amenities that we are used to at home. When away from shore power, solar is often the best option to supply the energy needed for the modern RV lifestyle. Based on an study from the RV Industry Association (RVIA), 46% of RVers looking to upgrade their vehicle indicate the need for electrical or solar parts.

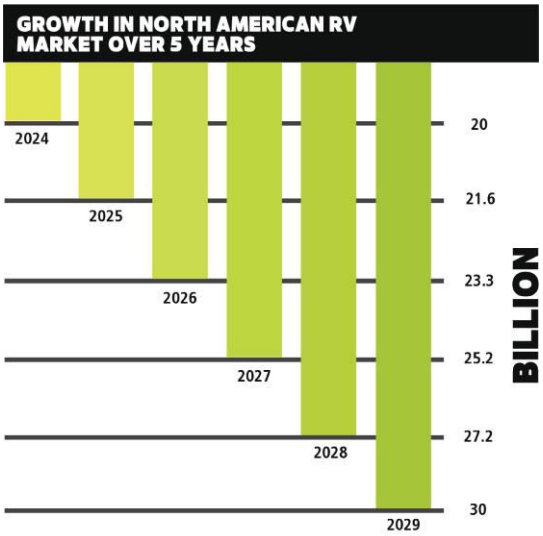
Another trend is the integration of smart technology in RVs. With the backdrop of smart home technology's success, the market for smart RV technology and connected RV power systems, in particular, is set for considerable expansion. Dealers and distributors are presented with an opportunity to capitalize on this trend by aligning their offerings with the technological advancements and evolving preferences of RV buyers. Staying ahead of these trends and understanding the benefits of connected RV technology is key to thriving in a dynamic market.

Aligning With a New, Younger Demographic

Recent trends in the RV market highlight a significant demographic shift. According to the 2024 IDS RV Industry Trends Report, young families with children now represent 34% of RV buyers. This younger, more technologically inclined demographic is redefining industry expectations, prioritizing a blend of mobility, comfort and advanced connectivity. The report depicts Gen Z and millennials with high expectations toward tech for their digital nomad lifestyle and concludes: "Mobile friendly is now mobile mandatory." In addition, the RVIA study finds that younger RVers are spending more than ever to make enhancements to their vehicles.

Smart RV Tech Is Trending

Mirroring the convenience and functionality of smart home tools, a market that has grown over 30% in the United States since 2020, smart RV technology is already conquering the industry, enabling operators to manage myriad RV functions and appliances through smartphones, tablets or onboard touchscreens. Wi-Fi and Bluetooth capabilities allow for the control and monitoring of a wide array of operations, like tire pressure, adjusting lights, extending awnings, deploying level jacks, etc. RV builders are installing interfaces, sensors and full-fledged smart RV systems in the



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latest generation of vehicles, e.g., Jayco with its JAYCOMMAND, which facilitates controlling and monitoring RV functions with a smartphone.

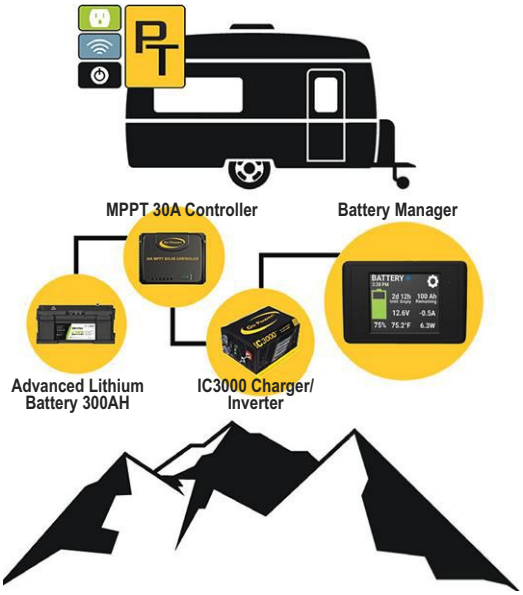
Why Connected Power Systems?

Integrating an RV's power system is a logical next step. Solar setups in RVs traditionally involve a fair amount of complexity: The various components, such as solar panels, batteries, inverters, charge controllers, etc., need to be properly hooked up and set up to work effectively as a coherent system. Smart RV technology is a game changer in that respect, enabling efficient energy management from a unified interface. It offers a level of integration and control that aligns with the smart, connected lifestyle that modern RV enthusiasts seek.

1. **Comprehensive Performance Monitoring:**
   - Smart RV systems enable continuous monitoring of all components involved in the solar power setup. This feature allows operators to track energy production and consumption in real time, ensuring optimal operation and improving overall energy efficiency.
2. **System Alerts & Adjustments:**
   - Systems provide real-time alerts on system status and health, facilitating timely adjustments. This proactive maintenance helps in preventing breakdowns and enhances the longevity of the solar power system.
3. **Remote Control of Devices & Appliances:**
   - With smart RV technology, users can remotely control various devices and appliances, adjusting power consumption based on need. This capability is crucial for managing energy use effectively, especially in solar-powered systems where energy conservation is key.
4. **Ease of Installation:**
   - The integrated nature of smart RV systems simplifies the installation process, significantly reducing the complexity and time required to set up solar power solutions. The "all-in-one-box" approach not only streamlines installation but also improves system reliability and reduces the likelihood of service calls.

What You Need to Know About RV-C

RV-C is a communication standard developed specifically for the RV industry. It ensures that various electronic devices within an RV, such as lighting, air conditioning, entertainment and power systems, can communicate seamlessly. RV-C utilizes a network communications protocol that supports real-time data exchange, enhancing system interoperability and enabling sophisticated monitoring and diagnostic capabilities. The standard is crucial for integrating advanced technologies into RVs, providing scalability and customization options for manufacturers and users alike. It is essential for delivering a cohesive and user-friendly smart RV experience.



Criteria for Selecting Smart RV Power Systems

When choosing smart RV systems for solar applications, dealers and OEMs should consider the following:

1. **Integration & Compatibility:**
   - Systems should easily integrate with existing RV infrastructure and other smart devices, ensuring seamless operation and user experience. Confirm RV-C compatibility.
2. **User-Friendliness:**
   - Choose systems that are intuitive and easy for end-users to understand and operate, making sure they appeal to a broad demographic.
3. **Reliability & Support:**
   - Reliable systems backed by comprehensive customer support ensure that any issues can be quickly addressed, maintaining customer satisfaction and trust.
4. **Scalability:**
   - Smart RV systems should be scalable and allow for upgrades and integration of new technologies, future-proofing the investment.

Reducing Complexity Via Smart Control

The Go Power! PowerTrak Smart Mobile Power System is a solution that redefines convenience for outdoor enthusiasts. It eliminates the need for multiple controls by integrating all system functions into a single touchscreen display. It uses RV-C to optimize solar battery charging and power system performance, effectively eliminating complex configurations during installation.

The system's 3-inch touchscreen display serves as a centralized control point. It offers multiple mounting options, allowing for optimal placement within the RV. The integrated smart technology also streamlines troubleshooting, eliminating back-and-forth between compatible devices.

Emerging Trends & Future Directions

Looking ahead, smart RV technology is set to incorporate more advanced features, such as artificial intelligence and Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity. These technologies could further revolutionize solar power management in RVs, offering more precise energy tracking, automated system adjustments and even predictive maintenance capabilities.

By adopting smart RV power systems, dealers and OEMs can meet the current demands of consumers young and old, and position themselves as leaders in a rapidly advancing market. Or as Frank Tamburrini, general manager of IDS, puts it, "The future of RV dealerships isn't about choosing between technology and human touch — it's about harnessing the strengths of both." RVP



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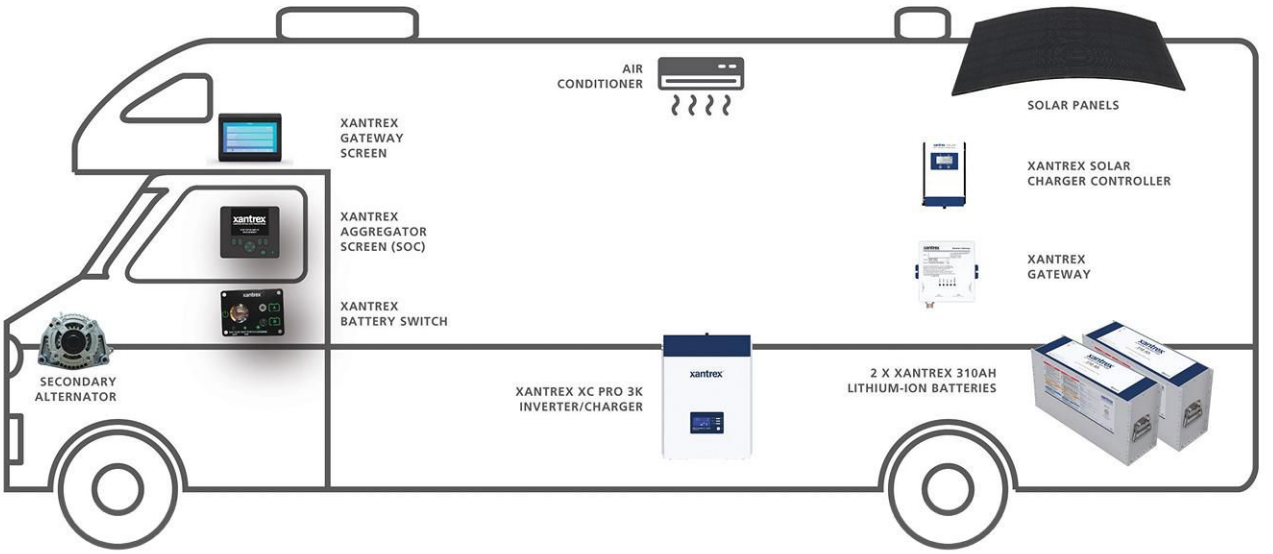
americasrvwarranty.com

RV Electrical Systems 101

Brush up on the basics so you're better equipped to explain to customers what will best meet their RV electrical needs.

BY DON WILSON

PHOTOS COURTESY OF XANTREX



RV electrical systems can be confusing to explain to potential users, and rightly so! Learning how all the components go together to make RV life more enjoyable can be complicated.

To break it down, the most important thing to know is that there are two different types of RV electrical power systems:

1. AC power (used in residential housing)
2. DC power (used in cars/trucks)

Understanding the difference between AC and DC power can be difficult. Hopefully the following explanation helps to demystify RV electrical systems a bit. Let's start with why RVs use both: Because each type has its own unique benefit.

AC power is easily generated, or changed, based on the demand of the appliance; unlike DC, which needs complicated electronics to change from one voltage to another. For instance, using a simple device, like a transformer, can change the 120 volts from a wall plug to 12 volts for charging batteries, 5 volts for computer use or 30,000 volts for long-distance transmission. So, the benefit of AC power is that it's used for many residential appliances such as microwaves, TVs and battery chargers, as well as large loads like air conditioners — all of which are found in an RV.

DC power is storable. Unlike AC power, DC can be contained in a battery to use whenever the demand arises, where AC power must be generated at the moment the load demands it. This is convenient for RVs when shore power is unplugged and the generator is not running, as DC lighting will continue to work.

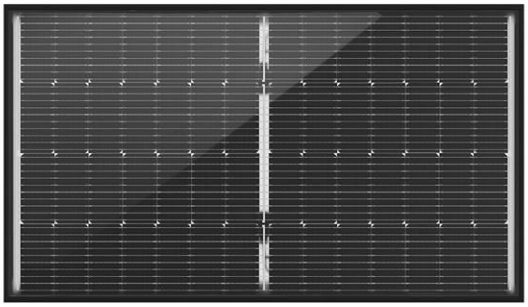
The bridge between AC and DC power is an inverter/charger. Let's look at how the RV electrical system uses an inverter/charger, batteries and other devices to make the system work.

The heart of an electrical system is the battery. A battery can be a high-amperage battery (like your car uses to start the engine) or a deep-cycle battery. An RV must have a deep-cycle battery because of how it uses the stored energy. That doesn't mean an engine starting battery can't work — it would — but it wouldn't last very long.

A battery is primarily rated by voltage (typically 12 volt, 24 volt or 48 volt), but its most important rating is the amp hours (Ah). Think of a battery as a fuel tank — the Ah rating is how many gallons of fuel the tank can hold. How long a battery will last is simple math:

- A 400Ah battery should be able to output 4 amps for 100 hours (or 100A for four hours) so A x H = Ah.

However, and this is important,



lead-based batteries (i.e., flooded, gel, AGM) should never be discharged to completely dead, as internal damage can cause the battery to age very quickly. The rule of thumb is to use 50% of their actual capacity. However, other battery chemistries, such as lithium batteries, using the LiFePO4 chemistry, are able to use all their capacity.

For instance: a pair of 105Ah Xantrex lithium-ion batteries (at 210Ah) can power a 100-amp load for over two hours before the battery is discharged. However, a pair of golf cart batteries, at 220Ah, could only feed that load for just over one hour.

If the battery is the heart of the electrical system, the inverter/charger is the soul. Or if the battery is a fuel tank, think of the inverter as a generator that feeds off the fuel tank — but with different math.

For example, using Watt's Law (volts x amps = watts), we know that a 60-watt DC load will draw 5 amps from a 12-volt battery (12 x 5 = 60).

We also know that a 60-watt AC load will draw 0.5 amps from the 120-volt AC circuit (120 x 0.5 = 60).

However, the different math comes into play when a 60-watt AC load is used through an inverter. The wattage of the load doesn't change, so even though it draws 0.5 amps from the AC side, it will still draw 5 amps from the DC battery (plus another 10% due to electrical losses through the inverter, so really about 5.5 amps).



As far as what size inverter works for a particular installation, remember that the downstream load is the No. 1 consideration for inverter size, but oversizing is not detrimental and allows for expansion. For instance:

- A Xantrex Freedom XC 1000W Inverter/Charger feeding 600 watts of load will draw 55 amps from the battery (600 watts / 12 volts = 50 amps + the 10% efficiency tax).
- But a Xantrex Freedom XC 3000W Inverter/Charger, feeding the exact same 600 watts of load, will draw the same 55 amps from the battery. So using a larger inverter makes sense if future expansion is in the works, without significant electrical downside.
- *Note:* Ensure fusing and cabling are properly sized for whichever system is installed. When in doubt — go big on cabling; you'll never be sorry.

To charge the battery, a generator or shore power feeds 120 volts into the inverter/charger and charges the battery using the same math in reverse (and a larger tax since charging is less efficient than inverting):

- 15-amp AC coming into the charger would be 1,800 watts (15 amps x 120 volts = 1,800 watts), but the losses are typically around 15%, so 1,530 watts (or up to 127.5 amps DC) should go into the battery.
- *Note:* These are general numbers using nominal values, and depending on the system structure, resistances and values, these may vary somewhat due to various factors.

To simplify: the DC battery feeds DC loads (such as lighting, water pump, thermostat, slides, etc.) and AC supply feeds AC loads whether they are inverted (TV, microwave, etc.) or not (air conditioners).

What Else Can Affect Performance?

Let's look at solar panels. These popular accessories do one simple thing: take solar energy and trickle it into the battery. How fast and how efficient depends on the panel's angle to the sun, temperature, type of controller, etc. But for the most part, the solar panel's job is to allow the DC battery to discharge more slowly, since RVs cannot depend on solar panels to run the entire system.



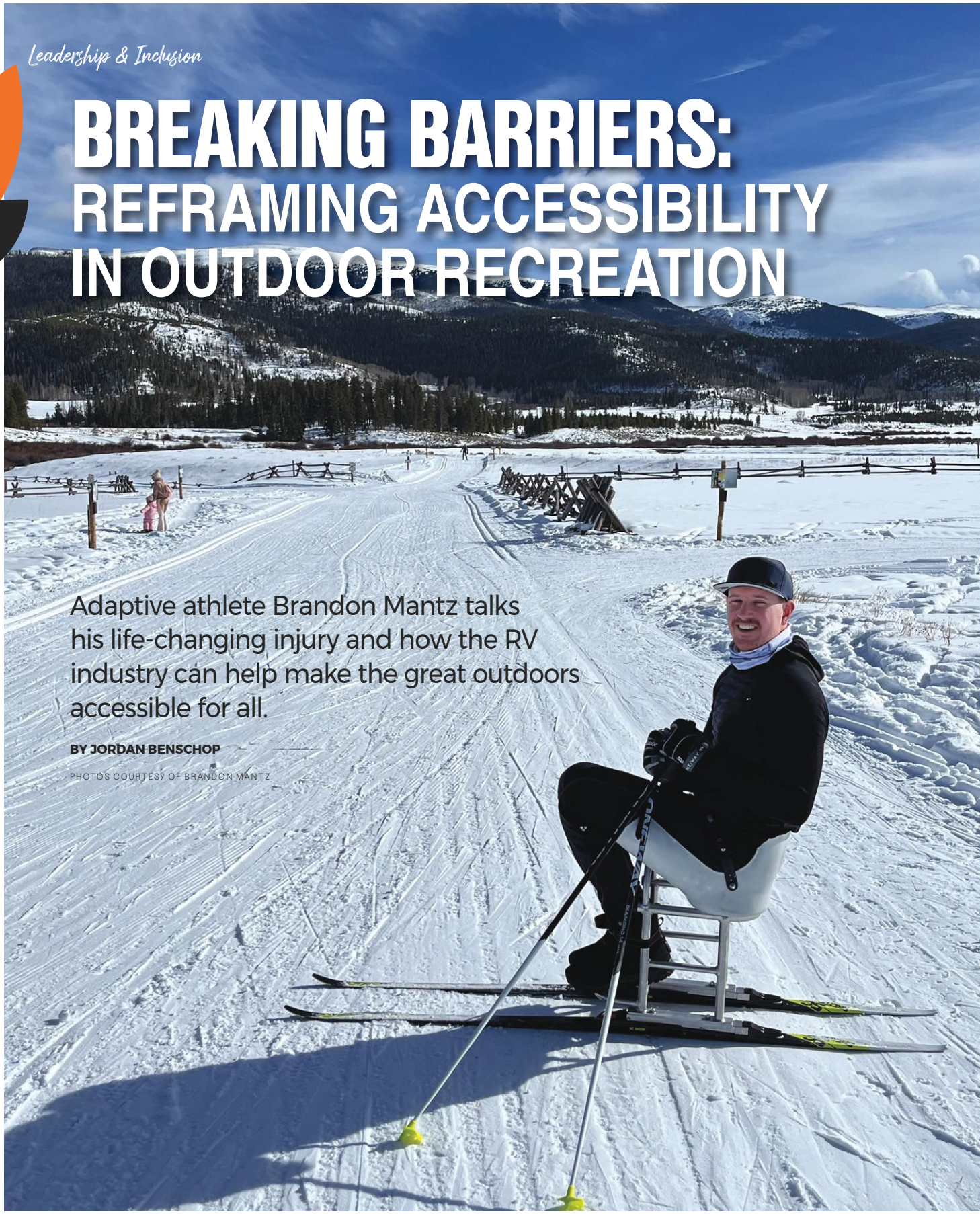
Solar panels come in different types and sizes. Solid glass panels are very popular for RVs, although peel-and-stick flexible panels, like the Xantrex Solar Max, offer a solid alternative to glass panels, especially for installation on curved surfaces. Glass panel technology has evolved with the recent launch of Xantrex bifacial panels that capture the sun's energy on both sides, offering more output.

Solar panels, batteries and inverter/chargers form the backbone of an RV's electrical system. When choosing the right system for an RV, it's crucial to research the right components to ensure the recommended system can meet an RVer's electrical needs when on the road. RVP

Don Wilson has worked in technical capacities in the automotive/truck, RV and marine fields since 1989. He has extensive experience in designing/troubleshooting onboard electrical systems. He currently serves as a technical instructor for RV Industry Association clinics, is a full-time chief engineer for Next Generation Power Systems and conducts live technical seminars throughout the country.



BREAKING BARRIERS: REFRAMING ACCESSIBILITY IN OUTDOOR RECREATION



Adaptive athlete Brandon Mantz talks his life-changing injury and how the RV industry can help make the great outdoors accessible for all.

BY JORDAN BENSCHOP

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDON MANTZ





Mantz (left) wins second place at a CrossFit competition in Barcelona, Spain.

When Brandon Mantz woke in the trauma center of St. Anthony's Hospital in Lakewood, Colorado, he couldn't speak.

A tube emerged from his mouth and his brain was foggy. He wasn't yet aware he had broken ribs, punctured lungs and a fractured shoulder, and — if he hadn't been rescued in time — enough internal bleeding to threaten his life.

"The first thing I remember is the doctor telling me that I was in a ski accident, I was paralyzed and that I had a zero percent chance of ever walking again," he says.

It was December 2018 when Mantz, an avid outdoorsman who had just moved to Colorado from Wisconsin, headed up to Breckenridge to hit the slopes with friends. Early in the season, a light dusting of snow covered the ground as the group tackled a few greens and blues before driving back to Denver. On the day's last run, his friends skied ahead as Mantz gained speed and abruptly smacked into a trail marker post. The group didn't see the crash, and he doesn't remember it himself, he says. Details came days later when a retired surgeon, who was skiing behind Mantz, visited him in the hospital.

"[He said] he saw me right away, started medical protocol and called ski patrol. He said that I was spitting up blood, but that I was conscious and responding back to him," he says.

When ski patrol arrived, the Flight for Life helicopter was dispatched to pick him up mountainside. Mantz spoke with the flight crew nearly two years later.

"They said there's maybe two days in a whole year that the conditions are good enough where they can pick somebody up from the mountain, rather than transporting me down on a snowmobile and then going to a helipad in Breckenridge," he says. "So, if it didn't happen so fast and they weren't able to pick me up, I probably would have bled out."

Mantz lost 3 liters from internal bleeding, requiring immediate blood transfusions and intubation. When he stabilized, he learned of his complete spinal cord compression. There were zero signals the doctors could see going past the injury point, Mantz says. He recalls being thankful for his doctor's sincere honesty.

"[He said] 'The best thing you can do is rehab and start figuring out what life is going to look like in a wheelchair.'"

After three weeks and a Christmas in the ICU, Mantz transferred to Denver's Craig Hospital — one of the country's top brain and spinal cord injury rehab facilities, where he spent another eight weeks.

He had always been an athlete, having played college baseball and, post-university, spent time skiing, trail running and biking outdoors.

"[After the accident], it was learning how to get dressed again, navigate in a wheelchair and what it was like to brush my teeth not having the ability to stand over the sink," he says.

Mantz had no choice but to learn, and eventually advocate for, how to live in a completely different way.

Pursuing Possibility

When he started his recovery, Mantz worked for a power conversion company adjacent to the RV industry, whose long-term disability policy allowed him six months before returning to work. Fortunately, he had a remote position and didn't need to worry about a commute.

"For a lot of folks that have an injury and become disabled, reentering the workforce is really challenging. There's a lot of logistics like learning to drive in a different way — or maybe you can't drive at all," he says.

Accessing public transportation isn't always easy with a disability, he adds.

Neither is navigating work travel.

"But at Craig Hospital, they have a driving program, so I learned pretty quickly how to drive with hand controls. I got portable controls, too, so whenever I traveled for work, I could get any rental car and install these portable hand controls myself."

His suitcase hooks onto his wheelchair so he can navigate airports independently. But until a few mentors showed him what was possible, Mantz says traveling seemed out of the question.

"I think this is why representation is so important. If it wasn't for people like Justin [a peer mentor at Craig] who visited me in the hospital and showed me pictures of him backpacking through Europe in a wheelchair and doing things like camping and hand-cycle mountain biking, I wouldn't have had any idea of what was possible."

Mantz connected with a group of four disabled athletes in Denver, all with spinal cord injuries.

"We were having dinner, and it was like, you know what? We may have met because of the wheelchairs, but it's the things we like to do that bonded us. We can go out and ride mountain bikes, do a CrossFit workout or go skiing together. Those experiences turned us into friends."

While he wouldn't wish the experience on anyone, Mantz says his personal growth has blossomed over the last five years. At the forefront was learning to accept himself as someone with a disability.

"I was kind of burying a lot of emotions," he says. "So, doing a lot of that work in how I navigate the world, I realized it's almost never the physical — it's the mental and emotional behind it. Like, I'm frustrated that I can't have the same experiences as my able-bodied friends. It's not that I have to push a wheelchair; it's the feeling that I don't have the chance to be close to them through specific experiences.

"I think an important thing is to have experiences that everybody can participate in. It's awesome that there are organizations that connect specific populations, like veterans or wheelchair users or amputees. But it's also important to have the general population be able to access something together. Like, could my friends going camping in their RV even invite me to go with them?"

Accessibility goes far beyond personal impact — it's about multiplying the reach, he says. Everybody knows someone who can benefit from better accessibility. Without the integration piece, where people with different abilities and disabilities can do things together at an equal level, Mantz says "we're just back to segregation in a different way."

> **"It's hard to change something. But if we build it accessibly from the start, it doesn't need to be changed. It's about removing barriers going forward."**

Reframing the 'Rare Case'

Across the board, representation in the outdoor recreation industry is becoming crucial to consider for the market's future. And while race, age and other factors are important to discuss, representation for those with disabilities has largely been left out of the picture — despite 1 in 4 (27% of adults) in the United States having some type of disability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"That piece is so huge for somebody that has a life-changing experience or injury," Mantz says. "And this could go way beyond disabilities — this could be for a family that has a baby for the first time, who's like 'we loved RVing in the past, but I have no idea how this will work with a baby.' It's to have other young families they can look to. Or if I'm a person of color and I think the outdoors isn't for me because of the underrepresentation.

"To see other folks that look like you outdoors — it can make you say, 'Oh, I can be part of this and have an awesome experience like this, too.'"

In the shifting RV industry, a hot topic is how to attract and retain more people (and more customers) in outdoor spaces. Much of the answer is engaging new demographics, which Mantz says includes reframing what "accessible" means.

"If we have that representation and we start to make accessibility more of a baseline, then you're going to see more people out there doing it," he says.

It's easy for businesses to think about accessibility as the "rare case" that can be accommodated with custom builds. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) — a 1990 civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on disabilities — serves its purpose, but Mantz says many would agree there are gaps that don't address today's functionality needs. Oftentimes ADA-compliant bathroom stalls have doors that open inward, not allowing enough space for a wheelchair to pull through and shut the door. Some accessible entrances or routes are through the back of a building and don't give the same experience to people with disabilities. Buildings with less than three stories aren't required to have an elevator. And even ride share apps like Uber aren't covered under the ADA, so drivers can refuse a ride to a passenger with a disability.

"In general, the ADA is reactionary and not preventative. A person needs to file a formal complaint of an ADA violation for action to occur, rather than preventing these barriers in the first place," Mantz says.

"I like to think of it as, what simple changes would benefit the majority of the population? If I'm an RV manufacturer, I have my ADA model, which is great, but how can I make my standard models with a wider galley for a wheelchair or stroller to fit through? Do I have a preplanned place where

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Mantz using a hand-cycle mountain bike alongside his wife, Micki.

I can add a ramp or lift to an existing model? Or maybe it's an aftermarket upgrade — but those things are thought about ahead of time. It's not this one-off custom project."

The same goes for RV dealerships — can salespeople provide the same service regardless of a customer's abilities? Pre-1990 buildings don't have to be ADA-compliant and often don't have accessible entrances. From a hospitality standpoint, when an RV business looks at how to greet and keep a customer, mission statements often mention making them feel like family to provide lifelong memories.

"If you're saying things like that, you should look at the experience from a lens of accessibility as well — that you're giving everybody the same opportunity to make those memories."

At one of the industry's largest annual shows, Mantz doesn't remember seeing any accessible RVs on the floor — and could barely peek inside the open doors of typical units. Whether a dealership or manufacturer, he says it's vital to have accessible models on the lot so customers of all abilities can see what's possible.

RV rentals are another opportunity to bolster the market, often serving as a pathway to attract buyers into the industry.

"But if there's not that many accessible rental models, how do I try RVing out? I have to go buy a custom RV — and then maybe I take it out and realize it's not for me. That's a huge barrier to entry."

With outdoor recreation generating $1.1 trillion in economic output in 2022, making the great outdoors accessible for all goes beyond the $140 billion RV industry. Areas such as campgrounds also have room for improvement. Some locations only have one or two accessible campsites available — and if they happen to be booked, those with disabilities are out of luck.

"If campsites were all accessible, that doesn't mean people who don't have accessibility needs couldn't use them. It would still provide a great experience."

Keeping terrain wild is part of the conversation, Mantz says, rather than opting for unnatural landscape changes such as adding chunky gravel.

"Where we're altering campgrounds and other outdoor areas, we can make choices for accessibility. If we're leveling terrain, make it flat, use a fine gravel or paved surfaces that are easier to move through."

For amenities, especially bathroom facilities, it is fundamental to make accessibility standard. If everyone can use an ADA-approved bathroom, what's stopping more stalls from being accessible? Rethinking accommodation isn't about benefitting a minority group — it includes families with strollers, the aging population and more.

"I think about my grandparents specifically. When I'm doing things with them, I'm not the limiting factor. They're not able to do a lot of stairs, and walking on uneven surfaces is challenging for them. But they love being with family and being in the outdoors and would totally do it more if they could," Mantz says.

Despite multiple areas having room for improvement, he notes one thing those with disabilities understand is not everything can change all at once. The biggest opportunity is rethinking how things are done moving forward, especially when it comes to landscape shifts such as electric vehicles and sustainability.

"Where we might be adding more [EV] charging spaces, can we make those accessible? It's hard to change something, but if we build it accessibly from the start, then it doesn't need to be changed. It's about removing barriers going forward."

Shifting the Language

Overall, the word "disability" is often a misconception in itself. The disabled community embraces the term, Mantz says — it's not something to dance around.

"From what I've seen, it's more offensive to say 'handicapped,' 'differently abled' or 'wheelchair-bound' instead of acknowledging and accepting the person for who they are."

It's about person-first language, he adds. A wheelchair is a mobility device, just like a hand-cycle mountain bike is a tool to improve one's quality of life.

"For me, I'm in the best shape of my life. My upper body is stronger and I'm healthier than I've ever been. The wheelchair allows me to do things I want to do. I think there's a lot of negative misconceptions that people using wheelchairs need to get better, or the goal is to eventually not use them — but walking will never be a possibility for me, unless there's some scientific breakthrough."

Living life to the fullest, he says, means using a wheelchair. Reframing the context and language surrounding mobility devices could help dissolve tough barriers set in place by society.

"If those barriers are removed, then I can have a great experience, and I don't foresee any challenges that anyone else would have when it comes to living a good life."

The insight Mantz gained from his injury reveals a simple truth: regardless of our origins or past experiences, there is always a pathway to greater possibility. Sparking important changes means coming together in compassion for one another's experiences.

"I think [accessibility] would give a lot of people a fuller life. And I think the RV industry can have a lead into making the outdoors accessible for everybody." RVP



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THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Grand Design's Don Clark took a unique route to establish a standout company.

BY RONNIE WENDT



PHOTO COURTESY OF GRAND DESIGN

Where some company owners see products and profits as their primary goals, Don Clark, president, CEO and co-founder of Grand Design RV, sees things differently. It's the people that matter the most, he says.

"What we do is more than just building an RV and making money," he says. "We're creating a vehicle for customers to build memories, travel the country and participate in an exciting lifestyle."

Despite being captivated by the industry for 40-plus years, he says he entered it after losing a bet. A family friend encouraging him to enter the RV industry said they would wager on the Notre Dame football game. Should Clark lose, Clark had to interview with the RV company of his friend's choice.

Obviously, Clark lost. He interviewed with Coachmen RV and the rest is history. "I immediately fell in love with the products we built and the customers," he says. "I just loved talking with customers about the product and the lifestyle. It captivated me and drew me in."

Stepping Outside the Box

Clark and brothers Bill and Ron French joined forces to launch Grand Design RV in 2012. The three became friends while working at Coachmen RV, then moved to Keystone RV together, where they worked their way up to management positions. Clark was named president of Dutchmen, Bill president of Thor Motor Coach and Ron senior group president of THOR Industries.

The three began dreaming of a new kind of RV company. One that focused on high-end travel trailers and fifth wheels, delivered amazing customer service and valued all employees.

Eventually, they stepped out of their leadership roles to build a company with an enduring mission, vision and core values. The mission is "Helping to create memorable stories for those who dare to dream."

The company's vison is connected to the mission, Clark says. "It is 'Working together in the relentless pursuit of a positive RV ownership experience.'"

The company's core values play off the Grand in Grand Design: Gratitude, Respect, Accountability, Innovation and Drive.

"The core values are our North Star," Clark says. "When we drift, we always return to what makes us Grand Design. What makes us special and different is our mission, our vision and our core values. It's what we strive for each day."

Living It Out

"I've never worked in an organization where company culture is so ingrained in everything we do," he says. "It's not just a plaque on a breakroom wall. It's ingrained in our people."

The Grand Design recruiting and hiring process is the first step in integrating its 2,000-plus employees into this culture. When hiring, Clark explains the company values attitude as much as skills, talent and ability.

"We consider if applicants are just there to collect a paycheck or if they will care about our customer," he says. "We might be an OEM, but we are dealer-centric and customer-focused."

He believes in hiring experts in their field. This spans everything from ability, education and skills to leadership style.

"I like to say that we hire the best people we can find and put them in a canoe. Then we give them a paddle to get to where we're going," he says. "But we do not tell them what stroke to use. The stroke is up to them. As long as everyone forges ahead together in the same direction, we will accomplish our goals."

This freedom empowers people to generate innovative ideas. "It's vital to listen to your people and get alignment," he says. "It's amazing to see what people can accomplish when they have ownership."

Grand Design also gets rid of office politics and siloed work. "When

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companies allow silos to move in, they stifle growth and they are hard to get rid of," he says.

Grand Design ensures a constant stream of quality individuals seeking employment. Though the job market is competitive in Elkhart, Indiana, and nearby areas, Grand Design has a pool of qualified candidates eager to work there.

The appeal is in the aspiration to work for a company that respects its employees, offers good pay and prioritizes work-life balance, according to Clark. He says it is better for team members when their loved ones support their career, and that the career should also support the family. Grand Design makes sure both happen by shutting down production on weekends.

"We have garnered a reputation for being one of the best places to work in Elkhart County," he says. In fact, the company has won the Michiana Best Place to Work award in the manufacturing segment and in the management and administration segment. "That's all of Michiana, which is a big deal," he says, noting Michiana spans northern Indiana and southwestern Michigan.

The company's impressive performance in the national RV Dealers Association (RVDA) Dealer Satisfaction Index has earned it a high score and multiple RVDA Circle of Excellence awards. "As far as I know, we are the only manufacturer to have every brand receive this award consistently throughout our years in business," he says. "Our people take immense pride in that. When I say people, I mean people on the line, in operations, management and sales."

A Better Business Model

Grand Design prioritizes creating separate brands for every segment of the travel trailer, fifth wheel and toy hauler markets. These brands are given names that capture the emotional desires of customers: Transcend, Imagine, Reflection, Solitude and Momentum.

"So many companies try to be all things to all people and therefore focus on nothing," he says. "They are the jack of all trades but the master of none. We have chosen to major in the majors. We focus on the 95th percentile of what customers will buy and what dealers will stock. That gives us laser focus on every single brand we offer."

The company's approach is unique as it only partners with a single dealer in each market, he adds. "Most manufacturers have clone products that compete with their sister brands," he explains. "Then they go into a marketplace and sign three or four dealers that compete with one another. We do not want that. We want a close, trusting relationship with our dealers. Our dealers have a strong connection with us and our brands, which extends to the retail customer."

Standout Service & Quality

Grand Design has placed a premium on service and quality — it's where excellence is delivered, according to Clark. When he helped start the company, there was only one guy he wanted to lead service operations: Jerry McCarthy. "He was just so customer oriented," he says. "I wanted that type of commitment to the customer."

McCarthy had a few demands when he was recruited. He wanted a service center in place before the company began producing RVs, to create a comprehensive, easily understood service manual for customers and to implement a warranty before RVs were sold.

Clark readily agreed: "You only have one opportunity to make a great first impression. Usually, when a company launches, you get a great salesperson to sell a product then figure out how to service it later. We had that all done before we started to ship products."

To ensure quality, the company sends products to a pre-delivery inspection department that checks over 300 points before shipping to dealers. "If they catch anything, the plant makes the fix before shipping out the RV," he says.

Keeping Customers Close

Customers play an active role in the construction of every new coach by Grand Design, Clark says.

"We ask our customers what they want because they know more about the lifestyle than we do," he says. "We constantly ask for feedback. We ask them, 'What do you love about your current unit? What do you hate? What are your pain points?'"

Grand Design is renowned for its customer rallies, which sell out in minutes and attract hundreds of coaches each time.

Paving the Road to the Future

"People are still discovering the RV lifestyle and that won't stop," he says. "But if the industry wants to keep delivering on that lifestyle, it will need more RV technicians."

He says the industry desperately needs RV technicians who can do more than simply turn a wrench. "Customers expect to push buttons in their RVs and have those buttons work," he says. "To grow as an industry, we are going to need to grow the experience level of technicians. Not just at the dealership level but at the OEM level, too."

Clark believes this so strongly that he sat on the founding board of the RV Technical Institute (RVTI). "I volunteered to serve because I feel it is so important that we give our customers the service they deserve," he says. "Today's coaches are a bit more complicated with onboard electronics and diagnostics systems. We need technicians who can service those products and get our customers back on the road."

Grand Design also formed a Service Response Team, which is dedicated to nationwide service training, repairs assistance and keeping dealers informed about new product systems and repair processes. Grand Design gives staff on this team a single guideline to follow: If they see a stranded RV, they are to stop and help get that RV on the road. "Even if the RV is a competitor's product, we do not charge for this," he says. "We just want RVers to have an enjoyable time and love the lifestyle."

When it comes to the company, Clark foresees steady growth. Winnebago took over Grand Design in 2016, and that has paved the way, he says. "I expect growth in our towables segment when the economy gains strength, and we are excited to announce our entrance into the motorized segment." RVP

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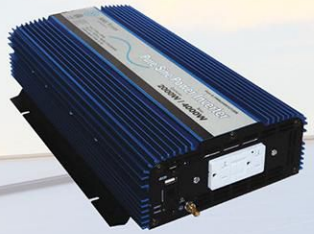


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LESSONS FROM A GOAL-GETTER

Continuous learning and goal setting helped Debbie Brunoforte rise as a leader at her dealership, and in the industry.

BY JENNIFER KING



PHOTO COURTESY OF RV WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

Debbie Brunoforte isn't just the leader of Little Dealer Little Prices in Arizona — she's a powerhouse in the industry, too.

"What really propelled my journey was learning and goal setting," Brunoforte says. "I attended seminars, read books, joined a 20 Group, listened to audio [books] while driving. I was a sponge, always trying different things, looking for an edge.

"If you really dive into your career and challenge yourself, learning is thought-provoking, it's energizing — continuous improvement can be fun."



Debbie Brunoforte (center) with (left to right) Kevin McArt, Nathan Hart, Craig Kirby and Phil Ingrassia.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RV INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Family Origins

Little Dealer Little Prices, now a Campers Inn RV company, was started in 1966 by Brunoforte's parents. The dealership has three locations: Mesa, Phoenix and Prescott Valley. In addition to diesel motorhomes, fifth wheels and travel trailers, the dealership also sells folding campers, cargo trailers, truck covers and more.

Brunoforte says that industry-wide, it seems people are taking a "big breath of air" this year. While the dealership took some hits in 2023, as many did, Brunoforte says they're on the other side of having too much aged inventory on the lot.

"It's time to reset and get our game plan on. We are more optimistic this year. We do feel like we're through the struggle," she says. "I do believe it'll be a much better year for the manufacturers, because as badly as the dealers were hurting last year, I think it was probably worse for the manufacturers ... this will be a much more normal year.

"One of the things I love about the RV industry is it's very adaptable. They are quicker at adapting than most other industries. We saw that during COVID, and we're seeing it now."

RV PRO webinar

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SPEAKERS



Stephanie Alderman, CEO of Pre-Pair by Canopy Technologies, drives the company's strategic vision, culture and business development. Her career has focused on financial operations, lending and technology. Before joining Pre-Pair, she served in leadership positions across operations, managed services, and product strategy for firms devoted to automating operations and workflows in the finance industry.



Shawn Moran is president of RV F&I at Brown & Brown Dealer Services. Since 2013, he has led F&I training in recreational product categories, including RVs, powersports and boats. He also led the wholesale division and pioneered the company's direct writing program.

Register at rv-pro.com/webinars

Volunteer Leadership

One key thing that Brunoforte says helped her grow as a leader is working with the RV Dealers Association (RVDA) and other industry groups. She says she learned about RVDA through a friend in her 20 Group who asked if she would serve as the Arizona delegate.

"That's kind of the beginning of most of my journey with volunteer leadership is somebody will come to me with the ask. My belief is, if I can do this, then I will do this," she says.

Learning about how to delegate responsibilities and let her employees solve problems on their own are two lessons she's learned during her time as a leader of Little Dealer Little Prices. At first, Brunoforte says she would go away for something like the RVDA conference and business wouldn't do as well while she was gone.

"One of my goals was to fix that and develop the company where they're not totally dependent on me," she says. "And now when I go, they do better than when I'm here."

She says it was always her first instinct to solve problems that were brought to her. "You have to force yourself to hold back and try to get the other person to come up with their ideas ... people learn to problem-solve on their own."

Hiring the Right People

Finding and retaining valuable employees is an issue across numerous industries, including RVs. Brunoforte says one thing she did early on was invest in a program called Hiring and Developing Winners conducted by Spader Business Management, which provides business coaching and consulting. In fact, she recently went through the course again for a refresher.

When it comes to giving employees feedback, Brunoforte says she believes positive reinforcement is important. "Whether you're a parent, a manager, a friend, whatever, we can focus on the positive aspects of people's actions and reinforce that as much as possible. As managers, we're kind of not wired that way. We only get involved when something goes wrong and now we have to go in and fix it. We've been talking about that in our manager meetings — how do we do that? We have to work on finding the good things that people do and saying thank you to them.

"And that way I believe they're more open to constructive criticism when that's necessary if we're also pointing out the good things. Nobody needs to just be criticized all the time. That's no fun."

On Top of Her Game

Brunoforte has been lauded for her leadership in the industry for years. Little Dealer Little Prices, which was named for her grandmother Irene (called "little dealer" by her husband), has won customer satisfaction awards from OEMs.

Brunoforte received the Trailblazer Award from the RV Women's Alliance in 2022 for lifetime achievement. During



the presentation of the award, she was described as "a consummate professional, serving in leadership roles across the RV industry for decades, including past chair of the RV Dealers Association and on the Go RVing Coalition and Committee on Excellence. As the owner and operator of one of the most successful RV dealerships in the U.S., Debbie has shown what it takes to be really good in the industry."

In addition to that accolade, Brunoforte was inducted into the RV Hall of Fame in 2014 and serves on the Hall of Fame board of directors, on the governing board of the joint RV Industry Association and RVDA technician certification program, and received the RVDA Chairman Service Award in 2006 and 2008.

She also received the David J. Humphreys RV Industry Unity Award in 2023, which recognizes who strives to encourage constituencies of the industry to work collectively for growth and betterment of the industry.

Keeping the Fire Lit

When asked how she continues to reignite her passion for the industry, Brunoforte says she goes back to goal setting. She uses the SMART acronym as her go-to strategy, which spells out Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

"It can be a real stretch goal. Maybe you don't know how to achieve it, and that's perfectly fine," she says. "But it does have to be something that is achievable. I'm not going to make the goal to be the quarterback for the Arizona Cardinals, right? It has to be relevant right now — that's what really propels you."

Brunoforte says you also need to know what your "why" is for any goal.

"That's what's going to give you the energy. And it has to be time-bound — you have to have a specific time that you want to accomplish the goal," she says. "If you don't accomplish it by that time, that's OK. You just set another goal, put another time on it. Don't give up.

"If you have this goal, you make the commitment that you're going to do something every day, or at least every day that you're at work. You're going to do something every single day, no matter how small it is, to get you a little bit closer."

One last thing Brunoforte adds is not to fall into the trap of giving in to negative internal thoughts.

"We're our own worst critics, right? So we have to practice being our own cheerleaders as well."

As for her "why"?

"I really do feel that the RV business makes a difference in people's lives," she says. "We have the opportunity to bring so much joy to people by providing them these RVs that they can go out and have fun and adventure and explore and get out into nature. [These are] all positive things — psychological benefits, physical benefits. So we are in an industry where we do make a difference, and I think sometimes people don't appreciate it as much as they could." RVP



BRING YOUR KID TO WORK

Developing childlike joy and laughter at the office can lead to surprising benefits in all aspects of business.

BY FRAN ZEULI



One of the greatest sounds on earth is the laughter of a child. Can everyone agree on that?

OK, this is a story for RV PRO, so maybe I should have said the greatest sounds on earth are the words, "We just had another record year of RV sales!" or "Our customer satisfaction ratings are through the roof!" or "These employee retention numbers are fantastic!"

Well, I contend that they're connected and that the joy and fun a child experiences might just be the key to operating a great business and hearing those positive business sentences uttered year after year.

I've read that kids laugh 400 times a day, but by age 30, that drops to 17 times a day. (As the Joker says in "The Dark Knight," "Why so serious?") Granted, there are times in business and our personal lives that we need to be serious, but with all the health and professional benefits of laughing and having fun, we have to put more of it in our lives. A Villanova University study found that laughter reduces the level of stress hormones in our body, builds a stronger immune system, helps us cope more effectively with stress and can even help us live longer. Wow! And that's just some of the powerful data out there reminding us of the value in laughing and having fun.

Create a Positive Culture

Unlike a new process or procedure, fun isn't something we can mandate, measure and evaluate with key performance indicators on a spreadsheet, but when it's there, we sure know it. We can see it in the smiles of our engaged coworkers and hear it in the respectful interactions during sales conversations. It's evident in how we treat our business partners across the industry and in how we negotiate a new contract. Fun is a by-product of a positive work environment and shows up in all aspects of our business.

So, how do we get there? Here are a few ways to help build fun, laughter and a childlike mentality into the fabric of your organization.

Build Trust

When there's trust in our workplace, great things happen. Harvard Business Review research notes that employees in high trust companies have 50% higher productivity, 76% more engagement and 106% more energy in the office than employees in companies with low trust. This alone sounds like a recipe to improve customer satisfaction and employee retention. And creating an environment of trust is pretty straightforward.

Listen — When we're truly available to our fellow employees and really listen to each other's ideas, confidence builds and creativity flourishes — and we learn so much in the process.

Respond — A real trust killer for me is when I don't hear back from people regarding questions I've had or requests

КАТЕРИНА ЄВТЕХОВА - STOCK.ADOBE.COM



I've made. It's so simple to get back to a person, even if it's a response they may not like. It shows we heard them and value their input.

Clarity Is Kindness — I first heard that phrase from the CEO of a large building and manufacturing company that I spoke to. She strongly believes that when clear, actionable goals are openly communicated and discussed, everyone feels respected and wants to be a part of the road map to success. This consistent communication can even reduce workplace anxiety by taking away a fear many have of the unknown. She said, "It's not just good business to gain employee buy-in, it's showing kindness to let your team know what to expect." I like that a lot! And speaking of kindness and respect …

Show Respect and Kindness — While I hope this isn't a lost art, it feels like many people today are carrying some anger and frustration into the workplace. Find common ground where you can and try to bring down the temperature with a smile or kind words. Use "please" and "thank you" at every opportunity and remember that unhappy people may be going through some tough stuff that we don't understand. We could be the positive difference maker in their day — and that's worth a lot.

Create Space for Fun Interaction

Bringing people together for some quality interaction is great, but this isn't a one-size-fits-all scenario. While a Ping-Pong table in the breakroom or a basketball hoop by the loading dock works for some, it may be a lunch time book club or an informal happy hour during the last two hours of the work day that makes sense for others. Ask your employees for ideas, and never make it strained or feel mandatory. It's about creating space to get to know each other.

Recruit, Hire, Train & Review for Fun

Think about the amazing opportunity we have to influence the culture of our organization every time we bring on a new employee. If we get it right, it's golden. So, why not blatantly declare at every early step of the hiring process and in every performance evaluation, that we're looking for people with a sense of humor that are willing to laugh a little?

Model Desired Behavior

It doesn't matter what position we hold within our company, we're all casting a shadow of who we are and what we believe, in everything we do. We're all models and we're all looking at each other for support, affirmation or reminders of what's important. We signal our beliefs in the words we use, the way we treat others and even in the body language we choose. So, if we have an agreed-upon company vision, it's up to all of us to carry ourselves in a way that embodies that vision.

So, while I'm not advocating to put a jump castle in our lobby or a Slip 'N Slide in our conference room (though those may be great ideas), I am asking that we reclaim some of our childhood behavior. Laugh a little more, trust each other and be willing to have fun when the spirit moves us. Yes, it's important that we take our job and the quality product we deliver seriously, but if we laugh when we can and let ourselves be a little more vulnerable, we could see a more positive culture spread like wildfire. And when that happens, record sales, elated customers and happy, healthy employees will soon follow. RVP

Fran Zeuli delivers entertaining keynotes about the importance of fun, creativity and kindness. He is an executive producer of the award-winning and Emmy-nominated Netflix film "The Saint of Second Chances." Zeuli can be reached through LinkedIn and at funisgoodteam.com.



POWER SOLUTIONS



LITHIUM DEEP-CYCLE BATTERY

Antigravity Batteries, Gardena, California, presents its Antigravity DC-200H Lithium Deep Cycle Battery. The intelligent DC-200H Lithium Battery is designed for use in deep-cycle applications and as a direct replacement for lead-acid deep-cycle batteries. It excels in deep-cycle applications such as in RVs, vans, utility trucks, emergency vehicles, boats, backup power supplies, off-grid use, camping, uninterruptible power supplies (UPS), emergency lighting, alarm systems, photovoltaic energy storage systems (solar), ham radios and many other uses where lightweight, high amp-hour capacity and long-lasting durability are required. Models with higher amp-hour capacities are also available.

antigravitybatteries.com

SURGE PROTECTORS

Arcon, Exeter, Pennsylvania, offers its 30/50A Surge Protectors. Arcon Surge Protectors shield RV appliances and downstream electronics against voltage spikes and surges. Available in 30A or 50A variants, these protectors can absorb and redirect high voltage while detecting low voltage and faulty wiring. Featuring multi-lightning strike protection, they channel strike energy to the ground. The 50A model has the capacity to suppress up to 7,200 joules of power and provides four distinct protection modes. Arcon Surge Protectors keep valuables and equipment safe.

arconelectrical.com





PORTABLE POWER STATION

BLUETTI, Las Vegas, Nevada, offers its BLUETTI AC200L Portable Power Station. The latest addition to BLUETTI's lineup, the AC200L delivers 2,400-watts of power in and out, making it versatile for motorhome appliances. Equipped with a NEMA TT-30 port for direct RV charging and a 48-volt DC port for seamless integration with the D40 DC-DC charger accessory, it's tailored for any adventure. With a 2,048Wh energy storage capacity, the AC200L can charge a 15-watt phone 300 times and power a 150-watt fridge for over 30 hours. Its quick recharge options include a 2,400-watt AC input in 1.5 hours or a 1,200-watt solar input in 2.5 hours.

bluettipower.com



LITHIUM GENERATOR REPLACEMENT

Dragonfly Energy and Battle Born Batteries, Reno, Nevada, present the Lithium Power Pack 6500, an all-in-one lithium power system and generator replacement. Designed with the dimensions and mounting points of traditional generators in mind, this pre-wired solution is made to be a quiet, clean and simple drop-in replacement, requiring limited installation and making the upgrade to lithium simple. Custom configurations of Lithium Power Packs are also available for volume orders, allowing dealers and OEMs to size these all-in-one solutions to their specific needs.

battlebornbatteries.com





FIXED-MOUNT INVERTER GENERATOR

Cummins, Columbus, Indiana, presents its Onan QG 4000i. Cummins' new QG 4000i fixed-mount generator is ideal for light- and medium-duty RV applications. This inverter generator operates with computer-controlled variable speed technology, which results in greater fuel efficiency with low noise and vibration, allowing RVers to have a peaceful, quiet journey.

cummins.com

POWER STATION & ALTERNATOR CHARGER

EcoFlow Technology, Seattle, Washington, offers its Power Station and Alternator Charger. The DELTA Pro and 800W Alternator Charger is a solution for taking the comforts of home on the road without the need for generators. This plug-and-play system charges quickly while you drive, topping up 1kWh by driving 1.3 hours. Store up to 3.6kWh of surplus energy in your portable power station to run up to 99% of everyday appliances.

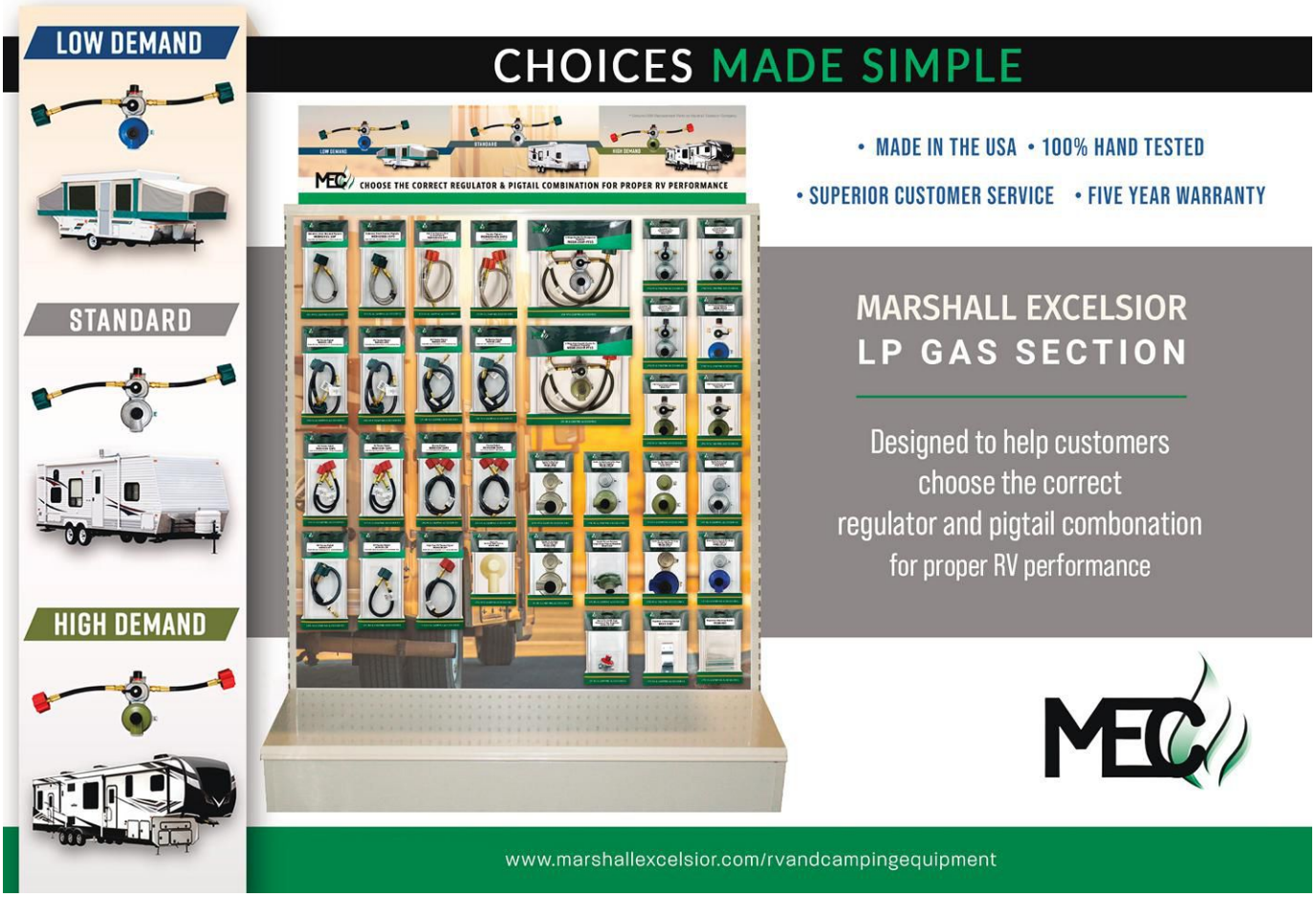
us.ecoflow.com

LITHIUM IRON PHOSPHATE BATTERY

Expion360, Redmond, Oregon, presents its The Edge, is a lithium iron phosphate battery for off-grid, overland and RV enthusiasts. With a slim profile in 12.8-volt and 51.2-volt configurations, it features Vertical Heat Conduction internal heating for top cold-weather performance. SmartTalk Bluetooth and CAN bus communication provide real-time insights, while 26650 4.0Ah UL1642 cells and isolated high-voltage terminals ensure durability and safety. The modular design allows for easy expansion and versatile mounting, offering energy storage solutions.

expion360.com







SOLAR POWER SYSTEM

Go Power! | Dometic, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, offers its PowerTrak Technology. The future of RV living is where smart technology meets sustainable power. It's not just about going places; it's about experiencing the journey with confidence, knowing your adventure is powered by a reliable mobile power solar system. PowerTrak technology offers control and efficiency in managing your RV's power system. Each component is designed to work in harmony, providing a user-friendly, robust solution for off-grid living.

gopowersolar.com

SURGE PROTECTOR

Hughes Autoformers, Anaheim, California, presents its Power Watchdog Smart RV Surge Protector. The Power Watchdog Smart RV Surge Protector offers advanced surge protection with real-time Bluetooth monitoring. It protects RV electronics from power surges and faulty wiring, featuring a replaceable surge module and easy-to-use app for instant alerts. With up to 4,800 joules of protection, it's a durable, user-friendly solution for RV power safety, ensuring peace of mind on the road.

hughesautoformers.com





BATTERY PROTECTION

Intellitec Products, DeLand, Florida, presents its Battery Guard 1000. The Battery Guard 1000 (BG1K) is an intelligent low-voltage battery disconnect. The BG1K senses when the voltage level of the battery drops to a specified voltage threshold, disconnecting the battery from the load, keeping the vehicle operable as well as preventing potential damage to the battery. The BG1K will automatically reconnect the battery when sensing the voltage level is safe. The BG1K system can be paired with a push-button switch for easy access to separate the battery from the load.

intellitec.com



SOLAR RV AWNING

Lippert, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its The Solera 3000 OG Series Solar Awning. The Solera 3000 OG Series power solar RV awning and slide topper meets the growing demand for more readily accessible energy independence. Developed in partnership with Renogy, Lippert's Solera OG awnings feature solar cell technology that generates sufficient power to charge RV batteries or act as a supplemental power source for existing photovoltaic systems. This retractable, shatterproof, laminated vinyl awning provides power generation up to 300 watts in the extended position and 200 watts in the retracted, travel or stored positions.

lippert.com



BATTERY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Mastervolt, Amsterdam, Netherlands presents its MLI Ultra 1250 Battery. The MLI Ultra 1250 has a life span of more than 2,000 cycles at a depth of discharge of 80%, meaning five times more energy storage than lead acid batteries. The MLI Ultra 1250 can be fully recharged within 60 minutes and offers MasterBus, CZone and NMEA2000 compatible communication. The battery is equipped with a Mastervolt Battery Management System that ensures optimal use of each individual cell. This self-learning, balancing algorithm predicts the behavior of each individual battery cell and balances proactively, resulting in a faster and more efficient charge cycle.

mastervolt.com



AC SOFT STARTER

Micro-Air, Hamilton, New Jersey, presents its EasyStart Breeze Soft Starter. The EasyStart Breeze is small and features a fully weatherproof enclosure. With its patent-pending adaptive learning and optimization technology, the EasyStart Breeze reduces startup current by 65% to 75%. A free extended warranty is available for the compressor motor when this product is installed on an AC that is six-years or younger. The EasyStart Breeze works with all RV air conditioners.

microair.net

PORTABLE SOLAR FAN

Nature Power/RDK Products, Atlanta, Georgia, offers its new Indoor/Outdoor Solar Fan & Portable Power for RVs and marine. The brand-new indoor/outdoor solar fan is quiet and has a lithium power supply, variable speed and the latest spec solar panel that can run the fan perpetually. Lightweight, portable and easy to store when not in use. The USB external charger acts as a high power charging station for phones, small electronics and more.

naturepowerproducts.com



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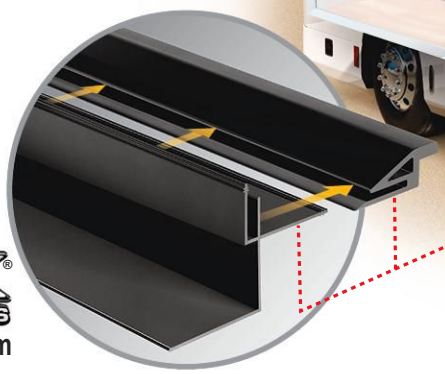
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POWER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Navico Group, Mettawa, Illinois, presents its Fathom e-power System. Fathom e-power is a complete lithium-ion power management system that delivers reliable power and performance. Combining components from industry-leading brands, the Fathom e-power system is an alternative to traditional generators, allowing users to extend time away from the charge source by providing more battery capacity while eliminating noise, vibration and fumes associated with a traditional genset. Fathom systems offer advanced digital controls and monitoring of power consumption, delivering information on demand and complete control for the user.

fathomepower.com



TRAILER CONNECTOR PROGRAM

Pollak, Long Island City, New York, offers its Pollak Trailer Connector Program, which features more than 60 components. The Pollak Pro line includes connectors, adapters, extensions and accessories, each designed to resist corrosion for a long service life. Additionally, Pollak offers specialized products for specific needs. For example, the ProSecure LED illuminates to verify continuity, the Pollak Quick ConneXion offers easier and quicker connections and the Pollak ProFlex features multiple ports to easily tow trailers with different types of connectors.

pollaktowing.com



BATTERY CHARGER

OptiMate High Performance Battery Chargers, Birmingham, Alabama, offers its OptiMate 7 6V/12V 'GOLD series,' an advanced battery charger for 6-volt or 12-volt lead-acid deep-cycle and marine batteries that optimizes deep-cycle battery performance. This fully automatic deep-cycle specific battery charger will make your RV or overlanding vehicle's batteries last longer and perform better with its intelligent charging program and desulphating technology.

optimate1.com





WIRELESS BLUETOOTH POWER CENTER

PowerMax Converters, Bradenton, Florida, presents its PCW Series Wireless Bluetooth Power Center. The PowerMax PCW Wireless Power Center, in both 30A and 50A service, is an easy-to-install upgrade that allows the operation of most 12-volt functions, such as lighting, awnings and slideouts, via the app. The PCW installs into any manufacturer's existing power center cutout and can be installed by the OEM, dealer or end-user. Both units also feature three-stage smart charging, with overtemperature, short circuit and high voltage protection, and are lithium compatible.

powermaxconverters.com

GENERATOR



RVMP, Columbus, Ohio, offers its RVMP Flex Power 4000i Generator. The RVMP Flex Power 4000i, with dual fuel and advanced inverter technology, ensures safety and convenience. Providing 4,000 watts of power, it is a versatile and efficient RV generator designed to meet all recreational vehicle power needs.

rvmp.co



PORTABLE POWER STATION

RELiON Battery, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, offers its Outlaw 1072s Portable Power Station. From laptops and lights to TVs and refrigerators, the Outlaw can power small to medium devices and appliances. The LiFePO4 technology delivers a seven times longer life span with 3,500 cycles. The portable power solution offers high battery capacity with 1,000 watts continuous and 2,000 watts peak. Additionally, it can be charged at home or on the go with either an AC wall charger or in the sun with 12- to 25-volt/160-watt max solar input charging.

relionbattery.com





CONNECTOR & INLET

SmartPlug Systems, Seattle, Washington, presents its 30-Amp SmartPlug Combo Kit. The SmartPlug Combo Kit includes a 30-amp, 125-volt cable retro-fit connector and an updated inlet. The inlets are available in 316 stainless steel or white, gray and black plastic options. They easily fit in the existing inlet hole pattern of the RV. The cable end connectors are made from high-performance materials for long life and resistance to corrosion. The end connector has a mechanical cord restraint, color-coded wire guides and a water-resistant cord seal.

smartplug.com



AC SOFT STARTER

Inverters R Us for Spartan Power, Reno, Nevada, offers its Spartan Power SpartanStart RV Soft Start Kit. The SpartanStart should be used across a wide range of RV air conditioner units, up to 20K BTU. This soft starter only requires access to the compressor's three wires (Run, Start and Common). Easy installation — only six wires, three per side. Made in Australia.

spartanpower.com



BATTERY VOLTAGE PROTECTOR

Samlex America, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, offers its BGW-40 Battery Voltage Protector. The BGW Series are intelligent, user-programmable battery protectors that prevent excessive discharge of the battery. They have an automatic voltage detection system with a choice of 10 on/off threshold voltage programs for both 12-volt and 24-volt battery systems. It is waterproof, prevents damage to connected components in an RV and is available in 40, 60 and 200 amps. 400 amps will be available soon.

samlexamerica.com





INTELLIGENT BATTERY CHARGER

Schumacher Electric Corp., Fort Worth, Texas, offers its Schumacher Electric SDC371. The SDC371 40-amp 12-volt intelligent battery charger features a solar priority button, intelligent three-stage charging and can be installed anywhere in an RV. The charger's waterproof and weatherproof construction gives it a rating of IP66, allowing it to operate in all weather conditions. The intelligent three-stage charging includes a boost mode, absorption mode and float mode, which allow RV users to charge their battery safely and fully.

schumacherelectric.com

SURGE GUARD WITH APP



Southwire, Carrollton, Georgia, presents its Surge Guard 50A 34951 and Surge Guard phone app. Many factors can impact the power quality entering your RV — the intensity of the electrical load on an RV park, the weather conditions or deteriorating electrical connections. Any combination of these variables can affect the longevity of your electronic equipment and motors, costing thousands in repairs and frustrating travel delays. Protect your RV with the Surge Guard 50A and monitor power through the Surge Guard phone app.

southwire.com



SURGE PROTECTION DISPLAY

Valterra Products, Mission Hills, California, offers its Mighty Cord Surge Protection 3-foot display, an in-store solution to showcase essential electrical accessories and boost customer confidence. This compact display features Mighty Cord surge protectors alongside circuit testers and AC voltmeters for complete power testing needs. Signage highlights the informative Surge Protection Fact Sheet, educating customers on the value of protecting their electrical system.

valterra.com





/ADOBE STOCK

SMI: Some Minimizing Ideas

Ways to reduce existing slow-moving inventory at your dealership.

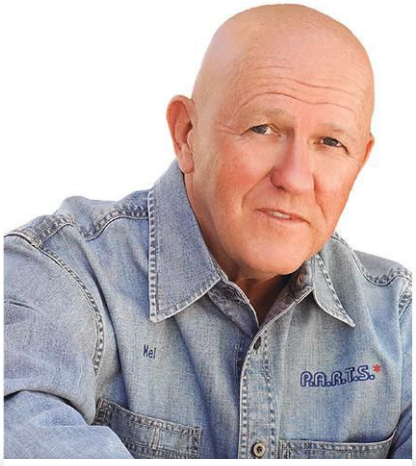
In the May issue of RV PRO, I invited you to tune in to this June issue's column for methods that you could use to minimize and to possibly eliminate existing "slow-moving inventory" (SMI) from your parts and accessories inventories.

Assuming that you have begun to apply your SMI prevention plan as suggested in my May column, then by implementing "Some Minimizing Ideas" that are included in this month's column, you could be on your way to a more effective, profitable parts and accessories operation.

Some Minimizing Ideas for Your SMI

What is in your SMI? If you haven't already generated a report to identify your SMI, then that is the primary task you need to accomplish. To do this, you will need to define SMI for your parts and accessories inventories. I suggest applying the definition of SMI provided in my May column, which is any item that has not incurred a demand in more than nine consecutive months and was received at least 12 months prior.

Using this definition, create a report (or use a report that exists) in your



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dealership management system (DMS) to identify these qualifying items. How many part numbers are reported? What percentage of your entire parts and accessories inventories does this represent? If it is more than 33% of your total inventory, then I suggest applying some filters to your report parameters to generate a smaller volume of part numbers. These filters could include but are not limited to:

- A separate SMI report for parts and one for accessories.
- Establish minimal unit cost — e.g., minimum unit cost is $25.
- Define minimum number of months with no demand (MND) — e.g., MND = 18 months (work on the older items first).
- Define a specific class of goods — e.g., sanitary supplies, electronic gear, suspension elements, etc.

Since these SMI reports are an application of management by exception, it is important to be able to resolve the reported exceptions in a reasonable amount of time, which I suggest be no more than two to four weeks.

That said, assuming that your SMI is a substantial portion of your total inventory, than perhaps you could use these suggested parameters for your report: a separate report for parts and for accessories with minimum unit cost of $25 for accessories and $10 for parts and for items with no demand in more than 18 months.

Now What?

Assuming you have generated an SMI report for parts and a separate one for accessories, there are similar and different options that could be applied for eliminating the contents of each of these groups. Those options that are similar could be:

- Return to the supplier.
- Contact the supplier and coordinate a swap where you purchase a cost value of goods that are currently in demand and might be two or three times the cost value of the SMI.
- List these goods on an internet parts finder provided by your DMS vendor or by any of your RV manufacturers.

For SMI accessories, you might consider offering them at a reduced price to your customers. This could be accomplished by including them in a special tab/button on your business website. If they are small enough, you could display them in a designated area of your retail displays.

For larger items, you could provide a list of these items to the RV sales and service departments so these associates could mention them to their customers. These lists should include the sale price, description, part number and brand/model/year application. You could also include a bonus that the selling associate could earn as an enticement to refer to these lists.

Related to this SMI option, you might teach your parts associates SWISS. No, it isn't the Swiss language. Rather it



stands for "sell what's in stock system."

If you train your parts associates to ask open-ended questions* when interacting with customers, your parts associates can identify what features and benefits are important to the customer with regard to the item(s) the customer is requesting. If there are goods in your parts and accessories inventories that have similar features, especially SMI goods, then the parts associate could offer these in-stock items.

*Open-ended questions are designed to establish a dialogue between the customer and the parts associate and usually begin with one of these six words: who, what, when, where, why and how.

Any Other SMI Options?

Any item that has not been demanded in more than 12 months has a minimal chance of selling and earning a profit since the holding costs associated with keeping it have absorbed the inherent profit. Generate a report of SMI that has a unit cost less than $5 and that has no demand in more than 12 months. You could consider writing these off against your profits for the year after confirming the benefits of doing this with your tax preparer. The caveat is that your RV business must be reporting a profit for the year.

Maintenance

As you apply your SMI Prevention Plan and Some Minimizing Ideas through the year, you should be experiencing more efficient and profitable operations because you are winnowing the existing SMI and preventing the accumulation of future SMI. To ensure that these processes remain in place, you should continue to generate SMI reports, which should consist of fewer pages. Eventually, assuming you continue your maintenance processes, your SMI should not require much of your time and not involve much of your parts and accessories inventory investment.

Your parts and accessories inventories should now contain items that are in current demand. And because you have substantially less investment in SMI, those inventories may also be open to trying new items offered by your suppliers. You could change your parts and accessories SMI to represent So Much Improvement. RVP

> "You could change your parts and accessories SMI to represent 'So Much Improvement.'"





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Adjust Presentations **To Fit Your Customer's 'Type'**

A customer's generation and personality style can influence how you should communicate with them to increase your sales success.

As I talk to some of the best RV salespeople in RV dealerships across the country, I find one common theme consistent among most of them — once they identify the selling style that best works for them, they use it on every customer who walks in the front door.

They tend to rely on the same "canned" first words and conversational style in the meet-and-greet with each new customer, and over time, they develop the same feature/benefits product demonstration style that is most comfortable to them, because it helps them relax and feel a sense of confidence.

While using this strategy can help the salesperson refine their communication skills with some customers, it could turn out to actually be offensive to others.

Why? Because not all customers are alike. They come from different generations, backgrounds and family dynamics, and have different personalities, RV knowledge, education, preferences and comfort levels in the way they like to talk and be talked to.

The best dealerships spend a great deal of time educating their sales staff on product knowledge and whatever selling system they are committed to, but even the best spend little or no time



Thomas Morin is an author and owner of Unlock Your Career Coaching, a North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, company that coaches salespeople in all industries on how to build the rapport and trust that customers must feel to be comfortable buying. For more information, visit unlockyourcareercoaching.com.

on how to identify the type of customer in front of them and how to adjust their communications and presentations to fit how each particular customer prefers to hear it. This obstacle frequently stands in the way of the salesperson helping the customer feel the comfort, rapport and trust they must have to be willing to listen to what the salesperson has to say.

Many of us have heard the phrase "opposites attract." That may be true in romantic relationships, but in my experience in working with both salespeople and customers, it's not true at all. For the anxious customer who wasn't treated very well by the dealership down the road, they will walk in with at least some anxiety even before the salesperson utters one word.

When this happens, there are a few different assessments a salesperson can make to quickly adjust their communications and presentations to best fit the customer they've just met: generational assessment or personality assessment.

In order for this to work, the salesperson must set aside their preferred way to communicate and take an open-minded approach by asking questions, listening and quickly assessing the type of customer standing in front of them.

Use this quick guide to help when taking a generational assessment approach with your customer:

Postwar (born 1928-1945)
Tend to trust more quickly because they were raised to do things the right way, with integrity. As a result, they are usually kind, friendly and great to work with. They like information to be short and sweet, and prefer an honest, professional delivery of information.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)
Have some of the tendencies of the postwar group but are savvy enough to communicate through text, quick videos and internet information. They feel they are deserving of your time, respect and honesty. They will take a bit longer to trust you, but it will be rock solid once it's established.

> "CUSTOMERS HAVE PROVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN THAT THEY PREFER TO BUY FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE SIMILAR TO THEM."

Gen X (born 1965-1979)
Although they are typically in the highest earning years of their lives, they are often quite money-conscious, so staying in their budget and focusing on RVs that are on sale is very important to them. They are comfortable bumping themselves up to a higher-priced product but are not comfortable with the salesperson trying to do it.

Millennials (born 1980-1996)
My experience is that this group is more laser focused on money than any other. They are looking to save money first, even if it means sacrificing quality to do so. This group suffers from buyer's remorse more than any other, so you will need to work hard to prove how and why paying more for upgraded features and options will benefit them.

Another way to quickly determine who your customer is and how best to communicate with them is to talk less and listen more, to determine the type of people they are and then adjust how you communicate and present your product based on that.

In addition, with this approach, if a married couple walks in the dealership, you will need to identify who the real decision-maker is, identify their type and adjust your communications to them. I have seen many cases where the husband appears to be (and thinks he is) the decision-maker, but the wife really is.

To identify this, you will need to be sensitive to not just what is said but also read the body language of both. Often, watching the wife's body language to things the husband has just said is the clue you need.

Different customer types each have different tendencies, and each one requires you to identify the challenges you will face and the adjustments you need to make in how you communicate, present and work with them:

Analytical & Detail-Oriented

This customer will ask detailed questions that go far beyond product features and benefits. They will want documentation and proof, with facts and details to back up what you say. They will not move on to the next feature until they are completely satisfied that your answers are factual.

This customer will respond more positively to bringing in a sales manager as a technical resource and loves when you get a manufacturer rep on the phone who has intimate knowledge of how the RV they are interested in is built. With this customer, you must plan for longer sessions — at times double the time spent with the typical customer — because of all the questions they will ask.

Friendly, Warm & Amiable

This customer is more interested in liking you than trusting you and will ask about yourself or your family.

They are kind, warm and gentle and must be handled with friendly, warm, compassionate communications that dance around the surface but won't get into detail. They also won't always tell you what they think.

You must only ask for specific wants, needs and budget after establishing a solid rapport and trust with them. It's unwise to push too hard with this group, as they do not like hard selling or confrontation. It may take more than one visit to the dealership to get them to buy something.

Driver/Take-Charge Leader

This customer is easy to spot, as they will typically be direct and to the point. You will not need to be overly friendly with this customer, as they will appreciate you responding to them with direct, short and factual answers to their questions. Trying to expand too much information in answering their questions just to sound smarter will not sit well with them. If they want additional information, they will ask. They will come off as unfriendly but do not mean to, so be careful not to take it personally. It will be important to maintain professional but honest (and sometimes blunt) behavior, and they will respect that they could not intimidate you.

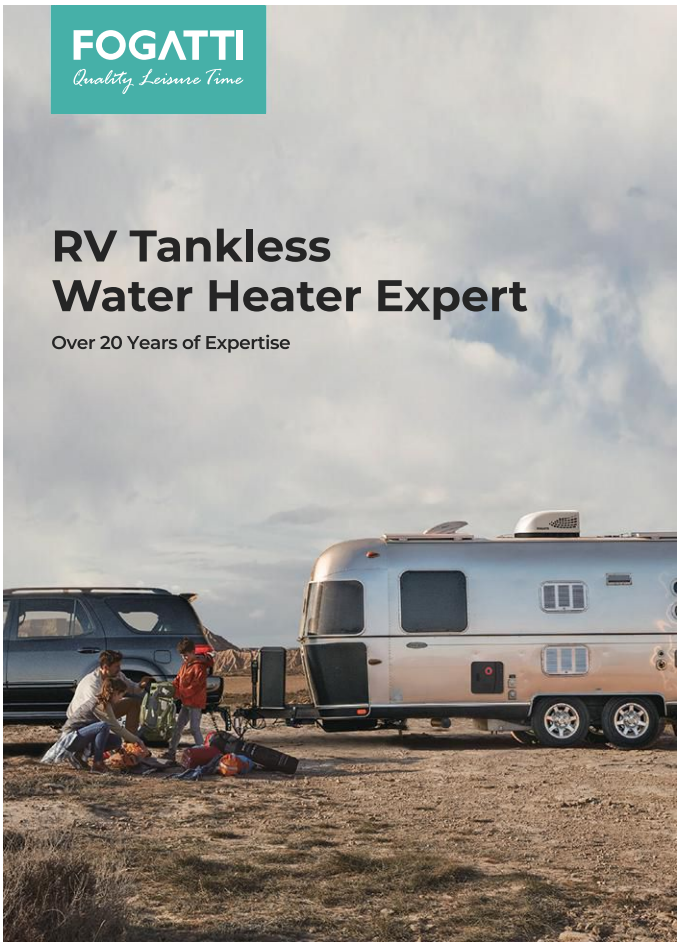
Expressive, Exceedingly Outgoing

This is the largest group of customers who will visit your dealership. They are outgoing, fun, social and energetic. They will also feed off your energy and enthusiasm, so if you are typically introverted and quiet, you will need to ramp it up a bit for this customer to respond to you. They love telling and hearing a good joke and having a good laugh.

Realizing that they often lose focus in what you're talking about (because they are distracted) is a sure sign of this type of customer. You must match their enthusiasm, while sticking to business, and talk about things they find interesting. They aren't great listeners, so you may need to confirm that they have heard key points in your presentation.

Regardless of whether you choose to identify what generation the customer might fall in or to determine their personality style, you should use one of the two to help you make the adjustments you need in how to communicate and present product, and what approach you use to eventually try to close the deal with them. Doing so will increase your success in achieving customer comfort, rapport and trust they need to feel safe enough to buy from you. Customers have proven time and time again that they prefer to buy from people who are similar to them.

If you haven't tried this approach in the past, I encourage you to start today, and I'll bet this not only helps your rapport building with customers but also with personal relationships. RVP





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Converting Cash Deals by Overcoming Cash Buyers' Financing Objections

Gain insight into this customer's perspective and how to guide them toward the benefits of financing.



Stephanie Alderman, CEO of Pre-Pair by Canopy Technologies, drives the company's strategic vision, culture and business development. Her career has focused on financial operations, lending and technology. Before joining Pre-Pair, she served in leadership positions across operations, managed services, and product strategy for firms devoted to automating operations and workflows in the finance industry.

In RV dealerships, the finance department guides customers through purchasing and offers various financing options to suit their needs. However, one of the most significant challenges the department faces is overcoming objections from cash buyers.

These individuals are prepared to pay for their RV outright, bypassing the need for financing. To effectively address these objections, it's essential to understand the cash buyer's mindset and present financing as not just a means to purchase but as a strategic financial tool that offers several advantages.

Understanding the Cash Buyer's Perspective

Cash buyers often come from a position of financial strength, believing that paying in cash is the most straightforward and cost-effective approach. Their reservations regarding financing typically revolve around avoiding interest, maintaining economic freedom and believing that cash payment offers a better deal. Overcoming these objections requires a nuanced approach, acknowledging their financial acumen while gently guiding them toward the benefits they might overlook.

> "OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS FROM CASH BUYERS ... REQUIRES EMPATHY, EXPERTISE & STRATEGIC REASONING."

Presenting Financing as a Strategic Advantage

1. **Highlighting Liquidity Preservation:** Emphasize how financing can preserve the buyer's cash reserves, providing financial flexibility. In uncertain economic times or unexpected personal expenses, readily available liquid assets can be invaluable. Financing an RV allows the buyer to maintain a safety net of cash, which can be used for emergencies, investments or other opportunities.
2. **Capitalizing on Low-Interest Rates for Excellent Credit:** While interest rates have risen, many lenders still offer affordable rates, especially for customers with excellent credit profiles. The finance department should be prepared with current market data to show how the cost may be lower than expected. By illustrating the concept of opportunity cost, you can also demonstrate how the money saved by financing could be invested elsewhere for a potentially higher return. Tools available can explain those differences with charts and graphs, making it easier for dealership associates to overcome objections with visual aids.
3. **Tax Benefits & Deductions:** Many buyers need to be made aware that, under certain conditions, the interest on an RV loan can be tax deductible if the RV is considered a second home. This perspective can turn a portion of the financing cost into a tax advantage, making the overall financial impact of financing more favorable.
4. **Building Credit History:** Financing an RV can be strategic for buyers who may benefit from improved credit. Regular, on-time payments contribute positively to a credit score, which can help future financial endeavors, such





as purchasing a home or securing a business loan.

5. **Protecting Against Depreciation:** RVs, like most vehicles, depreciate over time. By financing the RV, the buyer can mitigate the risk of investing a large sum of money into an asset that will lose value. This approach allows for financial flexibility, enabling the buyer to manage their assets more effectively in the face of depreciation.

Crafting a Consultative Approach

The key to overcoming cash buyer objections lies in adopting a consultative approach, understanding the buyer's financial goals and presenting financing as a tool that aligns with those objectives. This involves:

- **Listening Carefully:** Understand the buyer's concerns and objections to financing. This understanding will allow you to tailor your arguments effectively.
- **Educating the Buyer:** Many reservations stem from a need for more understanding. Providing clear, concise information about the benefits of financing can change perspectives.
- **Personalizing the Solution:** Show how financing can benefit their specific situation. Use examples and scenarios that resonate with the buyer's financial landscape.
- **Building Trust:** Establish credibility by demonstrating expertise and honesty. When buyers trust your advice, they are more likely to consider financing a viable option.

Navigating Common Objections

Objection: *"I don't want to pay interest."*
Response: Compare the current low financing rates with the potential returns from investing the equivalent cash in the market. Highlight the tax deductibility of interest to offset some of the costs.
Objection: *"I prefer not to have monthly payments."*
Response: Discuss how monthly payments can provide flexibility and liquidity, which could be beneficial for managing unforeseen expenses or taking advantage of investment opportunities.
Objection: *"I can negotiate a better deal with cash."*
Response: Clarify that dealerships value both financed and cash transactions. Offer to work with them to strike the best possible deal, regardless of payment method, and underscore the additional benefits financing offers.

Overcoming objections from cash buyers in RV financing requires a blend of empathy, expertise and strategic reasoning. By presenting financing not merely as an alternative to cash payment but as a financially savvy option that offers liquidity, tax advantages and flexibility, finance departments can address the concerns of cash buyers effectively.

The goal is to transform the narrative around financing from a necessity to a strategic choice, enabling buyers to make informed decisions that align with their broader financial goals. RVP







RABIA ELIF AKSOY/ADOBE STOCK

The Importance of a **Properly Structured Reinsurance Company for RV Dealerships**

How it benefits both your dealership and your customers.

In the ever-evolving landscape of RV sales and services, RV dealerships are continuously seeking ways to maximize profitability and manage risks effectively. An often overlooked but crucial aspect of achieving these objectives is the strategic use of reinsurance. Reinsurance, when structured properly through a reputable company, can offer myriad benefits that not only safeguard the dealership's operations but also enhance its financial



Steven Whitlock is the president of Innovation Financial Services, with a mission to amplify the income of dealerships via business evaluations and unparalleled products, technology and refined implementation processes. He has over two decades of experience in the automotive industry and is dedicated to guiding his team toward achieving dealerships' financial objectives. For more information, visit innovationfinancialservice.com.

health and customer service offerings. This article delves into the importance of a properly structured reinsurance company and how it benefits RV dealerships.

Understanding Reinsurance

Reinsurance is insurance for insurers. It allows an insurance company to transfer a portion of its risk portfolio to another insurance company (the reinsurer), thereby reducing its overall risk exposure. For RV dealerships, this translates to more stable insurance costs and the potential for better claims management and customer service.

> "A REINSURANCE COMPANY THAT UNDERSTANDS THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF THE RV MARKET . . . CAN BE A VALUABLE ALLY IN ACHIEVING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES."

The Benefits of Reinsurance for RV Dealerships

Risk Management

One of the primary benefits of reinsurance is its role in risk management. RV dealerships face various risks, including property damage, liability claims and customer disputes.

A well-structured reinsurance program can mitigate these risks, providing a safety net that helps maintain operational stability even in the face of unforeseen events.

Financial Stability

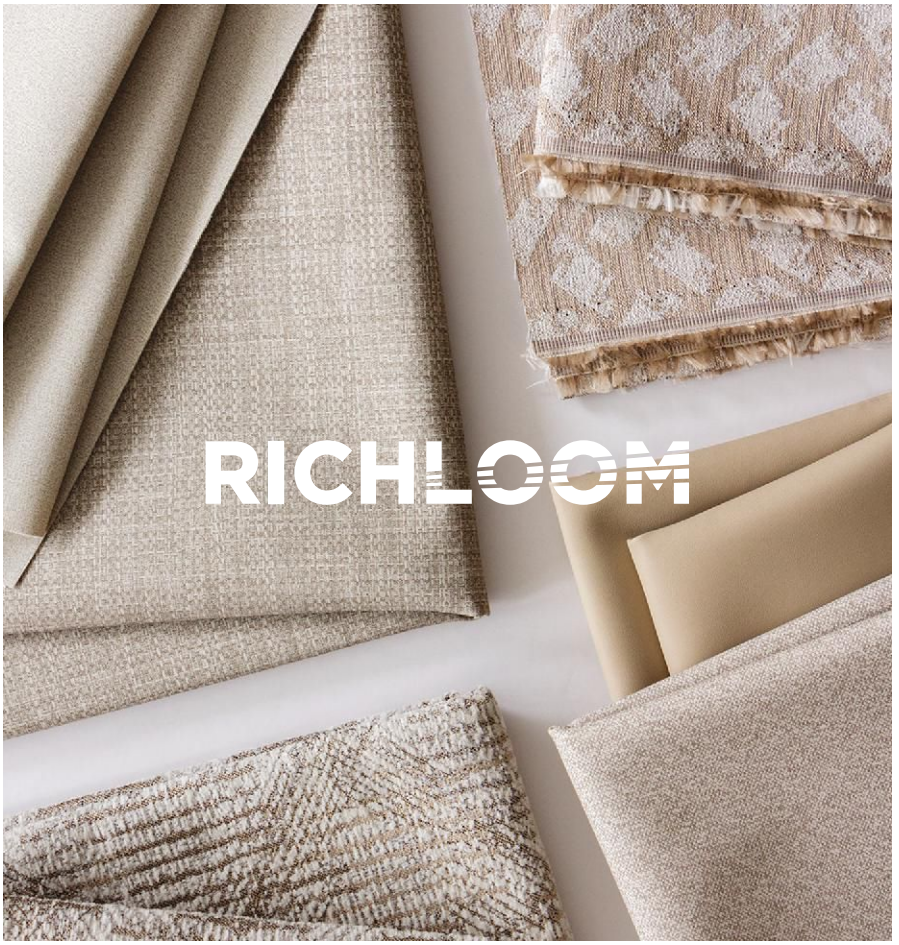
Reinsurance contributes to the financial stability of RV dealerships by smoothing out potential financial volatility arising from claim payouts. By transferring part of the risk to a reinsurer, dealerships can avoid large financial losses that might occur due to significant claims, ensuring more predictable financial outcomes and protecting their bottom line.

Enhanced Product Offerings

Dealerships with access to reinsurance can offer more comprehensive and competitive insurance products to their customers. This capability not only improves customer satisfaction but also serves as an additional revenue stream. Customers are more likely to purchase insurance directly from the dealership when they know they are getting a product backed by a reliable reinsurance structure.

Competitive Advantage

In a market where differentiation is a key factor to attracting and retaining customers, RV dealerships that leverage reinsurance effectively can gain an important competitive advantage. Offering superior insurance products and demonstrating financial resilience can set a dealership apart, making it a more appealing option to both existing and prospective customers.



Choosing the Right Reinsurance Company

Selecting the right reinsurance partner is a critical step to realizing the benefits of differentiating themselves in the

marketplace. Dealerships should look for reinsurers with:

- a strong financial foundation
- extensive industry experience
- a record of accomplishment of responsive and fair claims processing.

Additionally, a reinsurance company that understands the unique needs of the RV market and offers customizable solutions can be a valuable ally in achieving business objectives.

For RV dealerships, the importance of a properly structured reinsurance company cannot be overstated. It plays a vital role in risk management, financial stability and enhancing the dealership's product offerings, contributing to a stronger, more competitive position in the market.

As the RV industry continues to grow and evolve, dealerships that recognize and capitalize on the benefits of reinsurance will be well positioned to navigate challenges and seize opportunities for success. RVP



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Turn Sold Customers Into Repeat Fans of Your Brand With CRM Automation

Convert more prospects to sold customers by leveraging CRM.

BY INTEGRATED DEALER SYSTEMS (IDS)

A lot of people can go through your dealership on any given day, both online and at your brick-and-mortar. When they do, they could be at any stage in the customer journey. Whether they're checking out your store for the first time, or they're considering trading in their RV for something new, every touch point is an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with a customer and drive more sales.

But if you're not capturing and capitalizing on these touch points, many of those opportunities will fall through the cracks. That's where leveraging a CRM (customer relationship management) system to automate data collection and customer communication can be invaluable — especially if that CRM is feeding information directly into your dealership management system (DMS).

Here is what a sales flow that leverages a CRM's automation capabilities looks like.

Discovery Phase

When a customer inputs information on your website, this is an opportunity for your CRM to log that customer's information in your DMS. Then, you can automate notifications to your sales team and assign that lead to a specific salesperson. Automating lead assignments ensures there is ownership for that lead at the get-go.

If a customer comes into your store, one of the first things your front desk or salesperson should do is log that customer's information into the CRM to begin the process. Once a customer is in the system and assigned to a sales team member, you can follow that customer through the sales cycle.

Evaluation & Learning Phase

Once a customer has been interviewed, you can ensure they are matched with the best products to meet their needs. By using a CRM that integrates with your DMS, you can create a flow of information that enables automated functions like reviewing current inventory and inventory matching with the customer. Not only does this have the potential to save time for your

sales team, but it also creates a better experience for your customers.

Purchase Phase

Strike while the iron is hot and use a CRM to create a sales quote on the spot, out on the floor. If the customer is ready to buy, you can quickly hand off the quote number and customer number to your business office.

But if the customer is not ready to buy yet, use your CRM to ensure the opportunity doesn't fall by the wayside. Plan follow-up tasks based on how the interaction with the customer went and easily match new inventory to that customer based on their interest. Leverage your dealership's tech ecosystem with an integrated marketing tool to automate email marketing messages to keep prospects interested.

Use & Want More Phase

Congratulations, you've made a sale! But the relationship with your customer shouldn't end there. You have the opportunity to turn every sold customer into a repeat patron of your dealership. In the CRM, automate follow-up tasks and reminders for customers to share new products and services that customers may be interested in based on the data in their files. Equally importantly, you can assign sold customers to a salesperson to ensure ownership of the customer's file moving forward.

Once you have a solid process in place for inputting and maintaining customer information in the CRM, it becomes easy to use that information to maintain communication touch points with customers at all stages of the buyer journey. Communication is the foundation of any strong relationship — with your customers and with your team.

See the automated sales process flowchart on the next page. RVP

Integrated Dealer Systems (IDS) provides dealer management solutions for the RV, marine and trailer industries. For more data and industry insights, read the IDS RV Dealer Industry Trends Report: ids-astra.com/trends-report.

Cliff Andrew, Product Manager, IDS

Why do you think SalesCRM Online is useful for dealers?

"Many CRMs out there will do roughly the same thing, but none of them were built specifically for the needs of the RV industry. SalesCRM Online allows dealers to leverage key customer interaction data from the IDS dealership management system, eliminating the need to maintain customer information in multiple places. This makes the handoff from department to department seamless and easy, creating a better customer experience and helping you to build long-term relationships."

What pain points does the CRM address?

"Like all CRMs, SalesCRM Online helps dealerships sales teams sell more RVs. What sets IDS apart is its connection to the DMS, which provides a complete view of customer engagement and helps you desk deals faster. You just can't do that as effectively with a CRM that is separate from your DMS."

What can that dealer do to earn buy-in for this system from employees?

"Focus on how an integrated CRM can help them go from lead to sold customer faster, easier and with total visibility. Having centralized, detailed customer data will make their jobs easier and help them form long-lasting relationships with customers."



Steps to a Sale: CRM Automation

Convert prospects to sold customers by using a CRM to automate tasks, integrate with your DMS and streamline your sales funnel.



IMAGE COURTESY OF INTEGRATED DEALER SYSTEMS



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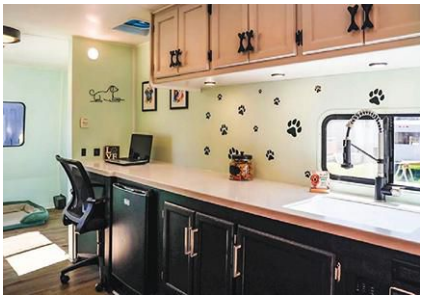


"Woof Way"

North Carolina-based **Rain2shine Ventures** is showing the possibilities of RV renovation. Its newest project is a retrofitted Thor Motor Homes' Chateau Class C, designed as a mobile dog rescue for a local nonprofit. The sofa, dinette, kitchen cabinets, shower, bed and other human-focused comforts were replaced with a **dog bath station, food pantry, dog beds, a small work desk** and more.

Source: Auto Evolution





MARCH SHIPMENTS

32,243 Total RV shipments

1.2% increase compared to March 2023 (31,869 units)

To date, RVs are up 9.3% with 85,941 shipped through March

"Our cautious optimism for the year continues as RV shipments are up over 9% through the first quarter of 2024," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "The strong desire to get out and RV continues with our latest survey data showing that 89% of RVers have taken an RV trip in the past year and 26 million Americans planning to take an RV trip this spring. Millennials, many with young families, are showing the greatest interest in RVing with 38% of millennials saying they would like to take an RV trip in the next year."

MAKING HISTORY

On April 9, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the **EXPLORE Act** (Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences). This is the first bipartisan outdoor recreation-specific bill with no cost to taxpayers. The act will:

- Facilitate permit streamlining — dissolve challenges for outfitters and guides, and enhance access to outdoor adventures
- Expand recreation on public lands and waters
- Guarantee green space access in underserved communities
- Develop, improve and complete long-range trails
- Boost rural economic development

Pride Month

June is Pride Month, a celebration of the LGBTQ+ community. According to 2023 research by Go RVing, the estimated **spending power of LGBTQ+ consumers in the U.S. is $1.1 trillion** — and the community increased TikTok travel posts by **55% last year.** A report also showed that **70% of non-LGBTQ+ Americans believe companies should support the community** through hiring and advertising.

IN 2024:



- **Camping sentiment** is up (from 56% to **62%**) across the board despite ongoing **inflation** concerns.
- **Millennials** have the highest enthusiasm for tech of any age group at **57%,** up from 19% in 2023.
- **Being in nature** was the dominant influence on campers when selecting a destination, at **47%.**

Source: RMS North America

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