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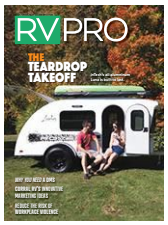
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Photo courtesy of inTech

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CERTIFIED AUDIENCE

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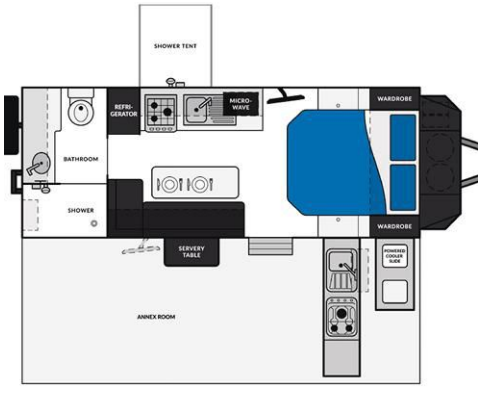
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Michele Moore

October is my favorite month. Aside from the obvious spooky reasons and college football, I love the change in seasons — the transition from hot, humid summer to crisp, breezy fall; foliage going from vibrant greens to blazing reds, golds and oranges; and that electric blue October sky.

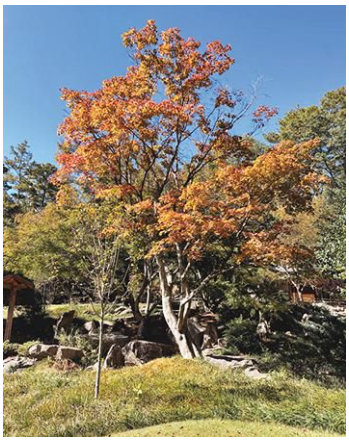
Yes, I realize that fall technically begins on the autumnal equinox, but if you live in the South like I do, September is hot, and October is really when it begins to feel like autumn.

The shift in seasons is a time of change, a transitional period that often makes us feel like we too need to make a change, whether it's cleaning in early spring or dusting off our cooler weather clothes when September or October roll around. It might also be an opportune time to take a look at your dealership operations and see what adjustments can be made. According to a 2018 Forbes article, the timing for when to implement change is crucial — the "Fresh Start Effect" phenomenon indicates we're more likely to undertake changes at certain times. So, why not make a few adjustments while there's already a seasonal shift in the air?

Our October issue highlights marketing and business services, offering a variety of perspectives on what your dealership can do to enhance efficiency, customer service, marketing and beyond. On page 26, Chad Hatzenbuhler discusses how his North Dakota family business, Corral Sales RV, uses social media communities as a powerful marketing tool. Emma Davis provides insight on page 30 into how leveraging Automotive Inventory Ads, or AIAs, on Meta platforms like Facebook and Instagram can benefit your dealership. On page 34, Scott and Vanessa Russell, who are full-time RVers, offer tips to create lifelong customers and how they can aid in word-of-mouth marketing. On page 22, hear from four different companies about dealership management systems (DMS) and why your dealership should be using one. Our Running the Business section includes more tips for keeping your dealership running smoothly, with topics such as hiring and retaining employees, workplace violence and more.

Fall camping is underway, and this issue spotlights teardrop trailers, with profiles covering inTech (page 16) and Rift Carbon Campers (page 20). Discover what makes their models unique — such as Rift's lightweight Utility Camper, which is apparently so light, even a tricycle can pull it.

We hope you come away from this issue with some new ideas for your dealership, and as always, thanks for reading!



A hint of fall color and that gorgeous early October sky at Alabama's Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Michele Moore

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Winnebago Names New President, Barletta Boat Executive


West

Winnebago Industries has made key changes to its executive leadership team.

After four years with the company, Winnebago brand President Huw Bower stepped down from his role on Aug. 31. During his tenure with the company, Bower helped guide the business through unprecedented times, brought several new industry-leading innovations to the market and built a committed team across the brand's motorized and towable RV businesses, the company said.

Chris West, currently senior vice president of Winnebago Industries enterprise operations and Barletta Boats, has been named president of the Winnebago Outdoors businesses — Winnebago-brand motorhomes, Winnebago-brand towables and Winnebago-brand specialty vehicles — effective Sept. 1. West was hired in 2016 to lead the company's enterprise operations, with responsibility for the entire manufacturing, supply chain and quality value streams across the Winnebago Industries portfolio.

Over the past eight years, West has worked closely with the company's RV and marine businesses, built deep outdoor industry relationships and driven significant progress and improved capabilities across key areas such as employee safety, manufacturing, strategic sourcing/supply chain management, quality and business excellence. West also spearheaded the integration of the company's Barletta Boats acquisition in 2021 and has provided executive oversight to a pontoon business now chasing double-digit market share growth.

"Winnebago Industries believes that time spent outside is priceless and we are committed to building a best-in-class leadership team that can deliver on our promise to elevate every moment outdoors for our partners and customers," said Winnebago Industries President and CEO Michael Happe. "We thank Huw for his contributions to our team and our business and welcome Chris to his new role. Our company has gone through a significant transformation over the last several years, but we know the best is yet to come for our team and portfolio of premium brands as we continue to grow our influence, impact and share of the RV and marine industries."

Prior to joining Winnebago Industries, West served as vice president of global supply chain for Joy Global, a worldwide mining equipment manufacturer, and held several other key leadership positions in the agricultural equipment manufacturing and aircraft interior manufacturing industries. A search for West's succeeding senior vice president of enterprise operations role will begin immediately.

In addition, Barletta Boats President Jeff Haradine will join the Winnebago Industries executive leadership team and report directly to Happe, effective Sept. 1. Haradine has been with Barletta since its inception and has been a critical driver of Barletta's strong growth trajectory.

"Jeff has been a key part of Barletta's impressive trajectory, first as a sales leader and then as president of the business over the last two years," said Happe. "I look forward to having his people-first approach and deep marine industry insights on our top leadership team."

Forest River Updates Leadership Team

Forest River founder and CEO Pete Liegl announced three leadership changes designed to continue the company's forward trajectory and dedication to customers.

"Since 1996, Forest River has remained a leader of the recreational vehicle, cargo trailer, pontoon, boat and commercial vehicle industries," the company said. "Today, Forest River is proud to continue this legacy with changes to its leadership team."

Chief Financial Officer Darrel Ritchie will lead Corporate Management. Having started with Forest River in 2002, Ritchie brings deep understanding of the company and is poised to continue the Forest River commitment to excellence.

David Wright, another 22-year expert, will assume management of Forest River's commercial division, inclusive of buses, vans, trucks and cargo trailers.

Doug Gaeddert, who has run towable divisions for 25-plus years, will oversee Forest River's entire recreational vehicles division, including towables and motorized.

Liegl remains CEO and will continue to lead strategic oversight of Forest River.

"I believe it is important to envision the future and plan for a smooth transition for the continued legacy of Forest River Inc.," said Liegl. "I will remain fully engaged and devote significant time to help the incoming leaders."

RV Products Completes Kansas Facility Expansion

RV Products, a division of Airxcel, completed the second and final phase of the expansion of its Wichita, Kansas, facility.

The company hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony and tour of its expanded facilities on Aug. 16. In 2022, Airxcel announced a two-phase expansion of its facility in Wichita, adding a total of 125,000 square feet. Phase one added 113,000 square feet of manufacturing space, new employee parking, a secured employee entrance and the improvement of trucking logistics of increased volume. The second and final phase of the project included a 12,000-square-foot expansion of office space completed in July 2024.

The expansion of the facility significantly enhances the operational capacity for Airxcel's two Wichita-based brands, Coleman-Mach and Maxxair. The strategic enhancement centralizes the current product lines of air conditioners and accessories, along with the warehouse operations for all raw and finished goods, into a single, streamlined location.

Rob Leach, division president, said, "Our dedication to our customers and employees is steadfast, and this expansion is a testament to that commitment. Since introducing the first-ever RV roof-top AC in 1967 with Coleman-Mach, and continuing with Maxxair from 1989, we have been steadfast supporters of the industry. We are enthusiastic about this expansion and the future of the RV market, underscoring our long-term commitment."

ORR Names Program & Administrative Director


Elrod

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) has appointed Cassandra L. Elrod as its new program and administrative director.

Elrod brings a wealth of experience in the outdoor recreation industry, legal expertise and a deep passion for sustainability and outdoor

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recreation policy to the ORR team.

"We are incredibly excited to welcome Cassandra to the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. Her unique blend of legal expertise, project management skills and passion for the outdoors will be invaluable as we continue to advocate for policies that enhance outdoor recreation opportunities across the nation.

"We look forward to the fresh insights and innovative approaches she will bring to our organization," said Jessica Wahl Turner, president of ORR.

Elrod joins ORR from Outside Interactive, where she served as commercial counsel. During her tenure, she played a pivotal role in project management and legal support for the inaugural Outside Festival in June 2024.

Her extensive experience in the outdoor recreation industry includes providing legal risk analysis and business expertise across various business streams, negotiating commercial agreements and managing the intellectual property portfolio for over 10 brands, ORR said.

As program and administrative director, Elrod will work across ORR's program areas, overseeing operations, communications, policy, programs and events. She will coordinate ORR members and industry stakeholders to educate Congress, federal agencies and state governments on policies aimed at enhancing outdoor recreation experiences and the quality of life for outdoor enthusiasts.

"I am thrilled to join the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable at such a pivotal time for the industry. The opportunity to collaborate with a diverse group of stakeholders to promote and protect outdoor recreation is truly exciting.

"I look forward to leveraging my background in legal and policy work to advance ORR's mission of connecting all Americans to the great outdoors, while also prioritizing sustainability and the long-term health of our natural resources," said Elrod.

General Coach Canada Earns Certification for 'Sustainable' RVs

TRA Certification announced that General Coach Canada has achieved its prestigious Emerald Green Certification for its innovative and sustainable RVs.

This certification applies to their wide range of products, including travel trailers, truck campers, theatrical trailers, office trailers and washrooms.

General Coach Canada's manufacturing process is focused on waste reduction and reduced environmental impact. The company utilizes recycled materials and ensures that components are cut to size by suppliers to minimize waste. Jigs are employed to further reduce excess, with scraps repurposed for other uses.

Certified units are equipped with LED lighting, ductless HVAC systems and solar panels. High-efficiency appliances, including convection cooktops, water heaters, furnaces, televisions and refrigerators, contribute to the overall reduction in energy consumption, making these RVs both environmentally friendly and cost-effective for consumers. Water conservation is another key aspect of General Coach Canada's design philosophy. The vehicles feature water-efficient bath and kitchen fixtures, along with instant or combination water heater/furnace systems that significantly reduce water waste.

GOT NEWS? Send your company news items to jbenschop@cahabamedia.com or mmoore@cahabamedia.com.

10 RV Professionals Inducted Into RV/MH Hall of Fame

This year's RV/MH Hall of Fame inductee class was celebrated Aug. 19 with a ceremony recognizing five new members of the RV class and five new members of the manufactured housing (MH) class.

The 2024 class of inductees includes:

RV:

- **Don Clark** – Manufacturer – Grand Design
- **Terry Elias** – Manufacturer – Triple E RV
- **Phil Ingrassia** – Association – RVDA
- **Jeff Rutherford** – Supplier – Airxcel
- **Brian Wilkins** – Dealer – Wilkin's RV

MH:

- **Charlie Hemphill** – Manufacturer – Clayton Homes
- **Sam Landy** – Communities – UMH Properties
- **Kamal Shouhayib –** Developer – Choice Properties
- **Nathan Smith** – Communities – Flagship Communities
- **Todd Su** – Retailer – Advantage Homes

Don Clark, president, CEO and co-founder of Grand Design, reflected on the honor.

"Looking back on my career, I'm most proud of the relationships we've built — within our team, with our owners and across the industry," Clark said. "Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is not just an honor — it's a powerful reflection of what we can accomplish when we lead with integrity, inspire with vision and relentlessly pursue excellence. This recognition belongs to everyone who has been part of this incredible journey, and I'm deeply grateful for the shared dedication that has brought us here."

Phil Ingrassia, RVDA president, echoed these sentiments.

"I am very grateful for the recognition and going in with great people as part of the RV/MH Hall of Fame class of 2024. Starting at RVIA, and then RVDA, working in this industry has taken me all over the U.S. and Canada and provided me with opportunities to see firsthand how RV travel and outdoor recreation impact people from all walks of life," Ingrassia said.

"Through the outstanding leadership of volunteer leaders past and present, RVDA has played an important role in growing the market and providing pathways for dealers, manufacturers and suppliers to form profitable partnerships." RVP

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HATS OFF FOR HUMANITY

RV PRO spoke with Kristin Hall, development director at Habitat for Humanity of Elkhart County (HFHEC), who said the organization expects to close on 11 homes this year — an increase from the five to seven homes Habitat built on average a few years ago. The organization's Elkhart County division was established in 1986 and has built 232 homes since. Read below on HFHEC's continued efforts and how to support affordable housing for Indiana-based families:



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HFHEC

How was the turnout for HFHEC's most recent builds?

The most recently completed home was for the Smith family. Our signature fundraising event, Raise the Roof, sponsored two homes home for the Smith and Leonard families. Sponsors for the event were Viewrail, Genesis Products, Patrick Industries, THOR Industries, Brinkley RV, Lippert, Dometic, Forest River, Dave Carter & Associates, Team Construction and PNC Bank. These sponsors compete as teams and build the interior and exterior walls of the homes, called a "Panel Build."

The Smith home was completed in just over three months, with nearly 300 volunteers.

Habitat partners with qualified applicants and homes are built based on the family size; three- and four-bedroom homes are standard. Habitat also builds five-plus bedroom and two-story homes. Depending on the size of the home, builds can take anywhere between three to five months to complete.



How does the organization advocate for fair housing policies in Indiana?

HFHEC advocates eliminating barriers to adequate and affordable housing by working with local and state officials. This includes a recent Indiana law signed into law in 2023, helping make housing infrastructure costs more affordable, plus new state tax credits (Attainable Homeownership Tax Credits) that went into effect in 2024. The goal is to increase affordable housing production throughout the state.

What support is the organization most in need of currently?

HFHEC relies on our community partners to volunteer and provide financial support for each home. Sustaining sponsors are corporate partners and local foundations that provide financial support for each home built annually. HFHEC also has house sponsors, like Winnebago Industries Foundation. HFHEC first partnered with Winnebago in 2019, and its sponsorship includes hosting Panel Builds — Grand Design RV, Winnebago Towables and Newmar have each hosted one.

This year, Newmar hosted the Panel Build for the Woods family, with 53 Newmar team members helping to build walls in their Nappanee location on Aug. 8. We anticipate having several groups participate in this build from the Winnebago brands.

As HFHEC continues to increase its impact in Elkhart County through increased construction activity, Habitat relies on community partners to support its mission and ministry of building homes, community and hope.

The average construction cost of a Habitat home in 2024 is $170,000.

How can companies become more involved in HFHEC?

Companies can support Habitat through sponsorships, individual giving, volunteering or becoming an advocate. Habitat builds year-round. Volunteers can sign up on our website or call to schedule a group. Habitat hosts groundbreakings and dedications for each home, and the community is invited to attend. Its signature event, Raise the Roof, is held the first Thursday in May at the Northern Indiana Event Center in the Peter Orthwein Pavilion, and we are actively recruiting teams and sponsors to participate in the 2025 event. RVP

To learn more about opportunities to support, follow Habitat on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram, or go to their website, habitatec.com.

RV PRO would like to highlight the philanthropic efforts of industry companies and dealerships. Please send us 500 words about your company's volunteer work and programs for a chance to be featured in future issues. Email Managing Editor Jordan Benschop: jbenschop@cahabamedia.com.

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BREAKING DOWN 2024 TRAVEL TRAILER TRENDS:

DATA INSIGHTS FROM RV TRADER



Top Travel Trailer Makes by Vehicle Detail Page Views

1. Forest River
2. Keystone
3. Airstream
4. Jayco
5. Grand Design

Forest River has received the most vehicle detail page views for travel trailer makes on RV Trader since 2022. Airstream has grown to the top three travel trailer makes from 2022 to 2024 based on vehicle detail page views.

Top Travel Trailer Makes/ Models by Vehicle Detail Page Views



Grand Design Imagine has remained the top make/model for travel trailers on RV Trader, according to vehicle detail page views. From 2022 to 2023, the Forest River Rockwood Mini Lite has risen to the top five travel trailer makes/models based on vehicle detail page views.

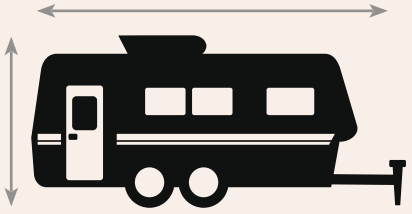
"Demand for travel trailers remains robust in 2024, with Forest River and Keystone continuing to lead the way among the top brands. Our data suggests that consumers are increasingly gravitating toward compact, more versatile models and are exploring brands that cater to their RV needs, similar to how Airstream rose to the top three in 2023.

With 'camper' and 'mini' emerging as popular keywords, the current focus is on compact RVs. Dealers have a prime opportunity to showcase and promote units that fit the trending search parameters through the end of the year."

New vs. Used Travel Trailers

The number of used travel trailers on RV Trader has been steadily growing since 2022. We have seen an increase of 8% in travel trailer RV inventory on RV Trader from 2022 to 2024.

Top Travel Trailer Lengths



The following are the top lengths (in feet) for travel trailers from January 2024 through June 2024, based on vehicle detail page views:

1. 22 feet
2. 20 feet
3. 21 feet
4. 23 feet

Top Sleeping Capacity for Travel Trailers

Consumers looking for travel trailers are most interested in units with sleeping capacities under six people. (Data based on vehicle detail page views)

1. 4
2. 6
3. 3
4. 2
5. 5



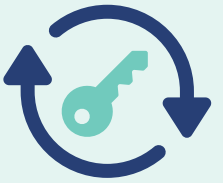
About RV Trader

RV Trader, a part of the renowned "Trader" family of brands and owned by Trader Interactive, is the leading 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.

Travel Trailer Keyword Searches

Consumers who searched for travel trailers on RV Trader also searched for the following keywords:

- Teardrop
- Camper
- Bunkhouse
- Mini
- King bed



THE DATA ON TRAVEL TRAILERS FROM RV TRADER WAS PULLED FROM JANUARY–JUNE 2024.

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inTech's Teardrop Takeoff

Cross-industry experience lends to the growth of inTech's RV segment, with roots in a timeless travel sector.

BY JORDAN BENSCHOP

PHOTOS COURTESY OF INTECH



In a world where travel trailers have evolved into ever-larger behemoths, the teardrop trailer remains a charming reminder of simpler times.

The lightweight campers — named for their distinct aerodynamic shape — captured American imagination in the 1930s as families sought Depression-era vacations. The United States highway system was underway, and teardrops could be towed by the family car, which boasted up to 100 horsepower at the time.

Despite the modernization of today's rigs, OEMs such as inTech have shown the truth behind the French maxim, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." The Nappanee, Indiana-based manufacturer began its foray into the RV space in late 2016 and launched its first teardrop model, dubbed Luna, one year later.

"We had a two-prong focus when entering the market," says Keith Fishburn, head of sales at inTech. "Number one was to bring units that offered a fresh look and were feature-filled (so, very few options) to the marketplace with every product, and secondly, as we are a very high-quality manufacturer of custom aluminum motorsports trailers, we wanted to introduce the RV market to our level of quality as well."

inTech's cross-industry experience boded well for the ongoing success of Luna. The teardrop was built with an all-aluminum, fully welded cage frame, making it lightweight enough to be towed by almost any vehicle without the risk of rusting. Its all-tube construction was designed to last. And while the historically small size of a teardrop is still fitting for today's customers seeking less-traditional forms of camping, Fishburn says, "We do not limit our focus on any particular size, but instead are always

looking for layouts and sizes that we feel can bring something of high-quality, with the unique inTech touch, to the market."

On Luna, that touch includes its signature front cap, which made way for an automotive-style panoramic windshield that "provides a fantastic view and allows a smaller unit to feel much larger," he says.

At its start, Luna and other inTech products were geared toward smaller units at 20 feet and under. Eventually the company expanded with its Aucta and OVR travel trailers for customers wanting larger rigs — but the company credits its teardrop takeoff for the ongoing success of its RV segment.

"With Luna coming out in the first year of our entry into the RV market, we were still learning a lot about what our customers were looking for in the overall layout. So, over the first couple years, we made a lot of changes based on feedback. Many of the things we learned from our Luna customers helped us as we designed our Sol and Aucta lines," Fishburn says.

Like its other products, Luna's aluminum makeup has remained tried-and-true over the years, but customer input sparked feature updates in the models' newest editions — most notably the addition of a cassette toilet.

"This was based on feedback from existing and potential customers as something they'd like to have available," he says. "Research and development (R&D) is critical to our success, as it not only helps us to build a better product but also enables us to make it more productionable right out of the gate — leading to fewer startup issues."



Campers increasingly want better kitchens, especially with growing interest in off-grid travel. The company says its rear outdoor setup was inspired by modern kitchen conveniences, boasting a two-burner LP stove with a cast-iron cooking surface, a large farmhouse sink and a 40-quart, 12-volt cooler. Customers











can also opt for a microwave and 12-volt refrigerator, with other options such as a fireplace, futon mattresses, a straight awning and windshield cover to round out Luna's offerings.

KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

Feedback from inTech's owners' groups and social media is an essential factor to consider for new model changes, Fishburn says. Paired with its R&D efforts, today's Luna layouts have evolved to offer creature comforts in a compact setting. The units sleep up to four adults, have an 8,000-Btu air conditioner and are loaded with entertainment features, such as a Bluetooth AM/FM stereo with a built-in DVD player and a 32-inch TV. Ample storage is scattered throughout the rigs.

For travelers who prefer the adventurous look, a Rover package boasts an adjustable roof rack, integrated side steps, an aluminum tube rear bumper and rugged decals. The line's sportier Base package has black powder-coated fenders and 15-inch aluminum wheels.

"We continue to see interest grow for small, lightweight options and customers that are interested is less traditional forms of camping," says Fishburn.

The small travel trailer segment, originally expected to be the hot market for first-time buyers, eventually drew a Baby Boomer crowd before becoming the go-to for millennial individuals, couples and small families. Today, the average low weight of the sector ranges from 2,000 to 5,000-plus pounds gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and continues to gain popularity for its towing convenience. Increased interest in off-grid travel has boosted desire for the sector — with teardrops coming in at some of the lowest GVWRs and more maneuverability by Jeeps, Toyota 4Runners, Subaru Outbacks and more.

"The simplicity of minimal systems, easy maneuverability, garage storage and not needing a large tow vehicle are all reasons we see this segment of the market has a lot of appeal. At inTech, we are continuing to look at new and innovative ways we can meet these needs," Fishburn says.

Although major changes aren't currently on inTech's horizon, he says, "We always want to keep the door open to changes as we receive feedback from both our customers and our dealers." The openness to move with the market is one of the reasons for inTech's solid RV segment success — and it all started with the timelessness of the teardrop trailer. RVP



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A RIFT IN THE MARKET

Washington-based **Rift Carbon Campers** taps impressive origins to bring up-and-coming teardrop innovation to the market.

BY JORDAN BENSCHOP

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RIFT CARBON CAMPERS

From carving waves to cruising highways, the founder of Rift Carbon Campers, Chris Durham, isn't one to become complacent.

In fact, his company's flagship product — a teardrop trailer weighing nearly half the industry's standard weight — was the result of more than 40 years of producing sporting, automotive and aerospace goods with composite materials similar to those that make up Rift's campers today.

Starting in the water ski industry, Durham worked with a company that made high-end slalom, trick and jump skis, and he saw an opportunity with a new product called a ski board, a recreational product primarily rotomolded or hand-shaped like a surfboard. With this product, Durham took advantage of the opportunity to advance the sport by updating the manufacturing process to compression molding. He says knew the process would elevate the product from a toy to a performance board. With that, the first wakeboard company, Wake Tech, was born and changed the water ski industry.

As a consultant for the composite industry, Durham was approached by one of the largest RV manufacturers in the world, which was seeking a solution to an ongoing construction issue.

"Long story short, the biggest problem that the trailer industry has is every time you sell a trailer, you usually have to upsell them to another vehicle," he says. "I've talked to a lot of manufacturers and dealers, and a very prevalent problem is trailers being too heavy for the vehicles out there in the market."

That issue turned profitable for Durham, who says he was tasked with an RV engineering project to build a "truly lightweight" camper. His first prototype was a teardrop trailer.

"I picked teardrops because they were small, so it was easy for me to make some tooling with, and I had baselines of weights to compare it to," he says.

That was almost seven years ago, and although Durham's prototype was successful, the all-fiberglass goal of the manufacturer didn't align with his visions.

"Fiberglass trailers are not what I do. I do carbon fiber and



fiberglass composite materials. I put those together to make the product react a certain way. It was very light and very strong," he says of the build.

Durham says the common usage of what he refers to as "garbage glass" — a sprayed-on fiberglass that's resin-rich — is heavier on the trailer. Making RVs from fiberglass was a big step for the industry, he adds, as the material takes away the risk of mold and mildew found within wood builds. However, fiberglass trailers are expensive to make and not necessarily lighter weight — a big priority for today's travel trailer segment.

Staying true to his origins, Durham took his teardrop prototype and tagged in his family, including his son, Matt, who worked on his dad's wakeboards at 11 years old and now holds a degree in manufacturing technology alongside managing design and CAD engineering at Rift, and his wife, Nancy, as a bookkeeper, to establish a trailer company that utilized composite materials and molding techniques — resulting in the family's brainchild, Rift Carbon Campers.

"With imagination, innovation and adventure, anything is possible," the company's website says, which couldn't ring truer — while the average weight of a standard teardrop is 1,200 to 2,000 pounds, Durham's base product with just the essentials weighs in at 480 pounds. The company recently shared a video online of the rig being towed by a tricycle.

"I've proved what I said I could do — you can make a lightweight, strong product. And I believe, coming from what people have told me is important [with travel trailers], that this would be a really hot thing the industry is looking for," he says.

Even for how shockingly light the Rift teardrop is, the roof and fenders are tough enough to stand on. The trailer is rebounded as one piece, with no seams or areas where water can seep through.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

The name "Rift" was also the result of Durham's cross-industry experiences. Transitioning from his original Carbon Lite moniker, the wakeboard maker at one point produced his own snowboards and skateboards under the name.

"They were all about making a 'rift' in the industry," he says. "I made some of the first carbon fiber skateboards, and some freestyle decks, which were the ones used on half pipes."

He sent the designs to a company called Santa Cruz Skateboards, where they were tested and proved surprisingly unbreakable, but the company had other plans for its manufacturing process.

"They said, 'We build wood decks for $5 and sell them for $50. Kids break them and have to replace them.' That's a common story I've gone through in my life. But making products for people, I know engineered products can be better," he says.

Today, Rift trailers is operating in ongoing research and development (R&D), having outgrown its original facility and moved to a new location that houses its R&D efforts, design, administrative and patent-pending manufacturing process to support a growing business. Durham says the company is currently building three teardrops at a time as a custom manufacturer. Its two main products include the Utility Camper,



a "casual" trailer that weighs less than 500 pounds. The unit offers radial tires, interior storage, a queen-size bed, roof vent fan and a Yakima roof rack — and with a tongue weight of 61 pounds, can be towed by a motorcycle or small vehicle. The camper's base price is $29,000.

"The inside [galley] wall is removable and only 20 pounds. I have two screws, so you can pull it out and pull the bed out to use it as a utility trailer — it's very versatile that way," he says.

Rift's other offering is an all-terrain trailer — dubbed the Adventure Wagon — weighing 660 pounds with a Timbren axleless 2,000-pound suspension. Geared toward off-grid travelers, the rig features off-road radial tires, a galley wall with pass-through storage, rounded tail for increased overlanding clearance, a queen-size bed, roof vent fan and Yakima roof rack. Base price for the rig is $39,000.

Both trailers are currently being sold customer-direct to avoid traditionally high markups. When compared to other manufacturer's teardrop trailers, Durham says Rift units are price-conscious in the segment.

"The trailers aren't cheap," he adds. "They're expensive to build. But I want to get them into the market. I want people to know there's something out there that's really working. I mean, the top 10 selling cars in the U.S. can't tow trailers except for ours."

Durham notes markets that show the most potential for his trailers are foreign, including Australia and New Zealand. One company told him they could sell 200-plus in the first year — likely due to the country's smaller roads. However, he says Rift is seeking bigger factories and OEM partnerships to bring the volume up and prices down. In the future, the company hopes to introduce larger travel trailers to the market using Durham's technology — including a potential 25-foot unit that could weigh between 2,500 and 3,500 pounds for towing capability by a small SUV.

"Our customers love them, and we haven't had any bad feedback come from them. People love what we're doing and why we're doing this," he says of his teardrops. "We don't use the normal framework of a trailer, and that's one of the reasons why my costs could go down, because my process is more efficient.

"I want people to know this product and technology is here. It's the type of knowledge that could change the industry," Durham says. "I love doing what I'm doing. I really would like to find other like thinkers who want to move the industry ahead and use technology to build different [rigs]."

Rift Carbon Campers is currently located at 9425 Lakeview Ave. SW in Lakewood, Washington. RVP

Why Dealerships Should Use a DMS

Four companies weigh in on what dealers need to know about this software system.

BY MICHELE MOORE

A dealership management system (DMS) can assist your dealership in a variety of ways, from sales and financing to parts and accessories and more. RV PRO asked several experts for insight into what dealers need to know about DMS and what advantages they offer.

RV PRO: Let's start with the basics — what is a DMS & why should a dealership use one?

Ben Platt, sales & marketing leader, BiT Dealership Software: A DMS is the glue that keeps all your departments talking to each other. The acronym DMS can refer to dealer management system or dealer management software. It combines all the tools that you need on a day-to-day basis into one platform.

Josie Prosdocimo, director of product management, IDS - Integrated Dealer Systems: A DMS is a comprehensive and holistic software solution designed to manage and automate operations within a dealership, from sales and service to inventory and accounting. A DMS centralizes data, digitizes processes, streamlines workflows and provides tools to enhance operational efficiency.

Chris Dominis, enterprise project manager, Motility Software Solutions: A DMS is a comprehensive software solution designed to streamline and integrate various operational aspects of a dealership, including sales, inventory management, finance, service and customer relationship management (CRM). Dealerships benefit from using a DMS because it centralizes data, improves operational efficiency, enhances customer service and provides valuable insights through analytics.

Jeremy Johnson, senior manager, OEM & business development, Lightspeed: A [DMS] is an all-in-one software platform that unifies every aspect of a dealership's operations. Acting as the central hub, it seamlessly connects departments like accounting, parts, service, sales, customer relationship management (CRM), inventory, rentals, financing and more into a single, cohesive system. By connecting parts, sales, service and finance across your business, your employees can see every transaction and make the best decisions based on real data.

Besides some of the obvious functions, what can a DMS do or provide that people may not know about?

Platt: Your DMS needs to be in the cloud ... your software should be light, flexible and browser based. You should be able to access it from anywhere in the world from a handheld device, and you shouldn't need the expense and hassles of managing your own server security and backups.

Your DMS should ... integrate all the departments of your



The RV sales quote section of BiT's software. *Image courtesy of BiT Dealership Software.*

dealership into one piece of software. … [It] should also be able to easily add estimates to existing work orders. RV repairs are often multifaceted — if the customer asks you to change the oil, what if you find a propane leak in the process? Your DMS should … facilitate sending additional estimates, getting approval for that estimate and then combining [it] with an existing work order. You should be able to easily attach vehicle intake photos with a handheld device and store those in the cloud.

A DMS should also put a high priority on customer communication. Having a text conversation from the estimate or work order that includes media will go a long way to avoid misunderstandings and improve customer satisfaction.

Prosdocimo: While a DMS is known for managing core functions like sales, finance and inventory, it offers several advanced features that may not be immediately apparent:

- Data Analytics: Track and visualize data to provide a 360-degree view of dealership operations. Advanced analytics can identify trends, customer behaviors and operational inefficiencies, leading to faster, more informed decision-making.
- Accounting: A seamless flow of information between your account general ledger and all departments of your dealership, eliminating double data entry and increasing the accuracy of your reporting.
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM): Some DMS platforms offer integrated CRM companion products, allowing dealerships to manage customer interactions, track leads and personalize marketing efforts and customer outreach.
- Automated Reporting: Produce detailed reports for audits and management reviews.
- Service Management: Manage the entire service department, from scheduling appointments to tracking repairs and managing parts inventory through the work order life cycle. It can even suggest upselling opportunities based on service history.

Dominis: Beyond its core functions, a DMS can automate workflows, facilitate regulatory compliance and integrate with external systems, such as manufacturer portals and third-party service providers. It also supports digital marketing efforts, enables predictive analytics for inventory management and provides tools for managing warranties and service contracts efficiently.



Leadership Insights, a DMS tool that consolidates a dealership's performance reporting into a single, web-based interface. *Image courtesy of Integrated Dealer Systems.*

Johnson: A standout feature of a DMS is its ability to seamlessly integrate multiple functions. Traditionally, dealerships might have relied on separate software for accounting, inventory management, CRM and other tasks. This fragmented approach can lead to inefficiencies, data silos and a higher risk of errors. With a DMS like Lightspeed, these functions are unified into one cohesive platform. This integration not only saves time and effort but also ensures data consistency and accuracy. For instance, when a sale occurs, the inventory automatically updates, invoices are generated and customer records are revised — without any manual input. Additionally, a DMS can integrate with major OEMs, transforming the 17-digit VIN entry process into a streamlined operation. Lightspeed's application programming interface communicates in real time, retrieving essential details like year, make, and model.

How can a DMS or CRM help make RECT better for a dealership?

Platt: The first step to improving repair event cycle time (RECT) is accurate reporting since … you can't manage what you can't measure. Your DMS should be able to easily report on RECT so that you can identify trends and identify and improve opportunities.

To improve your RECT, your DMS should [show] the status of all open work orders. This will help … identify bottlenecks. … Your DMS should also … suggest parts orders to ensure that you have a minimum level of standard parts on hand so you aren't waiting for parts.

A DMS that includes embedded texting will also speed up communication with your customer and improve RECT. Being able to [send] pictures [and get] text confirmation of estimate approval, all within your DMS, will improve RECT.

Prosdocimo: A DMS and a service-specific CRM product can [help] improve RECT in several ways:

- Identify Service Bottlenecks: Two common bottlenecks that impact RECT the most are warranty coverage and out-of-stock parts. A DMS can help you track your averages for both.
- Schedule Efficiently: By integrating service appointments with parts inventory and technician availability, a DMS ensures that repairs are scheduled optimally, reducing downtime.
- Track in Real Time: Service managers can monitor the progress of repairs in real time, identifying bottlenecks and reallocating resources as needed.
- Benchmark Service: Dealerships ought to compare their RECT results with the region's averages to determine if they are performing above or below dealerships in similar circumstances, climates and markets. By comparing your region's results with the national average, you can see how your region is trending.

- Enhance Communication: Automated notifications and updates keep customers informed about the status of their repairs, reducing anxiety and improving satisfaction.

Dominis: A DMS and CRM system significantly improve the RECT scores for dealerships. It enhances customer retention through better communication and reporting. The Motility RECT Dashboard allows users to see changes in real time and model data on screen. By basing our information on real-time data, transparency improves across the service and parts departments, fostering better decision-making and accountability.

Johnson: A DMS or CRM can greatly improve a dealership's RECT by streamlining workflows, enhancing communication and improving data management. By integrating departments, a DMS ensures smooth information flow, reducing delays in parts ordering, scheduling and repairs. Real-time updates keep service advisers and customers informed, while better inventory management ensures parts are readily available. Additionally, data analytics identify bottlenecks and optimize processes, leading to quicker repairs and improved RECT. In short, a DMS or CRM makes the repair process faster, more efficient and more transparent.

How can dealership ownership get buy-in from the service department & other departments for implementing a DMS?

Platt: An effective service department will be eager to implement a DMS when employees see the benefits of efficient processes that come with an integrated DMS, especially one that includes embedded texting. Efficiencies come in many ways, including techs being able to clock in and out of jobs on their phone, improved customer communication and satisfaction through quick text messages, including photos and estimates, and stock order reorder suggestions to ensure you don't run out of typical parts.

Prosdocimo: Upgrading your system ... impacts your entire team. To get buy-in from your team to implement a DMS, dealership ownership should:



MotilityAnywhere software. *Image courtesy of Motility Software Solutions.*

- Engage department heads in the selection process, allowing them to provide input on features that would benefit their teams.
- Clearly communicate how the DMS will make their jobs easier, such as reducing paperwork, improving data accuracy and providing tools to increase efficiency.
- Offer comprehensive training to ensure that employees feel confident using the new system. Ongoing support can help ease the transition and address any concerns.

Dominis: To gain buy-in, dealership ownership should emphasize the benefits tailored to each department. For service departments, highlight how a DMS can streamline scheduling, improve automated communication and notifications as well as enhance customer service. Demonstrating the ease of use and training opportunities can alleviate concerns about learning new systems. Involving department heads in the selection process and showcasing successful case studies from similar dealerships can also build confidence and support for implementation.

Johnson: To secure buy-in for a DMS, dealership ownership should:

- Clearly communicate how the DMS will improve efficiency and reduce manual tasks for each department.
- Involve department heads early in the process to tailor the system to their needs and gain their support.
- Offer thorough training and support to ease the transition and ensure everyone is comfortable with the new system.
- Share success stories from other dealerships to build confidence in the DMS.

What reports can a DMS produce & how can those reports help a dealership?

Platt: A modern DMS will have real-time reporting, including custom reports, that can be printed or opened in a spreadsheet. Reports on margins, inventory levels, tech efficiency, RECT, sales history, lead status, etc. If it is something tracked in your DMS, it should be reportable.

Prosdocimo: A DMS and analytics companion product can generate a wide range of reports to help you manage your dealership effectively, including tracking vehicle sales, profit margins and sales team performance. These reports help management understand market trends and identify top performers. [Also, inventory reports help] monitor stock levels, aging inventory and turnover rates. This information is crucial for optimizing inventory management and reducing carrying costs.

[Additional reports include] service reports that analyze RECT, technician productivity and service revenue. These reports can reveal inefficiencies and opportunities for growth in the service department. Financial reports provide a detailed view of the dealership's financial health, including profit and loss statements, balance sheets and cash flow analysis. These reports empower dealership management to make data-driven decisions, improve operations and boost profitability.

Dominis: A DMS can generate a wide range of reports, including sales performance metrics, inventory turnover, service department efficiency, financial forecasts, customer satisfaction ratings

and more. These reports provide actionable insights for dealership management to optimize inventory levels, adjust marketing strategies, improve staff performance, forecast revenue accurately and enhance overall operational efficiency.

Johnson: A DMS like Lightspeed offers a range of reports … [benefitting] a dealership:

- Sales Reports: Track performance and trends to optimize sales strategies.
- Inventory Reports: Monitor stock levels and turnover to manage inventory efficiently.
- Service Reports: Analyze technician productivity and service efficiency to improve operations.
- Financial Reports: Review financial health with detailed statements and profit analyses.
- Customer Reports: Understand customer behavior to enhance marketing and retention.

These reports provide actionable insights, helping dealerships make informed decisions and improve overall performance.

How would a dealership prepare for implementing a DMS?

Platt: Start by cleaning your data … give it a once-over and remove everything you don't need. If you've got data from an accounting system or older software, make sure that you can export that data into a spreadsheet for easy transfer to your new system. Your new provider should import this information for free.

Prosdocimo: Implementing a DMS requires careful planning:

- Conduct a thorough assessment of your dealership's needs and processes to determine the features and capabilities required from the DMS.
- Choose a DMS that aligns with your dealership's size, complexity and specific needs. Consider scalability, ease of use and vendor support.
- Develop a detailed implementation plan that includes data migration, system configuration, employee training and testing phases.
- Keep all stakeholders informed throughout the process and provide comprehensive training to ensure a smooth transition.

Dominis: Preparation for DMS implementation involves several key steps:

- Conducting a thorough needs assessment and selecting a DMS that aligns with the dealership's specific requirements.
- Ensuring adequate training and support for staff to minimize disruption during the transition.
- Planning data migration from existing systems to the new DMS, ensuring data integrity and completeness.
- Establishing clear implementation timelines, roles and responsibilities across departments.
- Testing the DMS thoroughly before full deployment to identify and address any issues proactively.

Johnson: A dealership should assess current processes and define clear goals for the new system. Assemble a cross-departmental team, clean up data for migration and choose a DMS company with a proven track record that fits the dealership's needs. Plan the rollout, provide thorough training and communicate clearly with staff to ensure a smooth transition. A well-executed implementation process is critical. Ensure the vendor outlines the implementation process clearly, including key milestones and assigned responsibilities. Check if they can provide a detailed step-by-step checklist and have adequate resources to execute the implementation promptly. Assess the experience level of the implementation team and ensure your data is clean and ready for migration.

Is there anything else our readers should know?

Platt: Pricing transparency should be at the core of a software company's values. If they don't list actual prices on their website, how do you know that you're getting the same pricing as a similar dealer across town? What will the pricing be next time your contract comes up for renewal? If you can negotiate away up-front fees, why are they trying to charge you thousands of dollars up-front in the first place? BiT's commitment to pricing transparency means no contracts, no up-front fees and no surprises.



DMS Power Six. *Image courtesy of Lightspeed.*

Prosdocimo: When considering a DMS, it's essential to recognize that this system is more than just software; it's a strategic tool that can transform how your dealership operates. Look for a provider that will work with you as a business growth partner [and] who understands your business and values your input. Whether improving service efficiency, enhancing customer satisfaction or providing valuable insights through reporting, the right DMS can be a game changer for your business.

Focus on choosing the right tool and partner to fit your dealership's current workflows and future goals. Ensure your dealership is prepared and approaches the implementation process with a clear plan and open communication of expectations.

Dominis: Implementing a DMS is not just about adopting new software; it's a strategic decision that can transform dealership operations. It requires commitment from dealership leadership, buy-in from staff and ongoing support and optimization to realize its full potential. Choosing the right DMS partner who understands the unique needs of RV dealerships and offers robust support and training is crucial for long-term success and growth.

Johnson: Selecting the right DMS is crucial for enhancing your dealership's efficiency and profitability. In today's fast-paced and innovative business landscape, your dealership needs tools that evolve with it. The right DMS will streamline operations, boost productivity and drive your dealership's success. RVP

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES

How the **Camping in North Dakota** Facebook Group revolutionized RV marketing for one dealer.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS BY CHAD HATZENBUHLER



A wintertime event at Corral Sales RV for the Camping in North Dakota community.

As a marketer in the RV industry, I've always sought innovative ways to connect with our audience. In 2020, my wife, Amanda, and I created the Camping in North Dakota Facebook group. What started as a simple platform for sharing camping adventures has transformed into a powerful marketing tool for our family's business, Corral Sales RV.

Starting a Community

It began as a casual way for friends and family to share camping experiences, but I quickly saw the potential for something bigger. We opened the group to everyone who loves camping in North Dakota. The first year was slow, but in the last four years, the group has grown to nearly 18,000 members.

This rapid growth presented both opportunities and challenges. To maintain the group's integrity, we implemented a careful vetting process, requiring prospective members to answer specific questions. Collecting email addresses during this process laid the foundation for our future marketing efforts while ensuring the group stayed focused on its core purpose: sharing camping adventures in North Dakota.

Turning Community Into a Marketing Tool

As the group expanded, I recognized its potential as a powerful marketing tool for my family's business, Corral Sales RV, co-owned by my father-in-law, Tim Helbling. My challenge was finding ways to leverage this engaged community without compromising the trust and goodwill we'd built. The key was striking a delicate balance between community engagement and subtle marketing initiatives.

My strategy hinges on collecting valuable data while providing genuine value to our members. The email addresses gathered during the membership process became the cornerstone of our sophisticated marketing approach. This data allows me to implement targeted email campaigns for Corral Sales RV, ranging from weekly updates to quarterly newsletters.

It's important to note that our marketing methods are constantly evolving. Using the collected data is an ongoing work in progress. I'm continually refining our approach, adapting to new technologies and marketing trends. This flexibility ensures our efforts remain effective and relevant in the ever-changing digital landscape.

Amanda is the biggest help, managing the page and keeping me focused on why we started the group. I continue to explore ways to develop and implement marketing strategies that benefit Corral Sales RV, always with an eye on maintaining our community's trust and respect. This partnership allows us to balance the group's original purpose with its potential as a marketing tool.

Expanding Our Digital Footprint

To complement the Facebook group, we launched a dedicated website, CampingInNorthDakota.com. This site serves as a comprehensive resource for campers, offering detailed information about campgrounds, blogs and other valuable content. The website not only enhances the user experience for our group members but also plays a crucial role in our digital advertising and retargeting efforts.

I believe in leading by example, so I regularly share my own camping adventures with the group, both on and off Facebook. To reach an audience

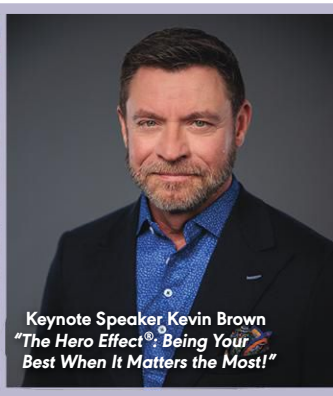




RVDA | RV DEALERS CONVENTION/EXPO

NOVEMBER 11-15, 2024 • PARIS LAS VEGAS





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ELEVATE YOUR DEALERSHIP:

Connect and Grow at the 2024 RV Dealers Convention/Expo

The RVDA Convention is designed for all RV professionals. Network with industry leaders, learn cutting-edge sales and marketing strategies, and optimize dealership operations. Keynote speaker Kevin Brown, a best-selling author and motivational speaker, will share his "Hero Effect®" philosophy for business success. The 2024 RVDA Convention/Expo is designed to empower RV dealership professionals at all stages of their careers. Whether you're a seasoned manager or just starting out, you'll find a wealth of solutions to propel your success. This dealer organized event will feature interactive workshops, future-focused insights, proven sales techniques, and department-specific effective practices.

Here is a look at some of the topics slated for the Convention/Expo:

Dealer/GM

- Talent Management: How to Retain Top Employees
- Successful Management Structures for Multi-location Dealerships
- Effective Communication and Collaboration
- Artificial Intelligence

Legislation and Compliance

- Marketing and Advertising Compliance Issues
- Labor Law – Overtime, Injury, and Illness Rules, Plus Worker Classification
- Dealer Data and Digital Issues

Fixed Operations *(Parts, Warranty & Service)*

- What are the Strategies and Tactics Top Performing Service Departments Employ to Improve RECT?
- Effective Practices to Elevate Service to Industry-leading Standards
- Management Strategies to Expand Service Facilities/Capacity
- Parts & Accessories – Winning Strategies for Competing with Internet-based Companies
- Innovative Training and Retention Practices

Digital Marketing/BDC/Social Media

- Working with Social Media Influencers
- Content Marketing
- Reputation Management

Business Innovation *(Sales & F&I)*

- Closing the Sale in the Age of Well-Informed Customers
- Set Yourself Apart: Creating Your Dealership's Competitive Advantage
- Building Relationships with Customers
- Seamless Integration: Sales & F&I

The exhibit floor features more than 150 vendors showing the latest products, software, and F&I offerings. Follow us on the RVDA Convention website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X.

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outside of Facebook, I've expanded our presence to other social media platforms. As RV Chad, I'm particularly active on Instagram (@rv_chad), where I share my camping adventures, product reviews and other camping-related content. We're also experimenting with other platforms like TikTok to broaden our reach and connect with diverse audiences.

This multiplatform approach allows us to engage with our community in various ways, providing real-world experiences and insights while subtly promoting our brand and services. By sharing my personal adventures and product reviews, I aim to offer practical value to our audience and reinforce the community aspect of our group.

Building Brand Loyalty Through Tangible Experiences

Understanding that effective marketing goes beyond digital interactions, we've implemented several innovative strategies to strengthen brand loyalty and community engagement:

1. **Surprise & Delight Campaigns:** We occasionally surprise group members at their campsites with custom gifts bearing both the Camping in North Dakota logo and our company logo, Corral Sales. This initiative has become incredibly popular among our community members.
2. **Exclusive Merchandise:** We introduced membership stickers, which have served multiple purposes. Initially offered for free, these stickers allowed for additional data collection while fostering a sense of community. We've since transitioned to a paid model, turning this into a revenue stream while still providing valuable marketing data.
3. **Community Events:** The group's popularity was dramatically demonstrated when a winter meetup, promising free gifts to the first 300 attendees, drew over 700 people to our RV dealership. This event underscored the strong sense of community fostered by the group and its tangible impact on brand engagement.

Measurable Impact & Future Directions

While it's challenging to attribute sales directly to the Facebook group, we've observed a notable increase in brand awareness and customer loyalty for Corral Sales RV. Our long-term strategy of building a community first and a customer base second is paying off in terms of brand perception and market position.

The success of the North Dakota group has led us to create a similar group for South Dakota, applying the same strategies to build community and drive marketing efforts across state lines.

Key Takeaways for RV Dealerships & Beyond

Through this journey, I've learned several valuable lessons that can benefit other businesses looking to leverage social media for marketing:

1. **Community First:** Prioritize building a genuine community around shared interests rather than focusing solely on sales.
2. **Value Exchange:** Offer real value to community members through information, experiences and exclusive benefits.
3. **Data-Driven Approach:** Collect and use data responsibly to inform targeted marketing efforts, while remaining flexible and open to new methods.
4. **Cross-Platform Integration:** Create a seamless experience across social media, email and web platforms.
5. **Tangible Engagement:** Complement digital interactions with real-world experiences and merchandise to strengthen brand loyalty.
6. **Patience & Persistence:** Recognize that building a community and seeing marketing results takes time and consistent effort.
7. **Continuous Evolution:** Be prepared to adapt marketing strategies as technology and consumer behaviors change.

Connecting With Customers

The Camping in North Dakota Facebook group has opened a new avenue for connecting with potential customers in the RV industry. By fostering a vibrant community centered on shared interests, we've created a platform that serves both our members and our business.

Our journey demonstrates the power of authentic engagement in the digital age. As we continue to grow and adapt, we're excited about the possibilities this community-driven approach offers. It's not just about selling RVs; it's about building relationships, sharing experiences and creating value for everyone involved.

The success of our group shows that when businesses prioritize community building, marketing opportunities naturally follow.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to our core purpose: celebrating the camping lifestyle in North Dakota while exploring innovative ways to serve our community and grow our business.

This approach has not only transformed our marketing strategy but has also enriched our understanding of our customers' needs and desires. In the end, that's the true value of community-building — it's a two-way street that benefits everyone involved. RVP

Join our community on Facebook by searching for Camping in North Dakota and Camping in South Dakota.
Follow me on Instagram and TikTok at @RV_Chad.
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UNDERSTANDING TOOLS THAT UNLOCK PRE-QUALIFIED LEADS FOR YOUR DEALERSHIP

RVPRO webinar

FREE • OCTOBER 30 • 1 P.M. CENTRAL

Now is the time to revolutionize your RV dealership's sales and marketing efforts to accelerate the sales process. By learning ways to effectively qualify leads and enhance customer engagement, your dealership can improve its conversion rates and increase revenue. A combination of tools is needed to make this happen, including advanced digital marketing tools and nurture campaigns that are designed specifically for RV dealer websites. When paired with the ability to conduct soft credit pulls on every lead, dealerships gain crucial insights like credit scores, trade line history and customized sell rates, in addition to the ability to run all deals through your full list of lenders. All these elements can come together to ensure your dealership can offer the best financing options to each customer, further streamlining the sales process and improving overall profitability. In this webinar, Rollick, Pre-Pair and 700Credit will explain how the seamless integration of these tools can help your business.

SPEAKERS



Stephanie Alderman
CEO
Pre-Pair



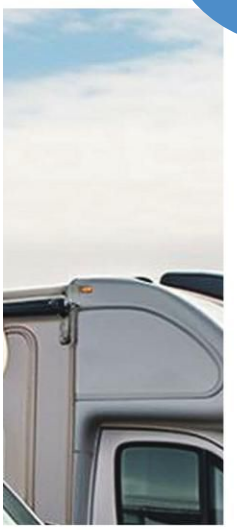
Chris Yeloushan
Vice President
Dealer Solutions
Rollick

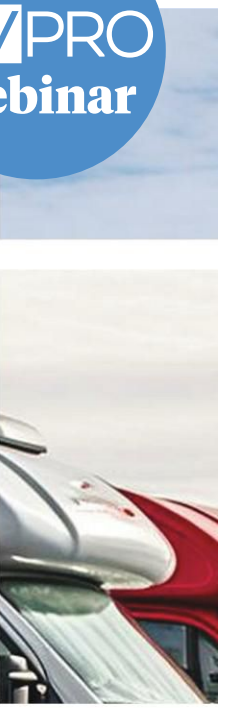


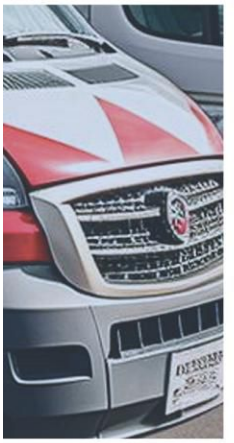
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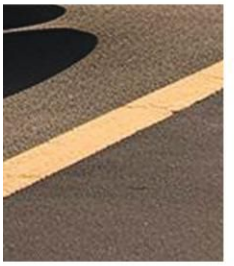
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LEVERAGING AIAs FOR DEALERSHIP SUCCESS



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Learn how to use **Meta's Automotive Inventory Ads.**

BY EMMA DAVIS

As shoppers spend more time online, the success of RV dealerships increasingly hinges on their ability to connect with potential buyers through effective online marketing strategies. One of the most powerful tools at a dealer's disposal are Automotive Inventory Ads, or AIAs, on Meta platforms like Facebook and Instagram. As we navigate a turbulent and unpredictable economy, focusing on cost-effective dealership marketing strategies is more important than ever. So we're here to help explain what AIAs are, how they function for RV dealerships and the myriad benefits they offer for awareness and conversion.

What Are AIAs?

AIAs are a dynamic ad format that promotes a dealership's current vehicle inventory to interested buyers. Unlike traditional ads that require manual updates and static content, AIAs leverage real-time data to display the most relevant units to potential customers based on their interests and browsing behavior.

This automated nature ensures that users see ads tailored to their preferences, increasing the likelihood of engagement and lead generation.

So, for example, imagine a potential customer searching online for fifth wheels for sale. That information is tracked, and the behavior is noted in their digital footprint. Meta takes this information about the user's interest in fifth wheels and, through an AIA, can show that person your current fifth wheels for sale in their Facebook or Instagram feed.

How AIA Functions for RV Dealerships

AIAs are a game changer in digital marketing for dealerships. These ads can integrate seamlessly with your existing inventory feed, allowing you to showcase your RVs on the social media platforms your customers are already scrolling. Here's a step-by-step breakdown of how AIAs work for RV dealerships:

1. **Integration With Inventory Feed:** AIAs pull data from your inventory management system. A third-party agency or your DMS manager can set up an automated dealership inventory feed, including vehicle details, images

> "AIAs are a game changer in digital marketing for dealerships."

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For coach specs and features, visit myrvadvisor.com

and prices. This integration ensures that the ads are always up to date with your latest inventory.

2. Dynamic Ad Creation: Using Meta's machine learning (AI) algorithms, AIAs are dynamically created and personalized for each viewer. These ads highlight RVs that match the viewer's interests, behavior and demographics. Data like this can be collected by Meta through behavior tracking codes like the Meta Pixel.

3. Targeting & Retargeting: AIAs leverage Meta's advanced targeting capabilities to reach motivated potential buyers. They can target users based on their location, age, interests and past interactions with similar content. Additionally, AIAs can retarget users who have previously visited your website or engaged with your content.

4. Placement Across Meta Platforms: AIAs are not limited to Facebook and Instagram feeds. They can appear in other placements within Meta's ecosystem, like Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp and Messenger. They could even appear on other websites and mobile apps through Meta's Audience Network. Meta's algorithm will choose an ad's placement based on which one is most likely to improve the ad's results.

Why Dealerships Should Use AIAs

RV dealers who run AIAs are reporting compelling results in terms of exposure, engagement, conversion and ROI. More specifically, dealers consistently see that more people are seeing the ads, more people are engaging, leading to higher conversion rates at a significantly lower cost per lead. At NetSource Media, we've tracked these ads delivering four times more exposure than traditional Facebook ads, while the cost per Messenger conversation has been two times lower and the cost per landing page view is five times lower, compared to traditional Facebook ads.

The dynamic nature of these ads ensures that they reach a wider audience that is more likely to be interested in RVs. Facebook also implements a frequency cap on ads, so a single user can only see an ad so many times. Since AIAs change based on current inventory and the user's most recent behavior, the frequency cap is often higher than that of traditional ads. That means users are shown AIAs more often than they might be shown another ad.

These ads also have better engagement and conversion rates. By showcasing vehicles that align with users' interests, AIAs significantly boost engagement rates. Users are more likely to click on ads that feature RVs tailored to their preferences, leading to more interactions and potential leads. They're also one of the most cost-effective, lead-generating digital ad options. The ads are generated based on information pulled from your inventory management system in real-time, which reduces the need for manual updates and saves time while optimizing



ad spend. This real-time feature also ensures that ads reflect current stock, alleviating user frustration due to outdated listings.

Maximize Success With AIAs

To fully leverage the potential of AIAs, RV dealerships should consider the following best practices:

Optimize Inventory Feed: Ensure your inventory feed is accurate and up to date. High-quality images and detailed descriptions enhance the appeal of your ads. Fill out as much information as possible. Facebook's current limit is 20 photos per item, and it's best to add as many photos as you can. This helps people feel more confident about contacting your dealership and helps prevent people from clogging inboxes and phone lines with basic questions.

Use Meta's Targeting Options: Take advantage of Meta's sophisticated targeting tools to reach the right audience. Experiment with different targeting parameters to find the most effective combinations. Dealers that have aggregated customer data — like names, email addresses and phone numbers — and have provided adequate disclosures to their customers that they may share this data with third parties, like Meta, should consider doing so. Providing this data to Meta allows them to find your customers on their platform and to understand their behaviors and interests. They'll use this information to show your ads to users who are similar to your previous customers.

Engage With Prospective Buyers: Use the increased engagement from AIAs to interact with potential buyers online. Promptly respond to inquiries and nurture leads through the sales funnel. This is essential when it comes to AIAs optimized for Messenger conversations. Many dealers don't take the time to provide people on Messenger with the same level of care and attention that they offer in-person or phone call leads. Treat potential buyers contacting you through Messenger the same as you would a person who walked through your door. Respond in a friendly manner and help the user narrow down which RV is best for them.

Enhancing Digital Marketing

AIAs on Meta platforms offer RV dealerships a powerful tool to enhance their digital marketing efforts. By leveraging the dynamic and targeted nature of AIAs, dealerships can increase their exposure, engagement and conversion rates. At NetSource Media, we have seen firsthand the transformative impact of AIA for clients. As dealership marketing continues to evolve, staying at the forefront with innovative solutions like AIAs will be key to driving success and growth in the competitive RV market. RVP

Emma Davis is the digital marketing manager for NetSource Media.



CREATE LIFELONG CUSTOMERS & BECOME A SOUGHT-AFTER DEALERSHIP



Tips on what repeat buyers are looking for and why **word-of-mouth marketing** is still a top priority.

BY SCOTT & VANESSA RUSSELL

In the competitive RV industry, the key to not just surviving but thriving lies in retaining customers for life. Repeat buyers are incredibly valuable. They bring in additional revenue with subsequent purchases and often serve as brand advocates by recommending your dealership to friends, family and fellow RV enthusiasts.

However, converting a one-time buyer into a lifelong customer entails more than simply selling an RV. It requires unparalleled customer support and a commitment to addressing post-purchase pain points. This article delves into common challenges RV owners face after buying an RV and offers strategies for transforming these hurdles into opportunities for customer retention.

Upgrading the Customer Experience

As an RV dealership, your goal is not only to sell RVs but also to create a loyal customer base that will return for their next purchase and recommend your business to others. Setting yourself apart by offering exceptional customer service and support is critical.

By addressing common customer pain points and implementing strategies to attract repeat buyers, you can build a reputation as the go-to dealership for all RVer needs. Consider the following common RV buyer challenges:

1. Lack of Support After Purchase

One of the most common complaints among RV buyers is the sense of abandonment after buying their RV. The excitement of purchasing soon gives way to uncertainty, particularly for new RV owners unfamiliar with how to use their RV. Without proper support, customers can quickly feel overwhelmed and begin doubting their purchasing decision.

2. Uncertainty About Required Maintenance

Maintaining an RV is key to preserving its longevity and functionality. It's also helpful to reduce the burden on your dealership's service department. However, many buyers are unaware of the basic necessary upkeep required to keep their RVs in optimal condition. This knowledge gap can lead to avoidable issues and costly repairs, putting a damper on the RV ownership experience.

3. Unreasonable Wait Times for Service Appointments

Timely service is critical in maintaining customer satisfaction. Prolonged wait times to schedule service appointments can frustrate RV owners, leaving them feeling undervalued and inconvenienced.

4. Lengthy Repair Times

Even once an RV is in for service, long repair times can render the unit unusable for extended periods. This both disrupts planned travels and also diminishes the enjoyment of RV ownership.

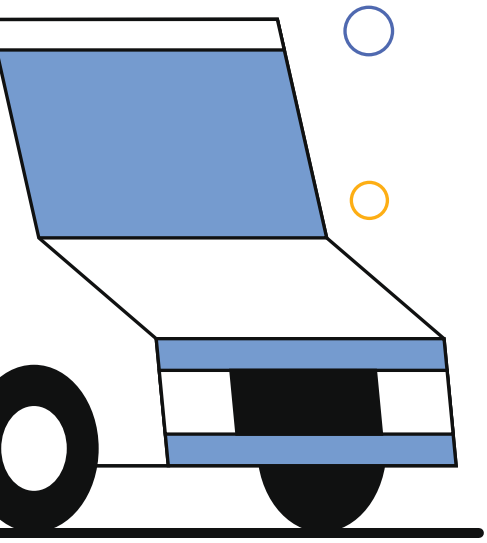
By addressing these pain points head-on, your dealership can differentiate itself from competitors and build a loyal customer base.

Strategic Solutions That Enhance Customer Experience

To address these pain points and foster lasting customer loyalty, consider adopting a more proactive approach. Here are some effective strategies:

1. Post-Purchase Support

Give your customers new to the RV lifestyle a head start to enjoy the experience. One of the easiest ways is to provide a thorough RV walk-through at purchase and offer to record it on video



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so the buyer has a handy reference later. Buyers may think they will remember the ins and outs of their new unit, but many find that when it's time to hit the first campground, many details are sometimes lost in all the excitement.

With this simple offering, your new owners will feel supported from the start.

2. Maintenance Reminder Emails

A simple yet effective strategy to further customer support is through sending regular maintenance reminder emails. These emails could include:

- Scheduled alerts: Remind customers of upcoming maintenance needs based on mileage or time intervals.
- DIY tips: Provide easy-to-follow tips for basic maintenance tasks that customers can perform themselves.
- Seasonal advice: Offer guidance on seasonal maintenance, such as winterizing the RV or preparing it for summer travels.

These reminders will help prevent costly repairs down the road and demonstrate your dealership's commitment to the customer's camping experience, creating a sense of trust and reliability.

3. Certified RV Tech Availability by Phone

Offering access to certified RV technicians via phone or video call can help customers troubleshoot and resolve many issues on their own, reducing downtime and easing the burden on your service department. A concept similar to Bish's RV's BishFix can be highly effective as an included or paid service option.

Bish's RV provides a hotline with an RV service technician available to help diagnose and troubleshoot issues via a video call. According to Bish's RV, BishFix resolves around 40% of customer issues by phone. This service increases customer satisfaction while reducing RV downtime and the burden on your dealership's service center. It's a win-win situation for both the dealership and the customer.

4. Timely Service Appointments

To enhance customer satisfaction, ensure that service appointments are available when customers need them. Consider evaluating your service department lead time and making adjustments to improve access.

5. Verify Parts & Technician Availability Before Drop-Off

Before customers bring in RVs for service, confirm that the necessary parts and technicians are available. This approach prevents RVs from sitting idle while waiting for service to begin and parts to arrive, thus minimizing downtime. The customer will have more confidence in the process when RV repairs begin on the same day the unit is dropped off. Possible strategies include:

- Pre-arrival checklists: Create a checklist for service advisers to verify parts and technician availability before confirming appointments.
- Efficient inventory management: Maintain a well-organized inventory system to track parts availability and manufacturer communications.

6. Increased Communication During the Service Process

Communicating regularly with customers during the service process is essential to maintaining customer satisfaction. Daily check-in calls or updates via text message can help manage expectations and reduce anxieties about the status of their RV. Consider the following ideas:

- Update protocol: Develop a protocol for service advisers to provide daily updates to customers.
- Transparent communication: Be transparent about repair progress, any delays and expected completion times.

The Power of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

When customers feel supported and valued after an RV purchase, they are more likely to return for their next purchase and recommend your dealership to others. In the tight-knit RV community, word-of-mouth marketing is incredibly powerful. Happy customers will share their positive experiences with friends, family members and fellow RVers they meet on the road.

Imagine your dealership being the subject of a great customer experience story shared around the campfire. RVers will share how your staff went above and beyond to assist them, how your innovative support services saved their vacation or how your efficient service department got them back on the road quickly. These stories will spread, attracting new customers and solidifying your reputation as a go-to RV dealership.

Final Thoughts on Attracting Repeat Buyers

Setting your RV dealership apart through exceptional customer service and support not only addresses common RV buyer pain points but also turns one-time buyers into lifelong customers. By focusing on post-purchase support, timely service and clear communication, your dealership can create a share-worthy customer experience that stands out from the competition. RVP

Scott and Vanessa Russell have been full-time RVers with their daughter since 2015. They work from the road as freelance social media influencers/content creators for RV manufacturers, RV dealerships, campgrounds and outdoor brands. They are also full-time freelance RV travel writers for RV magazines and websites. Contact them at scott@theadventuredetour.com, on their blog theadventuredetour.com or on Instagram @theadventuredetour.



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Your Personnel Need Your Personal Attention

How to find and retain employees by keeping them top of mind.

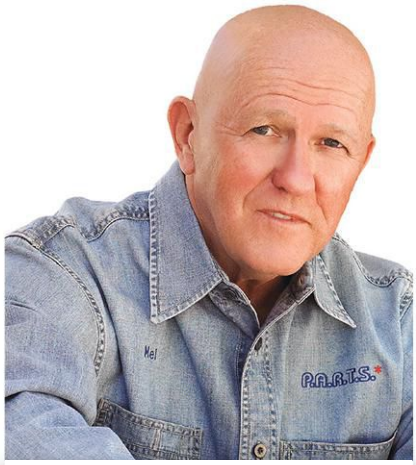
In many of my columns since 2005, I have presented the importance of turning your parts and accessories inventories with the suggestion that you should achieve as high a turn as possible considering several factors. For this month's column, I am suggesting that you achieve a low turn of another important asset — your personnel. Yes, personnel are considered an expense with respect to your financial statement. However, as a parts manager/director and as a consultant, I view personnel as an asset — or a liability.

Your frontline parts and accessory associates interact with your customers. Most people like to establish relationships with the employees of businesses with which they do business. I was in the local branch of my bank today, and I felt comfortable when several of the employees greeted me as Mr. Selway or Mel. Assuming this is the atmosphere you want to establish and maintain in your RV business, then perhaps some of the points in this month's column might assist you in your efforts.

NOTE: Though the job positions referenced in this column are in the parts and accessories department, the concepts are applicable in any part of your business.

Where To Start?

Before you solicit applications for a position in your parts and accessory department, have you prepared for efficiently and effectively handling those applicants? Do you have a detailed job



Mel Selway is the president of P.A.R.T.S. Inc., a Sahuarita, Arizona-based firm providing business management analysis and training to retailers. He can be reached at 520-336-8606 or melselway@aol.com.

description for the position? Does that job description reflect the current duties and responsibilities of the position? What qualifications will you require for persons applying for this position? How do you present the image of your RV business to the customer so that the applicants know what is to be expected of them? (e.g., Do you operate a dirt floor service department? Are your bathrooms clean and sanitary?)

Do you have test documents that can be used to determine the job knowledge of each applicant? Or do you accept the work history listed in the applicant's résumé? Early in my career as a parts manager/director, I learned that just because a person claims job knowledge based on years of experience, it doesn't validate their actual experience. I suggest that you have a few job skills tests that require each applicant to demonstrate how to research a work order request or research a customer request for a specific item on their RV, especially for a brand of RV that you sell and/or service. By evaluating these research tests for elapsed time and accuracy, you can establish a baseline of each applicant's job knowledge. This assists you in making your decision to hire or not.

How does the applicant present herself? Is she comfortable talking with the interviewer? If the job position for which she is applying will be dealing with people (customers, technicians, supplier representatives, etc.), then soft skills could be an important trait to include in your evaluation. If she is applying for the position of shipping/receiving or inventory verification, then perhaps the soft skills are not as important.

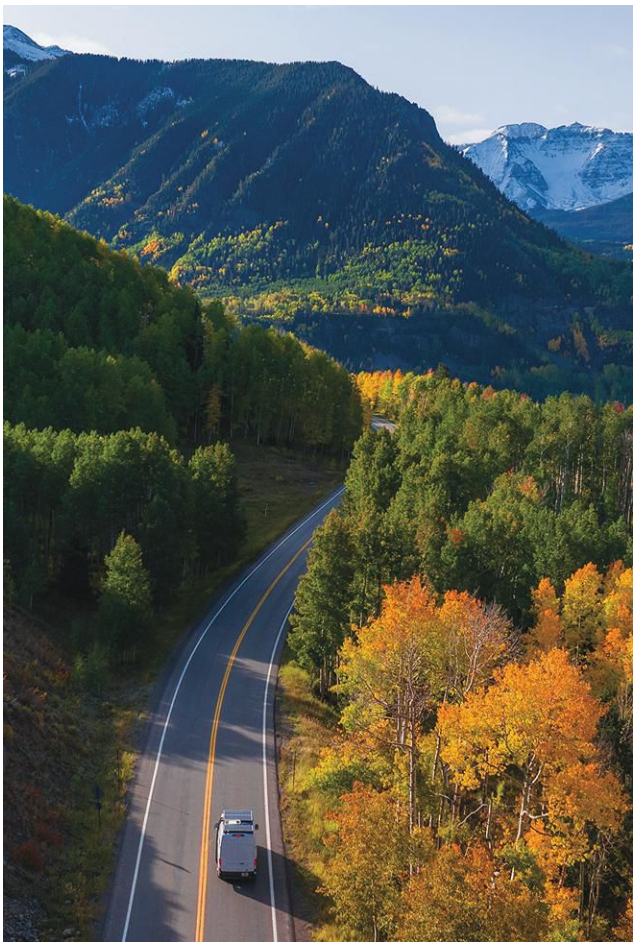
After the Hire

Once you have offered the advertised job to the applicant and he has accepted it, it is important to retain him. I suggest reading a book by D. Michael Abrashoff, a retired U.S. Navy captain. Though he has a series of books on management, I refer you to his first book titled: "It's Your Ship: Management Techniques From the Best Damn Ship in the Navy."

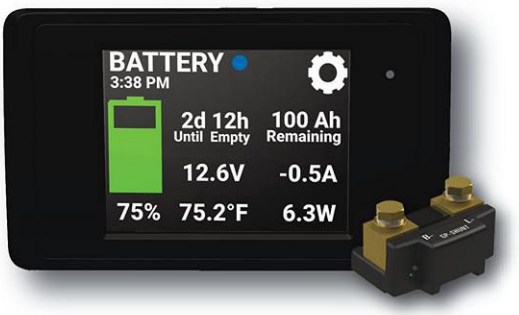
I recommend this book because most of it is about managing personnel. Unlike our retail world where we can seek out applicants and decide if we want them as part of our crew, in Captain Abrashoff's situation, he had to take whoever the U.S. Navy sent him. Just to pique your desire to possibly read this book, I will sum it up by saying that he took one of the worst-performing ships in the entire U.S. Navy and made it the best. He did this by managing his crew through training, support and caring about each of them. I include this quote from the book:

"Captains need to see the ship from the crew's perspective. They need to make it easy and rewarding for crew members to express themselves and their ideas, and they need to figure out how and when to delegate responsibility."

I suggest that you review how you interact with your associates. Each is an individual and those individuals have different views of life. What excites one person might be of no interest to another. By learning about each of your



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associates, you can increase their desire to stay with your team.

These are some of the techniques/tools that you might apply in your efforts to reduce personnel turnover. Do you:

- Thank an associate for suggesting and completing a project?*
- Acknowledge an associate for handling a difficult task successfully or in a unique way?
- Celebrate associates' birthdays or other major events in their lives?*
- Determine what training an associate might require and schedule that training?
- Ensure that each job function has a detailed written procedure to assist personnel in performing that function efficiently and correctly?*
- Create a daily to-do list of department maintenance tasks?*
- Ask your associates if there is a better way to do what they are doing?*

*For more information on some of these suggested techniques/tools — ask me about ideas such as Scott's Door, associate birthdays or my first day as a manager in each dealership — please contact me.

Congratulating & Counseling

Occasionally, an associate will turn in their resignation. Usually, this surprises their manager or the business owner. This should not be a surprise. More importantly, it should happen very infrequently. If communications between managers and staff are frequent and effective, the frequency of employees resigning is minimal.

A daily to-do list is a good tool because by assigning tasks to specific individuals or a group of individuals, you can evaluate their performance on a daily cycle. These daily evaluations provide the opportunity to congratulate or to counsel and could reduce personnel turnover because you and your associates know exactly how each is doing — every day. And you have the chance to decide if an associate requires some special training, either technical or social.

Scheduled formal evaluations might also enhance the quality of and the retention of your associates. As a manager/director, I directed each associate to evaluate themselves and I also evaluated them. We compared our scores on each point. For any topics on which we scored differently, we discussed the pros/cons of each score and agreed on a common value. Where training was needed to assist the associate to improve their performance, that training was scheduled. And the employees appreciated their involvement in the evaluation process.

Communication

As with most aspects of life, communication is key. Keep your doors and ears open so that you can listen to your associates and learn how to make your department and your team better. Please feel comfortable reaching out if you want to communicate with me to discuss the contents of this column. To paraphrase Captain Abrashoff: It's *your* RV business! RVP

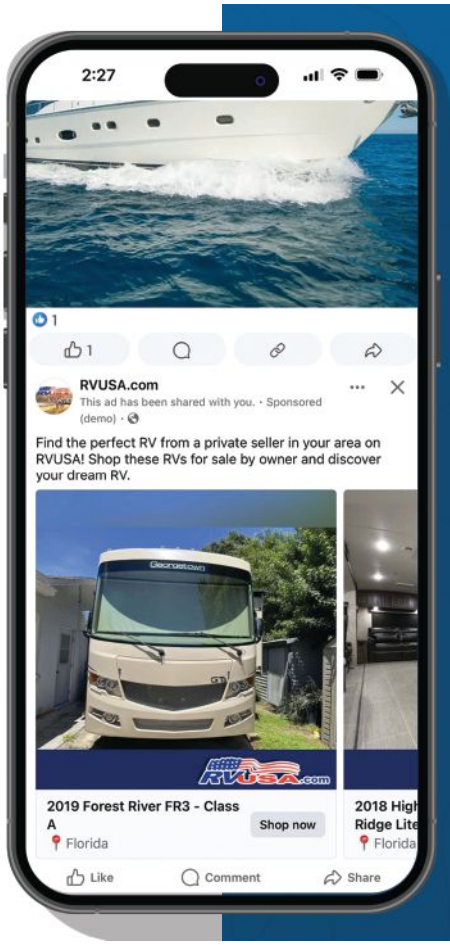
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Understanding the Preapproval Process

Why preapproving buyers early in the deal is beneficial to dealers and customers.

BY STEPHANIE ALDERMAN

Purchasing an RV involves significant financial commitments and detailed decision-making. Streamlining this process is essential for an efficient transaction for RV dealerships and customers. One critical aspect of this streamlining involves preapproving buyers early in the deal process. Preapproving buyers benefits RV dealerships by ensuring financial stability and reducing transaction times, and provides customers with confidence in their purchase.

Benefits for RV Dealerships

Financial Stability & Reduced Risk: Preapproving buyers early in the deal provides RV dealerships with a clear understanding of a customer's financial capacity. This clarity significantly reduces the risk of deals falling through due to financing issues. This economic stability is crucial for maintaining the dealership's cash flow and overall business health.

Enhanced Sales Efficiency: Sales staff can focus on customers who are financially capable of making a purchase, thus reducing the time spent on unqualified leads. This translates into more closed deals and a higher turnover rate for the dealership. Additionally, preapproved buyers are often more serious about completing the purchase.

Improved Inventory Management: Preapproving buyers allows dealerships to manage their inventory effectively. Knowing the budget range of preapproved customers helps sales teams match buyers with suitable RV models.



Stephanie Alderman, CEO of Pre-Pair, 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.

This approach prevents the need for extensive inventory holding periods and reduces the likelihood of unsold units.

Enhanced Customer Service: Understanding a buyer's financial constraints enables sales staff to recommend RV models that align with the customer's budget and needs. This personalized approach enhances customer satisfaction, fosters trust and increases the likelihood of repeat business and referrals.

Benefits for Customers

Clarity & Confidence: Knowing their budget allows buyers to make informed decisions and focus on RV models within their financial reach. This clarity reduces the stress often associated with large purchases, giving customers the confidence to proceed without worrying about potential financing obstacles.

Streamlined Buying Process: With financing already secured, buyers can concentrate on selecting the right RV rather than navigating complex financial arrangements. This often leads to quicker delivery and use of their new RV, enhancing overall satisfaction.

Better Deal Negotiations: Preapproved buyers are in a stronger position to negotiate with dealerships. With financing already arranged, buyers can focus on negotiating the price and terms. Furthermore, dealerships may be more willing to offer discounts or incentives to preapproved buyers, knowing the high likelihood of closing the sale.

Reduced Financial Uncertainty: Buyers can effectively plan their budgets by understanding their financing options upfront and avoid surprises or disappointments. This financial certainty enables customers to make informed decisions, ensuring their RV purchase aligns with long-term financial goals.

Mutual Benefits for Dealerships & Customers

Building Trust & Transparency: Preapproving buyers fosters trust and transparency between the dealership and the customer. Dealerships prioritizing preapproval demonstrate a commitment to open transactions, which can enhance their reputation. Customers appreciate dealing with a dealership that values their time and financial well-being.

Smoother Transaction Processes: When both parties are clear on the deal's financial aspects, the transaction process becomes smoother and more efficient. Dealerships can prepare the necessary paperwork and arrange delivery or pickup with minimal delays.

Customer Satisfaction & Loyalty: Satisfied customers are more likely to return to the same dealership for future purchases and recommend the dealership to others. By providing a transparent and efficient buying process through preapproval, dealerships can significantly enhance customer satisfaction.

Competitive Advantage: In a competitive market, RV dealerships that offer preapproval services can differentiate themselves from competitors. This service demonstrates a commitment to customer convenience and satisfaction, attracting more buyers. RVP



WORKPLACE VIOLENCE



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Reducing the Risk of Violence

Workplace violence can cause tremendous suffering and impact productivity, but a prevention program can mitigate the risk of such tragedies.

BY PHILLIP M. PERRY

A disgruntled employee opened fire at a small Philadelphia-area business earlier this year, killing two fellow workers and injuring three others. The tragic event added more numbers to the nationwide toll of gun-related fatalities, highlighting the ongoing reality of workplace violence in America.

"Any exposure to the news media today will reveal that incidents of workplace violence occur quite frequently across the country," says Ed Sherman, an organizational and public safety consultant. "Most business owners and employees recognize this is a significant issue and it's something that should be addressed."

The facts are clear: The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 392 workplace homicides and 37,060 nonfatal workplace injuries resulting from intentional harm in 2020 (the last year for which data is available). And workplace violence is the third leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States, according to a report from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

At least one state has taken steps to reduce the danger. "The California legislature recently passed a law requiring employers with more than 10 workers to create and disseminate a



Phillip M. Perry publishes widely in the fields of business management, workplace psychology and employment law. A veteran of both sides of the editorial desk, the author has more than 3,000 bylines to his credit. He is the recipient of two AZBEE awards from The American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE).

Workplace Violence Prevention Plan," says Kathleen Bonczyk, founder of the Workplace Violence Prevention Institute. "The standard must include employee training, along with antiretaliation and grievance procedures. I predict we will see more jurisdictions do something similar in coming years."

Warning Signs

The toll in human suffering from workplace violence is incalculable. Also, businesses can be held liable for injuries. "The employer has an obligation under the General Duty Clause of the OSHA Act to provide a safe workplace," says Pascal Benyamini, a partner at the law firm Faegre Drinker. "OSHA and other government entities can assess fines and penalties to an employer for not having provided one."

Employers can also incur financial losses from workers' compensation claims and lawsuits by injured employees or customers, or by the next of kin or family of an employee who has been killed. "Litigation can be expensive," Benyamini says. "And if a case gets in front of a jury that determines the employer looked the other way when there were warning signs of a pending violent act, a company can get hit with punitive damages."

Clearly, businesses would be wise to take action to mitigate risk when the warning signs of a pending violent act first appear. Those signs often take the form of behavioral changes that begin far in advance of a serious incident. The company mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article, for example, had received prior warnings of the employee's threats toward colleagues.

"The pathway to violence is typically a gradual one," Bonczyk says. "An individual may begin by coming in to work late every day. That may proceed to snapping at coworkers or customers. Then they may begin bullying people. Later their performance takes a dive. Then things accelerate to threats of violence, and then ultimately violence."

Many early warning signs are considered acts of violence in themselves by OSHA. These include verbal or written threats, harassment and intimidation. Violence can take the form of bullying, as well as swearing and hurling of insults. Supervisors should watch for:

- Unexpected and unwelcome behavioral changes, such as becoming quick to anger or engaging in continuing confrontations
- Talk of suicide or self-harm
- Paranoia and a tendency to blame others for their troubles
- Obsession with weapons, when accompanied by any of the other behaviors listed above

Individuals planning violent acts may become fixated on perceived occupational slights. "Very often these events begin with a grievance on the part of an employee or customer or other individual," Sherman says. "I am using the term grievance in the most general sense, as anything somebody is upset about. That's why it's so important for employers to respond to employees' issues, concerns and problems when they arise."

Behaviors outside the workplace can also be red flags. "Often, someone will post things to social media that could be important in assessing that they pose a threat to the workplace," says K. Campbell, principal at Blue Glacier Security and Intelligence. "These may include statements about fellow employees, supervisors or managers. That is an example of leakage, the disclosure of ill intent to a third person rather than to the individual who might be the intended victim of an assault. Leakage is usually an extremely reliable indicator of potential violence."

The above behaviors are not an exclusive list. Experts advise taking action anytime your gut instinct tells you something is not right. "You don't want to wrongly accuse someone," says Oscar Villanueva, the chief operating officer at TAL Global, a security-consulting and risk-management firm. "But people should know that if they see something that doesn't look right to them and their gut is telling them there's an issue, they should report it to their supervisor or manager right away so it can be looked into."

"WHEN EMPLOYEES SEE OR HEAR SOMETHING, THEY NEED TO SAY SOMETHING … MEASURES CAN BE TAKEN TO REDUCE THE RISK."

– PASCAL BENYAMINI

Employee Reports

When it comes to responding in a timely manner to warning signs, employees are often the first line of defense. "Management can't know everything that happens on the floor where people are working," Benyamini says. "When employees see or hear something, they need to say something so that if an incident ends up becoming a credible threat, measures can be taken to reduce the risk."

Too often, though, colleagues of a violent actor fail to speak up, either because they are not aware of the significance of what they have seen or they do not know the correct reporting procedures.

Planning and training can help. "Every company should create a workplace violence prevention and management program, which is a set of policies and procedures that tell employees how to report troubling incidents they have observed," Villanueva says. "This may prevent an incident from occurring."

Villanueva says the program should include a zero-tolerance policy, calling for the employer to take appropriate action when a violent act occurs. "If someone makes a verbal threat, for example, but there is no physical contact or further issues, the penalty may be a suspension, a letter of warning or a reassignment. At the other extreme, an aggressor who beats up a fellow employee on the workroom floor may well be terminated."

Filing a program in a binder is not sufficient: Managers and employees must be familiar with the details. "Everyone needs to know what steps to take if an incident occurs, including to whom to report," Sherman says. "People should also know how to call first responders if an incident rises to the level of an emergency."

More work needs to be done. According to OSHA, only 30% of all organizations have a formalized workplace violence prevention program. Part of the problem is that getting one off the ground requires an enthusiasm that is too often lacking. "I recommend all businesses identify someone with the passion necessary to manage a workplace violence prevention program from an organizational point of view, and then develop a policy that is supported by the CEO, COO or a senior member of the organization," says Felix P. Nater, president of Nater Associates, a security consulting firm.

Employees must also be regularly reminded of the program's details. "All employees need to be familiar with the warning signs of workplace violence and the steps that should be taken," Nater says. "This will build trust and confidence in the hearts and minds of the employees because they trust management's investment in their safety and security."

There must be safeguards to protect individuals reporting incidents from retaliation. "Employees may resist speaking up about questionable behavior because they are afraid they may be attacked by the individual involved," Nater says. "Everyone should be aware that the organization has protections in place so that if things become untenable, they will not be left to fend for themselves."

Respond Appropriately

Top management can feel as nervous as employees about taking action when troubling behavior occurs. How can they investigate a report without ruffling feathers and unintentionally making matters worse? "When troubling behavior is reported, the best approach is to start with a discreet investigation," Villanueva says. "Ask other employees if they can corroborate the behavior. Has anyone observed similar events?"

Once the background work is done, the supervisor should have a conversation with the employee who has committed the behavior. "Approach the individual in a respectful way and talk about what you have observed," Villanueva says. "Stick with the facts, rather than making accusations. Encourage them to talk about their behavior, explain why it is happening and what they can do to resolve it."

It's often appropriate to ask questions such as, "Are you OK? Is there anything you need? Can we offer something to assist?" Many employers have an employee assistance program (EAP) that can provide counseling.

Having these tough conversations early is better than allowing things to slide because they will only become more difficult to deal with over time. "The longer you take, the worse the problem gets," Villanueva says. "These things seldom get resolved on their own."

Reduce Stress

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. One way of reducing the emotional temperature that can lead to violence is to institute a stress reduction program. "It's good to appoint someone in your company as a liaison between a stressed employee and a source of assistance," Worley says. "The person in charge of human resources often fills this role, providing a safe, confidential place to go for the employee who feels as though they are struggling from stress at the workplace or at home."

Employees experiencing high stress can be referred to the company insurance company if it covers counseling, to an EAP or to a community counseling service. This can be an important part of a larger workplace violence prevention program. "All employees need to understand the risk factors of workplace violence, the warning signs and their responsibility to report what they see and hear," Nater says. "A business can't wait for a shooting for management to start backpedaling and acknowledging what they should have addressed long ago." RVP





DEAGREEZ – STOCK.ADOBE.COM

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO Navigating Difficult Conversations

Use these eight steps to make tough discussions easier and achieve better results.

BY KATE ZABRISKIE

"I don't like confrontation, but I'm tired of his abuse. He signed me up for another committee without asking."

"I know I need to say something about her taking credit for my work, but how do I start?"

"Another joy of adulting; I've got to have one of those thorny conversations. Not fun."

Difficult conversations are inevitable at some point in most people's lives despite their lack of popularity.

Avoiding them only leads to bigger problems down the road. The good news? With a clear framework, tough conversations can strengthen relationships, foster growth and achieve better results.

This step-by-step guide provides a roadmap for navigating challenging dialogues with calm, empathy and assertiveness.



Kate Zabriskie is the president of Business Training Works Inc., a Maryland-based talent development firm. She and her team provide on-site, virtual and online soft-skills training courses and workshops to clients in the United States and internationally. For more information, visit businesstrainingworks.com.

Step 1: Prepare Yourself

Before initiating a difficult conversation, take a moment to think about how you feel and why you need to have the conversation. What is the core issue you want to address? What are your goals and desired outcomes? Are you trying to affect a behavioral change, or do you simply want to be right? If the answer is the latter, you may wish to pause before starting a dialogue.

A well-formed goal statement is a good way to outline your intentions and keep your actions in check. For example, you might say to yourself, "I want to discuss the project schedule change that happened without my input. My goal is to be included in the future and find a solution that works for everyone now. I'm not placing blame."

Step 2: Set the Stage

As the saying goes, timing can be everything. Given that fact, schedule a suitable time and location for the conversation. The goal is to ensure you have privacy and few distractions. For instance, you could say, "I need to discuss something important regarding the project timeline. Can we talk in the conference room at 2:00 today?"

Step 3: Describe the Situation Objectively

Once you and the other person are together, it's time to explain the situation objectively. Stick to the facts without judgment or blame, and use "I" statements to express your perspective. "I" statements tend to reduce defensiveness and create an environment of mutual understanding.

1. Begin with "I feel" to take ownership of your emotions.
2. Describe the behavior or situation objectively and without judgment.
3. Explain the reason behind your feeling.

Example: "I feel frustrated that the deadline was moved again without consulting me. I'm now task-saturated and unable to get my project work and other work done by the new milestone. I understand there may be valid reasons for the shifting timeline, and I would appreciate being included in decisions moving forward. This isn't the first time I've been left out of discussions. I would also like to see how we might adjust the current schedule."

> "As the conversation progresses, look for areas where you agree or share similar goals. Validating each other's perspectives and emotions can help build trust."

Step 4: Allow the Other Person To Respond

After you've shared your perspective, listen actively and allow the other person to respond without interrupting. Additionally, ask clarifying questions to ensure you fully understand their point of view and validate the other person's emotions and experiences. You might say, "I understand that speed was the goal. Can you tell me how I might be included in scheduling decisions in the future?"

Step 5: Identify Common Ground

As the conversation progresses, look for areas where you agree or share similar goals. Validating each other's perspectives and emotions can help build trust and create a foundation for finding a mutually acceptable solution. For instance, you could say, "It seems we both want to deliver a high-quality project, even if we have different views on the timeline and how it gets adjusted."

Step 6: Propose Solutions

Next, collaborate and be willing to compromise while at the same time standing firm on your core needs and boundaries. For example, you might suggest, "What if we extend the deadline by two weeks? That way, we can ensure the project is completed without cutting corners."

Step 7: Summarize & Confirm Next Steps

As the conversation comes to a close, summarize the agreed-upon solution and action items. Express appreciation for the open discussion and the other person's willingness to work through the issue constructively. For example, you could say, "To recap, we'll extend the deadline to allow more time, and you'll provide an additional team member to assist me. Thank you for working through this constructively and for committing to including me to the extent possible when making future scheduling changes."

Step 8: Follow-Up

It's essential to implement the agreed-upon solution and check in regularly to provide feedback on what's working or if any adjustments are needed. You might follow up by saying, "Now that we've had a week with the new plan, how do you think it's going so far? Is there anything we should tweak or address?"

Difficult conversations may never be easy, but with practice and a commitment to effective communication, they can become opportunities for growth, understanding and stronger connections with those around us. RVP



INSPIRING.TEAM - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

How Emotional Connection Can Make You a Better Leader

Seven steps to practice now to improve emotional connections with your team.

BY JULIE GOWTHORPE

Navigating leadership brings a unique set of challenges and opportunities.

A young executive, Sarah, faced complaints from her team who described her as dismissive and devaluing. She was initially blindsided and defensive, yet as excellent leaders do, she focused on improvement — learning that how leaders make people feel is essential to retention, culture and ultimately profit.

As front-runners in your field, you know strategies to build your team, yet there is something preventing the desired outcome. What is getting in your way?

Failure to emotionally connect with your team members makes "lonely at the top" inevitable and creates a culture vulnerable to disconnection, dissatisfaction and lacking cohesiveness. On the other hand, positive connection with your team brings an entirely



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new level of productive and happy relationships.

Rather than focusing solely on strategies to improve interactions, a new approach called Self-Nurturing Therapy (SNT) targets the part within you — the part that carries fear of vulnerability and acts as a gatekeeper to allowing meaningful emotional connection with others.

How SNT Enhances Leadership

Leaders learn to change their relationships with vulnerability rather than attempting to eliminate it. SNT encourages leaders to engage with their emotions, building resilience and capability. This emotional strength translates into better communication, sharing of creativity and a more effective leadership style.

Self-Nurturing Therapy is a process that teaches you how to soothe your vulnerable part — specifically your inner child — and learn to thrive in relationships. Here are seven steps that leaders can practice now to enhance their performance.

1. **Get To Know Your Inner Child:** Give your young self the attention they deserve. By acknowledging and soothing early wounds, leaders can reduce reactive response styles. Sarah, for example, discovered that her reaction of dismissiveness was a self-protective reaction rooted in a childhood of bullying. Sarah's inner child was so anxious that the corporate strategies she had learned to communicate with team members were being interrupted by her emotional state. To reduce reactivity, create a timeline of your life, identifying experiences where you felt shame or vulnerability. Knowing where your self-protection emerged reduces reactivity in interactions with others.
2. **Create Emotional Awareness:** Leaders are taught the importance of communication, but in the absence of understanding your emotions, interactions will fall flat. To resolve this, reflect on what earlier experiences taught you about other people. Do you see others as trustworthy and safe, or risky and uncertain? Did safe people support you when bad things happened, or could you only count on yourself? Sarah identified that years of suffering bullying left her feeling alone in her journey. She realized that interactions elicited fear that they would disappoint and an immediate internal reaction to keep conversations short and direct so they would end quickly.
3. **Create a Soothing Mantra:** Negative early life experiences that are left unprocessed don't evaporate. Instead, the inner child holds them tight, a reminder to never put yourself at physical or emotional risk again. There were things that would have been helpful to you as a child that you never received. Practice acknowledging and accepting emotions from your early years. Start by asking yourself, "What does my inner child need to hear when she is worried?" Phrases like "You've got this," or "That was then, this is now," offer reassurance and empower a secure response.
4. **Think of Your Inner Child as Your Gatekeeper:** Excellent leaders have a business gatekeeper to ensure they are insulated from risk of overscheduling or losing focus. Your inner child is the gatekeeper to how much you allow yourself to emotionally care and invest in relationships. As a competent adult, you are capable of assessing those trustworthy enough to be part of your inner circle. Write a list of people who have shown integrity and take a moment to acknowledge them. Notice how your interaction improves when you assure your gatekeeper that you are safe, secure and confident in your ability to assess others.
5. **Purposefully Value Your Feelings:** What did your child-self need to cope during difficult times but was denied? For some, like Sarah, it was knowing they were safe, while for others, it was hearing, "You're loved." Good parents value what their children need and feel. As an adult, you can self-deliver what you need. Rewire negative thought patterns rooted in your early experiences with positive messaging. Were you taught to believe that other people's wants and desires were more important than your feelings? Tell yourself, "You matter." Were you taught to believe that harmony was more important than caring for yourself? Know that your feelings matter.
6. **Thrive Emotionally at Work:** See team members as worthy of having a meaningful relationship with you. While your inner child tries to protect you from caring too much, it disrupts the soft skills that make good leaders great. Communication without empathy and understanding is risky for leaders. Instead, practice curiosity about what people are experiencing and, equally as important, what emotional response these interactions evoke within you. Use open-ended questions: "How was your weekend?" rather than "Hope you had a good weekend." Leaders who know their people receive increased investment from them and a willingness to go the distance when asked.
7. **Practice Tolerating Emotions:** If you have a loud inner child determined to protect you from vulnerability, showing them that you're taking the lead requires practice. Avoid becoming frustrated with yourself and instead respond with self-kindness. It's been a journey to achieve your leadership goals, and you are constantly growing. Mastering comfortability with emotions requires practice and leads to joy for yourself and high-performance teams. Integrate reflective journals, conversation with trusted friends and meditation or yoga to support you through this rewarding process. Celebrate the moments when you notice emotions, feel the discomfort and remind yourself, "Hey, I'm OK!"

In summary, leaders who engage in SNT experience numerous benefits that enhance their effectiveness and happiness in their role. By healing past traumas and fostering present-moment awareness, leaders can create a positive, empowering environment that drives organizational success. RVP

BUSINESS SERVICES

RV WARRANTY

America's RV Warranty, Marietta, Georgia, presents its RV Extended Warranty Coverage. Whether for a motorhome, a travel trailer, a toy hauler or a fifth wheel, America's RV Warranty (ARW) has coverage to protect both the rig and an RVer's peace of mind. With plan lengths ranging up to eight years and warranty coverage available for RVs up to 20 years old, ARW has something for every RVer. Additional offers, like roadside assistance and RV insurance, make ARW the place to get protection.

americasrvwarranty.com

GRC PROGRAM



Better Vantage Point, Norfolk, Virginia, offers its Tuck The Octopus. Running a successful dealership is complex, and keeping operations running profitably, securely and legally can feel like trying to tuck an octopus into bed at night while its tentacles keep flopping all over! Tuck The Octopus shows you how to build a compliance program successfully and flag the important types of risks to consider to safeguard your stores. As regulatory enforcement and lawsuits against dealerships increase, owners are feeling pressure ratchet up, and they understand the increased need for administrative and compliance excellence. Now more than ever, a governance, risk and compliance program is necessary to protect a company's assets.

bettervantagepoint.com

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Cactus Sky Digital, Jacksonville, Florida, presents its Social Media Marketing. Cactus Sky offers comprehensive social media marketing services that drive engagement and brand awareness. It crafts targeted, data-driven campaigns across platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram to connect you with your audience. Cactus Sky specializes in creating compelling content, growing your follower base and enhancing your online presence. From strategic planning to execution, Cactus Sky focuses on delivering measurable results, increasing visibility and fostering meaningful connections that convert into long-term business relationships.

cactussky.com

TECHNICIAN CAREER TRAINING

DealerPRO Training, Columbus, Ohio, offers its Technician Career Path. Elevate your service team with DealerPRO's Technician Career Path Training Program. This comprehensive program equips your technicians with the skills and knowledge to advance from entry-level to D-level tech status. Boost productivity, enhance customer satisfaction and foster loyalty through structured learning and clear career progression. With DealerPRO's expert guidance, create a workforce that meets and exceeds industry standards, ensuring your dealership remains competitive and profitable. Transform your technicians into your biggest asset today.

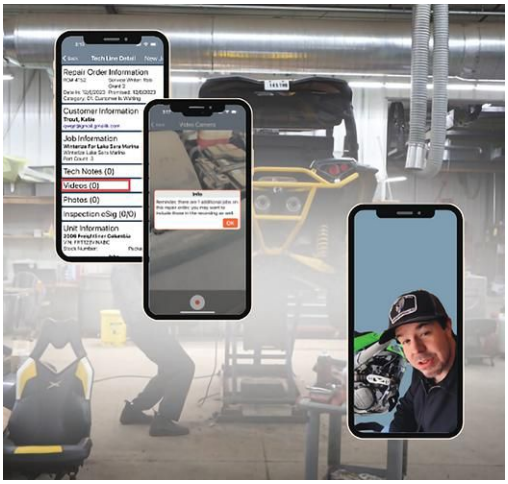
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FLOORPLAN FINANCING

Huntington Distribution Finance, Schaumburg, Illinois, presents its Floorplan Financing. Huntington Distribution Finance provides floorplan solutions for independent manufacturers and dealers. The company understands the unique complexities of your business and is committed to delivering custom solutions to help you achieve your sales goals.

huntingtondf.com





AI-POWERED CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE PLATFORM

Impel, Syracuse, New York, presents its Impel AI. Impel offers RV retailers and manufacturers an AI-powered customer lifecycle platform. Impel's solution leverages proprietary consumer behavioral data and generative conversational AI to deliver personalized experiences at every touchpoint of the buying and ownership journey. Impel's platform integrates with all major RV dealer tech stack providers. To date, the company has delivered 22 billion shopper interactions, influencing $6 billion in sales and service revenue across 51 countries.

impel.ai

SERVICE TECH VIDEO

Lightspeed DMS, South Jordan, Utah, offers its Lightspeed Service Tech Video, a tool for service departments. This feature enables technicians to record walk-around videos and share them with clients, offering a visual proof of repair recommendations. By providing transparency and fostering trust, Tech Video enhances customer satisfaction and drives higher ROI. Whether it's a routine check or a major repair, your clients can see exactly what's needed, making their service experience more personal and engaging.

lightspeeddms.com







RV RENTAL INSURANCE

MBA Insurance, Phoenix, Arizona, presents its RV Rental Insurance. MBA Insurance is a premier provider of vehicle rental insurance, dedicated to delivering top-tier rental insurance solutions and services tailored to meet the needs of individual rental businesses to large rental fleets. Its insurance products, automated technology solutions, service and partner carriers set MBA Insurance apart as a national program administrator. MBA Insurance is a member of the Recreation Vehicle Rental Association, the RV Dealers Association, the RV Industry Association and a contributor to the GoRVing campaign.

mbainsurance.net

DEALER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Motility Software Solutions, Dayton, Ohio, offers its MotilityAnywhere. Built with RV dealers in mind, MotilityAnywhere empowers dealers to drive better insights and achieve peak performance from virtually anywhere. This scalable, web-based dealer management system provides robust capabilities for every critical dealership function, streamlining operations and driving business success. Users can access information from anywhere, at any time; accelerate operations and close deals quicker; reduce double entry and keep data centralized; leverage advanced analytics and customizable reports; and connect to a network of partners.

motilitysoftware.com



ONLINE RV CLASSIFIED LISTINGS

NetSource Media, Ocala, Florida, presents its RVUSA.com. RVUSA has provided online classified listings for RVs since 1995. With nearly one million engaged users every month, RVUSA delivers increased exposure to a targeted community of RV buyers. On RVUSA, buyers can search listings and filter by model, price, location and more — helping qualified leads find your units with ease. With no long-term contracts and monthly subscription plans that fit any size dealer, you can ensure your inventory is visible across online classified sites with just one upload.

rvusa.com

DEALERSHIP BROKERAGE

Performance Brokerage Services, Irvine, California, offers its RV Dealership Brokerage Firm. Performance Brokerage Services is a high-volume dealership brokerage firm in North America specializing in RV and automotive buy-sell activity. With over 30 years of experience, over 900 dealerships sold and a 90% closing rate, Performance Brokerage Services' reputation is governed by the utmost honesty and integrity. Maximize your life's work with a confidential consultation and complimentary opinion of value on your business.

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If you're interested in submitting a product for the Special Product Focus section, submit to your sales rep: Rebecca Tittel: rtittel@cahabamedia.com or John Gaskins: jgaskins@cahabamedia.com. Or contact Managing Editor Michele Moore for information: mmoore@cahabamedia.com.

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Pit Stop



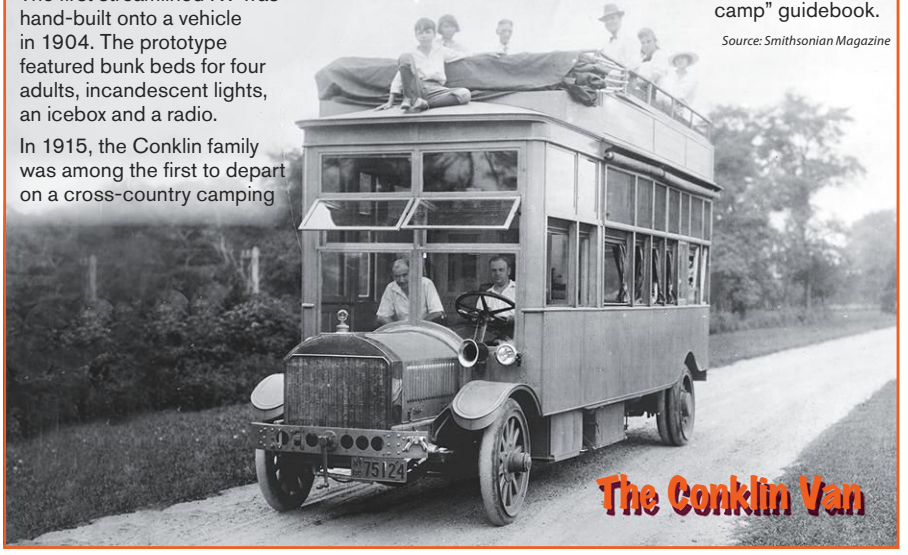
Some say RVs can be traced back to the 1800s, when Romani people traveled through Europe and lived in covered wagons — said to be what sparked the creation of recreational vehicles.

The first streamlined RV was hand-built onto a vehicle in 1904. The prototype featured bunk beds for four adults, incandescent lights, an icebox and a radio.

In 1915, the Conklin family was among the first to depart on a cross-country camping trip in their "Gypsy Van" — a 25-foot, 8-ton custom build by the Gas-Electric Motor Bus Company, according to Smithsonian Magazine. The van featured an electric generator, full kitchen, concealed bookcase and even a "roof garden."

The Conklins didn't become famous simply for camping their way from New York to California. Camping for fun was not novel in 1915 — it reportedly has been around since 1869, when William H. H. Murray published America's first "how to camp" guidebook.

Source: Smithsonian Magazine



JULY SHIPMENTS

24,116 (units)
Total RV shipments

17.5% increase compared to July 2023 (20,520 units)

To date, RVs are up 9.4% with 202,712 units shipped through July

"July's shipments continue this year's moderate year-over-year gains," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "As the summer comes to a close and kids head back to school, 27 million Americans are planning to go RVing this fall to take in some of the best weather and enjoy outdoor experiences with family and friends."

OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE

An Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) collaboration hosted the first National Leadership Forum on Rural Development Through Outdoor Recreation.

The invite-only event took place Oct. 1-2 in Pittsburgh, bringing together over 50 national presidents, CEOs and leaders in economic development, outdoor recreation and environmental conservation. In addition, ORR awarded five rural communities with grants to grow their local economies in 2024:

- **Beverly, Ohio**
- **Claremont, New Hampshire**
- **Giles County, Virginia**
- **Haines, Alaska**
- **Poultney, Vermont**

ROAD TRIPS REIGN SUPREME

27 million Americans plan to go RVing this fall, with 65% planning a road trip and considering their destination as "the journey itself."

- In a significant shift, RV camping overtook rental properties as the preferred accommodation for Labor Day vacationers.
- Key motivators for fall RVing among leisure travelers include escaping the daily grind (52%), enjoying destinations at their peak in the fall (48%), seeking less crowded experiences (47%) and embracing favorable weather (43%).
- Tailgating remains a beloved fall tradition, with 3.5 million people planning to partake. RVing at festivals leads the tailgating scene (59%), closely followed by college football (58%), professional football (57%) and concerts (54%).

Source: Cairn Consulting, RV Industry Association

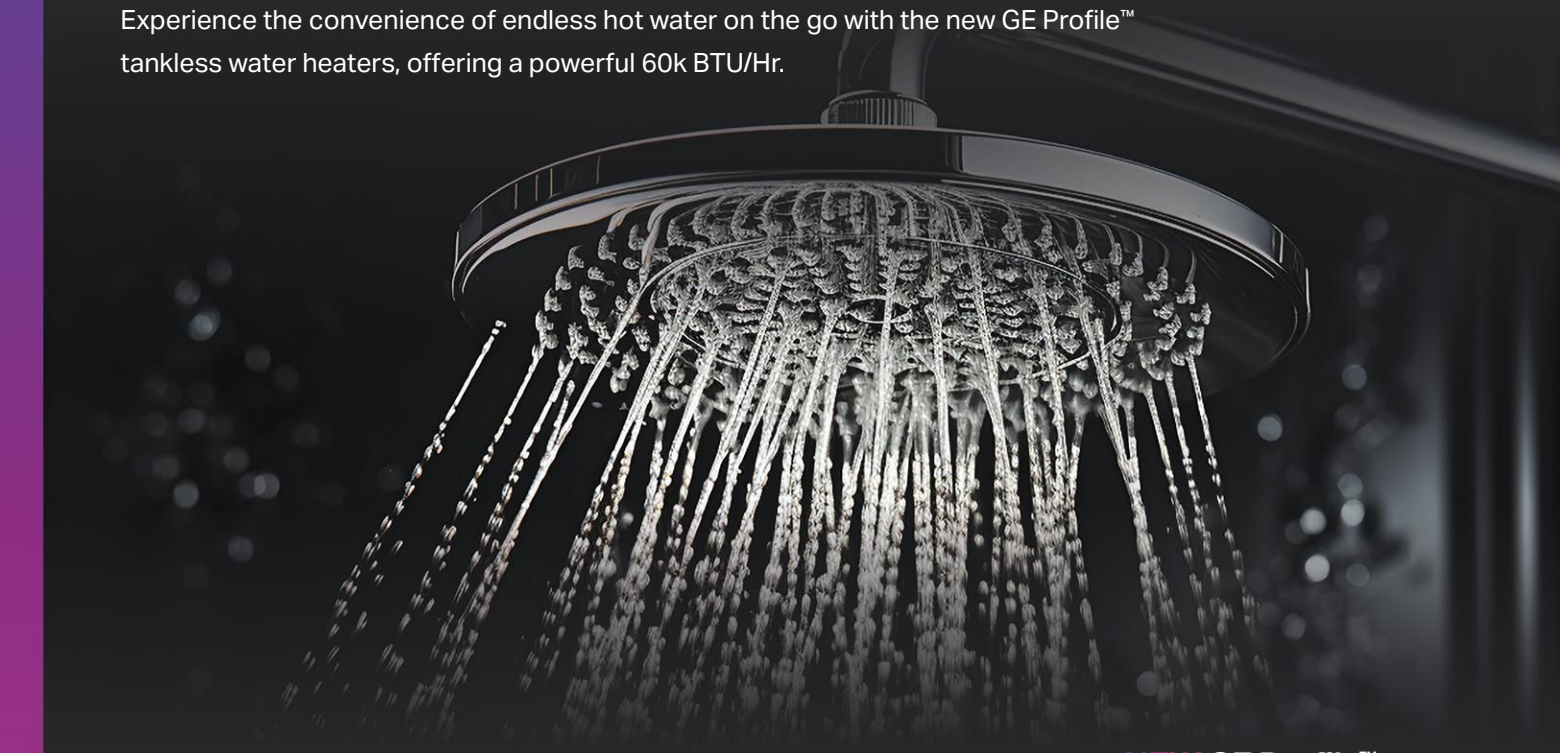

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