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Straight Line RV & Boat prioritizes putting people first. *Photo courtesy of Straight Line RV & Boat Collision Repair & Paint.*

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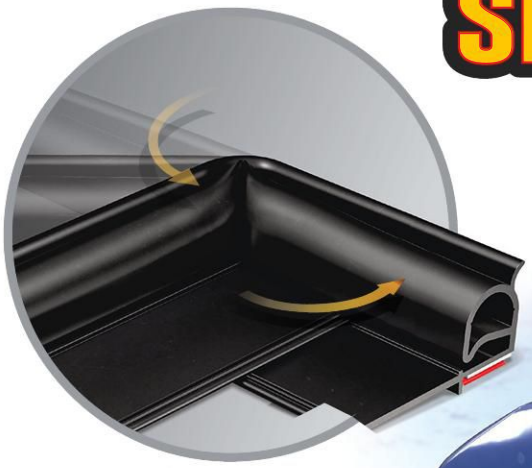
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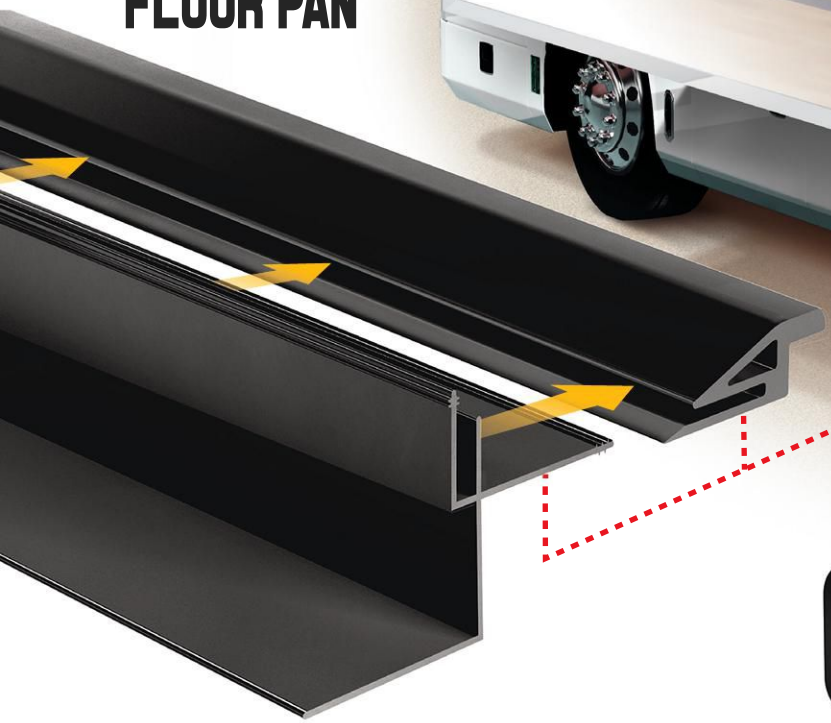


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Michele Moore

It's the most wonderful time of the year!

Apologies for the earworm a few months early, but for many people, fall is the best season. Cooling temperatures, colorful leaves, the return of college football, Halloween and all things pumpkin spice mark some of the perks that only autumn can offer.

Although it's not considered peak season, fall is also an excellent time of year for RVing, whether travelers are chasing scenic getaways or packing up the RV for tailgating. According to the RV Industry Association (RVIA)'s recent Fall Travel Intention Survey, more than 7.4 million Americans planned an RV trip over Labor Day weekend and 46% of RVers were planning road trips as their main destination this fall. Sixty percent of survey respondents "cited affordability of RV travel as a top reason they [planned] to take an RV trip this fall," and 47% said "economic uncertainty [was] a reason to travel by RV this fall, up from 33% this summer."

While consumer confidence has been fluctuating this year, so many people planning fall RV travel is certainly a positive. RVing and camping continue to be an affordable avenue for people to get away — Kampgrounds of America was recently named one of the Top Recession-Resistant Franchises for 2025 by Franchise Business Review, and in The Dyrt's 2025 Camping Report, "4 out of 5 campers said that inflation either caused them to camp more or did not affect their camping activities." And despite July RV shipments being down, shipments remain up 5.2% year over year, all good signs for the industry. RVIA's Fall Travel Intention Survey indicated a persistent strong interest in RV purchases, with the greatest year-over-year increase in purchase interest coming from millennials and Gen Z (up 16% year over year).

If fall and winter aren't a busy season at your dealership, now might be a good time to start looking at some "housekeeping" — are there things on the to-do list that maybe you haven't gotten to yet this year? For insight on taking full advantage of the data in your dealership management system, check out the article from IDS on page 34; and on page 36, find tips for using artificial intelligence at your dealership from InteractRV. Our Running the Business section, which begins on page 38, provides advice on customer experiences, nailing first impressions and more.

We hope you have a spectacular fall, and as always, thanks for reading!

Michele Moore

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HIRES & PROMOTIONS



Nick Simeri
Keystone RV

Keystone RV announced that Nick Simeri has joined the Montana and Montana High Country leadership team as assistant product manager. Simeri brings nearly 15 years of RV industry experience in both product management and supplier sales.



Jimmy Harlow, Marc Disher & Jeff Cowan
Airxcel

Airxcel announced a strategic reorganization of its leadership team for its brands Cleer Vision and Velarium. Jimmy Harlow has been named general manager for both Cleer Vision and Velarium; Marc Disher has been appointed product manager for both brands; and Jeff Cowan has been promoted to senior vice president of sales and engineering for both brands.



John Walsh
Air Lift Co.

Air Lift Company announced the appointment of John Walsh as its new senior vice president of sales. Walsh brings more than 25 years of executive experience in the automotive and industrial products sectors.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Meyer Distributing has acquired **Arrow Distributing,** a family-owned and operated distributor of RV and mobile home parts since 1981, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska.

Brown & Brown Dealer Services has acquired the assets of **Tire Shield**. Founded in 1997, Tire Shield offers administrative services for dealers and agents providing tire and wheel road hazard products and GAP waiver products for the RV, automotive and powersports industries.

Bish's RV has acquired **I-29 RV** in Tea, South Dakota, marking its 23rd dealership location. This move expands Bish's presence in South Dakota's second-largest RV registration market

RV MANUFACTURING



Forest River Inc. launched a high-end destination trailer, dubbed Lost Pines, which was set to debut at the Hershey RV Show at the time of publication. Lost Pines debuts with two distinct floorplans — Sequoia and Hemlock.

Winnebago Industries announced several key changes to its executive leadership team (ELT), effective Sept. 1: **Jeff Haradine** is now SVP – marine and president – **Barletta Boats**; **Steve Heese** remains president – **Chris Craft** and SVP – power systems; **Casey Tubman** is now group president – **Newmar** and **Winnebago** motorized, with added responsibility for corporate strategic planning; **Chris West** continues to lead **Winnebago**-brand motorhomes and specialty vehicles; **Don Clark** remains group president – towable RV segment and president – **Grand Design RV**; **Ashis Bhattacharya,** senior vice president of advanced technology, corporate ventures and engineering services, is retiring, effective Oct. 3; **Steve Speich**, SVP – enterprise operations and product technology, assumed responsibility for advanced technology and engineering services in addition to his manufacturing/ supply chain oversight; **Amber Holm** became SVP – chief marketing and experience officer; **Bryan Hughes** took on the role of SVP – chief financial officer, investor relations, information technology and business development; **Sri Koneru**, chief information officer, will report to Hughes and remains on the ELT.

Want more? For more information on any of these news items, visit rv-pro.com/news.

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Oct. 3-5
Arrington, Va.
overlandexpo.com/east

Adventure Van Expo
Oct. 4-5
San Juan Capistrano, Calif.
adventurevanexpo.com

RVWA Educational Symposium
Oct. 15-16
Chicago, Ill.
rvwa.org/events

Outdoor Hospitality Conference & Expo
Nov. 10-12
Louisville, Ky.
ohi.org/event/ohce

RV Dealers Convention & Expo
Nov. 10-14
Las Vegas
rvda.org/convention

Northern Wholesale RV Super Show
Dec. 10-11
Prior Lake, Minn.
northernwholesale.com

Florida RV SuperShow
Jan. 13-18, 2026
Tampa, Fla.
frvta.org/show/florida-rv-supershow

NTP-STAG Expo
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HIRES & PROMOTIONS



Amanda Anderson
National RV Training Academy (NRVTA)

NRVTA has welcomed Amanda Anderson as the newest member of its student adviser team. Anderson will help prospective students explore opportunities through RV technician training, RV repair training and RV inspector certification programs.



Joel Eberlein
Genesis Products

Joel Eberlein has been appointed vice president of RV product at Genesis Products. Prior to joining Genesis, he held key leadership roles at Heartland RV and Winnebago, where he led product line expansions, streamlined operations and built strong industry partnerships.

SUPPLIERS & AFTERMARKET

Dragonfly Energy Holdings Corp., maker of **Battle Born Batteries**, announced an expanded partnership with **Airstream**. Battle Born Batteries are now standard in Airstream's model year 2026 Interstate and Atlas motorized lines.

In a new partnership with **Rollick, Dealer Spike,** provider of digital solutions for the recreational and equipment industries, has made RollickEngage a Certified Partner, enabling dealers to streamline and consolidate their lead generation activities.

Big Beard Battery introduced the 24V Beast, its updated flagship 24-volt, 300-Ah battery, now enhanced with a built-in touch screen, which provides real-time state-of-charge, voltage, current flow and temperature data.

Renogy has expanded the availability of its Lithium 2.0 solid-state battery series, now available throughout both Europe and the U.S. This next-generation battery lineup (including 104Ah, 120Ah and 240Ah models) builds on Renogy's Solid State Slim battery.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS



During the 2025 Aftermarket Conference, **Susan Carpenter**, director of the aftermarket division at B&B Molders and former president of the RV Aftermarket Association, was awarded the 2025 RV Aftermarket Lifetime Achievement Award. To see other Aftermarket Award recipients, visit http://bit.ly/45uL19s.

The 2025 RV/MH Hall of Fame inducted 10 individuals (five from the RV industry and five from the manufactured housing industry) during a ceremony on Aug. 18. The RV industry inductees were **Larry Troutt Jr.,** Topper's RVs; **Jason Lippert,** president and CEO of Lippert Components Inc.; **Chad Reece,** Winnebago Industries' vice president of government and industry relations and chair of RVIA's Government Affairs Committee; **Tom Irions,** CEO of ASA Electronics; and **Garry Bewernick,** president of Atlas Trailer Coach Products.

Blue Compass RV was recognized with four Top 10 Dealership Sales Volume awards at the 2025 **Jayco** Dealer Homecoming event in Dallas, Texas. "We are proud of these significant accomplishments which contributed to the tremendous sales growth we've seen this year across Blue Compass RV with Jayco towable and motorized products," said Jon Ferrando, CEO and president of Blue Compass RV.

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- AI in dealership operations
- Developing future leaders
- Key performance indicators
- Recruitment & retention
- Ethics & culture
- Succession planning
- Preowned sourcing
- Cybersecurity & fraud

Fixed Operations *(Parts, Warranty, Service)*
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- Service excellence
- Competing in parts/accessories
- Retaining talent through training
- Enhancing the customer experience

Digital Marketing / BDC / Social
- Influencer collaboration
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- Reputation management

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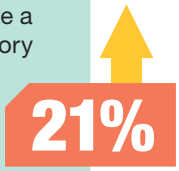
Data from June 2025 reveals a compelling uptick in shopper engagement for truck campers, even as available inventory levels dip. From rising search impressions to a surge in leads, all signs point to growing demand that could signal an opportunity for dealers.

Top Truck Camper Makes

The following are the top makes for truck campers based on vehicle detail page (VDP) views on RV Trader January-June 2025.

1. Palomino
2. Lance Mfg.
3. Travel Lite
4. Northwood Mfg.
5. Soaring Eagle

Recent data shows a noteworthy trend: VDPs and inventory levels appear to be positively linked for new truck camper units. As shoppers engage more online, the demand signal becomes clearer. Despite a 3% month-over-month decline in inventory for new truck campers in June 2025, VDPs surged by 21%.



This inverse relationship between supply and digital engagement offers a compelling signal: interest in truck campers is rising, even as availability contracts. More consumers are actively browsing listings, comparing units and potentially preparing to purchase, despite having fewer options on the market.

Stronger Buyer Signals

Truck camper engagement is showing growth on RV Trader:

- Search Results Page Impressions (SRPIs): **+11% month over month**
- Email leads: **+14% month over month**
- VDPs: **+21%**

In addition to the sharp rise in VDP views, search results page impressions (SRPIs) for new truck campers **grew by nearly 11% month over month**, indicating more shoppers are actively encountering and exploring listings. Even more telling, **email leads increased by almost 14%**, a key indicator of high-intent engagement. Across all other RV categories, average month-over-month gains were far more modest: VDPs increased by just 3%, SRPIs by 2% and email leads by nearly 10%.

When users move beyond browsing to request more information, it typically signals they are closer to a purchase decision. The increase in email leads confirms that the growth in interest is not just passive curiosity; it's translating into meaningful buyer behavior.

As digital engagement outpaces available inventory, truck campers are emerging as a high-interest segment worth watching. Dealers who align their stocking strategies with these shifting signals may be better positioned to capture growing buyer demand before the rest of the market catches on.

About RV Trader *RV Trader, a part of the "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.*

**SOURCE: RV TRADER SEARCH ACTIVITY FOR TRAVEL TRAILER RVS, JANUARY-JUNE 2025.





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PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

With locations in Oregon and Arizona, Straight Line RV & Boat Collision Repair & Paint focuses on hiring the right people to offer the best service.

BY JAVACIA HARRIS BOWSER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STRAIGHT LINE RV & BOAT COLLISION REPAIR & PAINT





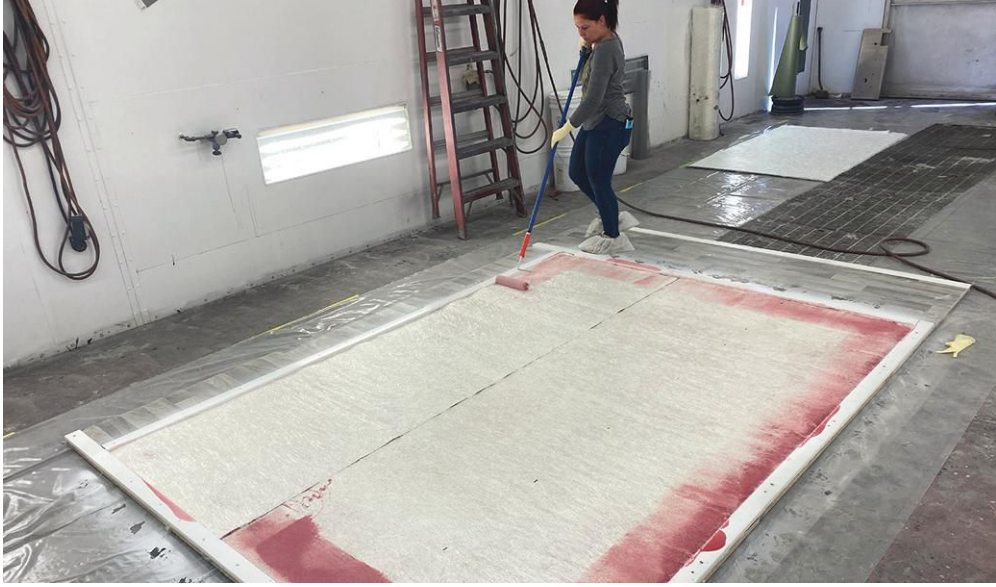
Perhaps Tony Hilsendager, owner of Straight Line RV & Boat Collision Repair & Paint, was destined to work in the RV industry — and not just because of his passion for camping.

"Straight out of high school, I got a job working on RVs — detailing them and assisting in the body shop," he says, adding that he grew up in Oregon, a state that's home to many RV manufacturers. "I've always loved fixing things, repairing vehicles of any kind."

In February 2008, Hilsendager opened the first Straight Line location in Springfield, Oregon.

"I realize now that as a child, whenever someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, there were a variety of answers over the years, but in all of the scenarios, I was self-employed," Hilsendager says. "I believe part of that is because my dad was a self-employed truck driver and diesel mechanic, and the other part is that most entrepreneurs are just born with that desire. It was not something I was conscious of; I have just never imagined it any other way."

This entrepreneurial spirit eventually drove Hilsendager to open a second Straight Line location in Phoenix in 2017. After leasing a building in Phoenix for years, Straight Line is now preparing to buy a building in





Buckeye, Arizona — proof that the move to the Grand Canyon State was a smart one.

"A lot of our RV customers are snowbirds who head south in the wintertime, and Arizona is a very popular place for people from Oregon to go spend the winters," Hilsendager explains. "So I've always had in the back of my mind that it would be great to be on both ends of that migration."

Straight Line began as an auto body shop, doing car collision repairs, customization and restoration, as well as RV paint and collision repairs. Over time, Hilsendager and his team shifted the company's specialty and never looked back.

"Eventually, the increased demand and better profitability of the RV portion of the business led us to focus solely on RVs — a decision we have never regretted," he says.

Hilsendager believes Straight Line's focus on RV repairs is one of the things that sets his company apart from others, especially from businesses that also sell RVs.

"If you're dealing with a shop that is strictly RV service, we have to be on our game all the time," he says. "We're not relying on millions of dollars of sales to carry us through. We can't get by on mediocre service, because that's all that we do."

Hilsendager and his team also take time to listen carefully to customers' needs so they can be sure they're offering the most cost-effective, top-notch service, striving to give customers a finished product that they'll love and save the customer money when possible.

"I think that [for] independent shops in general, we definitely have a big challenge in front of us, but it's also an advantage because we can connect with customers on a different level," he says.

ATTITUDE & TRAINABILITY

Both first-rate repairs and exceptional customer service would be impossible without a strong team. Currently, Straight Line has nine employees at the Oregon location and three in Arizona, with plans to hire six additional people soon.

What does Hilsendager look for in a team member? "It's going to be attitude and trainability," he says.

Time has taught him that a good mechanic or technician with a bad attitude is bad for business.

"A trainable person can pick stuff up really fast," Hilsendager says. "If they have the desire to do it and a good attitude, you can get them to perform better than somebody who maybe has some of the skills but doesn't have the qualities and characteristics you're looking for."

In fact, Hilsendager adds that one of the ways he measures the success of Straight Line is his ability to attract and retain outstanding employees.

"I'm seeing this momentum to where we're actually bringing in higher and higher quality employees, and I think that speaks a lot to the trajectory of the shop," he says. "It really makes everything easier. It makes the shop more productive and less stressful. It really does change everything when you have really great employees."

TRUE STORY

Straight Line will work on any type of recreational vehicle and does a host of different repairs, including full RV, travel trailer and toy hauler collision repair. It handles repairs from water and hail damage, tire blowouts and more. Straight Line also repairs fiberglass, roofs and awnings. The company offers paint repair and customization, along with simple touch-ups and clear coat repair.

Working in the RV repair industry, Hilsendager has no shortage of stories,



including one of a customer who, after getting $20,000 worth of repairs to his motorhome following an accident, returned to the shop just a few hours later with an additional $15,000 worth of damage.

One customer didn't properly apply the brakes to his motorhome while at a fuel station, and the vehicle rolled and smashed into one of the last known phone booths in the area. Another didn't properly hitch a boat he was towing, only to see it roll downhill into a dumpster, before eventually jumping a nearby curb.

A lot of customers come in after accidentally colliding with animals, especially cows. Even a turkey brought in one customer.

"It was shocking that that much damage could come from hitting a turkey," he recalls.



TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Straight Line is a family-owned and operated business. Hilsendager's daughter manages the Oregon shop, while his stepdaughter helps with estimates in Arizona. Having family to rely on, he says, made expanding the business easier.

"To know that there's somebody there that you really, completely 100% can trust when you're gone makes a big difference," he says.

His wife, Kelli, serves as the chief financial officer (CFO) for the company, and her business savvy has been a game changer for Straight Line. She's helped with office management and streamlined processes, making sure the company's finances — from invoices to insurance claims — are in order.

"If you bootstrapped your business and you've been out in the shop, and you've done every aspect of the repairs, you're very familiar with that, but the organization of what's happening in the office needs an equal amount of attention, and it's a lot harder to do for shop guys that are running a business because that's not our area of expertise," he says. "So I would say it's really going to be worthwhile to get somebody in there that understands that aspect of it."

Hilsendager believes hiring someone with this skill set will pay for itself.

"The addition of Kelli as CFO has made the difference of us going from just getting by month to month to having a safety net of several months of operating expenses in savings, as well as being able to set enough money aside to allow us to cover the down payment on our new shop in Buckeye, Arizona."

Though Hilsendager is eager to build on the foundation he's laid in Arizona with the new shop in Buckeye, he's quick to say he has no plans for any further expansion. Growing too big, too fast would lead to subpar service, he adds.

"We just want to have two efficiently run locations that are taking care of customers at the level that we demand, and I think that's going to get us to where we need to be," he says. "I don't think we need to take on any more than that." RVP

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A NEW DAWN FOR HEARTLAND

THOR Industries' strategic move brings a beloved brand under the **Jayco** umbrella, putting a spotlight on the product's quality and dealer relationships.

BY JENNIFER KING

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAYCO FAMILY OF COMPANIES

It's been seven months since THOR Industries president Bob Martin announced that the Heartland brand would move under the Jayco Family of Companies.

Now, with fall shows underway and new model year units hitting dealers' lots, Heartland and Jayco execs say they're ready to go.

"We'll introduce a new lineup of products — we're going to start shipping them this month," Jayco President and CEO Ken Walters told RV PRO in August. "Prowler, North Trail, Sundance travel trailers and fifth wheels, Bighorn and Cyclone will be the initial lineup ... going a little bit back to the basics of partner products that have a legacy and a measure of success.

"That will be the initial lineup of products and what follows beyond that, we're still working on."



Ken Walters

Originally, Heartland built its products on three separate campuses, Walters says. In the first few weeks of April as Jayco was integrating Heartland into its operations, they also had to decide which products







to focus on under the Heartland name. During that process, production moved to Jayco's Middlebury, Indiana, site.

The impetus for bringing Heartland under the Jayco umbrella came from a couple years of an underperforming budget, Walters says, and improvements needed in quality of the product and dealer relations.



Kyle Miller

"By all accounts from both Kyle and his team and the dealers we've had through the product, it's gone exceptionally well," Walters says, referring to Kyle Miller, Heartland's general manager, and speaking on the new Heartland units. "I think [it's been] better than expected given the shortened timeline."

It was the know-how already in action at Jayco that allowed the quick turnaround to happen, while still maintaining a high standard of quality.

"What we're doing at Jayco is working," Walters says. "We have a team that seems to respond really well to challenges, and we're good at strategy, and we're good at executing a plan."



Nic Martin

While the market is still a challenge that all RV manufacturers and dealers are grappling with, Nic Martin, Jayco's vice president of sales, says things have become a little more consistent.

"I don't think we're under any misconceptions of what the market is or planning for it to be significant growth," he says.

Nevertheless, there's a hole in the market where Heartland products used to be, and now, they are poised to fill that need with new and improved offerings.



Excerpts From the Announcement on Moving Heartland Under Jayco

From Bob Martin, president and CEO of THOR Industries:

"Through the current downcycle, our companies focused on appropriate brand rationalization and rightsizing their product lineups to meet the current market conditions and customer demands."

"By leveraging Jayco's expertise and learning into Jayco's support structure, we are confident that Heartland will achieve meaningful performance improvements, delivering greater value to our customers, dealers and stakeholders."

"Our goal is to foster a more seamless operational framework that allows us to operate more efficiently and more effectively in the evolving U.S. market. This restructuring reflects our dedication to long-term growth, efficiency and excellence in the RV industry."

From Ken Walters, president and CEO of Jayco:

"We look forward to working with key members of the Heartland team to get those brands back where they belong in the market."



"Judging by early responses from dealers, they certainly have a need for some of that, even considering that I don't think it's their expectation that their business will be drastically up in '26 over what they've been in '25," Martin says. "But [there's] nothing materially to make us feel worse about the market either; a lot more of the same and we've done pretty well navigating that."

A New Attention to Detail

As for how the Heartland units themselves have changed? Well, the Jayco execs say the new product isn't comparable to what's been done previously. The suppliers for different components will be similar to or the same as what Jayco's brands use, such as hardwood cabinet doors.

"Our view on materials and things we're not willing to compromise on structurally … there will certainly be a different story to the product there," Walters says.

Miller commends the history of Jayco's 55 years of experience and how that has been poured into the new Heartland products.

"When walking the initial pilots or prototypes, we were just blown away by the fit and the finish and the quality. All of that struck a really positive nerve with our entire sales staff, and instantly confidence came right back into our team," Miller says.

Miller adds that he feels the dealers have gained that same burst of confidence after viewing the new Heartland units.

During the integration of Heartland into Jayco, there was some reduction in the labor force, mostly among manufacturing and direct labor since that's the largest part of the company's workforce, Walters says. Just under 200 employees have been integrated into the Jayco Family of Companies.

While the Heartland manufacturing all occurs in Middlebury right now, some of that will also eventually take place in Jayco's Twin Falls, Idaho, facility.

The first real test for the new Heartland would be at the America's Largest RV Show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, during September. As of press time for this issue, the show had not occurred, but Walters notes that getting the product in front of consumers is the "real measuring stick of success."

"We're ready. We're going to show a complete lineup of product [at Hershey] and the following week at Open House," Walters says. "[We are] confident in our lens of what [the] product should be and [what is] good quality, high value, competitively priced [for the] middle of the market."

Walters adds that he believes Jayco and Heartland will show that their dealers matter, the customers matter and the "name on the front or side of the unit won't be the most important thing."

"The value, the price, the volume — we think they'll see we're confident in that," he says. "We're ready all the way around." RVP

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UTAH'S ESCAPOD: SMALL BUT MIGHTY

An off-road travel trailer built for the biking community that can withstand tough terrain.



BY JOHN MCCURRY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ESCAPOD

Billed as a "celebration of cycling," the Sea Otter Classic in Monterrey, California, draws more than 70,000 spectators and more than 9,000 athletes each April. By no means is the event considered an RV show, but for one RV builder, it is a gathering of their peeps. Escapod, the Utah-based manufacturer of teardrop off-road campers, views the festival as a rich pool of potential customers.

"We typically do shows that are not traditional RV shows," explains Chris Hudak, who founded Escapod with his wife, Jen, in 2016. "We focus on overlanding shows, and ones on camping and the activity-based type of show, and sportsman's expos. We do shows like the Sea Otter Classic. We target places where our people are showing up. We are able to speak the language they speak, as we are also passionate bikers. We do a lot better with that type of show."

Escapod has been busy this year fine-tuning its operations and concentrating on evolving with the market. The company is moving to vertically integrate, using capacity in its factory to perform additional tasks in-house. Vendor restructure is being reevaluated, and Chris says the goal is to use the additional capacity to gain sustainability through cost-saving measures.

"There is a general challenge right here in the RV





industry, following the COVID boom and the rebalancing of demand on the backside," Jen says. "We are trying to run our business smarter."

Escapod also markets its products through its Ambassador program, comprised of current owners. Members, whom the Hudaks consider to be "almost employees," allow prospective customers to take an up-close look at their trailers.

"It is the best way to really see why to buy one," Jen says. "Our website makes it really easy to find an Escapod near you. They can be found throughout the U.S. If you are interested in learning about our trailers, you can go to escapod.us and use our trailer finder feature. It is a nice way to get the authentic feel of what this trailer is about, without having to travel to Utah or Texas to see one in person."

Escapod's target demographic has remained generally steady through the years: customers who value their time outdoors and are looking for ways to be self-reliant in the outdoors, with a comfortable place to sleep that is protected from the environment. What has shifted over the last few years has been centered around the structure of its trailers. Jen describes Escapod as a high-end composite trailer built to stand the test of the time. She says the longevity of the trailers exceeds that of any trailer in the category, but notes that it comes with a premium price tag.

Built To Last

New this year is the TOPO2 MTB, a new trim package for the TOPO2. Chris says MTB offers customers an easier way to achieve their favorite activities.

"Our customers are not necessarily passionate about the RV industry in general, but they are passionate about mountain biking," he says. "We created the world's first purpose-built mountain bike-specific camper, that includes specialized mountain bike tools, a work stand and a swing-away hitch integrated with the frame. It has a customized graphics package that is louder than what we have typically done in the past, to match the mountain biking style."

Chris says mountain biking fits well with Escapod, noting that is why he and his wife developed the company's first trailer. In fact, he says the business is built around biking.

"Our customers may not all be into racing mountain bikes, but many of them are seeing national parks via bikes, and seeking open spaces via bikes. They like to make two wheels part of their camping experience. Now, with the advent of e-bikes, it is allowing many more people, even those who may not have ridden a bike in a long time, to be able to get back to biking, and be able to access all those special places," Chris says.

Jen believes one of Escapod's main selling points is the refinement of the fit and finish of its trailers. They are designed to have clean lines and maximize utilization of space. Every inch of space has a specific purpose.

"In the TOPO2, we have features such as what we call the mudroom, which is a space between the interior of the trailer and the entryway door that gives you a space to store your shoes and your coats. When you are camping in something that has a small interior capacity, it is great to be able







to get out to very remote places, but at the same time, it can create challenges in terms of where to put all of your gear. We are extremely thoughtful in utilization of space."

Another important factor is Escapod's monocoque body.

"Our trailer is a structural body unto itself. There are no separate exterior composite panels that are attached to an interior structure," Jen says. "This means it is going to hold up really well during all of those high frequency vibrations that you are going to get when you are off-road. These trailers are going to stay together a lot longer than other trailers on the market."

In addition to its ruggedness and teardrop shape, the TOPO2 is known for eye-catching exterior colors. Five colors are offered, with Lost Coast Blue by far the most popular, accounting for about 40% of sales.

Connected to the Customer

Escapod's retail operations differ from typical RV manufacturers. The company has just one dealer, located near Abilene, Texas. The Lone Star State is one of its larger markets. Escapod operates its own retail store in Utah, near its factory. Direct-to-customer sales is its preferred method.

"We deal with the customers directly, and this allows us to be in touch with them and respond to their needs more quickly," Chris says.

Escapod builds 120 to 180 units per year. Jen describes Utah, with its opportunities for outdoor recreation, as being a natural fit for its operations.

"Manufacturing in the U.S. has its challenges, but Utah is a small business-friendly state," Jen says. "Salt Lake City is a great resource for us. It has been important to us to be close to so many of our users."

Tariffs have been an issue, but Escapod tries to use products manufactured in the U.S. as much as possible. Batteries and water systems are made overseas. Some vendors have made price adjustments, while others have delayed raising prices to see how things shake out.

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Small but Mighty

Crafting a teardrop requires designing effective use of a defined amount of space.

"You have to look at what has to go into that space and carve that out first," Chris says. "One thing we do really well is to explore possibilities, such as working with Aqua-Hot to design a system to heat the water and air of a TOPO2 in a very specific way. Then that becomes part of the overall design."

Escapod works with each of its vendors early in the design process to see how much space they need and how their product works best. Function has top priority. After that is accomplished, attention turns to how things look and how it all fits together. That's Escapod's approach to everything.

The MSRP for Escapod base models starts at $33,990 and range up to $53, 990. There is an array of trim packages that offer many different options, everything from 12-volt air conditioners to swing-away hitches.

Most customers use SUVs or small trucks to pull an Escapod unit. The Hudaks pull theirs with a Ford Bronco or Ford Ranger. Many customers pull their unit with a Toyota 4Runner or a Subaru Outback.

"You have a wide range of vehicles that are able to pull TOPO2, and that is one of the special things," Chris says. "At 2,000 pounds, you have tons of options. You don't have to go buy a large truck in order to own an RV."

As the year winds down, the Hudaks are excited about the prospects for 2026. They believe some of this year's economic uncertainty will gradually subside.

"We feel that some of this uncertainty will be leveling off and people will be ready to get out there and start doing some of the travel they have always dreamed of," Chris says. "We want to be a part of that, and make sure we position Escapod to capture that interest." RVP





KEEP TRUCKIN' ALONG

Palomino's 36-year history producing truck campers continues to serve a wide-ranging market looking for a well-built way to travel.

BY JENNIFER KING

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOREST RIVER

"PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS INTRIGUED BY NEW FEATURES AND GADGETS, BUT FOR THE MOST PART, FLOORPLAN, SIZE AND WEIGHT, AND STORAGE SPACE ARE THE DRIVING FACTORS."

—BEN MELOCHE, PALOMINO GENERAL MANAGER

Nimble and easy to drive and park; good on rough terrain; fits in most garages — these are all pros for truck campers, according to Go RVing, and Forest River's Palomino truck campers fall right in line with these descriptions.

As a long-time manufacturer of this RV type, Palomino has found ways to produce truck campers that appeal to a wide demographic of campers, while keeping the quality high and the prices affordable.

RV PRO asked Palomino General Manager Ben Meloche to tell us more about their truck campers and how they fit into a dealership's offerings.

RV PRO: How long has the Palomino brand made truck campers?
Ben Meloche: Palomino has been around since 1968 exclusively building pop-up tent campers. It wasn't until 1989 when truck campers were introduced. We started with pop-up campers, then shortly after added hard sides.

RVP: What are consumers looking for in truck campers today?
Meloche: Customers have always had a wide range of reasons they prefer a truck camper. I believe the largest segment is looking for a camper that fits their needs to fulfill their lifestyle. Of course, people are always intrigued by new features and gadgets, but for the most part, floorplan, size and weight, and storage space are the driving factors.

RVP: What demographic largely looks for this RV type, and for what purpose(s) are they often used?
Meloche: Unlike some of our other products where we see a more defined demographic, truck camper customers are wide ranging. For the



most part, these individuals have a specific purpose for purchasing a truck camper. Many people are wanting to tow something behind their camper like a boat, or a trailer for snowmobiles, four-wheelers or horses. But I would say the majority of them just want the freedom to explore places that are difficult to reach with a trailer or motorhome.

RVP: Tell us about the requirements for the trucks that can hold these truck campers — what would dealers want to make sure customers know about pairing with the right vehicle?
Meloche: We build a lot of different models to accommodate just about any truck. The most important information needed is the vehicle payload capacity and size of the bed of the truck. Once you have that established, you can narrow down to find the right camper for the customer.

RVP: What features in your truck campers do you think stand out the most?
Meloche: I think it is difficult to drill down specific features for all Palomino truck campers. We have four different segments that touch on different price points, different sizes depending on the vehicle, and for different overall camper uses or experiences. The common feature throughout the Palomino brand is the quality construction and materials we use to build them. Many of our dealers carry other truck camper brands. What makes Palomino truck campers so popular is the value and quality customers see while choosing to invest in this type of lifestyle.

RVP: What do you think would appeal to customers most about your truck campers?
Meloche: This falls back to lifestyle









choices or purpose. Truck campers are your best option to visit hard to reach places, off the main road or campground. Or they are also great option if you have something you want to tow and take with you during your travels.

RVP: How has the truck camper changed over the years?
Meloche: I have been here almost 20 years and the most change I have seen is improvements with the production materials and components that we use. Other things like solar panels, 12-volt appliances and lithium batteries have all been great additions to truck campers. That technology changes so fast but has really improved the way people are able to use their campers. RVP

Palomino Truck Campers

Last month at Open House Week in Elkhart, Indiana, Palomino truck campers were on display, showcasing three distinctive lines — Soft-Side, Hard-Side and Hard-Side Max, each with refreshed interiors and updated exterior graphics.

The Backpack Soft-Side Truck Campers include an electric lift that helps customers easily set up their camper without needing to hand-crank the top up or down. There is also an optional remote. The 55-inch one-piece door makes the truck camper easier to enter and exit, and the exterior is available in a white or gray gel coat.

The Backpack Hard-Side Truck Camper's fully aluminum-welded frame is lightweight, Palomino says, and the interior has been redesigned to include more cabinet storage. The frameless windows are also a new upgraded feature.

Finally, the Backpack Hard-Side Max Truck Camper is Palomino's premium product, which includes insulated frameless windows and a heated basement. The front cap windshield, an exclusive to Palomino, opens the living space up.

Palomino says there are plans to introduce two new truck camper models in the near future.



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STAYING WELL CONNECTED

What to know about RV connectivity options to better meet your customers' online needs.

BY MICHELE MOORE

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE COMPANIES

"CONNECTIVITY IS NOW CONSIDERED A CORE FEATURE RATHER THAN AN AFTERTHOUGHT."

—COLLIN QUINN, TREK SYSTEMS

For most travelers, staying connected on the road isn't a "nice to have" anymore — it's a requirement, whether they're working remotely or simply want to watch their favorite streaming service. To get the latest on RV connectivity, RV PRO spoke with four industry experts.

What's new & innovative in RV internet/connectivity products?

Nathan Popp, vice president of revenue operations, TravlFi: RV connectivity has moved beyond single-source solutions to smart, flexible systems that blend satellite, 4G/5G cellular and Wi-Fi boosting. Portable, battery-powered devices now make it possible to stay connected while fully off-grid, and multicarrier technology ensures travelers can tap into the strongest available network throughout their travels. Many new RVs are also being built connectivity-ready, with preinstalled wiring for satellite, solar integration and app-based controls for a truly mobile smart home experience.

Collin Quinn, connectivity systems engineer, Trek Systems: The Peplink Antenna MAX S is a brand-new 5G and Wi-Fi antenna that includes a housing for both a Starlink antenna and a mobile router. The router mounting negates cable signal loss, and the Starlink integration saves roof space. Peplink routers can combine Starlink and cellular WANs for high-speed, high-reliability internet in remote locations.



TravlFi's JourneyXTR Router

Steve Loving, business development director, KORE Wireless: The launch of Winnebago Connect, powered by KORE Wireless, Robo and Ericsson, represents a major leap forward in RV connectivity. Instead of relying on multiple separate systems and cumbersome equipment, this platform integrates Internet of Things (IoT), 5G and automation into a single, seamless ecosystem. It includes dual-carrier 5G with in-vehicle and around-vehicle Wi-Fi via Cradlepoint routers; smart energy management for extended off-grid stays; remote climate control to keep passengers and pets comfortable; real-time GPS tracking and smart notifications for safety and convenience; [and] over-the-air software updates. It's not just internet — it's an always-connected, intelligent RV that adapts to user needs.

Keith Larson, director of sales — RV aftermarket, Winegard Co.: The growing 5G coverage has led to better internet coverage and at greater speeds from cell towers. Also data plans are becoming more price competitive with unlimited data limits to give customers great connectivity for all of their connectivity needs, whether working on the road, streaming their favorite shows or surfing the internet. Satellite internet has also changed landscape to get connected even in remote areas, and many accessories have been created to use Starlink on RVs.

What impact has a younger buyer demographic & the increased popularity of off-grid camping & full-time RVing had on RV connectivity?



Winegard's ConnecT roof mount system

Popp: Millennials and Gen Z buyers, many working remotely, expect fast, reliable internet anywhere. Their interest in boondocking and full-time RV living has driven demand for mobile, self-powered, high-performance connectivity that supports both work and streaming away from RV parks.

Quinn: Connectivity is now considered a core feature rather than an afterthought. In the past, RV internet was more of an optional add-on, often only in the form of a Wi-Fi booster for campground internet. Now, many younger RVers are working or streaming on the road, so maintaining a stable internet connection is a high priority. Since they require business-class reliability, multi-WAN routers are becoming more common in the RV world. These routers utilize multiple cellular connections and/or Starlink for redundant WAN links, increased speed and improved connection quality. For full-timers and off-grid campers, power efficiency and solar energy is also very important. This results in a need for more efficient devices and more sophisticated energy systems.

Loving: Younger RV buyers and full-time RVers expect their rigs to be as connected as their homes. Streaming entertainment, remote work, telehealth and smart home-style controls are becoming baseline expectations. The surge in boondocking and off-grid travel means connectivity must now extend beyond campgrounds with public Wi-Fi — into national parks, rural back roads and remote work spots. Winnebago Connect directly addresses this by combining nationwide 5G coverage with intelligent power management, allowing travelers to stay online, productive and entertained while off the grid.



Trek Systems' Work Anywhere Pro Kit

Larson: Younger, tech-savvy owners are driving new demands to stay connected as an essential, expected feature of camping both on- and off-grid. Manufacturers are responding by preinstalling or prepping RVs for Wi-Fi, 5G LTE and Starlink, app-controlled systems and smart devices.

What do dealers need to be aware of or educate their customers about to ensure their connectivity needs are met?

Popp: Dealers should set realistic expectations about coverage, speed and power needs; explain hybrid setups (satellite with cellular backup); and teach customers how to manage power, secure their network and choose the right plan for their travel style.

Quinn: Dealers should set realistic expectations for internet coverage. No single connection will work everywhere. Starlink suffers with inclement weather and physical obstructions, and cellular internet depends on your carrier's coverage. Multi-WAN routers can use multiple connection types to fill coverage gaps. Customers should also be educated on how failover is handled. Peplink routers enable the use of Hot Failover, which switches between a failing WAN and a backup WAN. This is essential for internet use cases like VOIP, video streaming and video conferencing. If this level of reliability is not necessary, standard failover may be sufficient. Most mobile routers have two or more SIM slots. When the primary SIM loses signal, the router automatically switches to

the backup SIM, but the connection is not seamless. The downtime can be up to several minutes. Multicarrier SIM cards also fail over in this way, but only take up a single SIM slot. Knowledge of data plan types is also very important. It is critical to make sure the customer chooses a router-friendly SIM. If a phone plan's SIM is used, the connection may be heavily throttled, and in the worst case, it may be completely cut off and the router blacklisted. Most carriers will prompt the customer to enter the device's IMEI when purchasing a plan to ensure it is valid for that plan.

Loving: Dealers should help customers understand the difference between campground Wi-Fi, mobile hotspots and integrated 5G/IoT systems. [They should also] advise on data plans, carrier options and coverage maps, especially for those who travel in rural or mountainous areas, [and] highlight how features like smart energy management can keep internet access running longer off-grid.

Larson: Dealers need to educate customers on the differences and pros and cons of 4G, 5G LTE and satellite internet, and the costs of hardware and services so the customer can pick the right product and plan for their needs.

What is a challenge that OEMs, dealers & end users face regarding RV connectivity?

Popp: According to a recent RVIA survey about purchase intentions, Wi-Fi/connectivity is a top 3 most important feature when considering the next RV purchase. However, customer needs are very different and technology is changing quickly, which makes it difficult for OEMs and dealers to stay ahead of the latest tech and/or provide a one-size-fits-all solution. Balancing coverage reliability, cost and simplicity is the biggest challenge. Different terrains, trees and weather impact connectivity, and managing multiple systems can overwhelm less tech-savvy users.



Winnebago Connect is powered by KORE Wireless, Robo and Ericsson.

Quinn: The biggest issues facing everyone in the chain are the variables outside their control. A user's ability to achieve a stable high-speed internet connection depends on many things, including cell tower locations, network congestion, physical obstructions, satellite visibility, carrier throttling and deprioritization. OEMs may have difficulty finding a one-size-fits-all package that works for every travel style and location. Dealers have the unenviable position of trying to explain the complex technology and its shortcomings without overwhelming the customer. And users can face frustration when their expensive equipment fails to perform as expected.

Loving: Coverage gaps remain a real challenge, especially in extremely remote or mountainous regions. Even with dual-carrier 5G, physics still wins in no-signal zones. Managing data usage and plan costs is another hurdle, particularly for full-time RVers who stream heavily or work remotely. From the OEM/dealer side, integrating advanced connectivity into RVs without adding complexity for the end user requires robust partnerships.

Larson: Challenges are there is not always a solution that works or can keep [RVers] connected in every situation. Satellite internet can have issues when blocked to signal, and cellular can have issues if in really remote areas, so it is different than a home that is constantly wired for access constantly.

What else should our readers know about RV connectivity products?

Popp: The most dependable RV internet comes from combining multiple connection types. For example, using a satellite service for remote or off-grid areas, paired with multicarrier 4G/5G internet like TravlFi for travel days or locations with strong cellular coverage. This hybrid approach ensures [RVers] have redundancy when one network is down or congested, maximizes coverage across different terrains and allows [them] to switch between options based on where [they] are and what [they] need to do.

Quinn: There's a wide range of connectivity options to fit many sets of customer needs. The challenge is catering a solution to their requirements.

Loving: Today's RV connectivity is about more than internet access — it's about creating a smart, self-aware vehicle that enhances safety, comfort and sustainability. Platforms aren't just for delivering streaming and browsing capabilities but also to monitor and optimize power, water and climate systems; provide security and location tracking; enable remote diagnostics and dealer support; future-proof the RV with scalable hardware and software that can evolve with new technologies. In short, RV connectivity is no longer an accessory — it's a core part of the RV ownership experience, and those who embrace it are set to attract the next generation of RVers.

Larson: 5G LTE products and services are getting better with price of hardware and services. There are many options to get 5G products from roof-mounted, 5G upgrades to a preinstalled prepped antenna to a desktop router with built-in 5G. Winegard 5G products now have available a 5G T-Mobile unlimited data plan. ... Also any 5G Winegard product purchased qualifies for a free month of unlimited T-Mobile data plan rebate. RVP

TENTS FOR TRAILERS

PahaQue Custom offers innovative trailer tents and shelters to enhance the outdoor experience.

BY RONNIE WENDT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAHAQUE CUSTOM INC.



For Jeff Basford, founder of PahaQue Custom Inc., the journey from traditional tent camping to custom shelters for towables was driven by passion and necessity. "I started out backpacking and sleeping on the dirt," Basford says with a laugh. "But over time, I aged out of that. I wanted something a little more comfortable while still being immersed in nature."



Jeff Basford

In 1996, that sentiment inspired Basford and co-founder Mike Greaves to launch a line of family tents that were large enough to stand in and designed for comfort and convenience. This tent line quickly gained traction with major retailers like REI. In 2012, PahaQue partnered with Green Supply in Missouri, a large sporting goods distributor. Following a company restructuring in 2017, Bill Green became partner and chief financial officer for PahaQue.

As competition in the family camping tent space grew, Basford and Green pivoted. Leveraging relationships with brands like Fleetwood Folding Trailers, PahaQue evolved from producing stand-alone tents to engineering custom shelters, awnings and add-ons that enhance the livability of compact trailers such as teardrops and truck campers.

Getting Positioned for Growth

PahaQue initially sourced its products through a Chinese trading partner as it had with its family tents. But as time went on, overseas manufacturing proved increasingly challenging. "You're tying up a lot of cash, hoping that your crystal ball is clear on what your sales will be," Basford explains, noting the strain of large minimum orders and lengthy lead times. Unlike their volume-driven tent line, the trailer accessory market didn't demand the same scale.

The co-owners then made a strategic decision to move production stateside, even though it came with higher costs, Basford says it offered key advantages: smaller batch sizes, tighter quality control and more financial agility.

"It freed up a lot of cash that otherwise would have been tied up in large container deliveries from China," he says.

PahaQue also carved out a niche by mass-producing the first-ever dedicated shower/outhouse tent for tent and trailer campers. "We called it the Teepee," he says. "It worked with a porta-potty and solar shower, and it was huge for trailers that didn't have plumbing."

What began as a small operation with two in-house models, a fabric cutter and a sewer has since grown substantially. Today, the company employs six full-time sewers, two cutters, and a full packing and shipping department. "We've more than doubled in size since we got into it, which represents how the market has grown," Basford says. "We've just grown along with it."

PahaQue produces about 5,000 products annually across 30 SKUs out of its 8,000-square-foot facility in San Diego, California. But the company plans to add a new 25,000-square-foot building in Missouri, where Green lives.

"Our capacity has exceeded what we can produce in California, so rather than expand here, we're going to expand in Missouri and take advantage of the opportunities that exist for us there," Basford says.

The Missouri operation will support the expanding product line, which is driven by a four-person team focused on solving design challenges specific to customer needs.

Making Small Trailers Feel Big

PahaQue Custom carved a niche with compact trailers by addressing a common problem: limited space.

"Smaller trailers, especially teardrops, are essentially a mattress on wheels," Basford says. "They're comfortable and

efficient, but they can be limiting in terms of space."

That's where PahaQue shines. From visors and screen rooms to full side tents and awnings, its products give campers an affordable way to expand their living footprint — without purchasing a larger RV.

"Our 10 by 10 trailer tent can more than double your available floor space," Basford explains. "It gives you a bug-free area to store gear, a place for guests to sleep or a space to hang out that is protected from the elements."

But it's not just about space. "We are always looking at how we can solve the problems campers are experiencing with their trailers or shelter," he says. From bugs and rain to UV rays, privacy and storage, the company creates solutions for real-world frustrations. Their product line includes everything from gear pouches and blackout curtains to screen doors, storage covers and tent footprints.

PahaQue's strength lies in customization, according to Basford. Each product starts with a conversation — often initiated by a trailer manufacturer or end user seeking a solution. The team gathers exact measurements to tailor products to the customer and the trailer itself.

"We work directly with trailer manufacturers to develop products that are designed to fit their models precisely," he says.

This approach has netted partnerships with trailer brands like Airstream, Bean Trailer, inTech, Helio, Forest River, Aliner, nuCamp, Extreme Outdoors and Off-Grid Trailers.

Tents are crafted from heavy-duty 200- or 400-denier nylon that's waterproof and UV-resistant. Protective covers are made from 600-denier Magnatuff with a water-repellent finish. "We are very particular about the materials we choose," Basford says. "Outdoor items that face the elements need to stand up."

This commitment to quality is backed by a lifetime warranty covering workmanship and materials.

PahaQue products are practical and lightweight — most tent additions weigh under 20 pounds, making them easy to handle without affecting towing or trailer balance. Still, Basford stresses safe use.

"If the wind pushes 30 miles per hour, you need guidelines to secure the tent or to take it down," he says. "There is a limit to what they can handle, and we try to set realistic expectations."

The company includes intuitive instructions and how-to videos with its tents. "Not everyone has experience setting up a tent, so we've worked to make the process very intuitive," Basford says.

Focused on the Future

Looking ahead, PahaQue is doubling down on what it does best: solving problems for campers.

"New product design is always at the top of the priority list," Basford says.

One standout is the Ramp Tent for toy haulers, a patent-pending design that converts the rear of a toy hauler into a fully enclosed, livable room. "We've more than doubled the amount of usable interior space in a trailer," he says. "It gives people the protected, functional room they need — whether for sleeping, relaxing or stowing gear."

Beyond trailer-specific gear, the company is exploring general-use outdoor products. "Not everything we make going forward will be specific to a trailer make or model," Basford explains.

The company is also entering the bedding space. "A lot of trailers come with a 4-inch cushion that's like laying on cement," he says. "We are now producing custom-size mattresses, memory foam toppers and slipcovers. These comfort-focused solutions fill a much-needed niche in a market where trailer beds rarely follow standard sizing."

PahaQue will use its Missouri-based steel fabrication shop to support small trailer manufacturers with custom frames and components. "There are only one or two large frame suppliers in the U.S.," Basford notes. "If you're a small company that only needs 20 frames, the lead times and minimums from big suppliers can be tough. We want to be the company that can make five to 10 frames at a time — or fabricate specific metal parts that help bring your trailer designs to life."

At the center of all this innovation is a simple philosophy: Campers designing products for campers.

"We've been doing this for over 25 years," Basford says. "We know the market and what customers need. We are also good at listening and creating solutions for unique problems."

With a passion for off-grid travel and a deep connection to the trailer community, PahaQue continues to embrace growth while staying true to what has made it a trusted name among serious campers.

"We love this market, and we're excited to keep growing alongside it," Basford says. "That's why we've refocused all our efforts in this direction over the past 10 years — and we're just getting started." RVP





THE DIGITALIZATION OF RV F&I

How to meet shopper expectations and close more deals.

BY JASON NIERMAN, ROLLICK

For years, the financing and insurance (F&I) process in the RV industry has lagged behind the streamlined digital shopping experiences found in automotive retail and other sectors. Today's RV shopper expects transparency, speed and the ability to shop online the same way they purchase other big-ticket items. Dealers and manufacturers who embrace digital F&I solutions are finding new ways to not only meet these expectations but also to accelerate deal closures and increase profitability.

Digital F&I brings financing and insurance options directly into the online shopping journey. Instead of waiting until the buyer steps into the showroom, solution providers like Rollick enable dealers to embed financing, protection products and insurance programs early in the process. By working closely with manufacturers, solution platforms can make it possible for dealers to present captive financing and third-party options seamlessly — right where the customer is researching units, customizing their purchase and comparing models. This integration gives shoppers the confidence that they can afford their dream RV and protects dealers from losing momentum at the critical point of purchase.

Empowering Buyers

One of the most powerful benefits of digital F&I is the ability to shop by monthly payment. For many RV buyers, affordability is defined less by total price and more by what they can comfortably spend each month. With the right solution, shoppers can adjust payment terms, down payments and loan durations to fit their budgets. This transparency not only builds trust but also empowers buyers to self-select into a payment structure that works for them, reducing negotiation friction at the dealership.

Equally important is the need for digital platforms to intelligently match customers with the right lenders. A robust solution doesn't just display a menu of financing options — it actively "decisions" the customer by evaluating their creditworthiness and connecting them with the best lender for their unique situation. This type of solution, which is offered by companies such as Priority One Financial Services that is integrated into Rollick's digital retailing tool, prevents shoppers from hitting dead ends, minimizes declines and ensures more deals are finalized. By handling this process in the background, digital F&I creates a smoother experience for both the customer and the dealership team.



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Manufacturers also stand to gain by embedding their captive financing programs into these digital journeys. Captives can influence brand loyalty by offering competitive rates, incentives and product bundles directly within the shopping flow. At the same time, dealers can layer in third-party insurance and protection products, giving buyers the convenience of a one-stop shop without ever leaving the digital ecosystem. This cooperative approach increases attachment rates on high-margin products while creating a differentiated buying experience.

Shorten Sales Cycles

The benefits of digital F&I extend beyond customer satisfaction. For dealers, automating much of the financing and insurance process reduces time spent in the F&I office, freeing staff to focus on consultative selling and relationship-building. It also minimizes errors and compliance risks that can arise from manual processes. Most importantly, when shoppers are prequalified and educated about financing before they arrive at the dealership, close rates rise, and sales cycles shorten — as the results shared earlier in this article clearly demonstrate.

Shoppers, for their part, feel empowered and respected. By allowing them to explore financing options privately online, digital F&I addresses one of the biggest sources of anxiety in the buying process. Buyers walk into the dealership with realistic expectations, a clear understanding of their budget and greater confidence in their purchase decision. This creates a more positive experience that increases the likelihood of referrals and repeat business.

Looking forward, digitalization of RV F&I is no longer optional — it's a necessity for staying competitive. Consumers will continue to demand the same seamless, transparent and efficient buying journey they receive in other industries. Dealers and manufacturers that partner with solution providers to deliver these capabilities will be best positioned to capture more deals, build long-term customer loyalty and drive profitability across the RV ecosystem.

In an era where buyers expect everything at their fingertips, the message is clear: digitizing F&I is the key to aligning with modern shopper expectations and unlocking the full potential of the RV market. RVP

The Data Speaks for Itself

The real-world results of digital F&I speak volumes. A California-based RV dealer that works with Rollick experienced a 20.6% close rate for digital retailing leads generated from their website. The study also found that nearly 38% of the leads engaged in prequalification activity, demonstrating the strong appetite buyers have for financing transparency early in the journey. Even more compelling, the average time to close was only 17.4 days, proving that digital engagement and prequalification not only improve close rates but also accelerate the path to purchase.

Jason Nierman is co-founder and chief revenue officer at Rollick, a "rec-tech" startup for powersports, RV and boat manufacturers. He co-conceptualized Rollick as a platform and leads all marketing, sales and business development activities. Previously, Nierman was chief development officer at OpenHouse Realty, a real estate technology startup sold to a Quicken Loans subsidiary in 2017. Also, as vice president of partner development at TrueCar, he managed prospecting, signing, launching and growing auto-buying partnerships with some of the nation's largest and most trusted affinity groups.



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YOUR DMS IS A GOLD MINE. ARE YOU DIGGING DEEP ENOUGH?

Sales and service insights that keep dealers competitive.

BY DON MILLER, IDS — INTEGRATED DEALER SYSTEMS

At Integrated Dealer Systems (IDS), we spend a lot of time talking to dealers about the features that really move the needle in their dealership management software. Overwhelmingly, one answer comes up: data and reporting. Data is your compass, after all.

If your dealership is running on an integrated dealership management system (DMS), you're already sitting on a gold mine of data to help you pinpoint inefficiencies and revenue opportunities in every area of your business. But here's the catch: many dealership teams still aren't tapping fully into the reporting capabilities of their DMS, and they're missing opportunities as a result.

In today's competitive market, where every lead matters and customers are cautious with big purchases, it's important to turn your data into action. Ideally, everyone on your team should be equipped with reports to track performance, incentivize their work and spot opportunities for improvement. But in a competitive market, where customers are hesitant to take the plunge on buying a new unit, homing in on your sales and service data is critical.

Below are some examples of reports you should be pulling on a weekly and even daily basis to stay on top of sales and service at your dealership. All of these reports are available in IDS Leadership Insights, IDS' integrated dealership analytics tool. But even if you're using a different analytics platform, these are the metrics you should be keeping an eye on.

Sales & Inventory Summary

In a market where every lead counts, it's more important than ever to keep an eye on your sales metrics, from total unit sales right down to individual locations and sales by individual salespeople.

From a bird's-eye view, it's important to track:

- Unit sales (current and historical)
- Gross profit (by location and salesperson)
- Sales margin as a percentage of net price
- Sales margin by brand and unit type
- Percentage of goal achieved (sales and F&I)

Inventory Review

One of the most common challenges our team continues to hear about is managing aging inventory. With high interest rates and inconsistent sales, many dealers are still feeling the pressure.

It's more important than ever to know what you have in stock. Some key metrics you should be tracking are:

- Total inventory count and costs (by manufacturer, brand and model)
- Inventory turns per year
- Monthly supply
- Units sold available and units on order
- Count and cost of aged units (over 270 days in stock)
- Identify and review oldest units on the lot

It's also important to home in on your parts inventory specifically, as those opportunities are easy to overlook.

- Aged parts on hand and cost
- Obsolete parts cost
- Total parts cost by lot and age
- Total cost by parts group

F&I Review

To get the maximum value on every deal, optimizing per-unit gross profits is increasingly important. Top dealers are financing 70% or more of unit sales. Many dealers even have someone in house focusing on F&I sales, to maximize on every opportunity.

Some key F&I metrics to track are:

- Total F&I profit (by location and manager)
- Average F&I profit per vehicle retailed (PVR)
- F&I profit as a percentage of net price
- Percentage of goal achieved
- Finance penetration
- Product penetrations
- Number of contracts per F&I manager

Services & Parts Summary

RV sales are highly competitive, and we can't control fluctuations in the market. Service, on the other hand, is rarely price-shopped. With the customer's vehicle already in our possession, we have a captive audience and greater control over the opportunity. Make sure your service department is operating at maximum efficiency, and don't miss out on opportunities to sell add-on parts.

There are several key metrics you should be tracking to keep a finger on the pulse of your fixed ops departments as a whole, by location, by team member and by job bill type:

- Labor sales
- Billed hours per work order
- Total sales per work order
- Parts invoice margin
- Repair event cycle time (RECT) days
- Service efficiency (billed hours compared to actual hours)
- Percentage of goals reached (service and parts)

Open & Completed Work Order Review

Don't miss out on the opportunity to dive deeper into your completed work orders. Analyze sales and profit by labor, parts, sublet and extras to pinpoint areas where performance may be lagging and where there's room to upsell more effectively.

Apply the same approach to open work orders. The goal isn't to micromanage your team, but to spot potential issues early so they can be resolved quickly and minimize any impact on the customer.

Technician Review

Track your service team's performance on a whole and individual level:

- Job count
- Billed hours
- Available hours
- Actual hours
- Premise hours
- Efficiency — billed/actual
- Proficiency — billed/available
- Productivity — actual/available

It's handy to be able to pull these metrics up during reviews with your technicians, so you can have a transparent conversation about what's working and where you might need to see improvement.

Compare to Regional & National Averages

It's essential to benchmark your dealership's performance not only against your own historical data but also against your strategic goals. However, in today's competitive market, what can truly set you apart is understanding how your dealership stacks up against others in your region and across the nation.

To support this, a new report within Leadership Insights allows dealers to compare their performance to regional and national averages across several critical metrics, including:

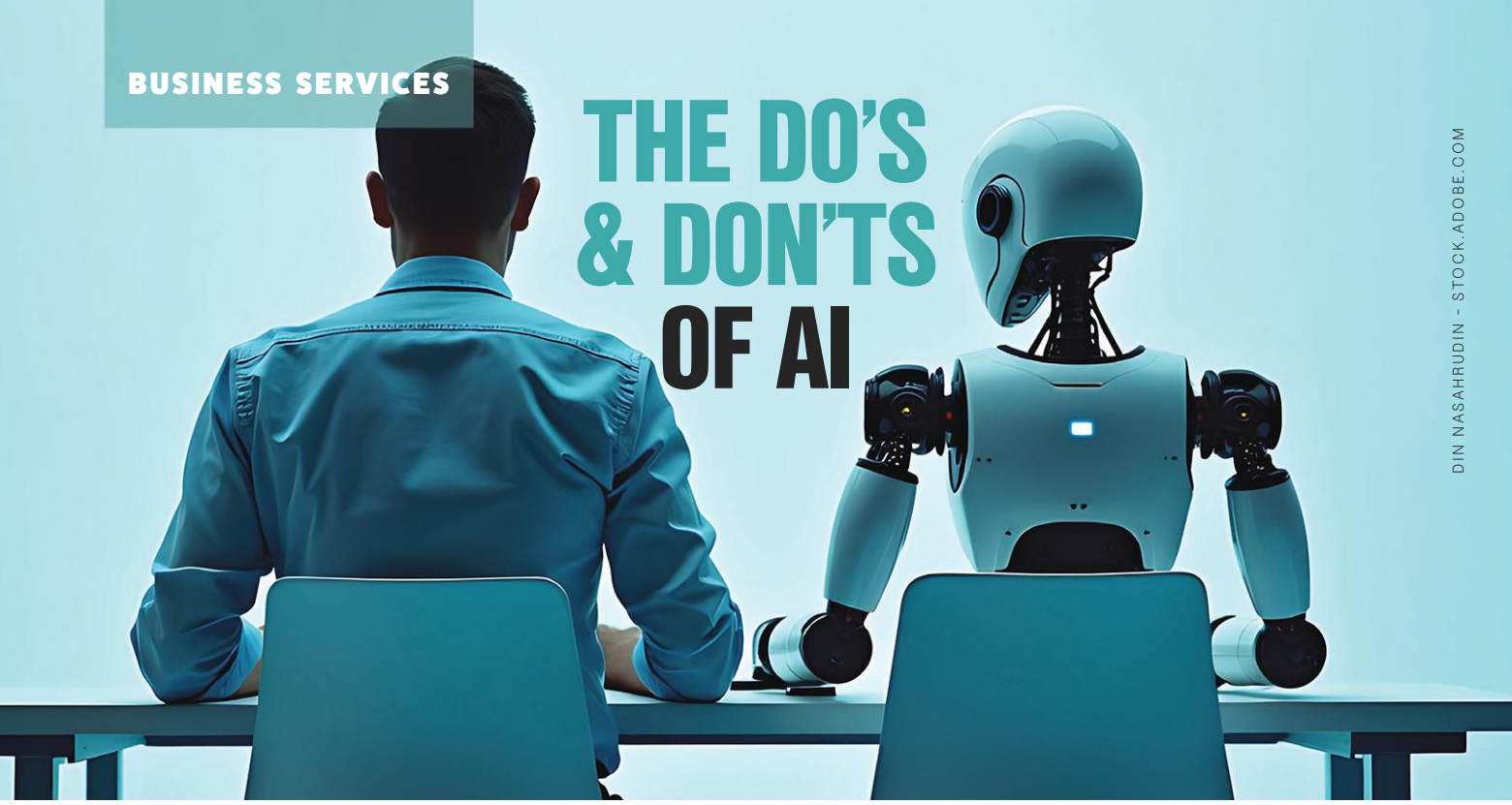
- Average deliveries per lot
- Gross sales margin
- Average net price of units sold
- Average financed deal structure
- F&I performance
- Finance product penetrations
- Finance penetration

For even deeper insights, consider breaking the data down by sales categories, such as new versus used units, consignment sales and motorized versus towable RVs.

Reviewing key performance reports should be part of every dealership manager's daily routine. Data is more than just numbers; it's your dealership's compass and most valuable asset. Your data is like gold — mine it often. RVP

Don Miller is an experienced senior data consultant at IDS — Integrated Dealer Systems — with over 30 years of industry expertise. He offers training, consulting and analytical services to dealerships, specializing in data analysis. Miller works extensively to educate dealerships on the benefits of adopting a data-driven decision model. He is the creator of the IDS RECT report, which won the RVDA Chairman's Service Award and is used worldwide by dealerships to improve customer experiences.

THE DO'S & DON'TS OF AI



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Simple guidelines to make AI work for you.

BY AUBREY AMBORN, INTERACT RV

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a ubiquitous and highly relevant topic in the technology, retail and RV industries. AI offers innovative digital solutions and enhanced marketing strategies, aiming to change dealership operations. However, not all AI meets expectations, and jumping in without a plan can be costly. AI is not magic — it is a powerful tool and its effectiveness depends on how it is used and the quality of the data it receives.

These days, our summer camper stays parked at its full-time site. It's our home base for family time, cookouts and quiet mornings with coffee. But as we look ahead, the hubs and I are thinking about adding something new — we're dreaming of a second camper. Something smaller and just right for the two of us to tow behind the truck with the motorcycles in tow, built for those long, winding country rides we love.

Of course, it still needs to have enough space to bring our two granddaughters along when the opportunity comes up. Think of it as a hybrid between a weekend adventure rig and a memory-making mobile.

Now, imagine an AI tool that could guide families like ours straight to the perfect unit, one with a toy hauler for the bikes, cozy sleeping space for the girls and a kitchen that can handle a post-ride feast. That's the kind of smart, intuitive experience AI can bring to your dealership. It's not just about features; it's about fitting real lives and real adventures.

With the right knowledge, AI can be harnessed to tackle real-world challenges without falling prey to the surrounding hype. To help you make AI a practical and impactful tool for your dealership, here are some key do's and don'ts to follow.

DO Work Smarter, Not Harder With AI

Consider your daily tasks that are major time wasters. AI excels at handling these. Need a quick answer to a customer's question? An AI-powered platform can answer inquiries like "Are there any lightweight toy haulers that can carry one or two motorcycles and still offer a full kitchen?" in seconds, allowing your team to focus on building relationships with buyers. Customers prefer accurate answers quickly.

AI also excels in inventory management by analyzing purchase trends, adjusting pricing strategies, predicting seasonal demand and prioritizing units on your lot. Prevent inventory from sitting idle for months by making smarter ordering decisions early. Harnessing AI can mean spending less time on routine tasks and more time growing your dealership's success.

Tip for Success: Integrate AI platforms that focus on your needs and challenges, whether that's improving lead management or inventory turnover. Start small and evaluate the results before broadening implementation.

DON'T Assume AI Replaces Human Touch

It's a common misconception that AI equals fewer hires. Don't fall for it. AI isn't a substitute for expertise or human connection; it complements and enhances your team. Think of it this way: AI can give your staff important info and data, allowing the team to focus on delivering exceptional in-store customer service and building strong relationships, and even reducing the sales cycle.

When sales reps can see what you've been searching for — small toy haulers, lightweight towables, dual-purpose rigs for grandkids — they can walk into the conversation already understanding your lifestyle shift.

Instead of asking, "What are you looking for?" they might say: "I saw you were looking at units that can handle motorcycles and accommodate a couple of grandkids. I've got a few that would fit both."

Your team's expertise and personal touch are still the backbone of trust and conversion.

How To Avoid This: Use AI to help your team work smarter. It can analyze customer behavior to determine which leads are worth calling and the optimal time to reach out. They send timely nudges, such as personalized follow-ups or reminders about units of interest, keeping leads engaged until your sales team finalizes the deal. When you pair AI's insights with your team's personal touch, the whole sales process feels smoother and more natural.

DO Verify, Verify, Verify

AI tools are only as good as their data. Trust but verify. If AI suggests towing capacities or specs and they're wrong, it's more than frustrating — it's unsafe. Accuracy matters. Always double-check AI output before sharing it with customers or making business decisions. Rely on your team's expertise to ensure AI enhances reliability, not undermines it.

How To Do This: Start with clean, accurate data. AI relies on the information provided, so ensure that details from manufacturers or your vehicle's pages are up to date. Establish a process for regular reviews and updates of this data, and cross-check AI insights before acting. With solid data, AI is a powerful tool rather than a liability.

DON'T Buy Into the Hype Without a Plan

Jumping into AI without a clear vision? That's a fast way to waste your budget. It's tempting to get sold on sleek demos or overhyped claims, but many flashy AI systems lack real-world applications. Worse, some dealerships spend significant budgets on tools they barely use or don't fully understand.

Before investing, identify the problem you want to solve. High turnover of unsold inventory? Missed customer follow-ups? Long time-to-lead response? Low employee productivity? Focus only on AI solutions specifically designed to address those challenges. This clarity can prevent costly missteps and align technology investments with your dealership's broader objectives.

Actionable Step: Take a moment to identify your dealership's challenges and name your goals, and then evaluate AI systems based on how specifically they align with your priorities. Don't just ask what the tool does; ask how it will directly benefit your dealership's day-to-day activities.

DO Prioritize Customer Experience

For today's buyers, especially those of us juggling packed workweeks and tight weekend windows, speed, convenience and relevance are everything. AI tools can dramatically improve that experience by cutting through the clutter and helping us find exactly what we're looking for before we ever step onto the lot.

Imagine a smart search tool that filters not just by size or weight, but also understands real lifestyle needs, such as a lightweight toy hauler that carries two motorcycles, has sleeping space for a couple of grandkids and includes a kitchen spacious enough for cooking after a long ride.

> "AI CAN PERSONALIZE FOLLOW-UPS AND OFFERS BASED ON BROWSING BEHAVIOR OR PREVIOUS INQUIRIES."

For buyers like me who want to do our homework online before ever setting foot inside, this kind of tailored experience turns research into momentum and makes us excited to actually visit.

Beyond search, AI can personalize follow-ups and offers based on browsing behavior or previous inquiries. If I were once looking at toy haulers but hesitated due to seasonal pricing, an intelligent system could follow up automatically when promotions or inventory shift in my favor. It's about meeting buyers where they are with timing, relevance and value, not generic sales tactics.

That's the kind of intelligent efficiency that builds trust and drives repeat business.

DON'T Skimp on Transparency

Here's a golden rule for AI in any customer-facing application: Don't trick people into thinking they're talking to someone if they're not. Customers don't mind dealing with AI, as long as you're upfront about it. Transparency is crucial to maintaining trust.

If you're using AI for chat support

or generating automated responses, make it clear that it's a bot. But also give customers the choice to connect with a human at any point. Offering that balance between AI efficiency and genuine human interaction preserves the personal touch that sets dealerships apart from faceless online retailers.

Trust Tip: Directly communicate with customers during the transition from automated to human service, establishing clear boundaries to indicate when AI support ends and a human takes over.

DO Build for Long-Term ROI

No one adopts AI for short-term thrills. Its power is in how it reshapes your dealership's growth potential over time. Aside from quick wins, such as responding to leads faster or making day-to-day tasks easier, AI excels at identifying deep-rooted patterns and streamlining processes on a larger scale.

Consider utilizing long-term data to forecast demand surges for specific unit models or to gain a deeper understanding of seasonal marketing trends. These strategic insights help your dealership make choices that bring measurable ROI over months or years, not just weeks.

DON'T Lose Sight of What Makes Your Dealership Unique

Above all, remember that people aren't buying an algorithm. Shoppers are buying the confidence that your dealership understands their dreams, needs and challenges and where they want to go next. AI works best when it frees your team to deliver those human experiences fully, not when it overshadows them.

Sure, AI can recommend the perfect RV, but it's your team that knows when to say, "This one's great if you're planning to take the grandkids to Yellowstone." Or "This one's great if you're planning to tow your Harley for those weekend rides." Those personal touches are what make your dealership stand out.

Keep personal relationships at the center, reinforcing them with tools that enhance your team's efficiency and accuracy, while maintaining the focus on the personal service that makes your dealership relatable and trustworthy.

Pro Tip: Let AI handle the repetitive tasks — such as follow-ups or scheduling appointments — so your team can focus on building genuine connections and understanding your customers' needs.

A Final Word

AI holds incredible potential for dealerships that use it with care and strategy. But staying smart with AI is all about keeping perspective.

It's not about replacing your team or throwing cash at the next trend. It's about using AI to refine the strengths you already have. Build your approach around the idea of AI plus people.

Done right, it's not just a tool for saving time or cutting costs; it's a powerful asset that can drive growth and profitability. It's a partner helping you deliver sharper insights, better customer experiences and consistent operational wins.

Know your needs, verify results and never lose the human connection that makes buying from your dealership a one-of-a-kind experience. AI can help you innovate — but the heart of the business will always be your people. RVP

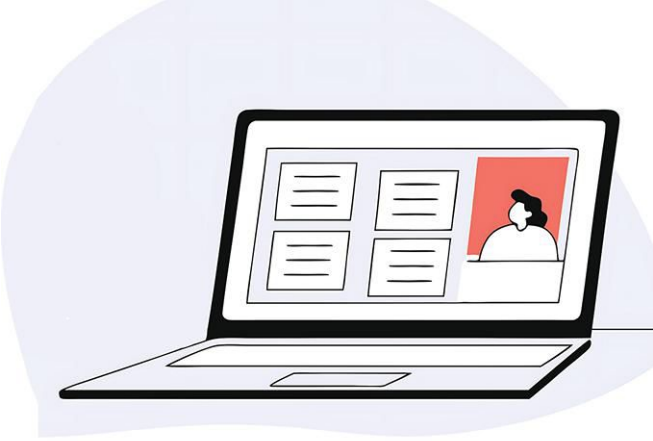


Aubrey Amborn, director of sales with InteractRV, has over 20 years of experience in dealer sales and marketing. Amborn plays a pivotal role in driving sales growth and fostering meaningful partnerships within the RV industry. Amborn is also a proud RV owner who spends her summers living and working out of her camper. This hands-on experience as both a customer and a passionate advocate for the RV lifestyle gives her a unique understanding of the needs and challenges faced by customers in the industry.

BY MEL SELWAY

DMS: Manage the Data That Represents Your Inventories

How to make the most of your dealership management system.





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The title and contents of this article are intended to correct some possible misconceptions about what a dealership management system (DMS) does. What it doesn't do is manage stuff. By stuff, I mean your inventories. What a DMS does is to provide a set of tools for storing and reporting on the data that represents your inventories. These inventories could be your dealership's:

- ✓ coaches and towables — new and pre-owned
- ✓ technicians' time
- ✓ parts, accessories, materials — goods
- ✓ supplies
- ✓ customers
- ✓ special service tools
- ✓ furniture, computers and other support items

You and your managers should learn the capabilities and the limitations of your DMS to effectively apply its features and functions to the management of your dealership's operations.

You should consider your DMS as a toolbox. And you should make certain that you and your associates understand how each of the tools contained in your DMS toolbox can be used to store and report on the data that relates to your several inventories. Abraham Maslow stated: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." In my interactions with dealership personnel, too often I observe them seeing every problem as a nail because of their limited knowledge of their DMS.

There are many tools in your DMS to assist in resolving the many different problems within your dealership. The following questions pertain to the parts and accessories department operations and a few related DMS features/functions. Answer these questions about your current DMS to determine if you are familiar with some of the features and functions provided by the DMS in your dealership.

- WHO has received training in the P&A module, and WHEN was this training provided?
- HOW frequently are the supplier data updates made available? WHO processes them for the parts and accessories department, and HOW soon after they are received are they processed?
- WHAT reports are available to identify exceptions to the inventory operations such as No Bin Location, Minus On Hand, Zero Cost and similar aberrations?
- HOW does the DMS calculate a suggested order for goods, and HOW easy is it to modify the suggested order?
- WHAT is the phone number to call if a problem occurs in the operation of the DMS, and HOW quickly is the problem resolved to your satisfaction?

Of course, there are many other aspects of your DMS with which you and your associates should be familiar. In some dealerships, the DMS is nothing more than a fancy cash register. Read on as I describe a situation involving the DMS and how it does or doesn't provide data related to a specific inventory performance factor, which, in this instance, is gross turn.

An Inventory Situation

How does your DMS report the data related to the gross turn of your parts and accessories inventories? Does your parts and accessories manager have to generate more than one report to collect the data? Or does your DMS provide one report of the gross turn of your inventory? And if the DMS provides a report of the gross turn, does it allow your parts and accessories manager to select specific categories/classes of your inventory for the gross turn report? What is the gross turn of your parts and accessories inventory? Overall, it should be in the six to seven range.

What if your overall gross turn is below that six to seven range? What could be causing it? Assuming your DMS has the capability to generate exception reports, you could run some of these reports to identify some possible culprits that might be hindering your gross turn. In the following paragraphs, some solutions are offered that you could apply in your dealership.

First, let's review the definition of gross turn, which is: *Cost of sales annualized divided by average inventory cost for that year.*

For example, if the cost of sales (COS) for 12 months is $2,182,949.09 and the average inventory cost for that 12-month period is $996,022.99, then the gross turn of that inventory = 2.19.

Whether your DMS provides a gross turn report or merely provides reports of the COS and the ending inventory value each month, the data is available for calculating the gross turn. The DMS cannot improve the gross turn from 2.19 to the minimum desired level of six. You and your associates must manage the inventory performance.

To improve your gross turn, you could:

1. Generate a report of slow-moving inventory (SMI) — to identify each part number that has not experienced any demand in more than nine months.
2. Review this SMI report to determine why the items have not moved — Are they the wrong items for your market, or have your parts associates not been offering them to your customers?
3. Identify methods to reduce or eliminate this SMI — create specials, return to vendors, post on electronic auction sites, scrap or donate.

These are actions that you and your associates must perform. The DMS cannot perform these functions. The DMS can only store and report the data.

Let's assume that you implement some of the suggested methods for reducing or eliminating some of your SMI. How will the results of your actions impact your gross turn? The specials and electronic auctions will increase your COS and reduce the inventory cost. Returning some goods to your suppliers will reduce the inventory cost. If you increase your COS and reduce your inventory cost, then the gross turn will increase.

These actions have taken care of some of the causes for the current problem. However, unless you and your parts and accessories manager change the purchasing policies at your dealership, the inventory could continue to grow.

OK, but we're still not at six turns.

How else could your DMS assist in improving the gross turn situation? By definition, those goods that do not qualify as SMI (no demand in more than nine months) are most likely items that should be stocked because customers are purchasing them.

But if you carry an excess of those goods, then your inventory cost is too high. Using your DMS exception reports, you could identify those items that have an on-hand quantity greater than the maximum stocking level for each of the items.

Assuming you want to achieve a gross turn of six for your inventory, then your days of supply should be 60. Let's assume that one of your stocked items has a selling pace of one per week. In a 60-day period, you would sell eight or nine of this item. However, when you generate the overstock exception report, this item is included because the on-hand quantity is 16. You have seven or eight more than needed to satisfy the normal demand for this item. By controlling your purchases to keep them in line with your demand, you can further reduce the inventory cost, thereby increasing your gross turn.

Again, in this situation, the DMS didn't manage the stuff. What it did was report a condition that you could manage by making changes to your policies and procedures.

Anything Else?

Using the same overstock report, perhaps your parts and accessories manager notices that a particular seal is listed as being overstocked. However, when reviewing the demand history of the related stove burner, she notices that the burner is not overstocked and that an equivalent quantity of seals is not being sold. This could indicate a possible service department problem because the seal is required to be replaced when the burner unit is serviced. The DMS cannot talk to the service manager to advise him of this possible liability; however, your parts and accessories manager can.

By selling more of the seals, the dealership reduces the liability of a comeback in the service department and increases the sales volume of the seal, which reduces the overstock and improves the gross turn.

Do More Searching

These examples illustrate the importance of understanding the capabilities and limitations of your DMS. You have spent money for the DMS, and most likely you are spending money each month to support the DMS software. Your inventories cost money to purchase and money to maintain. Improve the return on your inventory investment by actively managing your inventory using the tools in your DMS.

- ✓ Read the operations manual for your DMS.
- ✓ Read the emails that announce a new or modified feature in the DMS.
- ✓ Process the data-match updates to ensure that the costs, prices, part number changes and other important inventory data are accurate and current.
- ✓ Contact your DMS support personnel and ask questions related to the proper operation of the features.
- ✓ Contract with a dealership analyst who provides training and consulting services and who could assist you and your associates to understand the tools and techniques related to inventory management.

It's Your Turn

Having read this month's column, could you possibly throw away that hammer and use those DMS tools? RVP

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.



Free | October 23 | 1 p.m. Central



RVPRO webinar

Off-Grid Ready: Alternative Toilet Solutions Dealers Can Sell

RV buyers are moving away from black tanks and chemical toilets — and they're asking dealers for cleaner, simpler alternatives. In this session, CompoCloset will break down the latest alternative sanitation options, from dry flush to composting toilets, that are easy for OEMs to integrate and dealers to sell.

You'll learn how offering these systems not only meets customer demand for off-grid and eco-friendly solutions but also helps you differentiate your business in a crowded marketplace.

Key Takeaways:

- **Understand why more customers are looking for alternatives to black tanks and chemical toilets**
- **Learn which alternative sanitation systems are easiest to install and sell**
- **Discover how offering these upgrades can boost customer satisfaction and revenue**
- **Position your dealership or OEM lineup as forward-thinking and truly off-grid ready**

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SPEAKER:



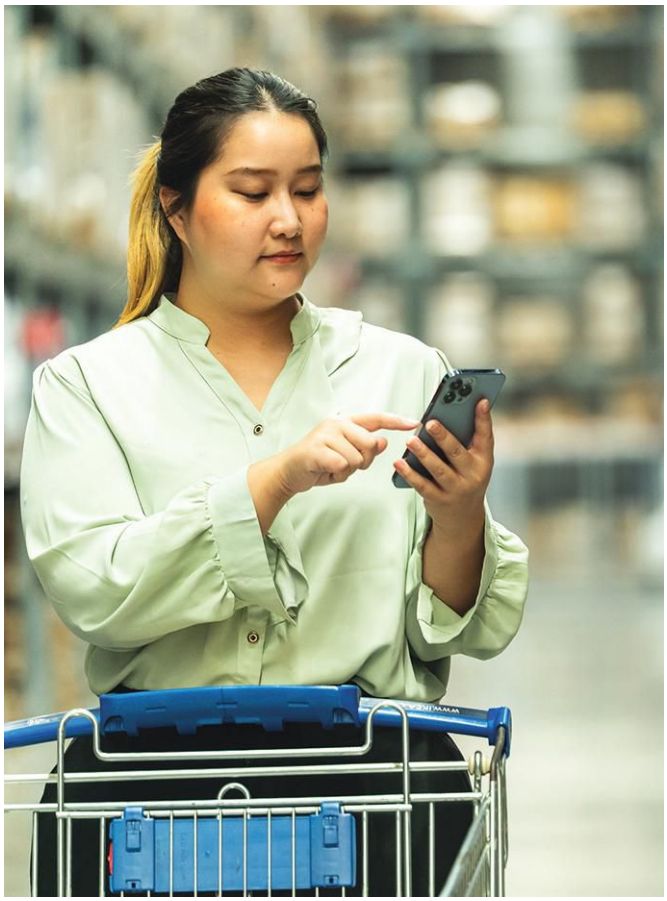
Richard Peter
Co-Founder and CEO
CompoCloset

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 BY LINDA CAHAN

Can You See Your Dealership Through Their Eyes?

Improve customer experiences by rediscovering your retail store from a customer's perspective.



LENY STUDIO - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

A positive customer experience depends on what they encounter as a they drive up, park, walk up to, into and through your store. I recently wrote about having pets in your store or dealership. They most often create good memories for your customers. When was the last time you experienced your dealership through the eyes of your customers?

If you have the budget, the first thing you can do is hire a customer experience expert. This person secretly shops your store and then writes up a report on the experience. Then, they spend a day or two in your store observing customer behavior. If you want to go to the next step, that same person will conduct exit surveys of your customers to find out their thoughts about their in-store experience. Reports are generated, and you learn how your customers move through your store, what they're experiencing, if they like and respect you and your team, if they like your store along with a myriad other important information.

If you don't have the budget for this type of expert, it may be time to do this yourself. A good friend of mine, Anne-Marie Luthro, is a customer experience pro. I asked her how you can rediscover your business from the customer's point of view. Our combined ideas are below in this comprehensive, easy-to-do list.

1. How do people come to your location? If they are driving, how is the parking experience? Easy? Challenging? Is there lighting at night? Are there hard-to-see steps? Is there a railing for people climbing any steps? Do you have clear signs indicating where to park (if needed) and where the front door is located? If service is through another door, is it easy to see from the parking lot?
2. Are the signs clear, clean and fresh-looking?
3. Is there anything blocking easy access to your front door? This can be planters, a garbage can, poorly placed outdoor signs, or a tree or bush limiting clear access.
4. Walk through the door as if it's your first time. What is the light level of the store? Do your eyes have to adjust to the dark? Does the temperature feel comfortable to you? How does the store smell? These are your animal perceptions — do I feel safe and comfortable entering this "cave"?
5. Walk through your store with a fresh eye. Pretend you're seeing it for the first time from a customer's point of view. Disregard your reasons why something hasn't been taken care of or done properly. Just look at what is right now.
6. What do you see first, second and third? What message is each visual giving you?
7. Does someone greet you? Of course, you're not a customer and you're known — but a greeting is important no matter what role you play in the organization.
8. Break up the store by areas and write a short sentence about each one. Do any areas of the store feel good? Uncomfortable? Crowded? Disorganized? Dirty? Clean? Very appealing? Very

boring or unappealing? Analyze each area and write down your impressions.

9. Are your interior signs informative? Easy to read? Are they clean and fresh or wilted and/or crinkled? Are there enough or too many?
10. As you work for or own the store, the shopping experience will be skewed toward making you happy. So, chances are good you won't be able to get a good read on that. So next, ask someone (or several people) you know who aren't known by the people who work in the store to do exactly what you've just done, including buying something. You can always either reimburse them, or they can return it and report on that experience as well. This silent shopper can be a friend, a relative — anyone who is willing to do so for a nice dinner or a friendly discount off the products you sell. (Not necessarily an RV!) Or you can hire a professional.

Once you have processed the information about the customer journey and experience, realize that what you've gleaned is just a tiny bit of what you really need to know. That's where your sales staff comes in. Develop a form they can have handy wherever they are standing or sitting. Their job is to track each customer as they come into the store and note:

- Do they stand in the doorway to look around before heading in a direction?
- Which way do they go? Which aisle do they go down first?

Following them around the store would be creepy and annoying, so you can only track them as far as you can see them from where you're standing.

The form can be an overhead floorplan, and your salesperson can just draw a line showing how each customer moved through the store. Adding the date and time per customer gives you extra information that can help you figure out your busier times of the day and week.

After every salesperson does this for a week, you'll have a pretty good idea of how people are moving through your store and which aisles are your "power" aisles. Seasonal items go in the power aisles, and they need to sell out before the season is over.

Now that you have a good idea of your customer's shopping journey and a sense of their experience, it's time to add another experiential part to make the entire shopping journey more memorable.

People love to see something new! It makes them feel like they're on top of things and have early access. It can make people feel special — which definitely adds favorably to their experience.

Trader Joe's has a "See What's New" area in each of their stores. Almost everyone who shops there checks it out. There's a strong sign above the shelving endcap to identify the area. It's a different design in each store as they hire local artists to personalize the signs to relate to the local areas. Consider adding a "What's New" section to your store and fill it with whatever accessories and chemicals that are new without worrying whether the merchandise works together. You should also house the new merchandise where it belongs throughout your store. Add a "NEW" arrow or sign to these new products sprinkled throughout your parts and accessories shelves.

With the current emphasis on "Made in America" merchandise, have small but clear signs made to add to every product that is genuinely made in the U.S. There are many styles to choose from, but just pick one and stick with it.

Once again, create a separate area for the Made in America products, plus house each piece in their appropriate category. There will be double exposure for these products and a strong memory in the minds of your customers. They will remember the "New" and "Made in America" signs, as these signs will make the merchandise feel fresh and more appealing.

As Nike says, "Just Do It." As soon as you know what's going on in your RV dealership, the sooner you can take action to rectify or enhance your customer's experience. RVP

Linda Cahan is the president of Portland, Oregon-based Cahan & Co., a consulting firm that works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit lindacahan.com.







Eberspächer

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BY THOMAS MORIN

How To Nail the Meet & Greet With Customers

Making a great first impression will go a long way in winning over your customers.



MUSE STUDIO - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

There are many things RV salespeople need to master to increase their chances of closing deals. The salesperson of today doesn't just need to know their product; they need to master it. But not just their product — they need to master their competitors' products as well to be able to tell the customer why theirs is better. Many RV dealerships have a selling system they are trained on, and most of the time, it takes a new salesperson as many as a few years to become proficient at delivering it.

Over the last few years, falling commissions have led many experienced, trained salespeople to choose to leave the RV business to go on to other opportunities. This puts pressure on dealerships to replace and train them, while at the same time economic conditions have caused them to cut back on money that is allocated for training.

In spite of the economic issues evident today, some dealerships still remain committed to training their salespeople at a high level. Many dealerships are using the increased downtime to sharpen sales staff skills and increase the odds of selling.

The economic climate, combined with the seemingly growing political vitriol over the last few years, has affected customers' emotions, attitudes and, frankly, their nervous system. As a result, the customer of today has constructed an electric fence around their wallet and is paying closer attention to how they spend their money, especially for discretionary purchases like an RV. The cash buyer is still a valid possibility for a sale, but the finance buyer has reacted negatively to high interest rates. Many are also presenting lower down payments than in previous years, making monthly payment projections much higher than in the past.

Some dealerships have responded by increasing salesperson training, as well as a higher level of scrutiny and accountability on every customer interaction, to ensure that no opportunity is lost for a possible sale. However, one thing that seems to be completely overlooked is teaching salespeople how to make a great first impression.

The customer of today is more nervous, and, in some cases, suspicious of salespeople, which puts more pressure on the first 10-15 minutes of an interaction. Many salespeople overlook the fact that the average customer makes significant perceptions and decisions about them in the first 7-10 seconds of meeting, before they have even spoken one word. Since most dealerships have no training focus on this, that leaves it up to the salespeople to take it seriously and better prepare for it.

For years, I have observed customers' body language and reactions in the very early stages when their salesperson is first approaching them, and it's very revealing. Their eyes are locked onto the approaching salesperson and sizing them up as soon as they're in sight. They're taking a mental and emotional snapshot of the salesperson and evaluating if the salesperson is:

- ✓ Professional looking?
- ✓ Knowledgeable or competent?
- ✓ An introvert or an extrovert?
- ✓ Honest, trustworthy?
- ✓ Strong or weak-minded?
- ✓ Friendly or unfriendly?

After a sale, to satisfy my curiosity, I have casually asked some customers what their first impression of their salesperson was.

Ninety percent of the time, the salesperson's body language and nonverbal cues reveal more than most of us ever realize. Yet most salespeople take these first few minutes for granted. Those who pay attention will get a head start.

As a security measure, some businesses have cameras near the front entrance that record all activity. If they do, I recommend that salespeople ask to view the footage to observe themselves approaching a customer and monitor the nonverbal cues of both parties. I believe they will be shocked at how they sometimes approach a customer and how their customer reacts to them. Many find that they approach customers in a manner that is sloppy and lazy. Too many are unprofessional in the way they dress and present themselves. Few salespeople see themselves the way customers see them, and as a result, take no action to fix their approach.

Little things do matter. Be aware that your customer will judge you at first sight, whether you like it or not. Here's a few steps to nail the greeting — some may appear obvious, but many salespeople aren't doing them:

- **Shut your cell phone off** — Unless it's a necessary part of the business, shut your phone off. I have seen a salesperson's cell phone go off (and they answered it!) as they were walking to a customer. Not good.
- **Look your customer in the eye** — You would be shocked at how many salespeople don't look their customer in the eye.
- **Manage personal space** — I have seen so many salespeople get just one step too close, and the customer instinctively reacts by taking one step back. That can be off-putting.
- **Don't jump right into your selling system** — At this point, this interaction is personal, and not yet business. Forget that you're wearing a name tag and just be a person until they feel comfortable.
- **Read body language cues** — In those first few minutes, you will learn more from their body language that what comes out of their mouth. This takes practice, but once you train yourself to do this, your skill at reading body language will quickly improve.
- **Manage your body language** — Salespeople can become sloppy in their posture, especially near the end of a long day. Just check yourself and be more aware.

Slow Down

Salespeople want to prove to our customers that we're fair, competent and knowledgeable. We all want to make a good first impression and often that nervous energy tends to speed us up in those first few minutes. That speeds your customer up, which adds to the anxiety they walked in with.

The small adjustments that you can make will go a long way in changing customers' first impression and open the door to building the trust they need to buy. RVP

Thomas Morin is a sales coach and author in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, who teaches salespeople in all industries how to build the rapport and trust that customers must feel to be comfortable buying. Listen to Morin's podcast "No Trust, No Sale" on Spotify, iTunes and Amazon. Contact Morin at bookauthorcoach@gmail.com.





BY RUSSELL TRAHAN

4 Tips To Score Your Public Relations Goals

How using fantasy football principles can boost your marketing and grow your business.



STOCKYME - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Recent statistics show that more than 29 million people play in some form of a fantasy football league. ESPN reports more than 13,000 monthly users on its fantasy football app, and participation in fantasy football grows at an approximate rate of 32% a year. It is estimated that fantasy football added $11 billion to the United States economy last year.

Wouldn't you love for your business to do the same? Well, it can, or come close anyway, with the right kind of publicity. And you won't need a staff or a budget that size.

All you'll need is to follow four easy steps based on fantasy football principles that apply to placing articles in magazines both in print and online. Now, it doesn't matter if you're a service provider, a brick-and-mortar shop, a mom-and-pop shop, a regional chain or a multinational powerhouse; all that matters is that you have a target market, a message to impart to them and a marketing funnel to deliver the results. Just like anyone with a smartphone and a little preseason research is ready for their first weekly draft, you'll be ready to armchair quarterback in the big leagues.

1. The Draft: Your Target Market

In fantasy football, research before the draft is key. You need to know the background of the available players so you can prerank them according to your personal preference. Trust your cheat sheets (player rankings). You worked hard to prepare them, and you don't want to let the other coaches sway you into making a mistake.

Many of these principles hold true for your target market. You need to research who they are and where they are. As it's said, "Whose pain can you solve, and who's going to pay you to solve their pain?" Now once you determine your target market, this doesn't mean you ignore other markets. It just means help those you can the quickest and then move on to those markets that might take a little longer to convert. As to where they are, this means learning what media they read, what social media platforms they follow and what podcasts they listen to. Rather than trying to scatter your message anywhere and everywhere, why not be smart and position yourself in front of your target market where they already are?

2. The Playbook: Your Content

Your playbook is how you manage your lineup. It helps you make better decisions and gives you the tools to collect and share data. Many playbooks even let you switch to different sports, but we'll stick to fantasy football for now. Most playbooks can be customized to give you the information you need to see based on the team you've drafted and the league you're in.

When writing an article for the communication source your target market reads, you can keep the same principles in mind as the playbook. Focus on the information they want/need to hear, not just the message you want to give them. Make the article informational, educational and entertaining, not self-promotional or advertorial. You can put all the promotion in an "about the author" paragraph at the end. You want the reader to identify themselves in the article, so write it in the "you" tense: "you might have this problem, here's how you can solve it ..." If they like the advice, they'll contact you

from the bio paragraph at the end! Oh, and editors love bullet points. Give them an article about "5 Myths" or "6 Steps" or "7 Ways" or "4 Easy Steps."

3. The Statistics: Pitching, Tracking & Follow-Up

Critical data provided by research and analysis can be the difference when it comes to your success or failure in fantasy football. There are a number of apps and websites that will compile and analyze your data for you, but you'll still have to do the work to input it correctly for your team to make sure you're getting educated and receiving informed rankings in your leagues.

Once you have your article polished and your bio paragraph honed (be sure you have a recent headshot to send along with the article), it's time to start pitching out your article to the editors of the publications your target market regularly reads. Don't just blast it out anywhere and everywhere; tease the benefit of your article to the editors' readership, and only when they say their readership would be interested, then send them the full text. This gives you permission to very politely go back to them in a few weeks and ask them if they've posted your article, or if they'll be printing it an upcoming issue. If the answer is "yes" to either question, ask them to send you a link, a PDF and/or a print copy.

4. The Postseason: Marketing From the Placements

If you've done your research, played your stats and your team has won, you're ready for the postseason and the playoffs! In fantasy football, the playoffs can have unlimited teams in their brackets and teams with no salary caps. And don't forget about the wild card teams! Check with the commissioner of your league on how they conduct the playoffs before your season with them begins.

The same can be said about marketing from your article's placements — you want to be ready for them before you even start writing and/or pitching them. You need to have your organization's website up to date and your social media platforms current. This is where you're going to put the majority of your placements as they will be links to the online versions. You'll want to create an "in the media" or an "as seen in" page on your website to put the links when they come in. Also, LinkedIn has an Articles section on your profile. When you do post your article placements on LinkedIn and/or Facebook, be sure to tweet them out — just don't copy the whole post again; only link to it.

Following these steps will take your business growth straight through the uprights and it won't be a fantasy. RVP

Russell Trahan is the owner and president of PR/PR Public Relations and author of "Sell Yourself Without Saying A Word." PR/PR Public Relations is a boutique agency with a 25-year track record of getting 100% of its clients' placements in front of their target market. For a complimentary consultation, visit prpr.net/contact-us.







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easycare.com



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American Guardian Warranty Services Inc., Warrenville, Illinois, presents its AGWS RV Motorhome and Towable Vehicle Service Contracts. The AGWS RV Motorhome vehicle service contract contains exclusionary coverage for motorhome vehicles, including diesel RVs, Sprinter chassis and Monaco Coach. The AGWS RV Towable vehicle service contract contains exclusionary coverage for nonmotorized vehicles, including travel trailers, fifth wheels, pop-ups and slide-in campers.

agws.com

RV EXTENDED WARRANTY COVERAGE

America's RV Warranty, Kennesaw, Georgia, offers its unbeatable RV Extended Warranty Coverage. Founded by warranty-coverage experts with over 50 years' experience, America's RV Warranty brings peace of mind, trusted protection and savings for any type of RV, from diesel engine Class As to travel trailers. America's RV Warranty's administrative team works hard to provide reliable coverage and great service.

americasrvwarranty.com



WEB-BASED PLATFORM

AppOne, Dayton, Ohio, offers its AppOne platform. When customers buy from your dealership, they're gearing up for adventure. With AppOne, you can help fund their journey while protecting profitability, compliance and efficiency. The platform streamlines lending by automating data entry, reducing errors and eliminating the need to juggle multiple systems, so you can focus on closing deals and getting your customers on the road faster.

info.appone.net/rvfi

BUSINESS & FINANCE CONSULTING

Elevate Dealer Services, Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, and Phoenix, Arizona, offers its F&I Business and Finance Consulting. Elevate Dealer Services partners with independent and family-run RV dealerships to boost profitability, streamline F&I operations and build high-performing teams. The company offers hands-on training, customized menu and lender setup, compliance oversight and a curated product lineup including VSC, GAP and reinsurance options. The boutique-style approach delivers real-time support, proven processes and measurable results.

elevatedealers.com



SMART RV CONTROL PANEL

Garmin, Olathe, Kansas, presents SERV+, a control panel for travelers who want a smart RV experience with a touch-screen display. Serving as the command center for the RV, drivers and passengers can easily control onboard entertainment, monitor security camera feeds, change the temperature settings and adjust other systems throughout the cabin — all from a single screen. For a hands-free option, voice commands can control systems from anywhere in the RV.

garmin.com



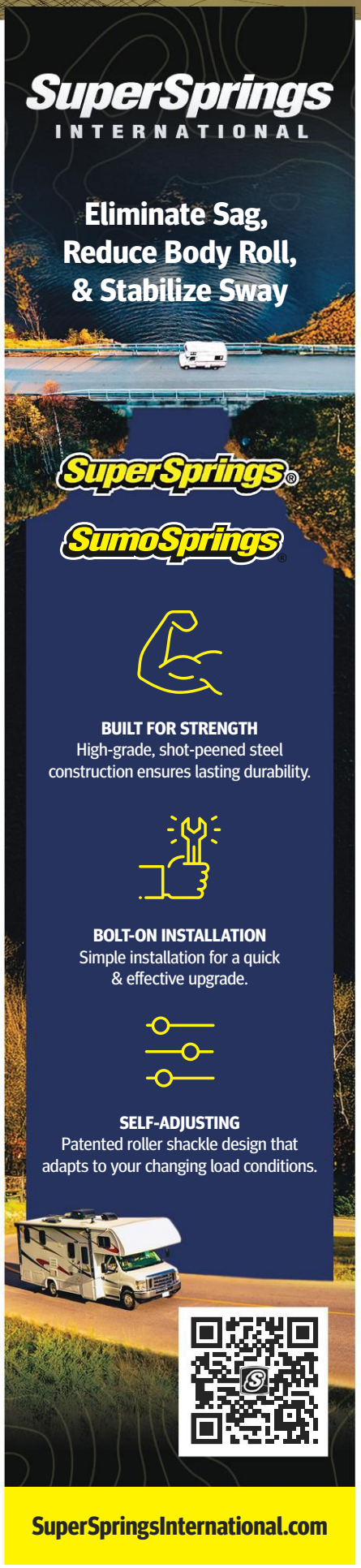
RV SERVICE TOOLS

Lightspeed DMS, South Jordan, Utah, offers its RV Service Performance Suite. Run a faster, more profitable RV service department with Lightspeed's purpose-built tools. From tech video sharing for instant repair approvals to an online service scheduler, VIN decoding to eliminate errors and mobile access to manage work anywhere — you'll streamline operations and boost customer trust. Designed for the unique demands of RV dealerships, the suite helps you maximize efficiency, increase transparency and keep customers coming back.

lightspeeddms.com









DEALERSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Motility Software Solutions, Dayton, Ohio, offers its MotilityAnywhere, a scalable, web-based DMS that unites your entire dealership, from sales to finance to service and beyond, so you never miss an opportunity. You'll gain real-time visibility, precise data control and a streamlined customer experience that keeps buyers coming back. Whether you run one location or many, this comprehensive platform drives productivity, performance and profit potential across your RV business.

motilitysoftware.com



SMART BATTERY

LiTime, ShenZhen, China, offers its 12V 100Ah Smart ComFlex Battery with Bluetooth & Victron Communication. LiTime's latest T5.0 tech seamlessly integrates with Victron systems in RVs and is customizable for Xantrex, AIMS, Go Power and more. It's plug-and-play with Victron systems and can manage 16 batteries as easily as one. It features Bluetooth, smart lifespan optimization and LiTime's One-Stop Power System. It's IP65 waterproof and includes low-temp cut-off, salt-spray resistance, overload protection with auto-recovery and more.

litime.com

RV RENTAL INSURANCE

MBA Insurance, Phoenix, Arizona, presents its Recreational Vehicle Rental Insurance. MBA Insurance offers innovative insurance products and automated technology solutions in the recreational vehicle rental insurance space. Partnered with an A+ AM A best-rated insurance carrier of over 25 years, MBA Insurance provides exceptional service with its knowledgeable, customer-focused team. Regardless of fleet size, managed or owned, MBA's commercial rental insurance products and services are designed with your business in mind.

mbainsurance.net

INVOICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Nimbello, Granger, Indiana, presents its Nimbello AP Automation. Nimbello AP Automation streamlines complex invoice management for RV OEMs and suppliers. Using AI in its software, Nimbello offers an intelligent three-way matching to automatically pair invoices with purchase orders and receipts, eliminating manual data entry and errors. The result is a faster, touchless accounts payable process that reduces costs, improves cash flow and strengthens crucial vendor relationships.

nimbello.com

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p1fs.com

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Performance Brokerage Services Inc., Irvine, California, presents its Dealership Buy-Sell Adviser. Performance Brokerage Services offers a complimentary and confidential consultation to review your exit strategy. The company will develop a custom-tailored approach intended to increase the likelihood of accomplishing your goals, maximize the value of the business and minimize the risk throughout the selling process. A free estimate of value on your dealership(s) is provided so you can determine if now is the right time to sell.

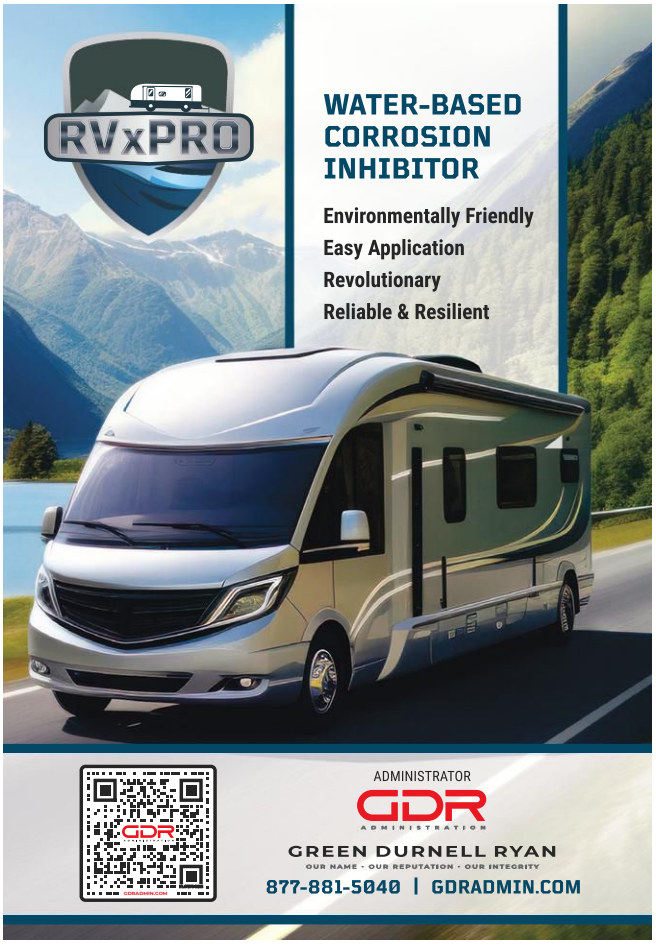
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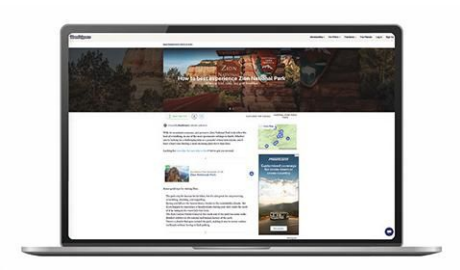
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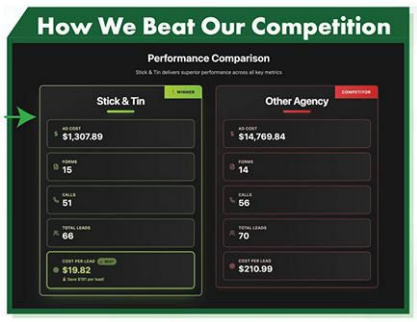
REDARC Electronics, South Australia, Australia, offers its BCDC Alpha Range charger, which keeps you connected and your business running. By charging your secondary batteries from your vehicle's alternator and solar power, it ensures you have the energy to run Starlink, keep your laptop powered and operate essential business service devices. Its ability to recover a flat start battery, combined with Bluetooth monitoring and Green Power Priority technology, means you can stay productive and online — even in remote locations.

redarcelectronics.com









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roadtrippers.com

MARKETING AGENCY

Stick & Tin Marketing Systems, Missoula, Montana, presents its Stick & Tin Marketing Systems. Stick & Tin is a full-service digital marketing agency built exclusively for the RV industry. The company drives results through Google SEO/SEM, RV listing ads, dynamic digital display, streaming audio and video, and social media campaigns. Its services also include first-party lead generation, automated follow-up and a dealership-ready CRM tailored for RV sales. Everything is designed to help dealers attract more traffic, sell leads and retain more buyers.

stickandtin.com

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United States Warranty Corp., Cleveland, Ohio, presents its Tow & Motorized Service Contracts. United States Warranty Corp. offers an expansive range of coverage at affordable rates on new and used RVs, and marine watercraft, with no minimum quotas. USWC goes back 20 model years. The Eagle Infinity-Timeless Protection Plan for new units features no expiration date and no expiration mileage. USWC offers a menu-selling platform and ancillary products as well as 24/7 claims.

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winegard.com



If you're interested in submitting a product for the Special Product Focus section, submit to your sales rep:

Rebecca Tittel: **rtittel@cahabamedia.com**

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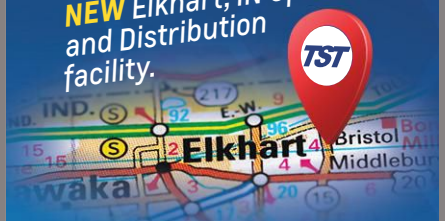
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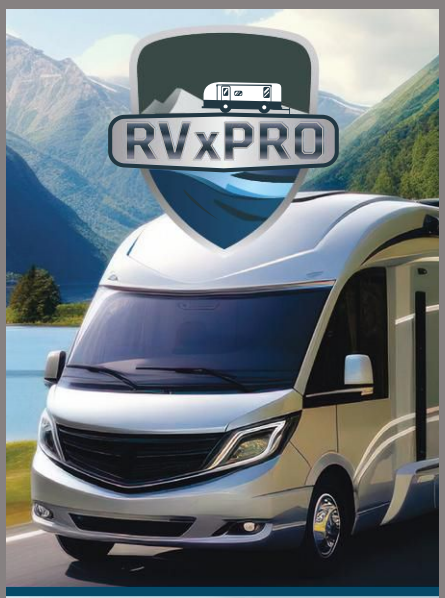
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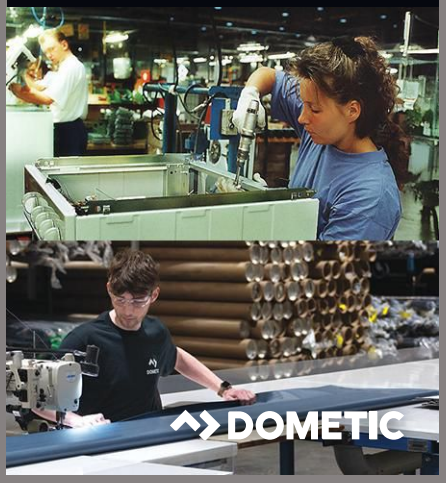
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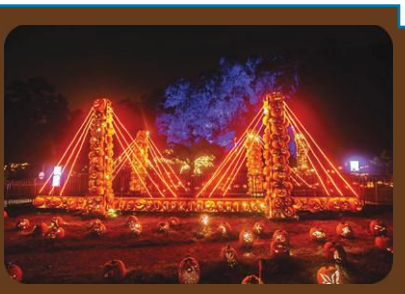
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HAUNTED HIGHWAYS

Autumn leaves and Halloween are just around the corner — what better way to celebrate the changing seasons then with a spooky RV road trip? Add these ghost towns to your itinerary:

- **Salem, Massachusetts,** is known for the infamous witch trials of 1692. RVers can park at **Winter Island Park** for easy access to candlelit ghost tours and the Salem Witch Museum.
- **Sleepy Hollow, New York,** inspired Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." RVers can park at **Croton Point Park Campground** and see the Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze — a display of over 7,000 hand-carved pumpkins.
- **New Orleans** is filled with rich history and haunted tours. **The French Quarter RV Resort** offers convenient access to spooky events, including St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 — where voodoo queen Marie Laveau is said to rest.



- **Savannah, Georgia,** is known as one of the most haunted American cities. Stay at **Skidaway Island State Park** for a short drive to the historic district and the annual Halloween on the River Festival.
- **Estes Park, Colorado,** is home to the Stanley Hotel — inspiration for Stephen King's "The Shining" and a spirit-lover's paradise. Attend the hotel's Masquerade Ball and stay at **Estes Park Campground** at Mary's Lake as a home base.



Source: Outdoorsy.com

JULY 2025 SHIPMENTS

22,633 (units) total RV shipments

6.1% decrease compared to July 2024 (24,116 units)

To date, shipments are up 5.2% with 213,338 units

"This summer, 44 million Americans are prioritizing time outdoors with family and friends as they made RVing their vacation of choice," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "And our latest research shows RVing will remain popular as we head into fall with affordability topping the list of reasons people plan to go on an RV adventure."

RVIA'S FALL TRAVEL INTENTION SURVEY

found that **affordability** is a top reason respondents are choosing to RV this season. In addition:

- 32% of leisure travelers will use **AI tools for trip planning,** but trip planning websites, social media and app-based services will continue to play an integral role.
- 46% of RVers are planning road trips as their main destination this fall, with national and state parks, coastal spots, festivals, fairs and concerts and theme parks not far behind. **The Northeast** also made its mark as a top destination for RVers to visit.
- 47% of RVers cite **economic uncertainty** as a reason to travel by RV this fall, up from 33% this summer.
- **Millennials and Gen Z** show the greatest year-over-year increase in RV purchase interest (up 16% year over year).
- Most RVers plan to stay within **a 4–7-hour** drive from home.
- 72% of RVers plan to **bring their pets along** on fall RV trips.
- More RVers than this time last year are planning to **work remotely** while RVing this fall.

Last month, on Sept. 5, a House Natural Resources Subcommittee hearing was scheduled to address the

Legacy Restoration Fund

and the next steps for the program expiring at September's end. During Advocacy Day earlier this year, RV leaders asked Congress members to reauthorize the five-year funding source, which was established in 2020 by the Great American Outdoors Act.

Taking place in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, the hearing planned to spotlight deferred maintenance in national parks — the Legacy Restoration Fund **invests more than $6.5 billion** into the initiative.

"Americans may seem deeply divided — at least that's the impression we get from the headlines. But amid all that separates us, one powerful force continues to unite us: a shared pride in nature," said an op-ed from West Virginia's "The State Journal."

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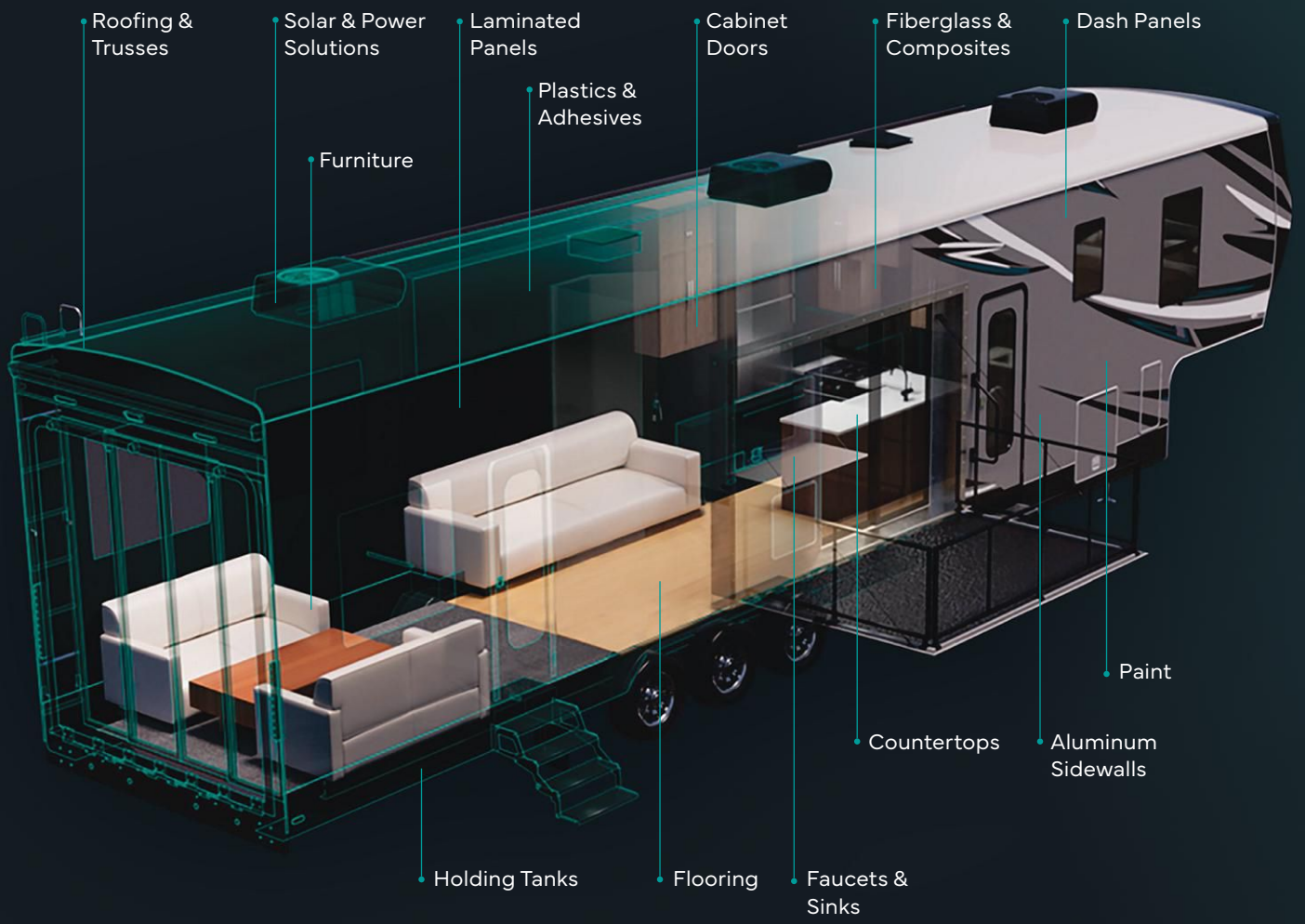
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