



Karen **Uriarte**

Women Rock

As a woman working in the car business, I'd like to paraphrase Charles Dickens from his "A Tale of Two Cities" that "these are the best of times; these are the worst of times."

It is the best of times because women in America are empowered like they have never been before. They control most of the purchasing power in this country, are an economic force in the workplace and, for the first time in history, we have a viable candidate for President of the United States. It is the worst of times, as most dealers still do not understand the value of female sales personnel in their stores and many men selling cars lack the sales skills, attitude and focus to build a relationship of mutual trust with their women customers.

If you doubt my words or the power that women yield, then try this simple test: Ask a married male associate if they would ever buy a sofa, dining or bedroom set of furniture without the involvement and/or approval of their wives. I can assure you the majority will tell you there would be dire consequences if they ever made that purchase without their spouse's input. Then ask those same men if they have ever empowered their wives to make those purchases without their input? Hmmm. Starting to see a pattern.

Now let's turn to cars, vans and trucks. The exact numbers vary, but most sources indicate that women directly or indirectly influence over 75 percent of vehicle purchases. In many cases, they have total authority to buy the vehicle on their own. In the rest of the transactions they might not have full authority to say "yes," but they do have the authority to say "no." When you are working with couples in the showroom, you will rarely go wrong in assuming the woman will be the final decision maker. This doesn't mean ignore the husband or boyfriend, but pay close attention to tone, body language and questions asked by the female prospects. Be sure to make eye contact with the woman while you are talking with the couple.

The good news is there are resources to help dealers and sales people focus on serving their female clients. AskPatty.com is a Web site that works with dealerships to help train and certify them for working with women. The services are extensive and there is a significant expenditure up front, but if you are serious about the market you should

check out their program. Their Web site also provides shopping tips for women and other services, too.

CarTango.com is a site that touts its female-friendly program. At this point the design, colors and icons are cute and there is the dancing/tango metaphors, but as time goes on I am sure they will build more functionality to appeal to women buyers and dealer participants.

At the very least you should make a point to have a section of your Web site that has a "Ladies Only" or "Women Shoppers" button. Take a look at these two Web sites:

- www.duvalhonda.com
- www.nelsonmazdaok.com

Both of those sites have links off of the home page and back page content solely focused for the female shopper / buyer. I suggest that you let people know the following:

- Your dealership is cognizant of the fact that women are important
- You respect and value their business
- You are dedicated to doing business the way they want
- That you have women employees... sales, service, management etc...

Utilize technology to assist you. Last month's Internet Sales 20 Group column by Sean V. Bradley highlighted a great product called Flip Video Camera. With this camera you can easily take a lot of video, and, with its integrated YouTube software, have it live on online in minutes. Try to imagine how much more powerful your Web site would be if you had video testimonials of happy female shoppers / buyers. Or, take the examples I gave in this article of Duval Honda or Nelson Mazda: They are doing a great job, but try to imagine on their "Ladies Only" back pages if there was video biographies — that would make an already-powerful back page even more powerful. Once you have created these videos and they are on YouTube, you can cut the URL of that video and paste it into your e-mail templates. You can now utilize video e-mail capabilities, custom video responses, video auto-responders, video bios, video testimonials, video "why us," etc....

Dealerships and sales personnel should also explore social networking sites that women frequent. Most women look to their friends, co-workers and family for advice about buying cars, so word of mouth is a very important. After you have successfully sold

a vehicle to a female customer, be sure to ask for the names, e-mails, and phone numbers of her friends. Then give her a week or two to contact her friends to let them know about her purchase and give them a heads up that you will be contacting them to introduce yourself and offer your services when they are ready to buy. Remember to be polite, helpful and consultative. Do not go for the close on these calls or e-mails.

We all know about MySpace.com and Facebook.com as the "big dogs" of social networking, but I view these sites as a great place for teens and college kids to surf. They offer minimal business opportunities and are not designed for promoting yourself or prospecting for customers.

I have been watching the development of a new site called CarFolks.com, which is being built as a community whose primary purpose is to help sales personnel and dealerships build relationships with consumers (prospects). This is a fantastic concept. Many dealers I speak with are frustrated that online sales has come to mean just posting your inventory at a low price on the Web. When you start the conversation with "price, price, price," it makes it difficult to talk about other things. CarFolks.com will be offering sales people a free page on the site to promote themselves. They can talk about their experience in the industry, their background, ties to the community, their families, or whatever they believe might be important to a prospect. Then the sales people invite their customers to come to the site and rate them. Each dealership and/or sales person can be rated by the public for the world to see. Consumers coming to the site after launch can search for a salesperson and a dealership, not for inventory.

I invite your dealership to develop an audit of your processes as it relates to selling to women. See what your real attitude is in the dealership towards this powerful market segment.

If you have any questions or you would like some help in trying to create a female-friendly environment at your dealership, please feel free to call me.

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