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It's a fact. Lots of dealerships still use manual systems with little or no software to manage the sales process; and many of them are very successful. There seems to be a perception that changing from a manual system to lead management software will change the process. That doesn't have to be the case.

Let me use the analogy of a home builder. Hammers, saws and AC powered drills have been replaced with air-guns and cordless tools because they save time. While the tools are different, the home building process is the same. Good lead management software shouldn't change the steps in managing leads and sales staff, just the tools that are used!

I recently hired a sales person from a top selling franchise auto dealership that used a paper-based sales methodology used by dealerships all over North America. They used log books combined with a lot of hands-on sales management. Read on to get a sense of how much time and manpower it required to make this system work.

Every new lead or "Up" as they are known in the auto business, was logged by the sales person in their sales book. They wrote down customer contact information, the units viewed, product interest, trade info, hot buttons and the next follow up task.

If it was a first time meeting, they would create an index card with the prospect's information and give it to the receptionist. The receptionist would enter the same information into a database and check to make sure the prospect wasn't already working with another sales person.

Each morning the sales person would review his or her log book to see what tasks they needed to do that day and who they needed to contact. Every time they talked to the prospect, they would log this info into the sales book. At the end of the month, they went through all of their notes, to decide which opportunities should be transferred over to next month's log.

The sales manager would spend 15 to 20 minutes a day with each sales person (there were 8 sales people at this dealership) going through their opportunities. The sales manager would write down any new ups in his own log book and then review every opportunity with the sales person – making notes of completed follow-ups, suggested next follow-ups, or whether the opportunity was dead or sold.

Also on a daily basis the entire sales team would get together for the better part of an hour to discuss new products, dealership issues, sales results, training and the trade board. The trade board was a 4x6 foot whiteboard in the staff room where all incoming trades were listed. This allowed the sales staff to discuss any cross-selling opportunities based on incoming trades.

When the terms of the sale was accepted by the customer, the sales person would write down the unit, the name of the customer, the date, the deposit and estimated date of delivery on a sales clipboard in the sales manager's office. That would be the sales manager's cue to send the customer and deal information to the finance office.

As soon as the finance manager finished the paperwork and delivered the unit, sales staff would hand write three "thank you" cards. They were labeled; next day, next week and next month. The "Next Day" card was to thank the customer for the sale; the "Next Week" card to make sure there were no problems related to the purchase; and the "Next Month" card was to ask for a referral. It was up to the salesperson to make sure these cards were dropped off in the mailbox at the right time.

The receptionist at the dealership also kept track of new sales. Using her database the receptionist would print a handout for the sales person with basic questions about the customer's experience for every new customer. It was the sales person's task to follow up, fill in the time they contacted the customer and what their answers were. The answers were logged by the admin person to keep track of customer satisfaction.

Post sale follow-up beyond the 90 day timeframe was left to the sales person's own initiative. The dealer principal figured that if you wanted to stay in business as a sales person, or make it to the next level, you would make periodic contact with your customers.

Most sales persons did this by writing an index card with information on the customer, what they purchased and any other useful information they remembered from the previous sale. Each card was dated and inserted in a card holder. Sale staff would pull out a hand full of the oldest cards from the back of the card holder. When time permitted during the week, they would use the cards to make follow-up calls.

The following table compares the manual system I have outlined above with one using software. As you can see, the manual sales process overlays perfectly with the sales process where software is used. The process hasn't changed, just the tools. And because the tools are more powerful, it allows the various sales steps to be completed more effectively. If we examine the time and staff savings on a day by day, week by week, customer by customer basis incrementally over the course of a year, the huge impact can be easily seen.

In my opinion a major benefit of automation is the amount of time that would be saved by sales staff, management and administrative staff. If they switched, more sales could be accomplished in the same amount of time or the same numbers in less time or with fewer staff. In addition, you get a much clearer understanding of your data, plus opportunities cannot fall through the cracks.

I've been in high-tech sales for my entire sales career in positions both as sales person and as sales manager. I wouldn't think of managing my team or expecting a sales person to sell without lead management software. For some reason though the majority of dealerships still use manual paper-based systems to keep track of their leads.

I believe there is a reluctance to switch to an automated system because of a fear that the whole process will change. As the following table shows, the automated lead management system actually follows the procedures in the old manual process, but makes things a lot more efficient.

Task	Manual System	Software System	Benefits of Using Software over Manual System
Entering Opportunities	Sales staff are required to collect information on every new sales prospect. Key information about the prospect is entered into a log book. Normally, prospect information is written on a paper note pad prior to entering it into the log book.	Sales staff are required to collect information on every new sales prospect. Key information about the prospect is entered into the software. Normally, prospect information is written on a paper note pad or lead sheet prior to entering it into the software.	The amount of time required to enter a prospect into a log book is comparable to the amount of time it takes to enter it into a lead management software program. By entering Ups into the computer, the computer can automatically track the leads going forward, analyze who they are and where they come from (e.g., 54% of Ups in November were female, 27% came in due to Internet search, etc), and, when required, populate F&I and Service systems or the DMS (instead of re-entering data over and over).
Confirming Lead Ownership	The sales person enters the prospect's contact information on an index card and submits it to the receptionist (admin person). The admin person enters the information into a database at which point the lead is allocated to the sales person (unless it's determined that another sales person is already working with the prospect).	The software automatically checks to see if the prospect is in the system and already working with another sales person when it's first entered into the software. As all entries are time-stamped, disputes are virtually eliminated.	The admin person saves time on every new Up, because she doesn't have to check the database and allocate the lead. The time-stamping of leads is irreversible and helps keep the peace between salespeople.
Next Contact Follow up	Every opportunity should have a next contact task associated with it. It's up to the sales person to make note of what the next contact	By design, every opportunity has a next contact task associated with it. The software automatically posts the first Next Contact task	A certain amount of discipline and sales management is required to ensure the appropriate next follow up task exists for every opportunity and that all previous ones were

	task is and act on it in a timely manner using the log book. When a task is completed the sales person is expected to enter any notes of importance related to the completed task as well as make note of the next Next Contact task. The sales manager makes sure that every opportunity has the appropriate next contact task associated with it. This is covered during the daily sales person/sales manager meeting.	when an opportunity is created. When the current next contact task is completed, the software prompts the sales person to enter notes pertaining to it. A new Next Contact task is automatically created when the previous one is completed.	completed. Using software for this task reduces the reliance on sales management in the process in effect shortening the daily sales meeting requirements. The sales manager can quickly check up on each sales person's daily activity, even when he/she is not at the office as the reports are all available online. The sales manager can now spend less time with each sales person, every single day, while having better control of what is going on. In addition, leads can no longer fall through the cracks as happens in a manual system, as every failed lead follow-up is flagged.
Monthly Opportunity Carry Over	At the end of each month sales staff are expected to review all of their opportunities and when appropriate re-enter them into the next month's log. In most cases this is done with the sales manager.	When software is used for this process, current opportunities are automatically carried forward and held active until they are either set to sold or lost. The sales manager can review current opportunities anytime and when appropriate set them to "lost".	In reality, the true purpose of this task is to ensure that opportunities are reviewed periodically helping to minimize the chance of opportunities falling through the cracks due to inactivity. Using software to makes continual review an integral part of the process. Sales person time is saved every month because opportunities are automatically logged into the new month.
Sales Completion	Sales staff work with the customer and the sales manager to create an acceptable deal. It's up to the sales person to notify the sales manager when an	Many dealerships already use software to create quotes. The sales stages used in the dealership can be setup in the software, making it easier for a	Sales people don't need to tell the sales manager what stage an opportunity is at or if they've got an accepted offer, because the software automatically

	offer is accepted by the customer so he or she can notify the finance office of an incoming deal.	sales person to notify the sales manager when each stage is completed including when an offer is accepted. Instant notifications, auto-reporting and ad-hoc reporting tell the sales manager exactly what stage each sales lead is at.	notifies everyone in the dealership that needs to know. The software can also feed the customer's contact information and deal information into the F&I system or DMS.
Post Sale Follow up (1 – 90 days out)	Sales staff are tasked with sending a series of hand written thank you cards to customers. In addition to the cards, sales admin staff task sales staff with post sale CSI calls. The completion of these calls is closely monitored.	Sales staff are tasked with performing post sale follow up tasks with recent purchasers. Upon delivery of the unit, an infinite number of task reminders can be automatically created by the software for the sales person to perform. For monitoring purposes exception reports will show what has and hasn't been accomplished.	To perform post sale follow up tasks correctly the manual system is reliant on discipline by both the sales person and admin staff. When software is used far less time is used in task setup and in monitoring by admin or management staff, plus it is impossible for post-sale follow-ups to fall through the cracks. Time Savings: Incremental (weekly)
Post Sales Follow up (yearly)	Sales staff create index cards with customer and purchase information upon completion of the sale. These cards are placed in a filing system by date. When time allows sales staff place follow up calls and make notations on the card.	The lead management software can be setup to automatically create a series of post sales follow up tasks as a continuation or separate from the 1-90 day follow ups. For monitoring purposes exception reporting will show what has and hasn't been accomplished.	The manual system is reliant on the discipline of the sales person to make the follow up calls. It is also prone to errors. When software is used, time is saved in creating the index card, plus the software schedules the follow ups for each sale person for each day. More importantly using software makes doing post sales follow up calls part of the ongoing process, as opposed to an event that occurs when time allows. Finally, automating the follow up process lets you analyze how many possible customers are in your wider sales funnel as well as report

			on buyer behaviour and demographics. It gives you a picture of your entire customer base: past – present – future! Time Savings: Incremental (Daily)
Sales Management	On a daily basis the sales manager spends 15 to 20 minutes with each sales person reviewing sales opportunities; new and old. Each sales persons log book is reviewed page by page. In addition, new opportunities are added to the sales managers log book.	When software is used the sales manager can review a sales person's opportunities anytime he or she wants, including on-line while away from the office. Auto-reporting can be set up to update the sales manager whenever new opportunities are entered in the system, sold, or set to lost. At their own discretion sales managers can transfer opportunities and/or set them to lost – negating the need for a meeting.	The software makes it easy for the sales manager to review each sales person's opportunities prior to the meeting, which reduces meeting times and sets the sales manager free to focus on mentoring weaker sales people etc. Time Savings: Incremental (Daily)
Sales Management (Trade Board)	Sales staff are required to write information about all potential trades on an easily accessible 4' x 6' trade board. As part of a daily "all sales" meeting, trades on the board are reviewed for potential cross-selling opportunities.	Using software, a sales person can review potential trades anytime. The software can automatically match what one customer is looking for with what another has to trade.	The trade board is no longer needed when software is used to record incoming trades and/or point out cross-selling opportunities. The software also ties into the inventory database*, making it easier to help customers find a vehicle that interests them and also flag which units a customer is interested in. Time Savings: Incremental (Daily) *When integrated with DealerVu DMS software.