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THE INNOVATION ISSUE

How Changes in Technology Impact Canadian Car Business

Mobile trends pushing innovation in all dealership departments — including the service bay

By Sarah Rubenoff
Correspondent

With more and more consumers completing day-to-day tasks, purchases and communications all through their smartphones, e-payment solutions across the auto finance industry are increasing in number and gaining popularity.



Dave Hooper
VenueVision

And now, this trend is showing up in the dealership service department, as well. You'll always hear lots of talk of how to find leads and customers using new online and mobile tools.

But what about your current customers? How do you keep them? One way is to make sure to use innovative tools to make your dealership more efficient—across all departments.

The mobile shopping trend, which of course shows no sign of slowing down, is good news for companies like VenueVision Media Systems, who launched its own express e-payment solution for service department customers — Mobile Cashier — late last year.

The express e-payment solution that aims to make checkout at the dealership service department faster sends dealer-branded notifications to customers when their repairs are done and lets customers pay directly from their mobile device or PC.

Dealer response

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, says VenueVision president David Hooper.

In fact, the company announced this past spring that both Key West Ford and Kia West in British Columbia have both adopted its mobile solution.

Hooper told *Auto Remarketing Canada* the tool's dual offering — either standalone or integrated — gives the dealership a choice between two price points.

The standalone option allows dealers to control every transaction individually, and they can create payment links ad hoc to fit each situation, "whether it's a parts deposit, service invoice, F&I purchase, vehicle deposit, A/R collection or collision center payment or deductible," Hooper explained.

The integrated version, on the other hand, automates all of the updates and builds the links without the need for staff involvement, and is integrated with the dealership management system.

"Many dealers opt to 'crawl, then walk' with the standalone option before they 'run' on automation with the integrated version," Hooper explained.



Photos courtesy of VenueVision.

When a service technician completes all lines on a repair order and the invoice has been reviewed, the integrated version of the tool texts and/or emails the customer with a "status complete" update.

"Every setup is customized to be fully dealership branded so all communications the customer receives and all payment links they touch in the secure payment process look and feel like they are an extension of the dealership, giving greater confidence in the mobile payment."

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Dealers can include a personalized message, and the communication has a customized link that the customer can follow to view their invoice summary and pay directly from their smartphone. The customer then receives a payment confirmation by text with a courtesy copy by email. All communication can be fully branded by the dealer.

"Every setup is customized to be fully dealership branded so all communications the customer receives and all payment links they touch in the secure payment process look and feel like they are an extension of the dealership, giving greater confidence in the mobile payment," Hooper said.

During a manual payment request with the standalone version, on the other hand,

dealership staff just log into the Mobile Cashier app and enter the customer's info, such as name, cell number and email, before the process begins and the initial text is sent to the consumer.

Tools like this can help "flush out" billing errors, Hooper shared, which cause strain on dealership service customers.

And when servicing fleet vehicles — when the driver isn't necessarily the person paying the bill — Hooper said, "There is a huge time savings for the dealership staff in the time it takes to get paid and release the vehicle to the driver."

Further, collecting deposits on special order parts, large service repairs, new and used vehicles and F&I office items like extended warranties, can be simplified, as well. For example, when eligibility is about to expire and the customer can't get to the dealership to make a payment in time.

Dealership staff can also attach rebates, coupons and loyalty messaging, to drive future customer retention.

Built to solve customer, dealership pain points

When developing Mobile Cashier, VenueVision was trying to solve a set of specific pain points for consumers, dealers and service technicians.

Hooper explained Mobile Cashier was built in part to "provide busy service customers with a way to reduce the amount of time spent picking up their vehicle at end of day," as well as cut down on the and 5 p.m. rush for service dealership staff.

Data security breaches are also becoming more and more of an issue, especially for businesses dealing with collecting a large number of payments every day over the phone and collecting customers' information including credit card numbers.

"Often this information sits in an unsecured area before and after the payment is processed at the payment terminal, leaving it exposed to wandering eyes and potential theft," he pointed out.

As for what's in the pike for VenueVision, Hooper shared there is "lots of development in progress right now for Mobile Cashier and autoTEXT to accommodate expanded usage in the new- and used-vehicle departments."

Potential uses range from dealership tasks such as holding deposits and reserving vehicles to website integration. Also, Hooper said dealers should keep an eye out for upcoming releases of the company's license plate recognition technology and marketing texting solutions.

Ultimately, Hooper explained, "Customers want to do business with a dealership that recognizes and caters to their busy lifestyle, and those dealerships that utilize new mobile technologies are the ones that can put time back into their customer's day."