

Train your staff in prospecting calls that work

In the plate-change month of March, as they achieved their biggest sales volumes of the year, car dealers were said to be presented with 500,000 customer retention opportunities.

But what if a business considers that it may be beneficial to equip itself with the tools to hit manufacturers' often ambitious sales targets at other times of the year? What if retention was a term not exclusively attached to customers?

For MFG Group, both of these considerations sit near the top of the agenda.

Former BMW UK colleagues Declan Gaule and Jerry Sutton set up the dealer training business ten years ago. It specialises in telephone prospecting campaigns, delivering sales results to retailers at a time of their choosing and delivering skills that leave a legacy of continued sales success.

This is retention in a new guise. Retention of sales skills.

Jason Cranswick, commercial director at long-standing client Jardine Motors Group, said: "The training provided by MFG sticks in the minds of our staff like a muscle memory, meaning that the training is delivering skills that are retained long after a session."

Declan Gaule, MFG group director and co-founder, said instilling confidence in dealership sales staff to carry out prospecting calls is key to his business's success. He said: "Equipping sales executives with the confidence and the processes they need to

carry out prospecting calls that will deliver results is central to what we do.

"Telephone prospecting is not something most sales executives relish in most circumstances and if they have not received high-quality training it is a poor use of their time.

"When we have been in, delivered the training and they can see it has delivered results, attitudes soon change. When prospecting results in great leads and multiple sales, it soon becomes less of a chore."

Gaule originally joined BMW UK's graduate training scheme and rose through the ranks to become a specialist training provider within the group, eventually holding the post of regional corporate sales manager.

After spotting that a decline in dealer footfall had left a gap between the type of training delivered and the aspirations of retailers, he teamed up with Sutton to set up MFG.

"What we did was to assist sales executives to drive footfall without using a distress message," he said.

MFG specialises in delivering one- to two-day training courses, which are pre-empted by dealer marketing and incorporate a prospecting sales campaign while trainers are still at the dealership.

It can work with a dealer's existing database – be they customers from the past 24 to 48 months or those considered 'lost sales' – to market a prospecting campaign and then follow up with a structured calls programme.

Gaule said a two-day exercise is ideal,



with training and some live calls taking place on day one and a supervised calls session on day two.

"It's always an advantage that trainers are there when the calls are being made at first. We can make sure the processes have been taken on board and also work to instil confidence," said Gaule.

The calls process starts with an early introduction of "a very compelling offer in a short amount of time", he said, but emphasised that a professional introduction and posing the question of whether a customer is interested or not is key. He said: "Do it right and the worst you will get is a 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'."

Measured at seven days out from a training event, MFG claims that its call techniques result in an average 52% conversion rate, despite working with premium brands such as Rolls-Royce, Maserati and McLaren.

In some cases, training and prospecting sessions have resulted in a boost of 600 incremental sales, said Gaule.

Among its clients is Jardine Motors Group, a top AM100 group split into six divisions, with 70 locations representing 23 brands.

Commercial director Jason Cranswick said MFG was selected as a preferred training provider two years ago and said they are a key component of injecting structure and "a little urgency" into prospecting campaigns.

He added: "There is a reasonable cost attached to using MFG, but what it does is adds focus and priority to making sure that we are doing things right and there is always a positive recollection of the work they do."

"What MFG do extremely well is tailor their training sessions to the brands they are dealing with and quickly get a team working co-operatively together. They make it fun too. It can't always be hard work."

"We certainly get a good return on investment from using MFG and the fact that we keep using them time after time is testament

to the value of the service they offer."

Cranswick said the changing nature of automotive retail meant MFG had become an operational necessity.

He said: "Ten years ago it might have been the type of thing that was used to recover performance, but now it's very much something we return to in order to enhance it throughout the year."

When the MFG business was set up it had just three trainers. Now there are more than 20 trainers – all from automotive backgrounds – and five back-office staff supporting its operation, with the business growing an average of 15% to 20% each year.

While it started out in the UK and Ireland, it now carries out manufacturer and dealer training through satellite businesses in

France, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

It is also working with long-standing client BMW on a training initiative involving 55 dealerships in South Africa.

In the UK alone, MFG now completes many hundreds of training events every year.

Gaule said many clients consider their investment in prospect training with MFG as a "cost of business" as the drive to achieve sales in a high-volume market becomes ever more "tough and aggressive".

He added: "The business has changed. Retailers can no longer afford to view prospecting as an 'optional extra'. It has gone from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have'. Done properly, it soon becomes an integral part of the business."



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