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Strategic, innovative uses for technology in service

FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

BY IAN REILLY

Over the past few years, automobile retailers have been focused on improving operations as well as the guest experience in their stores.

Much effort has been driven by a growing pressure to balance an increase in throughput with high levels of customer satisfaction and tighter profit margins.

What I have seen is that the most successful dealers are those who have begun to use technology in more strategic, innovative ways across every dealership department and with each dealership customer.

Yet, there is one area of the dealership that is often overlooked – but ripe – for using new, more sophisticated tools to improve efficiencies and service levels. That is fixed operations.

In fact, there are a number of new technologies that can help dealers more effectively handle the uptick in service work, standardize business processes, and im-

prove the customer experience – from the time the car pulls into the service drive to final payment.

Dealers can use newer RFID technologies to greet each service customer by name automatically, on a large display screen, creating a personalized experience that makes every customer feel welcome and expected. When built to work together with the DMS, those technologies also can alert the service advisor of the customer's arrival.

Advisors can be equipped with tablet PCs that access service write-up tools in the DMS. This mobile access enables them to more quickly greet the consumer, perform a walk-around inspection, and complete the write-up process – all while at the vehicle. The tablet becomes a mini-TV screen for visuals, videos, and other engaging information, such as recommended services or vehicle inspections.

Dealers can also use RFID technologies to display to waiting customers where their vehicles are in the ser-

vice process, keeping customers informed about their repair status and the estimated time remaining.

When the advisor completes the service invoice, the customer can be notified electronically that the vehicle is ready. With newer payment technologies integrated into the DMS software, the customer also can pay electronically with a few taps of the smartphone screen.

For consumers, these technologies offer a more informative, engaging experience that can lead to improved satisfaction with the dealership.

For dealers, these technologies help support a more efficient, consistent process for each customer and vehicle.

The end result: Dealers can more effectively and efficiently serve an increased number of service customers, protect service profits, and create a more rewarding experience for every service customer.

Ian Reilly is the V-P of sales for Reynolds and Reynolds (Canada) Ltd.