Upcoming DealersEdge webinars

The Chicago Automobile Trade Association has established a partnership with DealersEdge to provide high-quality training and informational webinars that offer the content to CATA member dealers at a significantly discounted rate.

The rate for CATA members for the weekly presentations is $149, half of what is charged to users who do not subscribe to DealersEdge. Webinars premiere on a near-weekly basis.

Even for dealers who hold an annual membership with DealersEdge, the new relationship with the CATA represents a savings because DealersEdge offers its Webinars to its own members for $198. Regular annual membership fees are $397, and normal webinar fees are $298 for non-DealersEdge members.

Once purchased, DealersEdge webinars and accompanying PDF files can be downloaded and viewed later—and repeatedly. No matter how many people watch at your location, each connection costs a CATA member just $149. A telephone connection is not needed; and the fee includes both PowerPoint slides and audio.

To register for any of the DealersEdge webinars, go to www.cata.info. On the tan bar across the top of the screen, click on Education/Careers and follow the drop-down menu to CATA-DealersEdge webinars.

Coming topics:
Thursday, Feb. 9 at 12 p.m. CST
“Google Analytics 101 for Car Dealerships - Getting Started!” Digital marketing for car dealers has grown and evolved greatly over the past five years. Early on, dealers thought digital marketing was only about buying leads from online lead generators. But more and more

Stage set for Chicago Auto Show

The auto industry’s elite gathers in the Windy City beginning Feb. 8, in advance of the 104th edition of the Chicago Auto Show, which opens its 10-day public run Feb. 10.

The formal portion of the show’s media preview commences Feb. 8, when Volvo Cars U.S. President John Maloney will speak at a breakfast hosted by the Midwest Automotive Media Association and the Chicago Auto Show. Following breakfast, the news moves to the show floor for presentations of new products by GMC, Hyundai, Kia, Ford, and Nissan.

Expect more news at lunch that day, when the Economic Club of Chicago hands the mike to Yoshimi Inaba, holder of several titles including CEO of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. Then reporters return to the show floor for revelations of MotorWeek’s annual Drivers Choice Awards.

A news segment begun last year repeats Feb. 9, when the auto show devotes part of its media preview to the ever-expanding group of social media. Chrysler Corp. will show new vehicles and make executives available for

New Chicago Auto Outlook reviews December sales

The latest issue of Chicago Auto Outlook tracks May new-vehicle sales in the eight-county CATA area. Read it online at www.cata.info.

On the blue bar across the top of the screen, click on Publications, then follow the drop-down menu to Chicago Auto Outlook.
In Memoriam

Dale R. Christenson Sr., co-owner of a namesake Chevrolet dealership in Highland, Ind., died Jan. 16 at age 90.

Mr. Christenson was an Army veteran of World War II; a longtime businessman in Highland and Griffith, Ind.; and a volunteer at St. Anthony’s Hospital in Crown Point, Ind. He worked for several family businesses before devoting all his efforts to Christenson Chevrolet.

In his free time, Mr. Christenson loved to be with his extended family at “The Cabin,” teaching adults and children how to fish and enjoy the outdoors. He was an avid supporter of Purdue University.

Survivors include his daughter, Lynn; sons Dale and Robert; stepchildren Frank Lazzaro Jr. and Sheryl Lazzaro; 13 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.


After serving in the U.S. Air Force, Mr. Shaver joined his father, John B. Shaver in the automobile business. His younger brother, Richard Shaver and, later, John B. Shaver III, also joined.

In 1969, Mr. Shaver moved his family near Homewood, where he and his son built a new Chevrolet dealership. That franchise became one of Chicagoland’s largest, and it expanded to include Peugeot (largest in Midwest). He continued to expand by becoming the 3rd assigned Mitsubishi dealership in the Midwest region.

Mr. Shaver is survived by his wife of 60 years, Mary Jane; sons John and William; daughters Connie and Cindy; four grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Webinars

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more, dealers and their Internet sales staffs are getting more sophisticated in being able to drive customers to their own websites and through their own sales funnels. A key to sharpening this skill to the next level is an understanding of how to access and use Google Analytics. Get an entry-level look at G.A. and how to gain access and then extract very specific and usable data that will help you improve results.

Wednesday, Feb. 15 at 12 p.m. CST

“When Hiring- Pre-Employment Process - Pick the Right Candidate” As we continue into a year that promises an accelerating recovery, many dealers will be in the market for some new talent. Just in case you might be a little rusty when it comes to interviewing and then checking out applicants, labor attorney Penny Phillips will discuss the pre-employment process with an eye toward what you can and cannot do legally. Penny will examine:

• Interviewing Dos and Don’ts
• Credit & Criminal Background Checks
• ADA Issues, including Medical Exams
• Reference Checks
• Drug Testing
• Motor Vehicle Checks

Thursday, Feb. 16 at 12 p.m. CST

“Service Advisor Sales Breakthrough” Warning, this is not your average, mild-mannered, service advisor training! Even in the face of a struggling economy and intense competition from independent repair shops, some dealership service departments are enjoying record sales and profits. The key, as always, is the ability of service advisors to form quick connections with service customers.

In this intensive 90-minute webinar, your service advisors will get specific, usable tools that they can implement immediately. Chris Collins has developed a program based on results-proven systems and techniques designed to create instant results. Keep this recording in your training library for use down the road!

Marketplace

Sales/Marketing Self-motivated professional with background as a dealer principal and a complete working knowledge of sales and management. Major strengths include a loyal following and client base, ability to organize and develop a cohesive management and sales team, train and develop inexperienced salespeople into informed and responsive sales professionals. Résumé on file at the CATA. Donald Cranley, (708) 228-9064.

Bulletin on hiatus

This newsletter takes a one-edition break, in deference to the coming Chicago Auto Show. The next issue is March 5.
CAFE: Dealers know what sells

BY MARK SCARPPELLI
CHICAGO METRO NADA DIRECTOR

The following letter to the editor by NADA Chairman Stephen Wade was published in the Jan. 23 issue of Automotive News.

“To the Editor:

The Jan. 16 editorial about fuel economy (“NADA must be reasonable about CAFE proposals”) overlooks a couple of key points:

-- The National Automobile Dealers Association supports both continuous improvement in fuel economy and a single national standard to help get us there.

-- When it comes to determining what sells in the showroom, auto dealers are in the best position to offer relevant comment.

We know firsthand, for example, that for the overwhelming majority of Americans fuel economy is not a major factor when deciding what car to buy. Price matters most. So when we learn that the proposed standards could add at least $3,200 to the price of the average car, we are naturally concerned.

The proposed rule requires a leap of faith, a sort of build-it-and-they-will-come approach, which may work in the movies but not in real life. In testimony at the EPA/National Highway Traffic Safety Administration public hearing in Detroit on Jan. 17, for example, manufacturer after manufacturer cautioned that there is no certainty as to how consumers will respond. It’s no wonder that even they called for a strong mid-term review in 2018.

The manufacturers may be able to produce the right product mix, but it is the dealer who will have to pay for the product and then hope there are interested consumers. Dealers have already lived the nightmare of empty showrooms. To reap the societal benefits of higher fuel economy, government policy should encourage fleet turnover, not shrink the dealers’ customer base.”

In other news . . .

• Due to NADA efforts, Congress halts an inconsistent rule on service advisor exempt overtime status. In April 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor — without any advance warning — issued a notice indicating that it intended to reverse its position on the overtime-exempt status of service advisors.

Doing so would have overturned three decades of regulatory interpretation and a consistent line of federal and appellate court rulings that service advisors are exempt from overtime. It would have forced dealers to make disruptive compensation and staffing changes and would unnecessarily complicate regulatory compliance.

The NADA argued that those changes would expose dealerships to unnecessary litigation and were not properly justified. After pursuing regulatory remedies, NADA sought assistance from Congress. The recently signed fiscal year 2012 Omnibus Appropriations Act preserves the exempt status of service advisors for one year, until Sept. 30, 2012.

With the appropriations bill now on the books, Congress has sent a clear message that the exemption should not be altered in the future. For more information contact Doug Greenhaus of NADA Regulatory Affairs at (703) 821-7040.

• Used-vehicle prices start the year on a positive note. Dealers’ preparations for the spring selling season pushed AuctionNet wholesale prices over the first half of January in a familiar direction – up. At a segment and model-year level, January’s results make for an interesting juxtaposition, as vehicles at opposite ends of the efficiency spectrum — large SUVs, mid-size cars, and compact cars — outpaced all other segments in terms of month-over-month price appreciation, according to auction data supplied to the NADA Used-Car Guide through its partnership with the National Auto Auction Association (NAAA).

A 40 percent year-over-year drop in AuctionNet supply, combined with normal seasonal demand, pushed large SUV prices up by an average of 1.3 percent compared to December. Car prices, on the other hand, are benefitting both from the reduction in supply and the elevated level of fuel prices. As a result, mid-size and compact car average prices grew by a collective 1 percent over the first two weeks of the month.

Regarding price declines, only luxury car segments saw prices fall from December levels. But the average drop of 1 percent was close to a one-point improvement over what normally is seen for the period.

• Dealer alert: The NADA reminds dealers to protect their data. As part of the NADA’s ongoing efforts to promote compliance with the full range of legal and regulatory obligations affecting franchised dealers, the NADA sent a brief memo to all NADA members that underscores the importance of dealers protecting their electronic data. Additional educational resources on this and other regulatory compliance topics are available at www.nadauniversity.com and www.nada.org/regulatoryaffairs.

• Four NADA-Google Learning Hub webinars will be offered free to NADA members. The first webinar, “The Smartphone Revolution,” is activated on-demand for members in Learning Hub, in the Internet category. Next up is “The Google+ Project for Dealers,” to be presented live Feb. 29. Subsequent topics and dates will be announced later.
Auto Show

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Interviews in the biggest display Chrysler builds anywhere.

Throughout the morning, manufacturers will hold events that, while open to traditional media, will accommodate bloggers, influencers, Facebook fans, club members and others upon whom many turn to for their opinions.

“Think of your friends, and there’s always someone who is the ‘expert’ on cars,” said show Chairman Steve Foley Jr. “While we have sought them out, the interesting part of our social media group is that it is comprised of people the manufacturers themselves find valuable. Each car maker will be able to invite those whom they think will benefit from being there.”

Dave Sloan, the show’s general manager, said, “We view this as a big plus in keeping the auto show’s messages in front of the public for the entire run of the show, not just the media preview.”

First Look for Charity

Don’t overlook the benevolent portion of North America’s largest auto show. First Look for Charity, held the evening before the public opening, is raising funds for 18 area nonprofits. Ticket sales are tracking 21 percent higher than last year’s edition, which generated $1.9 million for charities. And, mind you, the 2011 First Look for Charity ranked No. 3 on NBC5 Chicago’s Readers Choice Awards for the best area events to attend.

What to credit? Outstanding catering themed to highlight culinary celebrations worldwide? Two prize vehicles to win—a 2012 Cadillac Escalade and and ’12 Cadillac SRX, both compliments of Your Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana Cadillac Dealers? A 90-minute performance by Blues Traveler, featuring harmonica virtuoso John Popper? The answer probably is yes, yes, and yes.

Tickets are $250 and are sold up to and including at the event. For a great overview, go to www.firstlookforcharity.org. Purchasers can direct the proceeds of their transactions to any or all of the participating charities.

Publicpalooza

As the date nears and excitement builds, more and more are turning to the Internet to interact with the nation’s largest auto show. At ChicagoAutoShow.com, those website visitors can buy tickets, check out appearances by personalities, get a preview of nearly every vehicle on the show floor, go inside the show with its six webcams, and drive deep into the illustrious history of the nation’s longest-running auto show.

Mobile users aren’t neglected either. Smartphone users are automatically redirected to ChicagoAutoShow.com/mobile. It’s a light version of the full-featured site and is designed to interact with attendees. They even can buy tickets on their phone in about a minute. Don’t know what’s going on? Check the daily schedule for appearances. Want help shopping for a new car? Check out the “Vehicles on Display” section.

The Chicago Auto Show also leads the way when it comes to social websites. The show’s Facebook page currently enjoys an ever-expanding legion of more than 12,000 fans and is constantly conducting contests and ticket giveaways. The show also utilizes Twitter (@chiautoshow & #CAS2012) to connect with followers and attendees.

The show also will provide ongoing Digital Media Releases—quick-paced video news and activity releases designed to keep show interest at peak level with both media and consumers. Some DMRs will contain hard news content featuring in-depth manufacturer explanations of their newest vehicle, while others will highlight executive interviews and perspectives.

Daily “webisodes” will offer short videos showcasing many of the exciting events happening at show, such as celebrity signings, test tracks and outdoor test drives. The show’s mission is to keep the show and its activities pinging blogs, Facebook, Twitter feeds and Smartphones throughout the show.

Sedgwick deflects Q4 unemployment claims

One hundred forty-eight CATA dealer members reported a combined 732 unemployment claims management services during the fourth quarter of 2011 to Sedgwick Claims Management Services, Inc., which has been serving CATA dealers under various names since 1979. The company’s efforts saved those dealers a total of nearly $1.5 million in benefits by contesting the claims.

Sedgwick CMS monitors any unemployment claims against its clients and contests all unwarranted claims and charges. The company counts about 250 CATA dealers among its clients.

Claims that can be protested and subsequently denied help minimize an employer’s unemployment tax rate. The rate can vary between 0.55 percent and 9.45 percent of each employee’s first $13,560 in earnings. The 2012 average unemployment tax rate among Illinois employers is 4.35 percent, or about $590 annually per employee ($480 in 2011).

“With the downturn in the economy, unemployment remains at record highs (9.9 percent in Illinois through August) and a drain on the Illinois Department of Employment Security trust fund, markedly higher tax rates for 2011 and probably for a couple of years after that,” said Paul Schardt, a Sedgwick senior vice president.

“The unemployment tax is really the only controllable tax, in that it’s experience-driven,” Schardt said. An ex-employee’s claim affects the employer’s tax rate for three years.

For new enrollees, client fees amount to $2.60 per employee, per fiscal quarter. For the fee, Sedgwick monitors all unemployment claims; files any appeals; prepares employer witnesses for hearings, as necessary; represents the client at any hearings; verifies the benefit charge statements; and confirms the client’s unemployment tax rate.

To discuss retaining the company, call Schardt at (773) 824-4325.