



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 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:

Premiering Thursday, May 15 at 12 p.m. CDT

“Which Online Tactics are Working Best in Dealerships Today” Get the seven most effective online marketing ideas for immediate implementation. Cut through the clutter!

There is no shortage of conferences and workshops

SEE **WEBINARS**, PAGE 2

2nd annual USO fundraiser July 19

Throughout their country’s history, Americans have felt profound appreciation and gratitude for the dedication and sacrifice of U.S. troops and their families. In that vein, scores of area new-car dealerships last summer raised \$37,500 by hosting fundraiser barbecues, with all proceeds donated to USO programs that support deployed troops, military families, wounded, ill and injured troops and their caregivers, and families of the fallen.

Circle July 19 as the second annual USO Barbecue for the Troops to be coordinated by the Chicago Au-



tomobile Trade Association. The inaugural event in 2013 was conceived by Rob Padgor, who owns Evanston Subaru in Skokie and is a board member of USO of Illinois.

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Fore!

CATA annual golf outing is June 9

Join fellow members of the Chicago Automobile Trade Association on June 9 for the CATA’s annual meeting and golf outing at Cog Hill Golf & Country Club in Lemont.

Camaraderie abounds at the daylong golf affair; and the dinner meeting, at which

the board of director election results are announced, offers good networking opportunities.

A full-day ticket — which includes green fees, cart, use of the club driving range, lunch, beverages at spon-

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NADA's Dealership Workplace Study extended to June 30

To accommodate numerous requests from dealer members, the deadline to participate in the 2014 Dealership Workforce Study has been extended to June 30. Dealers are encouraged to submit their data as soon as possible in advance of the deadline to allow for the extensive data review process.

The study is the only effort by the National Automobile Dealers Association to compare dealership compensation and benefits, retention and turnover and hours of operation to aggregated peer data. With the results, dealers can make data-based decisions on recruiting, hiring and motivating employees. Only members of the NADA and American Truck Dealers are eligible to participate, and there is no cost.

It's easy to participate. There are separate processes for single dealership and dealer group enrollments. Further, participants in the 2013 study will find the survey conveniently pre-populated with their previous answers, which can be changed as necessary. Finally, this year's reports will be sent directly to the person identified as report recipient. Reports will be sent as soon as they are available.

Each participating dealership will receive a complimentary, customized Basic Report comparing its data against data aggregated on a regional and national basis — plus a complimentary, comprehensive Dealership Workforce Study Industry Report.

Participants also can purchase a customized Enhanced Report, which further compares individual dealership data against data for the franchise and state. Additional customized group reports are available, as is the Compensation and Tenure Search Tool, which enables ad hoc searches, including searches by dealership or dealer groups. Visit www.nadaworkforcestudy.com to participate.

NADA Fair Credit Compliance webinar is now available online

Paul Metrey, the NADA's chief regulatory counsel, visited the CATA in April to provide an overview of the optional NADA Fair Credit Compliance Program, which was unveiled in January. Earlier last month, Metrey's presentation was recorded for a webinar.

That webinar, which includes general and specific instructions for dealerships to tailor the program for their situations, can be seen online. Members of the NADA can log in at www.NADAuniversity.com and enter the phrase "nada fair" in the search box in the upper right corner of the page.

For assistance with login or password information, contact the NADA's customer service team at (800) 557-6263 or NADAuniversity@nada.org.

Webinars

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on what you should be doing in the realm of Digital Marketing in your dealership. For the most part, the presentations are focused on the products and/or services that the speaker represents.

In this workshop, Samantha Cunningham promises to provide you with a list of the seven most effective digital marketing tactics that you can, and probably should, employ right away.

Premiering Thursday, May 22 at 12 p.m. CDT

“How to Use ‘Captive Insurance’ to Manage Risk: Generate Cash Flow & Tax Benefits” New opportunities make Captive Insurance accessible to more and more dealers. Learn how to employ this strategy for added protection, cash flow and tax benefits.

In this workshop, the presenters will discuss how to use captive insurance for a tax advantage and to fund potential risks to your dealership organization. Attendees will learn of a new—and at a lower cost—funding option to protect against existing risk by employing a “related party insurance company” on a tax favored basis.

These new opportunities make captive insurance accessible to more dealers than in the past. The presenters will share their views as leading dealership insurance and tax experts.

Golf

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sored locations, entry in a putting contest, dinner and a gift — costs \$95 each for dealer members and \$125 each for allied members. A dinner-only ticket is \$75.

Allied members who host a CATA dealer in a foursome can buy that dealer's ticket for \$95, and allied members who sponsor an element of the outing can buy tickets to play for \$95.

The outing features many potential prizes, adding to the excitement. Get full details at www.cata.info.

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Review past editions dating to 1998 or search by subject at www.cata.info.

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Check Guarantee helps dealership GMs earn 5-star ratings

BY RASHA ISMAIL

CROSSCHECK, INC.

In our previous post, “Top 3 Reasons Why Auto Dealership GMs Thrive with Check Guarantee,” we discussed the many roles of automotive dealership general managers. This position essentially oversees everything of the location. Often times they can be found on the sales floor, in the service department and outside, representing the brand and making sure the entire operation is running smoothly.

Let’s face it: Purchasing a new vehicle is a high ticket item and big decision for consumers. More often than not, when consumers go to buy that shiny new car or truck they do not carry large sums of cash or use credit cards for the down payment; they use checks instead. Checks offer a convenient and familiar payment method, and increase the likelihood of sales for general managers.

As with most industries, the automotive industry is all about maximizing sales and revenue. But what sets dealerships apart from the competition is having a five-star rating. To do

this, dealerships must constantly move inventory off the lot and replenish with new vehicles.

Meeting monthly sales goals is a priority, and it is a healthy barometer to measure the dealership’s ongoing success. This is even more important for auto dealerships considering how competitive the market is, and the fact that Bloomberg News reports “consumer confidence figures rose unexpectedly in July.” General managers need to capitalize on these confidence numbers if they want to earn that five-star rating.

A proven and cost-efficient method to exceed monthly sales goals and maximize revenue is with check guarantee. Check guarantee offers auto dealership general managers the following benefits:

- Increased sales and revenue at the point of sale via check terminal and PC
- Approval on both out-of-town and out-of-state checks
- Premium services such as Multiple Check (hold check) programs to help customers gather funds
- Reduced risk and fewer returned checks

Another important priority for general managers is to improve and maintain customer satisfaction, because word-of-mouth is crucial and can lead to future sales. Welcoming check payments and offering check programs help build customer loyalty.

Accepting check payments broadens your customer base for consumers who prefer not to pay with credit card or large sums of cash. A check guarantee service provides you and your dealership added protection for bad checks. It’s a win-win for general managers and for consumers, too.

General managers are able to enjoy a higher sales volume, and consumers are able to drive home their perfect vehicle the day they make a down payment.

Download our free guide to check guarantee; stop losing sales to your competition and earn that five-star rating you deserve.

See more at www.cross-check.com, or contact me at (877) 384-2038, ext. 5845 or Rasha.Ismail@cross-check.com.

In blog post, FTC officials call for end to ‘anti-Tesla’ franchise laws

Three top officials from the Federal Trade Commission have publicly criticized dealer-franchise laws that have served as a roadblock for Tesla Motors’ direct-sales model in many states.

In a rare statement directly questioning existing laws, the trio argued in an unofficial capacity in an April 24 blog post that current “bad policy” restricts customers from shopping in new ways. They point to smartphone-based Taxi hailing and Internet shopping as two examples of innovations that have begun

to transform markets and better serve consumers.

But Forrest McConnell III, chairman of the National Automobile Dealers Association, said the franchised dealer network is the most efficient and cost effective way to sell and service vehicles, providing a network of independently owned retailers who compete fiercely against one another with regard to pricing and financing benefits consumers.

McConnell added that franchised dealerships, which primarily are small- and me-

dium-sized family businesses, are

- driving new-vehicle sales in a way that manufacturers could never duplicate;
- saving automakers money because dealers handle service and marketing costs at the regional and local level; and
- saving consumers money because of the franchise model’s inherent inter- and intra-brand competitiveness.

In addition, said McConnell, franchised dealerships create hundreds of thousands of jobs, billions of

dollars in tax revenues, and support thousands of local communities in which they operate.

Dealerships also benefit consumers in the event of safety recalls, he said, stating that an extensive network of franchised new-car and new-truck dealers can respond to recalls faster and more efficiently than a single manufacturer or factory-owned store. If manufacturers sold directly to customers, McConnell said there would be “zero” competition in pricing, parts and services.

2014 natural gas update

By TOM JANKOWIAK

UTILITY MANAGEMENT GROUP

Consumers opening their natural gas invoices over the past couple months experienced somewhat of a surprise. After benefitting from low natural gas prices over the last five years, the market for February and March spiked considerably. This spike was caused by a combination of factors, the two most important ones being this winter's temperatures and issues with the pipelines that transport gas to the Chicago market.

While the pipeline issue has been resolved, the impact of last winter's temperatures is going to linger into this coming natural gas season (April through March) due primarily to the depletion of our national storage levels. As with most markets, the natural gas market is driven by supply and demand, so having more gas stored for the upcoming winter tends to hold down prices. In recent years, storage levels have ranged from average to near record highs. Storage levels currently are at a low not seen since May 2003, as we burned through our supply this winter to meet record demand. This means producers not only will have to supply the natural gas consumers require, but will have to replenish storage as well, increasing the overall demand for gas. Based on current projections, analysts believe it's unlikely that last year's positive storage levels will be restored by November.

Storage levels are one of many factors driving the natural gas market, with temperatures, oil prices, the economy and geopolitical events also playing a role. We're currently facing a great deal of uncertainty as to what the market will do over the next 12

months, as one or more of those factors turning positive or negative can cause the market to fluctuate from the lows we saw prior to January to highs we haven't seen in a number of years.

Given this uncertainty, it's important to understand the impact your natural gas budget has on your overall budget, as well as what options are available to you. If a spike in prices has a negligible impact on your overall budget, you may want to consider a variable rate program. The offerings from suppliers we work with have averaged between 10 percent and 15 percent below the utility's rates. If budget certainty is more important to your organization, you may want to consider locking the rates for at least a percentage of your overall usage. Doing so does not guarantee savings compared to the variable rate program, but it does offer protection against future spikes in the market.

Because budget concerns vary and customers do have options that can be tailored to their needs, it's important to work with a supplier who offers the flexibility to customize a program for your individual budget concerns, as opposed to trying to sell you on the benefits of the program they offer. Once you understand the options available to you, budgeting for your natural gas costs becomes a much more manageable task.

Utility Management Group has been providing natural gas and electric service for close to 14 years, and our services are endorsed by the CATA. Please contact our office at (630) 279-0117 to discuss your energy needs or to arrange a time to have one of our consultants meet with you in person.

USO

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The USO, a nonprofit, non-political organization, has for 70 years provided Americans with a tangible way to express appreciation and gratitude for the dedication and sacrifice of the nation's troops and their families.

"The CATA's participation in USO Barbecue for the Troops has raised the bar in grassroots support, both locally for our USO of Illinois, and nationally at USO locations across the country," USO of Illinois President Alison Ruble said following last year's barbecues. "Their expression of gratitude, collectively through this initiative, is an inspiration and will be of great support to USO of Illinois military support programs and services."

The CATA will arrange for radio advertising and is working with many radio, print, television and social media partners to develop an aggressive promotional campaign leading up to July 19. All CATA messaging will direct individuals to www.DriveChicago.com to find participating dealers nearby. Host dealers will be highlighted on DriveChicago, with links to information on specific events.

Dealers who want to join the fundraiser should contact the CATA's marketing director, Tim McBride, at (630) 424-6085 or tmcbride@drivechicago.com.

Some of last year's fundraising activities included:

- Car Washes, with dealers asking for donations
- Lunch specials for employees and their families and friends. Leave the brown bag at home and eat in, to support the troops
- Cornhole/Bags Games. No American barbecue is complete without a cornhole/bags tourney!
- On Demand DJ, with donations made for song requests
- Collecting additional donations through Social Media event pages

Tune in ...

... to "Drive Chicago," the CATA's automotive radio show, 8-9 a.m. Saturdays on WLS-AM 890.