



# COMMERCIAL PLAYBOOK

## COMMERCIAL CUSTOMER CARE: PARTNER VS. VENDOR

CHAPTER 3

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## COMMERCIAL CUSTOMER CARE: **PARTNER VS. VENDOR**



In the Commercial Playbook Chapter 1, we learned that adding a commercial vehicle component to your dealership business is a savvy way to aid in continued growth. In Chapter 2, we explored strategies to implement or fine-tune your commercial vehicle department. Now, let's look at how an expanded view of commercial-customer care can build on that.





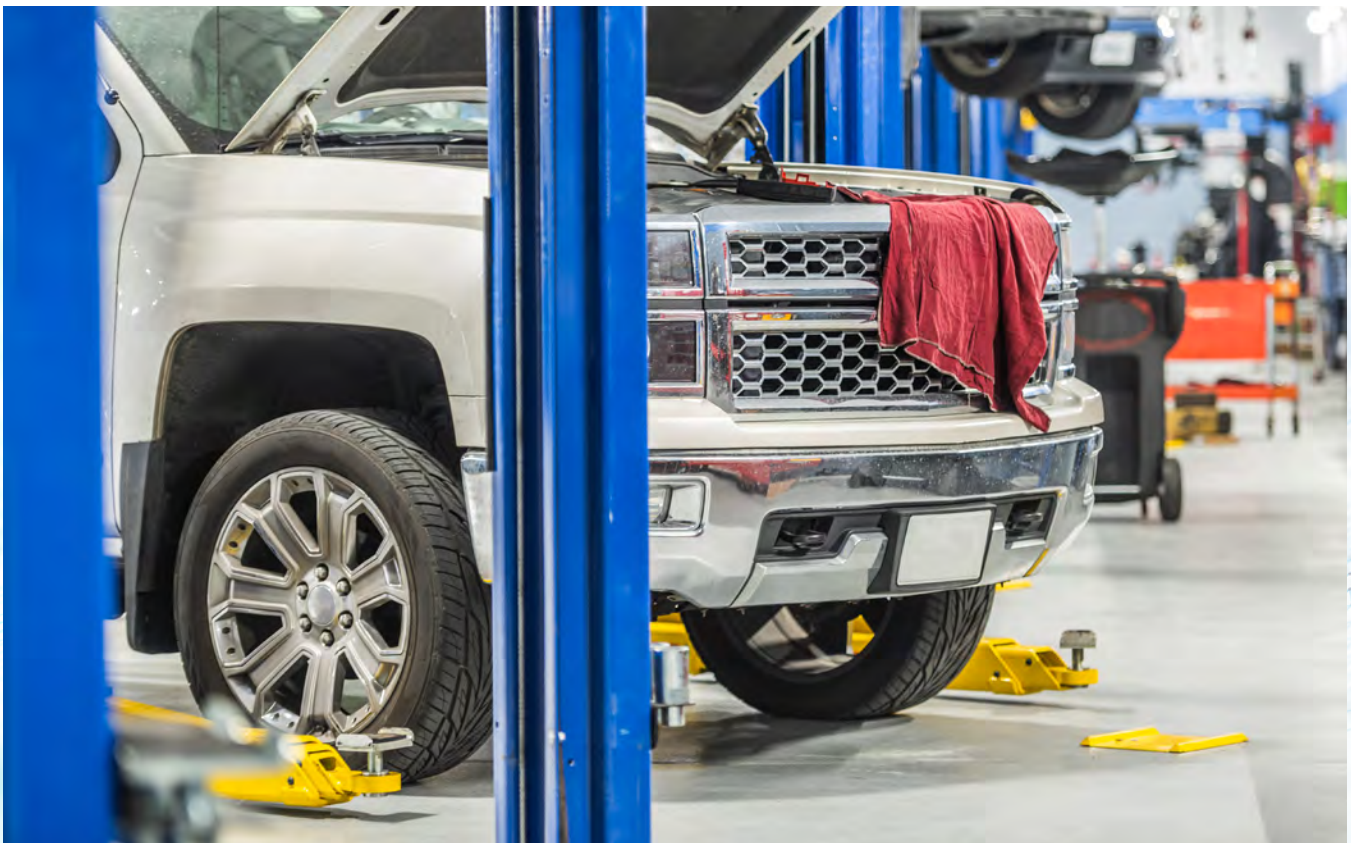
## THE PLAN

### STEP ONE: TRANSITION YOUR MINDSET FROM VENDOR TO BUSINESS PARTNER

We can see that commercial vehicle sales represent high-profit margin transactions, so it should come as no surprise that after-sales services represent a sustainable recurring revenue stream. To leverage this new opportunity, it is crucial to transition your dealership's mindset from being an auto vendor to being a business partner or consultant.

This transition begins with an expanded view of commercial-customer care. It means going beyond simply selling a work truck or van; dealers must develop a proper understanding of their customers and anticipate the eventualities of their business needs. These might include: repair, preventative maintenance, upfitting, fleet management, telematics, charging, and aftermarket services. Building a consultative business relationship with your customers is the key.

The bonus is that anticipating customer needs creates value for your customer—and translates to additional revenue opportunities for your dealership.



## THE PLAN

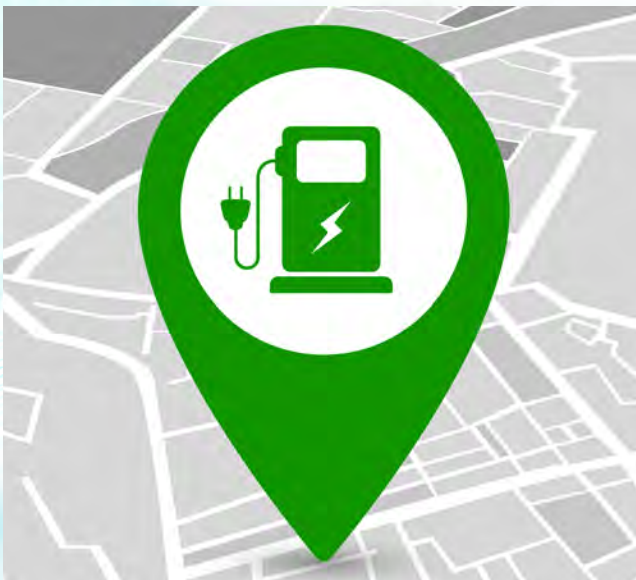
### STEP TWO: PROVIDE VALUE

Start with how you can be a resource for valuable industry information. If you can write original content, that's terrific. If not, content creation can be outsourced. But even if you don't publish content, you can provide links on your website for tools and articles that your commercial vehicle customers will find helpful in business operations.

#### A few examples might include

- Local EV charging station maps for those who have jumped into the EV market. Providing maps helps your customer while also helping establish your commercial department as a leader in the commercial EV space.
- Equipment storage options. Vehicle storage could run the gamut from toolboxes to shelving to other storage compartments. The reality is work truck and van customers are experts in their business, but they likely aren't experts in upfitting their work vehicles for efficiency. Providing links to storage options is an excellent service to your customers.
- New or used purchasing guidance. In today's market, this topic could hit home with your B2B buyers, particularly if you (like many dealers) have very little new inventory.

Remember, the idea is to tune in to whatever after-sale issues interrupt your customer's business, and step in with a possible solution.



## THE PLAN

## STEP 3: SET UP SERVICE AND REPAIR PROGRAMS

Unlike retail customers, downtime for business owners equals lost profits. They cannot afford to be without a vehicle or have one sitting idle waiting to be repaired. Your customers trusted you enough to buy a vehicle from you; the odds are excellent you can leverage that trust to fulfill their service and repair needs as well. Or, perhaps a business owner bought their work truck or van elsewhere, maybe even several states away - possibly due to inventory challenges. Nonetheless, they still need service work completed; and you can be sure they aren't going several states away for that. Too many dealerships are missing out on the opportunity to expand into the repair aspect of their dealer/customer relationships.

But don't stop at just repair; consider expanding your role to include a consultative relationship, working with your customers to forecast maintenance, repair, and replacement needs.

Preventative maintenance (PM) is a valuable service area that can position your dealership as a partner in business. Review the specifications of the truck or van you sold to them and analyze how your customer will use it. Then explore an appropriate service schedule to avoid downtime. Shepherding your commercial customers into a consistent maintenance program constitutes a massive benefit for them.



**Commercial service revenue can be as much as twice the value of retail.**

Furthermore, as a vehicle's age and mileage increase, there comes the point where it may be more cost-effective to replace the truck or van rather than continue having it repaired. Be a partner, rather than just a vendor, by bringing them information that could help them in their planning. You can add value to the relationship by evaluating the cost comparison between continued repair vs. replacement and then presenting the information in a Total Cost of Ownership context.





## THE PLAN

### STEP 4: VIP TREATMENT

While providing expert service and repair is the foundation for your commercial dealership's success, you can exceed all expectations by offering your commercial customers VIP treatment.

#### OPTIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

##### **Optional vehicle warranties and insurance**

Integrating vehicle warranties and insurance into your dealership's commercial-customer care plan is a great way to increase revenue while providing peace of mind for your customers. By partnering with a reputable insurance provider, you can offer competitive rates and comprehensive coverage to protect your customers' vehicle investments. Not only will this help build customer loyalty, but it can also lead to referrals and repeat business.



##### **Telematics services**

Telematics combines GPS tracking with vehicle diagnostics to provide data about a vehicle's performance. For commercial customers, telematics can be a valuable tool for managing their fleet of vehicles. By offering telematics services, you can provide your customers with valuable data to run their businesses more efficiently.



##### **Additional OEM Solutions**

For example, OnStar services - If you're a GM dealership, you have the unique opportunity to offer OnStar services, a subscription-based service that provides safety, security, and convenience features for drivers. These features can be invaluable for commercial customers who use their vehicles for business purposes. By offering additional OEM services, you can provide another layer of care for your commercial customers.



## THE PLAN

### The OEM connection

Ford, GM, and Stellantis (Ram) have created unique business arms catering specifically to commercial fleet customers. As a franchised dealership, you can leverage these programs to serve your customers better and position yourself as a business partner.

#### Ford Pro™

Launched in 2022, Ford Pro leverages technology from the ground to the cloud to help improve uptime, total cost of ownership, and performance of fleets with electrified or combustion vehicles. Ford Pro solutions combine software, charging, service, and financing for commercial vehicles, providing customers with one comprehensive platform to operate their fleets as they adopt connected and electrified vehicles across their business.

#### GM Business Elite

One of the ways General Motors is catering to commercial customers is with GM Business Elite. This OEM program partners with commercially focused dealership teams to support small businesses and small fleets with services and expertise designed to keep their vehicles and businesses running smoothly.

#### Stellantis Fleet & Business Solutions

Stellantis works through participating BusinessLink Dealers that can provide everything from dedicated account managers and extended service hours to complimentary loaner vehicles, telematics, and more. Stellantis Fleet & Business Solutions perks may also include a dedicated support system of in-field technicians, a business relations team, and exclusive incentives and discounts.

#### Mercedes-Benz Fleet Services

Mercedes-Benz offers commercial vehicle fleet services analysis of your fleet needs, fleet management, and telematics. They also provide custom upfits, mobile service, and roadside assistance.





## THE PLAN

# THE VALUE OF MONTHLY SALES GOALS VS. LIFETIME CUSTOMERS

It comes down to this: Long-term relationships represent much more in total revenue than one-time sales. And don't forget the disproportionate cost of acquiring new customers vs. exceeding the needs of existing customers. Remember, customers have relationships with business partners and consultants, but not so much with vendors.

### **Creating “sticky” customers**

Customer retention is about building a relationship of trust and respect that will result in customer loyalty and continued business. Nurturing that long-term relationship lets customers know you are vested in their success.

### **Your customers are looking for:**

- Regular communication
- Proactive problem solving
- Follow up
- A personal relationship

### **Cultivating “consultative” salespeople**

To be successful at these long-term relationships, you have to foster an environment for consultative sales professionals; you must find team members with this capacity and then support the different skill set needed than what is typically found in a dealership. Making the commitment to being a consultative resource is what will build those long-term relationships and validate your customers' loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

Customers will remember who took care of them vs. who was looking for a quick sale. This philosophy of expanded care for your customers fosters long-term relationships and develops sustainable recurring revenue.

Don't fall for the short-game trap because what you do today creates your tomorrow.