

# Selling F&I at Boat Shows

## *Put Yourself Ahead of the Competition*



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**P**roviding F&I at boat shows can be a key element that sets you apart from other dealers at the show. Let's face it. Boat shows are full of competition. If a potential customer doesn't like something about the services you offer, the boats you sell, or even the salespeople you employ; that customer can walk a few steps away and purchase from another dealer. Your challenge is to keep the customer interested, excited, and comfortable with his or her choice to buy from your dealership. F&I plays a critical role in this process.

F&I helps you take control of the sale. When a customer works with your F&I Manager or F&I outsource company, you keep the customer away from outside sources that could cost you the sale. If the customer seeks outside financing, that lender may direct the customer to another dealer at the boat show. Credit unions and local banks are notorious for approving loans with unfavorable terms that hike up monthly payments and make the boat unaffordable. In either case, you will likely lose the sale. Your best bet is to lock the customer into the sale by asking him or her to fill out a credit application with your dealership and leave a deposit for the boat. Once you obtain a credit application and deposit, you have reduced the risk that your customer will visit another dealer at the show or attempt to obtain financing from an outside source.

Do not forget that lenders who exhibit at boat shows fall into the category of outside financing. It is unwise to direct customers to these lenders—even if you are signed up with the lender. Sure—the lender may give the customer a quick loan approval, but that approval is good no matter which dealership the customer buys from! Your customer may actually take his or her credit approval and choose to buy from another dealer at the boat show. Always direct the customer to your F&I Manager or your F&I outsource company, so you can control the sale from beginning to end.

Handing over the customer to your F&I Manager or F&I outsource company during a boat show is simple. After your salesperson completes the sale, the salesperson should inform the customer that your dealership offers many competitive financing options that will make the boat affordable for your customer. The following script and general guidelines will help your salespeople promote your F&I department during boat shows.

"Mr./Ms. Customer, our dealership offers many competitive financing options for your new boat. Let me put you in touch with our Finance Manager (F&I Manager or F&I outsource company) who will work with your budget to determine the best lending program for your needs."

If the customer mentions that a lender at the boat show is advertising "finance specials," explain that your dealership works with several lenders in order to find the most competitive loan for the customer. Remember—you never want the customer to leave your F&I service and look for outside financing.

"Mr./Ms. Customer, the lender at this boat show may be able to approve you for a loan, but the lender may not offer the best options for you. Our lenders specialize in marine loans, so they offer special programs that keep your payments affordable, and they



typically accept lower down payments than most other lenders. You don't need to spend your time looking for financing. Let us do the shopping for you and put together several options for you to choose from."

The next challenge for your salespeople is to resist the temptation to quote interest rates or payments to your customers. Salespeople are NOT F&I professionals, and they can actually lose sales by saying too much. If a customer mentions a particular interest rate, the salesperson should remind the customer that if that interest rate exists, your F&I department will do its best to obtain that rate. Salespeople should remember they cannot control a customer's credit profile (which determines terms) or what Alan Greenspan does to interest rates. They can, however, control the selling process by focusing on the fun and excitement of boating and by staying away from the interest rate and payment traps. The best way to get around these objections is to write up all deals, "Subject to comfortable financing."

When your F&I department obtains a loan approval for a customer during a boat show, I would encourage you not to tell the customer about the approval until after the show. If you feel that you must tell the customer that his or her financing has been approved in order to keep the customer excited, DO NOT share details about the lender. If the customer knows that he or she has been approved by a particular lender, the customer might use that approval to buy a boat from someone else at the show.

You can use F&I as an effective point of sale promotion during boat shows. Talk with all of your lenders prior to each of your shows about incentive programs that they may be offering. Many times marine lenders will offer "No Money Down" or "Deferred Payment" programs during boat show season. You can promote these finance incentives with signs, banners, or transom tags at your shows.

If you're not already using professionals to run your F&I department, you should do so before your first boat show. Professional F&I services will enable you to do several things during your boat shows:

- Increase profits
- Gain a competitive edge
- Take control of your sales
- Offer point of sale promotions
- Provide an important customer service
- Make the buying process easy

You can turn this boat show season into your most productive yet by using F&I to take control of your sales.

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