



THE 5 SOFT PHONE SKILLS

CHANGING THE GAME

FOR DEALERS



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From start to finish, the customer's buying journey is arguably most affected by one element — their experience. This can include in-person interactions, phone conversations, or online communication.

For the automotive industry, agents more often than not interact with a customer for the first time over the phone. With that in mind, great phone handling skills seem obvious to have, right? Unfortunately, this isn't always the case.

Agents aren't confident in their ability to handle phone ups which leads to poor customer experiences and lost revenue. Phone skills matter. Top dealerships utilize these five soft phone skills to provide excellent customer experiences and capitalize on every opportunity.

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PRACTICE #1

HAVE A PROPER PROCESS IN PLACE

Creating greater efficiency with your phone processes starts with identifying the problem areas. Two common areas that threaten customer experience are long hold times and transferring customers straight to voicemail.



The average hold time for an inbound call is about 3 minutes.

The average hold time for an inbound call is about 3 minutes. Minimize those hold times by developing a warm transfer process. For example, if a customer calls in and wants to speak with Jason from the Sales Department, tell the customer you'll put them on a brief hold while you check to see if Jason is available. If Jason doesn't pick up, ask the customer how you can help with their request. Then, if you're unable to answer, offer to connect the customer to your manager. If neither Jason nor the manager is available, take down all of the customer's contact information, thank them for the call, and make sure the customer is promptly followed up with. The simple implementation of a warm transfer process can reduce wait times and minimize the chance that the customer hangs up before being helped. Ultimately, this is one of the quickest and easiest ways for dealers to generate revenue and improve customer experience.



PRACTICE #2

YOU'RE IN SALES, BE PERSONABLE!

Being friendly, personable, and attentive are all critical qualities top agents possess that provide customers with a positive experience while visiting a dealership. These same elements should be present on the phone as well. As noted before, the phone is the first place the customer will interact with your business, so it's important to represent your dealership well.

From the customer's perspective when calling into the dealership, he or she has done their research and is very interested in a vehicle. The average customer calls 4 to 5 dealerships while visiting only 1 or 2 — they're looking for a reason to eliminate you from their list. [Additionally, statistics show that 85% of customers made up their minds to purchase a vehicle before they even left their house.](#) Your job is to make sure they know they have called "THE" place.

Being personable on the phone starts with utilizing proper greetings. After taking so

many calls throughout the day, it's easy to get trapped in a routine and feel like you're a server taking down a food order. Push through that feeling and make sure to greet the customer with enthusiasm. Another way to be personable on the phone is to build rapport. Smile as if you were in person. This may seem odd, but customers can hear your smile through the phone.

Also, get the customer's name early on and use it repeatedly throughout the conversation. This can create a sense of comfort and familiarity for the customer. Lastly, write down all relevant information such as name, number, email, vehicle preference, and communication preference. This will be easier to obtain when done in a conversational manner! By viewing the phone as another tool to build trust, you'll contribute to an excellent customer experience and push those high-quality customers into visiting your dealership to close the deal.

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PRACTICE #3

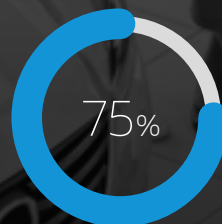
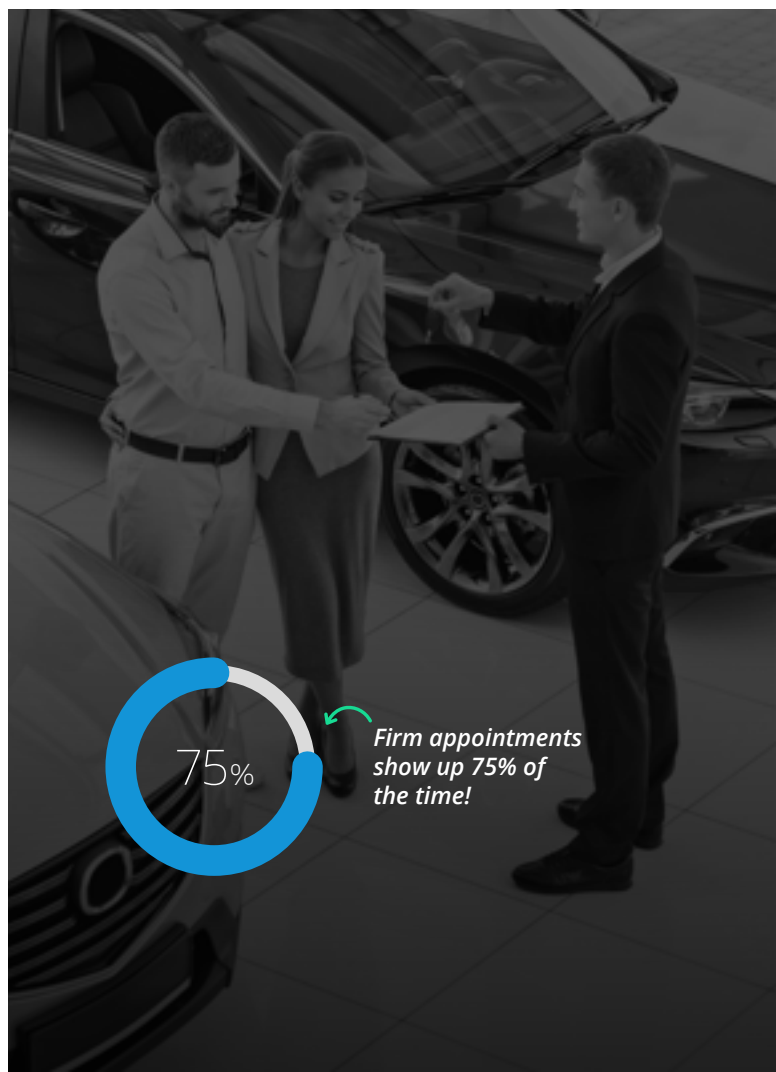
LISTEN, ADDRESS, AND INVITE

Customers appreciate when they're being listened to and can tell when they're not. As mentioned before, the customer has already done extensive research on the vehicle they want, and your dealership is most likely not the only one on their list to call. If the agent is only interested in upselling the customer or isn't paying attention, the customer will gladly hang up and call the next dealer in line.

Agents simply need to listen and ask the right questions to reassure the customer their wants and needs are being heard. Let's say a customer calls in after seeing a BMW 5 Series on your website. As the customer is providing the model number and specs, reply with, "Hey that's a great car, I'm going to look it up right now for you. While I'm doing that, what is it about that 5 Series that really interests you?" The agent conveys to the customer they know what vehicle they want and uses that as a transition to gather further information.

Now whether the vehicle is available or not, always invite the customer in. When setting the appointment, make sure to have the customer agree to a specific date and time, otherwise known as a *firm appointment*. This avoids a loose commitment where the customer simply states they'll stop by at an unspecified time in the future. **In fact, firm appointments show up 75% of the time!** Once the customer comes in, that additional information gathered from the original call can assist the agent in speaking to those

interests or, in case the vehicle is unavailable, allow an opportunity to propose a different vehicle that speaks to those interests as well. By listening to the customer, addressing their wants and needs, and inviting them in for a firm appointment, you're using the phone to best set yourself up for success.



*Firm appointments
show up 75% of
the time!*

PRACTICE #4

SET CLEAR
EXPECTATIONS

You just finished a great phone call with a customer. You were personable, listened to the customer's wants and needs, and booked a firm appointment. However, the day comes and the customer doesn't show. You try calling and emailing but no answer — opportunity lost. *So what happened?*

This situation is common among agents and is often the result of a lack of expectations being set on the original call. Setting expectations gives the customer knowledge of what's coming next. Purchasing a vehicle can be intimidating for customers, so providing them with all the information they need puts them at ease and makes them comfortable when they walk through the door. For example, before getting off the phone with the customer, let them know you'll text them your name, dealership's address, the vehicle of interest, and the date and time of the appointment. Also, throw in specifics such as where to park at the dealership, what door to enter through, and where to check-in upon arrival. Customers will appreciate the added detail and immediate confirmation.

Secondly, make sure to log all the call details in your CRM. This allows your team to know who the customer belongs to and for you to review notes prior to the customer's visit and prepare. As a bonus, if you have a call tracking system like [Car Wars integrated with your CRM](#), this occurs automatically!

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PRACTICE #5

MAKE TIME FOR MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Unfortunately not every opportunity leads to a sale the first time around and that's okay! What's not okay is giving up on an opportunity that simply didn't go as planned. Even in scenarios where a customer in the market confirms a firm appointment and the agent sets clear expectations, things come up and the customer may not show or cancel altogether. This can be disappointing, but on the bright side, there are still techniques to follow up and turn these opportunities around.

First, set aside time in your day to make outbound calls and follow up with those missed opportunities. Having a designated time to reach out to qualified leads forces you to get these calls done. In doing so, it can bring an opportunity back into play and present a proactive approach to the customer — don't assume the customer will call you first. Second, team up with

your managers to find out the best days and times to make your outbound calls. You want to give yourself the highest probability of reaching a customer ear-to-ear and not just getting their voicemail. If you do only get sent to voicemail, keep smiling through the call and clearly state the purpose of your call along with your name, email, and phone number. Finally, use your call tracking system to your advantage by alerting you of missed opportunities. It's easy to get sidetracked, so these alerts can be great reminders in delivering timely follow-ups.



IN CONCLUSION

Using these five soft phone skills will make a tremendous difference in your dealership's phone handling ability. With these practices in place, your team will turn the phone into your greatest asset impacting your dealership's bottom line and provide an outstanding customer experience.

To learn more about Car Wars and how Car Wars is helping thousands of dealers Own The Phone, visit us at carwars.com.



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