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COMMERCIAL PLAYBOOK

NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL SHIFT IN COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BUYING:
**MEETING THE COMMERCIAL VEHICLE
BUYER WHERE THEY SPEND THEIR TIME**

CHAPTER 6

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NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL SHIFT IN COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BUYING:

MEETING THE COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BUYER WHERE THEY SPEND THEIR TIME

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, the journey undertaken by B2B buyers has been profoundly transformed by the digital realm. The traditional path of purchase decisions has given way to a dynamic process that unfolds across various digital touchpoints, and numerous channels.

According to Gartner Inc, 75% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience. However, the commercial vehicle vertical has typically been slow to reflect the buying habits as have other areas of B2B. And business purchasing is nowhere near completely dependent on digital interactions, as evidenced by B2B buyers being 43% more likely to regret purchases made through digital channels alone. But the commercial vehicle buyer's journey is beginning to reflect the demographic preferences of next-gen business owners.

The commercial vehicle buyer's journey, once characterized by linear steps taken primarily in-person at dealerships' lots, has now embraced a multidimensional approach, facilitated by the proliferation of technology and interconnectedness. Understanding the buyer journey is a commercial dealer's foundation for leveraging their pain points and helping them on their journey.

This chapter of the Commercial Playbook series delves into the intricacies of the B2B vehicle buyer's journey within this digital-specific ecosystem paradigm. We will dissect each of the four stages, or steps—Awareness, Consideration, Decision, Delight—and shed light on the pain points that businesses encounter as they navigate their way to making informed, and valuable, purchase decisions.



You are not selling trucks and vans. You are partnering with business owners and fleet managers to solve their specific problems and challenges. Market your dealership as much as your vehicles. Waiting for OEM inventory to return to glut-level numbers is just plain lazy. Finding the vehicles your customer needs is a smart recipe to develop those lucrative long-term relationships.

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THE AWARENESS STAGE

The awareness stage marks the beginning of the B2B vehicle buyer's journey. At this stage, potential buyers have a burgeoning need, or problem, requiring resolution. However, they may not yet have a definitive grasp of what their particular need or problem entails.

PAIN POINTS

Some specific issues or pain points that might prompt business owners and fleet managers to embark on the Buyer's Journey include:

- ▶ Their business is growing and it's getting harder to complete jobs with the current number of vehicles in their fleet or the types of vehicles they have.
- ▶ The increasing cost and scarcity of commercial vehicles have made it harder for them to purchase work trucks quickly.
- ▶ The escalating costs of vehicle purchases and repair operations are becoming unmanageable.
- ▶ Increasing government regulations have narrowed the vehicle choices available for their companies.

At this point, the prospective buyer just knows that they are experiencing issues and something probably has to change, but they're not sure what or how.

ADDRESSING THE AWARENESS STAGE

During the awareness stage, the commercial dealership's overarching goal revolves around providing education about the prospect's problems. Their job is to help the prospect understand why they are experiencing problems and identify potential solutions.

Asking questions like "How has this impacted your business?" can help you understand where the prospect is at and what knowledge gaps exist. The goal is to identify their pain points and ensure that they have all the information they need to make an informed decision.

The key here is to not try and sell them anything yet, but rather focus on educating business personnel about the issues they are facing and how to create numerous touch points between them and your dealership.

UTILIZING TOP-OF-THE-FUNNEL CONTENT

Positioning your dealership as a trusted industry source through reliable, relevant content is key to engaging the prospective buyer. Consider circulating eNewsletters/ emails linking to articles tackling key industry topics.

Help buyers quantify their pain points with content that asks questions like:

- ▶ "What are your biggest concerns with your current vehicles?"
- ▶ "How many vehicles do you service annually?"
- ▶ "How long does it take to perform a routine maintenance check, and do you handle this in-house or do you bring these vehicles into a dealership?"

Leverage content that offers insight into trends in the commercial vehicle industry to further build your credibility and establish your dealership as a trusted source of information on all things automotive.

Developing robust, branded content is so key in the awareness stage that even if you must invest in professional writing services for topical content, it is worthwhile.

ENHANCING ONLINE PRESENCE AND VISIBILITY

Creating a compelling online footprint that caters to your prospect's specific needs is essential to capitalizing on an efficient content marketing plan. In the awareness stage, branding is the word of the day. You want to make sure that your business is recognizable as a leader in the industry.

This starts with having a strong website, but it doesn't end there. You should also be active on social media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), where you can share links to your blog posts and other content. If possible, consider investing in paid advertising campaigns through Google Vehicle Ads or Facebook Ads to drive traffic back to your dealership's website.

Your dealership site must feature highly visible commercial branding. A prominent link to your dedicated "Work Truck"

site/pages is one of the best ways to generate a strong commercial identity for your business and create continuity between your messaging.

BUILDING BRAND RECOGNITION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Sustained brand recognition requires not only an online presence, but also continuous networking and community engagement.

Being active in your local and regional trade and business groups can show your commitment to the area's economy.

Supporting community initiatives and events regularly can demonstrate your commitment to the well-being of local residents.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Addressing the awareness stage is a two-pronged effort:

- ▶ Help the customer identify and quantify their pain points.
- ▶ Build your dealership's brand as a trusted resource in the world of commercial vehicles.

The awareness stage is the critical first step in the customer lifecycle, and it's where your dealership can make or break its reputation. It's important to remember that buyers are looking for a trusted resource that can answer their questions, provide information on available options, and help them make an informed decision. As such, you should take advantage of every opportunity to connect with potential customers and show them why your dealership is their go-to choice for their work truck and van issues/questions/needs.

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THE CONSIDERATION STAGE

During the consideration stage, commercial vehicle buyers begin evaluating possible solutions to the issues identified during the awareness stage. They've determined what exactly their problem is, now they are trying to determine what options are available and how much investment will be required for different solutions.

PAIN POINTS

Key concerns for buyers include:

- ▶ **Available options:** The buyer wants to know what options are available and how they work. This is a great opportunity for your dealership to help educate potential customers about types of vehicles and the latest technology and features that can help them solve their business' vehicle needs.
- ▶ **Cost:** The price of the solution poses elemental decisions for buyers. The prospective buyer needs to be certain that the cost will yield a solid return on investment.

Remember, buyers in the consideration phase may not have determined that purchasing a vehicle is the best solution for their problems. Also, bear in mind that your dealership can offer more than just vehicle sales. You are the expert in your industry and can provide solution ideas that may not be immediately apparent. For example, you can help a customer determine whether purchasing a vehicle is the best solution for their particular circumstance, or if an alternative would help them get the most value from their investment. Alternatives to a new vehicle might be an interchangeable truck body system or delivery routing software depending on the issues a business is dealing with.

ADDRESSING THE CONSIDERATION STAGE

Dealerships need to provide as much information as possible to the buyer at this stage, with a focus on helping the customer find an appropriate solution for their needs.

- ▶ **Publish content that highlights multiple solution options:** Content that responds to the specific concerns of your target market has a crucial role during this stage. Now is the time your communications should articulate how various options can mitigate their identified issues, whether in the form of a vehicle purchase, vehicle upfits, or fleet management offered through your dealership.
- ▶ **Distribute content focusing on vehicle types:** Commercial dealerships need to distribute information about specific vehicle types and models, as well as provide information on the comparative benefits of each vehicle option. Don't forget the possibility for one vehicle to fulfill multiple roles. This is an important consideration for organizations looking to make the most out of their investment. Your job right now is to provide your target market with everything they need to make an informed decision about how a vehicle type might alleviate their dilemma. In addition, this content should be distributed across multiple channels to reach as many people as possible; think blog, email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Ads, etc.



Social channels are extremely under leveraged platforms for B2B brands,” said Rick LaFond, Director Analyst in the Gartner Marketing practice. “Marketers can go beyond using social channels for flashy short-form videos promoting brand values to truly demonstrate how the brand supports different customer needs and pain points across various stages of the buying process.”

- ▶ Optimize your website for search engines: Essential content must be easily discoverable by search engines. Ensure that your webpages, especially those focused on vehicle specifics, are SEO optimized to appear at the top of search results when prospects seek solutions. SEO best practices should include indexing efforts, whether using a sitemap or requesting indexing directly via Google Search Console.
- ▶ Optimize your site for user experience (UX): Beyond just finding your site, users must be able to navigate it easily. Use clear, intuitive site design and implement UX best practices to guarantee seamless navigation to and around the commercial portion of your website.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Like the Awareness stage, the Consideration stage is also a two-pronged approach:

- ▶ Publish content that helps buyers decide what type of solution is appropriate for their needs.
- ▶ Ensure your website UX is optimized to influence prospects to consider the options your dealership provides.

Your efforts here form stepping stones to the decision stage that follows. At this point, you have your prospect’s attention and you’ve established yourself as a trusted authority and influencer in the buyer’s world. The buyer has used provided material to choose the type of solution that will address their needs and they are ready to make a decision. They just need some help deciding where exactly to spend their hard-earned money.

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THE DECISION STAGE

The decision stage is critical in the B2B buyer's journey. It's the point at which potential buyers have determined which solution is most beneficial and they are ready to buy. However, even at this stage, perhaps especially at this stage, potential buyers still face several impediments.

PAIN POINTS

Pain points in the decision stage may include:

- ▶ **Financing:** Arranging for the funds to make the purchase can be a considerable hurdle. Businesses need to identify a financing method that suits their financial plan.
- ▶ **Availability:** Limited vehicle options can force companies to compromise and choose solutions that may not exactly match their requirements.
- ▶ **Delivery:** The timeline of vehicle delivery can significantly impact business operations, making this a pivotal criterion for decision-making.

ADDRESSING THE DECISION STAGE

The decision stage is when you want to ease any pain points that are holding your prospect back from pulling the trigger on a purchase.

At this point in the buyer's journey, your focus should be on facilitating the final decision and ensuring the completion of the purchase. Here are some ways dealerships can reduce friction during this stage:

Optimize your website for search engines: Keeping your website SEO optimized continues to be critical. Prospective buyers will likely return to your site multiple times before making the final decision. For your website to appear in your potential customers' searches, it should host a diverse range of pages featuring keywords linked to vehicle makes, models, and characteristics.

Optimize your site for user experience (UX): A seamless, intuitive user experience can significantly simplify the decision-making process for your prospects. Providing quick access to financing information, availability details, and delivery logistics can be crucial.

Engage prospects with direct response emails:

Personalized, targeted emails can help address any remaining concerns. You can outline financing options, discuss availability, and supply information regarding delivery timelines, along with offering a way to connect with your commercial department team to take the next step(s).

Engage prospects with Google and social media

retargeting: Retargeting can effectively nurture prospects at this stage, keeping your solutions top of mind as they navigate their decision-making process.



TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC PAIN POINTS:

- ▶ **Total Cost of Ownership (TCO):** Now is the time to highlight your offerings that help reduce TCO. Whether your dealership offers favorable financing options, maintenance packages, fuel-efficient models, or warranties, ensure that this information is easily accessible to your prospects.
- ▶ **Availability:** Communicate clearly about vehicle availability. If you don't have something in stock, custom vehicle search platforms can help you quickly locate what your buyer wants. You can also embed easy-to-use order forms right on your vehicle detail pages (VDPs) to ease prospects right into your pre-sales process.
- ▶ **Financing:** Offer comprehensive information about various financing options available to prospective customers. Consider partnering with a financial organization with a deep knowledge of commercial vehicles. Again, you can feature that financing option prominently on your VDPs.
- ▶ **Transportation:** Everything we've covered on financing applies to transportation as well. It's critical to display options on VDPs which are natural landing spots for buyers in the decision stage. You want prospects looking at those vehicle description pages to think of your dealership as the place that has solutions to their pain points, no matter if you are "in their backyard" or a thousand miles away.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overall, ensuring clarity and detailing customer-supportive options at the decision stage can significantly influence the business buyer's journey, tipping it in your dealership's favor.

NON-LINEAR APPROACH TO THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

People rarely take a linear path from prospect to lead to buyer. Your marketing must leverage content and pathways to engage buyers wherever they may be at any given moment.

Once a buyer moves on from the awareness stage, they will bounce between the consideration and decision stages many times before actually buying.

When developing your marketing strategy, keep in mind that buyers will often revisit content related to all three stages during their journey to purchase. It's important to remember this when developing your strategy, as it will help you create content that speaks directly to each stage of the buyer's journey.

As buyers gain knowledge of options and weigh the ROI for each option, they will, at some point, settle into the decision stage and your dealership must be prepared to deliver and delight.



Photo - Email On Acid

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THE DELIGHT STAGE

The delight stage is often viewed as the conclusion of the buyer's journey, yet in reality, it's the beginning of the next cycle. This stage emphasizes the critical role that post-purchase experiences play in fostering customer loyalty and perpetuating repeat business.

The objective of the delight stage shifts away from direct selling and focuses on transforming customers into advocates and promoters who can contribute to growing your business further. Growth can manifest as repeat purchases of commercial vehicles, a steady stream of revenue from maintenance and repair services, expanded operations into fleet management programs, and potential opportunities in passenger vehicle sales to the business customer and their employee base.

PAIN POINTS

After purchasing a commercial vehicle, customers may encounter several challenges, such as:

- ▶ **Customer service quality:** Effective customer service can greatly influence how customers perceive your business, which can consequently impact their future purchasing decisions.
- ▶ **Maintenance and repair challenges:** As vehicles age, important maintenance and timely repairs become paramount.
- ▶ **Resource management:** Managing and tracking a fleet of vehicles can be a daunting task for your customers.
- ▶ **Expanding needs:** As businesses grow and diversify, their commercial vehicle requirements will likely expand.
- ▶ **Staying current:** Customers may struggle to keep abreast of new vehicle options, government regulations, and emerging technology pertinent to their business.

If these pain points look a lot like the issues that lead to the first step in the buyer's journey, that's because they are. This is why the delight stage can lead to a virtuous cycle.

ADDRESSING THE DELIGHT STAGE

(Strategies to Delight Customers)

To change these challenges into opportunities to delight your customers, you can:

Enhance the customer service experience:

Adopt a proactive approach to customer service, addressing potential issues before they become problems. Always aim to provide efficient, helpful, and empathetic customer service - and seek out ways you can make your dealership stand out.

Assist with maintenance and repair:

Either provide vehicle maintenance and repair services yourself or establish partnerships with trusted service providers. Introduce beneficial service packages and comprehensive warranty programs to add value for your customers.

Support fleet management:

Establish in-house fleet management solutions or connect your customers with dependable third-party providers. Show your commercial vehicle customers how utilizing fleet management solutions can help them effectively track and manage their vehicles, thus saving them money.

Identify and respond to growing needs:

Stay connected with your clients, understand their evolving needs, and present solutions proactively to resolve their anticipated challenges.

THE CYCLE REPEATS

Understanding the cyclical nature of the customer journey helps you recognize the importance of sustaining customer relationships. By delighting customers each time they interact with your dealership, you set yourself up for repeat business and customer referrals.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

To summarize, the delight stage is not merely a closing stage of the buyer's journey, but an initiation point for future transactions. Prioritizing proactive customer service, offering comprehensive care for the vehicles you sell, empowering your customers with fleet management tools, and staying in tune with changing needs will all help to ensure customer satisfaction.

Satisfied and happy customers transform from being strictly customers into industry advocates, promoting your business and contributing to its sustained growth. Use the same customer-centric approach when addressing the needs of each stage, and your dealership will be on its way to building customer loyalty.



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