

Professionalism

Your affiliation with the National Independent Automobile Dealers Association and your state association is an excellent image-builder, and one which you should brag about. Customers respect dealers who are members in good standing with professional organizations. It shows you are concerned about building a long-lasting business, and not a “here-today-gone-tomorrow” operation.

Consequently, you should display in a prominent place your NIADA membership certificate with its Code of Ethics, and your current year window decal proclaiming your NIADA membership. Advertising is another very important ingredient in image-building, and you need to be sure that all advertisements--whether print or broadcast--reflect positively on your dealership in both their content and appearance.

NIADA Code Of Ethics

1. We will have a general duty of integrity, honor and fair dealing toward the general public.
2. We will comply with all city, county, state and federal laws and shall endeavor to keep ourselves informed of those laws governing our business.
3. We will not intentionally injure the business reputation of another member or competitor.
4. We will employ truth and accuracy in advertising and selling.
5. We will stand behind any guarantee given with the sale of a motor vehicle.
6. We will not perform any act which would bring disrepute to the motor industry.
7. We will expose or halt, where found, any scheme designed to deceive or defraud the automobile buying public and aid in prosecuting those guilty of such acts.
8. We will constantly strive to improve business methods to the end that the public will be better served.
9. We will encourage the American system of free enterprise.

Image Checklist

- Telephone voice friendly, warm.
- Yard free of trash.
- Grass and shrubbery cut and pruned.
- Signs, buildings, office and shop have good appearance.
- Cars on lot are clean.
- Sales staff and office personnel neatly dressed.
- Importance of honesty discussed with sales staff.
- Personnel briefed on importance of community involvement.
- Participation in Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, or other such organization.
- Current trade association membership certificates and window decals displayed.
- Advertising reflects quality, professional image.



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Tackling The Image Problem

*Or, how to make the
public see you in a
positive way.*



NATIONAL INDEPENDENT
AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION

What Is Image?

Image is a powerful, but invisible force. It is what people think of you, your industry, and your company. Good image can pave the road to success for your business, while a poor image shackles you with additional work and burdens.

The image of the used car industry needs improvement. Comedians and cartoonists have long used the industry as the victim of their jokes. A close look, however, shows they actually are not talking about the product (car or truck) but the salesperson. As an example, the frequently used punchline, "Would you buy a used car from this man?", features in a negative fashion the salesman and not the vehicle being sold.

And it is this image which needs to be improved.

First Things First

Correcting a bad image is a difficult and time-consuming task. It takes patience, a lot of hard work, and a lot of determined effort.

But most importantly, improving the image of the used motor vehicle industry will require industry-wide support. It demands that each dealership make a special effort.

Telephone Manner

The way you answer the telephone often creates the first impression a customer has of your business. Develop a short, but professional manner of answering the telephone. Use either just the name of the company, or a brief salutation such as, "Good morning, Johnson's Used Cars."

Be polite with caller and avoid long sales pitches over the telephone. If you have to put a customer on hold, do not leave him holding for more than a couple of minutes. If it is necessary for him to wait longer than that, offer to take a number and return the call. At the conclusion of the call, thank the customer for calling.

Neatness

The first visible impression your customers receive carries a lot of weight, and if that first impression is a positive one, it can go a long way toward improving image. The most important thing you can do to make a strong first impression is to have a business which emphasizes neatness.

Make a walk-through inspection of every aspect of your dealership periodically, as if you were a customer just coming onto the lot. You may even want to ask a friend to walk through with a critical eye. Check to make sure that the vehicles on the lot are always clean, that the grass has been cut and that trash is not blowing around the grounds. The paint on buildings and signs should appear fresh and the exterior clean and attractive.

Inside, the office area should be neat and well-organized, with all furnishings in good repair and sales materials professionally created and displayed. If there is a shop area, much effort needs to be put forth to make its appearance as neat and clean as possible.

Dress

While neatness of the grounds is very important, neatness carries even double weight when it comes to individuals. It is not necessary for

all of the men to wear a coat and tie and women to wear skirts, but the attire should be neat and clean. Men should appear either clean-shaven, or if a beard is worn, it should be neatly trimmed. Women should not wear heavy make-up or strong perfume.

Honesty

One of the greatest challenges facing the used motor vehicle industry is overcoming an image of dishonesty. Often a customer will come to the dealership primed to do mental battle with the salesperson because he believes the salesperson is trying to hide something that is wrong with the car or will charge him too much for the vehicle. While this image is deeply entrenched, it can be overcome.

The way to beat this negative image is to be completely honest with the customer. If there is something not quite right about a particular vehicle, point it out before the customer spots it himself. If you don't know the exact condition of a car, say so. Not only will this approach build the customer's respect for you, it will also build trust.

Community Involvement

One of the key ingredients in forming a good image for your business is to become involved in community programs. In other words, give time and effort back to the community in which you live. For example, be active in the Chamber of Commerce, coach a Little League baseball team, work with the PTA, be active in your church or synagogue, work in civic or fraternal organizations, or become involved in other community projects which come up each year.