

Ten Questions To Ask Any Dealer Software Vendor Before You Sign

Including us.

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Most dealer software is bought on a demo. The demo is the vendor's best day, on the vendor's best data. It tells you what the system can do. It doesn't tell you what it's like to live with.

I sat on the buying side for years, and vendors came to see me all the time. I used to tell every one of them, "I already have one of those." Then I watched what they did. They were prepared for the demo. They weren't prepared for me. The rep was friendly, the deck was good, and friendly doesn't get the spend approved. The people who signed the cheques wanted cold, factual answers, so that's what I asked for.

And in all those years, not one of them asked me the question that would have got my attention.

Start with the system you have

You have a lead management system. A CRM. A valuation tool. Training. Before you look at anything new, ask of each one:

01 **Is it working for you?**

02 **Can it do more?**

03 **Can it do better?**

If the honest answer is yes, leave it alone. A new system has to beat something that works. If the answer is “sort of”, you’ve just found the real reason to have the conversation. We’ll ask you the same thing.

Then ask the vendor

01 Who owns my data, and what happens if I cancel?

Everything you put into that system is your business. Your stock, your customers, your history. But it sits on their side. So find out now what happens on the day you leave. Can you take all of it with you, in a form you can use? And how much notice do you have to give? You don’t want to discover you’re tied in after you’ve signed.

02 What does it really cost, and what do I pay when I need something changed?

The price on the proposal is rarely the whole price. Get it clear what’s included, what isn’t, and what happens the first time you need a change. Every dealership works differently, so you will need changes. If each one comes with a quote, you’ll stop asking. Then you’re working around the system again.

03 What has it produced, and can I see the numbers?

Features don’t pay the bills. Leads, sales and hours saved do. So ask how many leads it has produced for a dealership like yours, and ask to see the figures. Not the promise. The figures. The answer will tell you a lot, including when there isn’t one yet.

04 What does the salesperson get out of it, and can they use it from a phone?

The people who fill in the system aren’t the people who read the reports. If it gives them nothing back, they’ll put in as little as they can. And if updating means walking back to a desk, it gets done at the end of the day from memory, or not at all. Ask to see it working on a phone, there and then.

05 What does my manager see without pulling a report?

Your managers already spend hours downloading reports and reconciling them. If the new system doesn’t take that away, it hasn’t saved anyone any time. Ask what they’d see first thing in the morning without asking for anything. Ageing stock, leads nobody has touched, what’s still outstanding.

06 When one of the systems you connect to changes or stops sending, who fixes it, and who pays?

Every vendor will tell you they integrate. It's in every pitch. What you want to know is what happens when it goes wrong. A feed stops. The DMS changes its export. A portal changes what it accepts. Somebody has to notice, somebody has to fix it, and somebody has to pay. Find out which of those is you.

07 How does it count days in stock for a car that moves between my dealerships?

Some groups count the days at each dealership. Others count the total days in the group. Move a car across and it can look brand new on one count and a year old on the other. If the system only holds one, you can hide an old car by moving it, and never see it. Ask which count it uses, and whether you can see both.

08 What happens at month end when something breaks?

Month end is when deals invoice, settlements go out and reports get pulled. It's also when things break. So find out who you call, how fast they answer, and whether it's a real person. Get it in writing before you need it.

09 Where is my data held, and who can see it?

You hold customer details, ID numbers and finance information. POPIA holds you responsible for it, even when a supplier looks after it. Ask where it lives, who has access, and how that access is recorded. Then ask what they've agreed to in writing.

10 Can I try it before I commit?

Nobody should sign for something they haven't lived with. A month or two, running alongside what you have now, means nothing you depend on is at risk. Switching in the middle of a month is how deliveries get missed. You decide when to switch, and you can walk away if it doesn't work.

THE AUTOCLOUD VIEW

If a vendor can't answer these plainly, you've learned what you needed to know before you signed, not after.

We'll answer all ten in writing. Ask us.