

Would you blame anyone for assuming the vehicle walkaround has been abandoned or forgotten? Dealers and salespeople are opting for processes that value speed over everything else. As a result, simple, effective tools like the walkaround are being left by the wayside.

The walkaround is our best chance to sell the sizzle and not the steak. Our customers have done their research. They need to make an emotional connection with the vehicle.



Follow these five simple steps to make better connections:

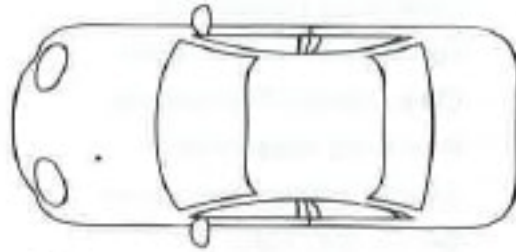
1. Listen to the Customer.

Customers will write salespeople off if they believe their questions or what is important to them is not the focus of every interaction. They want us to listen to their statements and questions, not ignore them. Do not ignore their concerns, no matter how minor they might seem to you.

Give them your full attention and assume nothing.

This is where a walkaround is a fantastic tool. It is a chance to point out features that specifically address any questions that arose in the initial consultation. It is a chance to listen carefully as they explore the vehicle in

person. They might ask about options that are only available in higher trims — or even other vehicles — that might better fit their needs. Ask open ended questions to learn how the customer will be using the vehicle.



2. Be Genuine.

We must demonstrate our intent to help the customer find the right vehicle for them, rather than just trying to make commission. Customers often walk into the dealership with a mental checklist of features or characteristics they want in their dream car. But they just as often have an entirely different set of needs they can't — or won't — articulate.

Uncovering those needs requires the utmost sincerity. Tying the vehicle to their stated and unstated desires will set the tone and determine the level of trust that customer gives you in return.

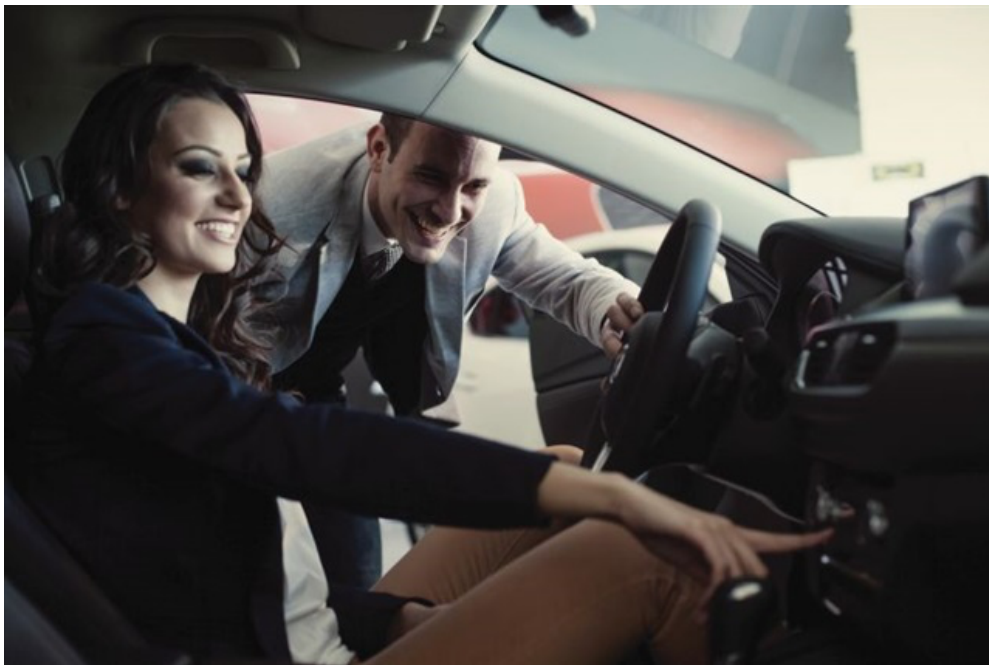
Take, for example, an SUV buyer who expresses a need for a certain amount of cargo space. Don't just rattle off the cubic footage. Ask what they have to carry and show them how to fold the seats down. If they struggle with the hatch, they might appreciate a power liftgate. Actively watch to see if they are doing anything wrong.

Everything you do at this stage of the sale will either create or break trust. People do not like buying from people they don't trust. You can build that trust by being open and honest, listening to and acknowledging everything the customer tells you, and letting them know you are doing your best to help them find the right vehicle for them.

3. Showcase What's Important.

The walkaround is your opportunity to highlight everything from the powerful engine to the perfectly engineered rear axle to the intuitive infotainment unit. It is imperative to showcase with passion. The chance to amaze a customer comes once. Don't squander the opportunity by failing to highlight everything that car is capable of doing.

By all means, start with the features that are most important to the customer. But once those have been completely demonstrated and explained, showcase everything else. This is your last chance to uncover whatever hidden needs the customer has yet to mention, and it's a great opportunity to see which additional features they are drawn to.



Putting the customer in the driver's seat can help turn "a" car into "their" car.

4. Keep the Customer Engaged.

A walkaround shouldn't just be an endless sales pitch to a passive customer. Ask questions. Have them sit in the vehicle and tell you what they like and dislike. People buy cars they are excited about, and that excitement has to begin and end in the car itself. The walkaround is the perfect time to really

get the customer engaged in the process. You want them to start thinking of it not as “a” car but “their” car.

5. Overcome Objections.

This is a big one. It is easy to ignore objections. It takes skill and practice to resolve them. Customers will walk away if they feel you are just trying to push any car you can on them. Buying a car is a big investment, one that many people will make only once or twice in a decade. You must listen for problems, acknowledge them, and demonstrate how a particular vehicle can solve them.

Whether they are overwhelmed by the latest in-vehicle technology, unsure about collision-avoidance systems, concerned about fuel efficiency, or particular about the size and position of the cupholders, every objection is important. Take the time to hear them out and have faith in your product. Ask follow-up questions and then connect the dots to match objections to features.

The growth of digital media and online resources has made our business more transparent. But if you think that means you can ignore the walkaround, you are missing a major part of the sales puzzle. Customers might walk in knowing more about the cars they are interested in than ever before, but there is no substitute for actually sitting in the driver’s seat, opening the trunk, and testing the features. Options that, on paper, might not have seemed important to them suddenly can become indispensable.

The walkaround is a chance to connect the dots between the virtual showroom and the actual sale, and to begin to build trust that we have their back and we are there to help them purchase the perfect vehicle for their needs. It is one of the best tools we have, and we can’t afford to shortchange it. Doing so will only risk losing the sale before it can even begin.