

P L A Y B O O K

# Auto Dealers

*Handshake Outreach email sequence, adapted.*

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Four messages, one sequence. Mail-merge ready.

## ADAPTATION 2

# Category notes

Lower-sensitivity category, but with a unique trust problem: shoppers spend roughly 14 hours researching, visit 4+ websites, and arrive at the lot already wary. Industry research shows the average buyer would pay more for a better experience and that dealer follow-up is widely poor — about a quarter of leads don't get a 24-hour response. The visitor's central fear is being flooded with phone calls or shown a different price than the website.

This is a category where Variant C (no acknowledgment, value-led) may outperform. The version below uses a soft acknowledgment — acknowledging the research process, not the surveillance. Insider terms used: out-the-door (OTD) price, doc fee, market adjustment, dealer reserve, buy rate, trade-in negotiation.

MESSAGE 1 OF 4 / SEND WITHIN 4-24 HOURS

# Message 1: The Honest Hello

*Acknowledge the cold contact. Promise no flood of phone calls. Give one useful tip.*

**Subject:** From [First Name] at [Dealership] – not a sales pitch

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Hi –

Most people researching a vehicle visit four or five dealer sites before they ever talk to anyone, and [Dealership] was apparently one of yours recently. I'm not going to pretend that's a coincidence, but I also don't want to be the dealer who follows that up with five calls and a flood of "limited time only" emails.

I'm [Name], [role] at [Dealership]. One short note, one useful thing, then I'll back off.

The single most useful thing I can tell someone in the research phase is this: the price you see on a dealer website usually isn't the out-the-door price. The numbers that actually matter are the doc fee (varies wildly between dealers – some are \$99, some are over \$800), and any "market adjustment" or "dealer add-on" markups. When you're comparing two dealers on the same vehicle, ask both for the out-the-door price in writing before you visit. The spread can be thousands of dollars on the same MSRP.

If that's useful, I'll send two or three more notes – short, no pressure, just things worth knowing while you're shopping. If not, the unsubscribe link is at the bottom and we're square.

– [Name]

[Direct line, reply-to]

MESSAGE 2 OF 4 / SEND 3-4 DAYS LATER

## Message 2: The Inside Knowledge

*The costly signal: teach them how to negotiate — with you or anyone else.*

**Subject:** The thing that costs car buyers the most money (and it's not the price of the car)

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[Name],

Quick follow-up. If you're shopping for a vehicle, the question you're probably focused on is the price of the car. The question that actually moves more dollars is the financing.

Here's the version I'd tell my own brother. Dealers make a meaningful share of their profit on financing, not the vehicle. There's a thing called dealer reserve — if a lender approves you at 6.5%, the dealer can mark it up to 7.5% and pocket the spread. It's legal, and it's invisible unless you know to ask.

Two things to do before you sit down with anyone, including us: (1) get pre-approved at your bank or credit union before you walk into a dealership. Even if you don't end up using it, you now have a real number to compare against. Credit unions in particular often beat dealer financing by a full point or more. (2) When you're at the dealer, ask explicitly: "what's the buy rate from the lender, and what's the rate you're offering me?" An honest dealer will answer. A dealer who deflects is telling you something.

If you want a deeper read on this, [Dealership] put together a guide on the four numbers that actually decide what a vehicle costs you over five years. No form. [link].

— [Name]

MESSAGE 3 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

# Message 3: The Story

*One customer story with a friction moment. Specifics over selling.*

**Subject:** The customer who walked away twice before buying from us

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[Name],

Wanted to share a story.

A guy I'll call Mark walked onto our lot looking at a [model]. Three-row SUV, growing family, replacing a sedan that had aged out. He'd done his homework – spreadsheet, three other dealers visited, target price already in hand. He almost left after his first visit because we couldn't quite hit his number. He almost left after his second visit because he wasn't sure about the trim level.

What ended up changing his mind wasn't price. It was that on his second visit, the salesperson he was working with – Aaron – told him the trim he was looking at had an option package that was over-engineered for what he actually needed, and steered him to a trim a thousand dollars cheaper that fit the family better. Aaron made less money on that sale than he would have on the original deal. Mark figured that out, and it's the reason he sent two friends to us in the year that followed.

I'm sharing this because the part of car-buying that gets less attention than it should is whether you trust the person across the table. Price you can find online. Trust you find by watching how someone behaves when they have something to lose by being honest.

If you want to come in and just look – no test drive, no paperwork, no pitch – reply to this email or text [number] and ask for [Name or specific salesperson]. Or come during off-hours – mid-week mornings, we're slow and you'll get an unhurried walk-around. If you're not ready, that's fine. One more note and I'll let you go.

– [Name]

MESSAGE 4 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

# Message 4: The Clean Close

*Three options. The exit is graceful. The questions are theirs to use — with anyone.*

**Subject:** Last note from me

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[Name],

Last email unless you want to stay in touch. Three options:

**If you're getting close to a decision:** Reply to this email, text [number], or just come by. Mention my name and you'll skip the standard intake. If you want a real out-the-door number on a specific vehicle before you visit, hit reply with the stock number and I'll send it within the hour during business hours.

**If you want to keep watching the market:** [Dealership] sends a once-a-month note — inventory changes, real (not theatrical) incentives, end-of-quarter pricing patterns. No daily blasts. [link] to subscribe.

**If we're not the right dealer for you:** That's a fair outcome. Whoever you buy from, three things will save you money: (1) get the OTD price in writing before you visit, (2) get pre-approved at your bank or credit union, (3) negotiate the trade-in separately from the new-vehicle price — dealers love to mix them because it hides the math. If you want a more thorough buyer's checklist, [link].

Either way, good luck with the search.

— [Name]

# How to ship this

- **Replace the brackets.** [Dealership], [Name], [role], [number], [link], [vehicle category] — every placeholder filled, nothing left in template form.
- **Pick a real salesperson or sales manager as the sender.** Not the BDC. Use a direct line and a reply-to that reaches the actual person, not a queue.
- **Render the body as plain text.** HTML email part, slightly large font (~16-17px), warmer-than-white background. Looks typed. Reads typed. People scan plain text differently.
- **Mind the cadence.** Message 1 within 4-24 hours. Message 2 at day 3-4. Message 3 at day 8-11. Message 4 at day 13-18. Then stop.
- **Honor the promise.** If you said “last email,” it's the last email. Reactance kills the relationship faster than silence.