

PERSONAL PRODUCT ASSISTANT

A NEW SALES TOOL

The digital age offers many new ideas for spreading information. Here's one innovative approach.

Imagine being able to hold all your product information in the palm of your hand. Power Nissan in El Monte, California, is putting Palm Pilot personal digital assistants (PDAs) downloaded with Nissan product and price information in the hands of sales consultants.

For Jon Montgomery, director of fleet and Internet sales and leasing, the benefit is clear. "Immediate access to accurate information breeds confidence," he says. "It's pretty hard to get stumped by a customer when all you have to do is give your PDA a few taps and up comes the latest vehicle information."

HOW IT WORKS

Essentially small computers, PDAs are popular for their compact versatility. You can use one as your address book, daily planner, and memo pad, or to create to-do lists and download e-mails. You can even download client names and contact information from your computer. And it fits in the palm of your hand.

Power Nissan participated in a pilot test of PDAs conducted by Price Books and Forms, Inc., the company that produces the Nissan *Product & Price Guide*. At the end of the test, Power decided to continue using PDAs. They enable the dealership to get product updates via e-mail. "All we do is hook up the PDA to our computer, follow the e-mailed link, and download the information," says Chris Lujane, an Internet and fleet manager at Power. "It's that simple."

HOW IT HELPS

On the lot is where you really begin to understand the value of the PDA. "If I'm walking with a customer on the lot, I'll just take down their name and contact information without asking them to sit at my desk first," says Vincent Santos, an Internet and fleet manager. "I can log in clients on the spot so I won't forget later. It's more convenient for everybody."

"Then let's say they're interested in Maxima. I can use the PDA to check the MSRP with destination charge, the



standard equipment, and available colors. I can also check the options and tell the customer what's available. If they're interested in the Sensory Package, I can tell them what it includes and how much it costs."

Using the PDAs also helps sales consultants relate to the growing number of digitally informed and capable customers. These customers use e-mail, cell phones, and PDAs. They have the latest home computing and gaming systems. They use the Internet to enhance their lives. And there's more and more of them all the time.

"Most Internet customers are very well-informed," Montgomery says. "They've mined the Web for information, and they usually bring the data with them. So when they see us pulling up the latest product information on our PDA, they feel comfortable. It helps us relate to them and puts us on common ground."

A POWERFUL TOOL

For sales managers, the PDA also provides something else: peace of mind. "I have no fear of any customer coming in and not getting the right information," says Montgomery. "I know our sales staff can go out on the lot with this great piece of technology and have the answer, immediately. In the competitive market we're in, knowledge is the most powerful tool." **ST**