DEALER SPIKE

Get Ahead of Your Next Busy Season

How to get ready for the season while the showroom is quiet, with a fall-to-spring plan for your listings, search, and email.







Spring is decided before it arrives

Most dealers start building their spring presence in spring. That means paying peak prices for visibility they could have earned months earlier. Three things that make or break your spring need a runway:

1. **Search rankings.** Google needs time to find, index, and rank your pages before shoppers start searching.
2. **Email lists.** Every customer you add this winter is one more person you can reach in March.
3. **Audience frequency.** Shoppers who see your name all winter already know you when the season starts.

Search rankings, email lists, and audience frequency all need months of runway. None of them can be bought in a hurry once demand comes back. This guide shows you what to do between Labor Day and March, so your store is ready when the season starts.

> [Off-season pipeline is] likely not something that many dealers have recognized and are using to coach their salespeople. The veterans probably have learned, but the new guys may not realize that today's tire kickers are next spring's buyers."
>
> **MARK SHEFFIELD**
> *Dealer Spike Advisor, Woods Cycle Country*

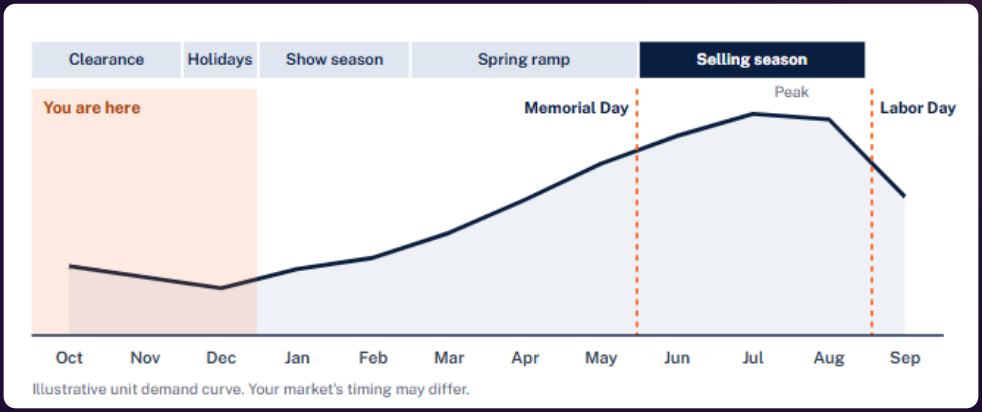
What's in this guide

1. **Read your calendar before you write your plan**
2. **Search rankings take months, so start now**
3. **A listing that sells while you sleep**
4. **Paid media follows the funnel**
5. **Email never turns off**
6. **If you can't do it all, start here**
7. **Your 90-day checklist**

CHAPTER 1

Read your calendar before you write your plan

The selling calendar in this business is about as predictable as anything gets. Plan your marketing to it, not to the thermometer.



Illustrative unit demand curve. Your market's timing may differ.

Here's what each stretch means for your marketing:

- **October and November:** End-of-season clearance on prior-model-year units. Urgency messages work here.
- **Late November and December:** Gift shoppers looking for gear, accessories, youth units, and gift cards.
- **January and February:** Show season. Shoppers compare dealers in person and online in the same week.
- **March through May:** Demand builds toward Memorial Day, the unofficial start of the selling season.
- **Memorial Day to Labor Day:** The selling season, with demand peaking in July and August.

If winter is your busy stretch

In warm-weather markets, snowbird season can be the peak. Flip the calendar. The plays in this guide still apply, timed to your busy months instead.

CHAPTER 2

Your runway to spring

Not every channel runs on the same clock. Search compounds over months. Paid media works best in sequence. Email never turns off; only the message changes.

Search rankings take months, so start immediately

When it comes to search, the timing rule is simple: the sooner the better.

Publish the day the embargo lifts

As soon as a manufacturer lifts the embargo on a new model, get it on your site. Google needs time to find, index, and rank the page before shoppers start searching for it. The dealer who publishes first, with the richest page, is the one ranking when spring searches peak.

Two dealers, one new model

A new model year is revealed on a Tuesday in October. Dealer A posts the page that afternoon with photos, specs, and a few lines on who it fits. Dealer B waits until units arrive in February. When spring searches climb, Dealer A's page has had four months to rank. Dealer B's has had four weeks.



Write it the way you'd say it at the counter

Nearly every dealer runs the same catalog or manufacturer copy on their unit pages. Your perspective is the difference: who the unit fits, who it doesn't, and what you'd tell a customer standing in front of it.

Copied description

Powerful performance meets refined comfort. Featuring an advanced suspension system and premium styling, this model is built for adventure.

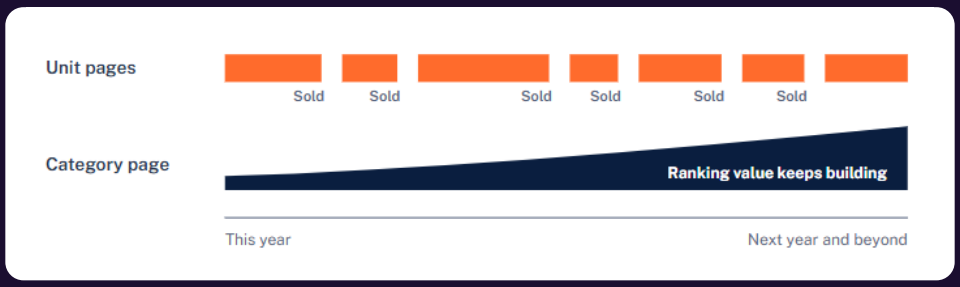
Your voice

This is a big machine, and it rides like one. If you're hauling gear into deer camp or plowing a long driveway, it's the one we'd point you to. If you want something lighter to trailer, ask us about the model below it.

You don't need to rewrite every unit. Start with the models you'll sell the most of in spring.

Build pages that outlast the unit

Unit pages disappear when the unit sells. Category pages stay, and they build ranking value year after year. That makes them the best place to put your effort this winter.



Add new-year content and local context now, so the pages are ranking when spring searches start:

- Registration, titling, and brake requirements in your state
- Nearby lakes, launch ramps, and waterways your customers use
- Local trail systems, riding areas, and seasonal access rules
- The categories shoppers search all year, such as utility, enclosed cargo, car hauler, equipment, and dump trailers

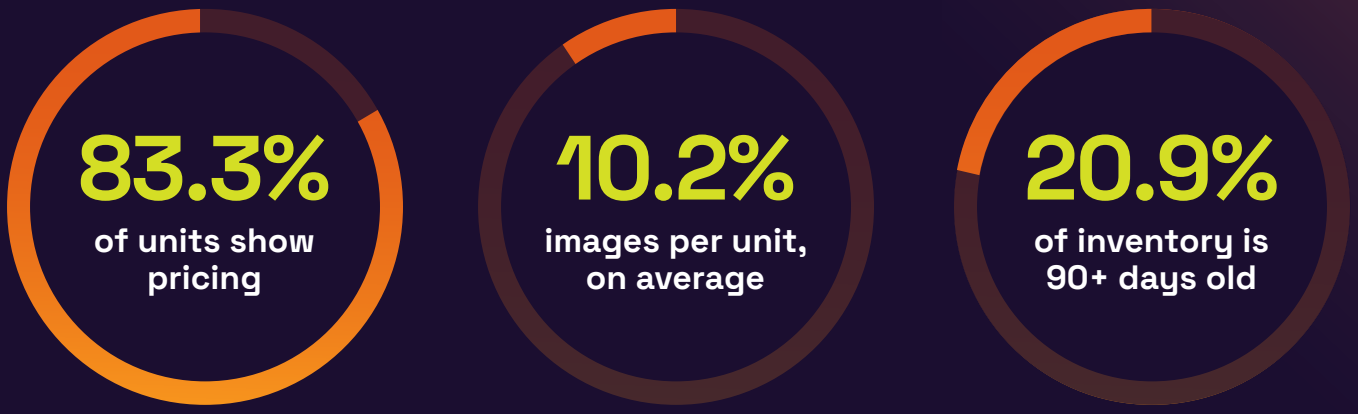
CHAPTER 3

A listing that sells while you sleep

A unit that's listed badly is a unit that sits. When more than half your traffic shows up after hours, the listing does the selling while nobody's on the floor.

The standard top-turning dealers hold

Among the top 50 dealers by inventory turn[1]:



Over half of browsing happens on mobile

Treat these as a floor, not a target. They're numbers you can pull this week and check against your own inventory:

- The share of your units with a price
- Your average photo count per unit
- The share of units with complete specs
- The share of inventory past 90 days

1. The State of the Dealer 2026

Decide once what every listing must include

Write down the fields every listing of each type must carry, then hold to it. The list is short, and it should never be optional.

TRAILERS

- ☐ GVWR
- ☐ Axle count
- ☐ Deck length
- ☐ Ramp type
- ☐ Interior height on enclosed units

Trailer inventory is close to commodity. Specs are how a buyer picks between four dealers.

OFF-ROAD AND STREET

- ☐ Hours or miles
- ☐ Trim
- ☐ Accessories included
- ☐ A full walkaround photo set

The walkaround is the unit. Multiple angles show what a spec sheet can't.

BOATS

- ☐ Engine hours
- ☐ Engine make and model
- ☐ Trailer included or not
- ☐ Hull material
- ☐ Model year of the engine and of the hull

A used boat with no engine hours asks the buyer to call with the one question that decides the deal.

Use the same photo set on every unit

Same angles, in the same order, every time. Consistency matters as much as count. It's what makes your inventory look like one dealership instead of fifteen different people's work.

Most listing problems are drift, not decisions

Nobody chooses to publish a unit with two photos. It happens because the photographer was out, the feed brought over partial data, or someone meant to come back to it later.

The fix is a weekly check, not a project

- Pick one day a week and one person.
- Pull the units listed in the last seven days.
- Check each against your field list and photo set.
- Fix what's missing before the weekend traffic hits.

Price is the first question shoppers ask

"Request a price" is the most-submitted form on dealer websites. That's shoppers telling you exactly what they came for. And dealers who show payment context on the unit page see the difference in lead quality.

Hiding the price doesn't delay the conversation. It moves it to a competitor's site.

The objection depends on what you sell



TRAILERS

Mostly price-shopped already. The dealer who hides the number loses to the one who shows it.



OFF-ROAD AND STREET

The worry is freight, setup, and fees landing after an advertised MSRP. That's a reason to show the breakdown, not to hide the total.



BOATS

Highest ticket, most resistance. Buyers are working out a payment, so payment context does more than a sticker price.

Show what makes up the number

The fee objection is real, which is why one unexplained number isn't the answer either. Buyers want to know how the price is built. A clear breakdown answers the question before they have to ask it, at any hour.

How this price is built	
Unit price	$14,999
Freight	$795
Setup and prep	$450
Documentation fee	$299
Total before tax	**$16,543**
Estimated payment	See your rate

Sample figures for illustration only.

Banners that tell the truth

Your home page banners are the first thing most shoppers see. One rule carries the whole thing: one message, one image, one button. A banner trying to say three things says nothing.

- Check every banner on a phone, where most of your traffic is.
- Link every banner to matching inventory, not the home page.
- Keep three to five in rotation.
- Pull expired offers. A promotion that ended in August tells shoppers the rest of the site is stale too.
- Refresh by season: show promotions, in-season availability, model-year changeover, then service and parts.

Inventory badges: sparingly, truthfully, temporarily

Labels like “On Sale,” “Price Drop,” and “Going Fast” earn their place on aged units, overstocked models, last year’s units once the new model year lands, and anything carrying a manufacturer incentive. If every unit is flagged, no unit is flagged. And an “On Sale” badge with no price is a promise with no proof.

The same unit, the same story, everywhere

A shopper might see one unit in three or four places before they reach your site. The price should match everywhere, same day. So should the photos, the specs, and the title, written the way shoppers search: year, make, model, trim.

Try this in 15 minutes

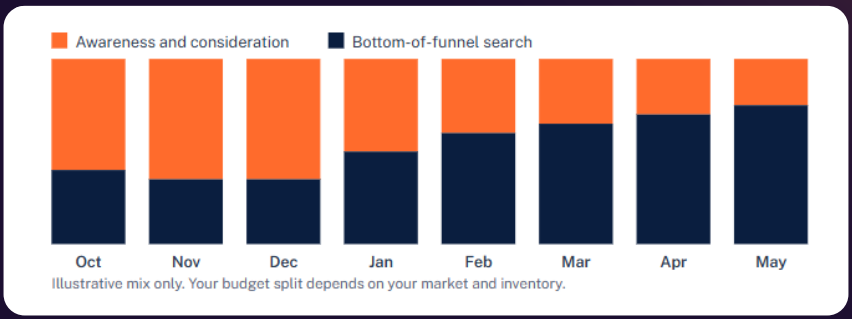
1. Pick three units from your inventory.
2. Look them up the way a customer would, on every site you list them.
3. Check that price, photos, and specs match.
4. Check that units you’ve sold are gone.

It almost always turns something up. Paid search and inventory ads run on this same listing data, so clean listings make every paid click count.

CHAPTER 4

Paid media follows the funnel, not an on/off switch

Many dealers run paid media like a light switch: on in spring, off in winter. The ones who start spring ahead run it like a dial.



Labor Day through the holidays

Pull back on broad bottom-of-funnel search. Put more of your budget into lower-cost awareness and consideration formats such as Performance Max, Demand Gen, and Meta ads. CPCs are up year over year, but off-season clicks still cost less than spring clicks. You build frequency with next spring's buyers for less than it costs in May.

Keep search on two jobs right now

- **Urgency:** moving aged 2026 units before year-end.
- **Reach:** a statewide or next-state delivery offer that your organic rankings won't realistically cover.

Build from January toward May

Bring search back up as show season starts and spring demand returns. Build campaigns around the value and utility models you ordered, not only the flagship names.

> Track the whole funnel. Clicks are nice, but cost per inquiry and cost per conversion will tell you if paid search is working."



BILL KOEHN
Director of Digital Marketing, Dealer Spike

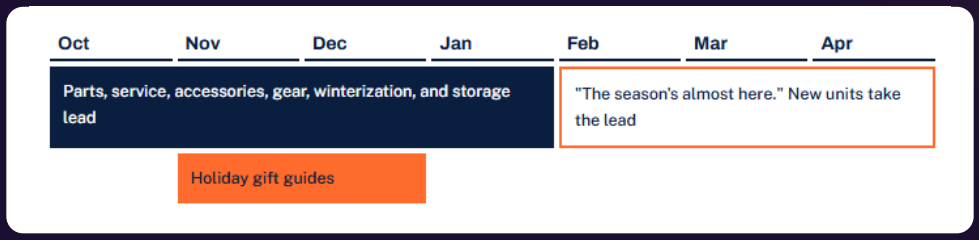
CHAPTER 5

Email never turns off, only the message changes

Your newsletter is how you stay in touch with customers between big purchases. They don't stop reading in winter. They just aren't buying units yet, so give them something they can buy.

Promote all your profit centers every month

Every newsletter should touch units, parts, service, accessories, and F&I on some level. Let the season decide which one leads.



When the message turns toward spring, match it to what your customers do:



ON THE JOB

"We'll have your trailer ready for your first haul."



ON THE TRAIL OR ROAD

"Perfect time to ride."



ON THE WATER

"Get on the water."

Give winter service a reason to happen now

A snow-belt dealer can't sell many motorcycles in February. But they can fill the service schedule with an offer like this:

"You're not riding now anyway. Let us pick it up, handle the service you've been putting off, and bring it back ready for the first warm weekend."

It spreads the spring tune-up rush across the slow months, when your service team has room and fixed ops carries the better margin. The same idea works for boats: shrink-wrap, storage, and a spring-ready checklist in one offer.

Prep events months ahead, promote them days ahead

Customers don't plan months in advance, and early promotion gets lost. For in-store events, one to two weeks out is the sweet spot for email. For a Saturday event, send on the Tuesday and Thursday of that week.

You're giving people an excuse, not a reason. This is a passion-based business, and you're inviting them to the toy store. Winter event ideas that work:

- A hot chocolate open house or a chili cook-off
- A "cold days, hot deals" sale on gear and accessories
- A class that fits your market, such as avalanche awareness, boater safety, or towing and hitching basics
- A holiday gift night with wrapped gear and gift cards ready to go

Protect the list, because it shrinks every year

People change email addresses, abandon old ones, and stop responding. A list you stop feeding gets smaller every year, and after a couple of years there isn't much left.

The fix is low-tech. Put a small label on the monitor at the sales desk, the service desk, and the parts counter that asks one question: **"What's your email address?"** Then ask every customer, every time.

CHAPTER 6

If you can't do it all, start here

No channel is better than the others. Each one has a job it does best. Start with the job you need done most.

You need units moving now, or reach outside your local market ›

Paid search and Google Vehicle Ads

The fastest way in front of active shoppers, and it can reach buyers your organic rankings won't.

You want traffic that keeps paying back, and you can afford to be patient ›

Organic visibility

Slower to build, but organic traffic compounds and keeps coming without a per-click cost.

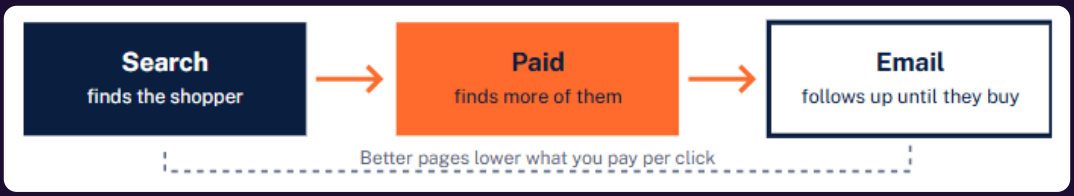
You need to stay in front of the customers you already have ›

Email marketing

Keeps service, parts, and repeat buyers coming back between big purchases.

Channels work better together

Every newsletter should touch units, parts, service, accessories, and F&I on some level. Let the season decide which one leads.



- **Organic and paid together are additive.** Ranking and running ads on the same results page is how you capture as much of that page as possible.
- **SEO lowers paid search costs.** Page relevance is a big factor in what you pay per click. When your landing pages clearly tell Google what the page is and who it's for, paid costs come down, sometimes significantly.
- **Email closes the loop.** Once a shopper tells you who they are, email keeps following up until they're ready to buy.

Your 90-day checklist

Print this page, hang it in the office, and check things off as you go.

October

- [ ] Run the three-unit listing check
- [ ] Publish pages for new models as embargoes lift
- [ ] Pull your four listing numbers and compare to the standard
- [ ] Decide your 2027 channel mix

November

- [ ] Refresh category pages for 2027
- [ ] Move paid budget toward awareness formats
- [ ] Build your winter event calendar
- [ ] Start the weekly listing check

December

- [ ] Push clearance on aged 2026 units
- [ ] Send holiday gift emails
- [ ] Pull expired banners and offers
- [ ] Lock your show-season plan for January

About Dealer Spike

For nearly 20 years, Dealer Spike has been the digital partner built specifically for dealerships.

We serve 6,800+ dealers across North America in powersports, marine, trailer, agriculture, heavy truck, heavy equipment, and outdoor power equipment, partnering with 200+ OEMs and driving more than 3.1 million units sold through our platforms.

We put our promises in writing: 24-hour support resolution, 99.97% uptime, and a minimum 30% increase in leads, guaranteed. From high-performance websites and inventory management to AI-driven marketing and discoverability built for how buyers search today, we make selling inventory easier and faster.

From first click to customer for life, Dealer Spike has one job: **help you sell more stuff, faster.**

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