



Data-Driven Dealerships Meet Profitability Goals at a 17-Point Higher Rate, Cox Automotive's 2026 Dealer Success Study Finds

As Data Reshapes How Dealers Compete, Distinct Behaviors in Technology Adoption and Customer Experience Strategies Define Data-Driven Leadership; Only One-Third Dealers Have a Plan in Place

ATLANTA, Ga., October 20, 2026— Dealerships whose decision-making is primarily data-driven are far more likely to hit their profitability goals, according to the 2026 Dealer Success Study from Cox Automotive. These data-driven dealers meet their profitability goals at a 17-point higher rate than other dealers (36% versus 19%) and the gap is widest in fixed operations.

Only 22% of franchise dealers strongly agree their decision-making is primarily data-driven rather than driven by gut instinct or experience. Vehicle sales profitability performance was directionally higher among Data Driven Dealers (29% versus 21%), although the difference was not statistically significant.

"What I hear from the dealers I talk with is consistent. They have a vast amount of life experience and gut instinct, and they want to combine that with real-world data to drive the best decisions. The dealers doing that well are intentional about keeping their data clean and putting it to work in every part of the store," said Lori Wittman, President of Retail Solutions at Cox Automotive. "This study highlights the importance of those habits, and they're ones any dealership can start building."

What Separates the Most Profitable Dealerships?

Data-driven dealers differ most sharply from other dealers in how much they trust the customer and business information in their systems, how they choose technology and how they connect that information across the store.

- **They trust their data.** 24 points separate the two groups on whether staff fully trust the data in their systems (76% versus 52%), one of the widest gaps in the study.
- **They vet technology on data quality.** A 20-point gap divides dealers who weigh whether a tool improves data quality before signing (42% versus 22%).
- **They connect data across departments.** Data-driven dealers lead by 14 points on whether their data is seamlessly integrated between tools or vendors (52% versus 38%).
- **They plan before they buy.** An 18-point gap separates dealers who set a plan for judging a tool's success before rolling it out (73% versus 55%).
- **They are outpacing their peers.** Across multiple KPIs, data-driven dealers outpace peers in customer loyalty (56%), sales volume (54%) and staff efficiency (52%).
- **They report greater improvement in business performance metrics.** Over the past year data-driven dealers reported better show-to-close rate (53% versus 37%), better gross profit per deal (53% versus 39%) and more repeat business (56% versus 42%).

Survey responses are protected under a confidentiality agreement, but as one high performing Director of a BDC at a multi-point, multi-location dealership put it, "We use data all the time. That's how we make decisions, based on the data...It's very, very important to have the data, otherwise you're just guessing."

How Was the Study Conducted?

The 2026 Dealer Success Study was conducted in two phases. Phase one was a survey of franchise dealerships, with 500 respondents, fielded in the first quarter of 2026 and weighted on dealership size. Phase two was a series of 11 in-depth interviews with data-driven dealers, fielded in the second quarter of 2026. "Data-driven dealers" are respondents who strongly agreed that their dealership's decision-making is primarily data-driven rather than based on gut instinct or experience. Findings reflect self-reported practices and outcomes, bases vary by question, and associations do not establish causation.

An executive summary of the study can be downloaded at www.coxautoinc.com/retail/dealer-success-study, and the full study is available upon request.

About Cox Automotive

Cox Automotive is the world's largest automotive services and technology provider. Fueled by the largest breadth of first- and third-party data fed by 2.3 billion online interactions a year, Cox Automotive tailors leading solutions for car shoppers, auto manufacturers, dealers, lenders and fleets. The company has 29,000+ employees on four continents and a portfolio of industry-leading brands that include Autotrader®, Kelley Blue Book®, Manheim®, vAuto®, Dealertrack®, NextGear Capital™, CentralDispatch® and Cox Fleet®. Cox Automotive is a subsidiary of Cox Enterprises Inc., a privately owned, Atlanta-based company with \$23 billion in annual revenue. Cox Automotive has been included on Glassdoor's Best Companies in Tech & AI 2026 and Best Place to Work in 2026 lists. Visit coxautoinc.com or connect via @CoxAutomotive on X, CoxAutoInc on Facebook or Cox-Automotive-Inc on LinkedIn.

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