

COLORADO INDEPENDENT AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION

# FRONTLINE

Q1 2026

## REPRESENTING YOU

*CIADA board member Jambo Woldyohannis and CEO David Cardella testify on HB26-1199 Replacement of Catalytic Converters, which passed 13-0 out of the committee.*



## FRONT LINE

The official digital publication of the  
**COLORADO INDEPENDENT  
AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION**

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## CEO'S MESSAGE

### *Working For You*



No matter what is happening in the world, at your dealership or in our lives, CIADA never stops working for our members. We are here to answer your questions, provide you with the required state forms at discounted prices, offer educational classes and more, all while keeping an eye on legislators working at our State Capitol. We do this with the help of our lobbyist Edie Busam and her team who have enabled CIADA to build relationships with legislators.

This is why our bill HB26-1199 Replacement of Catalytic Converters passed 13-0 at the House Energy & Environment Committee. This bill still needs to pass the Full House and Senate, but you could not ask for a better start.

Relationships also matter when an impactful bill might affect our industry like HB26-1262 Motor Vehicle Consumer Protections, which is being introduced. CIADA, NIADA, CADA, GM, Banking Institutions, Credit Unions, Toyota, Carvana, Tesla and other industry leaders are working with you to voice their opinions to oppose this bill.

For some reason, every independent dealer in Colorado does not belong to CIADA, so please use your voice and tell them working together matters!

Sincerely,

David Cardella, CEO  
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# MEET 2025 CIADA HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE DEAN GUNTER



In 1991, Dean began his career in the automotive industry, working for Dan Wilder Auto Center in Washington State. Drawing on the leadership skills he developed as a Marine, he quickly rose through the ranks to become General Sales Manager. In 2000, he moved to Colorado and opened Mile High Car Company in Colorado Springs. In 2012, he was selected to serve on the CIADA Board of Directors. He is also a founding member of the Used Car Dealers Charity Fund of Colorado and continues to serve as Director of the Charity Gala, an event that has raised more than four million dollars over twelve years.

His greatest achievement in life is his forty-six-year marriage to his wife, Esther, with whom he shares three children and eight grandchildren. Congratulations, Dean, on your induction and for being a role model others can follow. ■

*Used Car Dealers Charity Fund of Colorado presents Access Gallery a \$7,000 check for their artwork that sold at the 2025 Charity Gala.*



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**DAVID CARDELLA 303-239-8000 ext.302 [dcardella@ciada.org](mailto:dcardella@ciada.org)**

**CIADA AND OUR MEMBERS APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT**

# Congratulations, Bet!



NIADA recently appointed Bet Gaylord owner of Gaylord Sales & Leasing (Aurora, CO) to serve as Vice-President for their 5th District Region.



Check out the Kinetic Advantage Team and CIADA volunteering at Metro Caring Food Bank in March. Way to go!



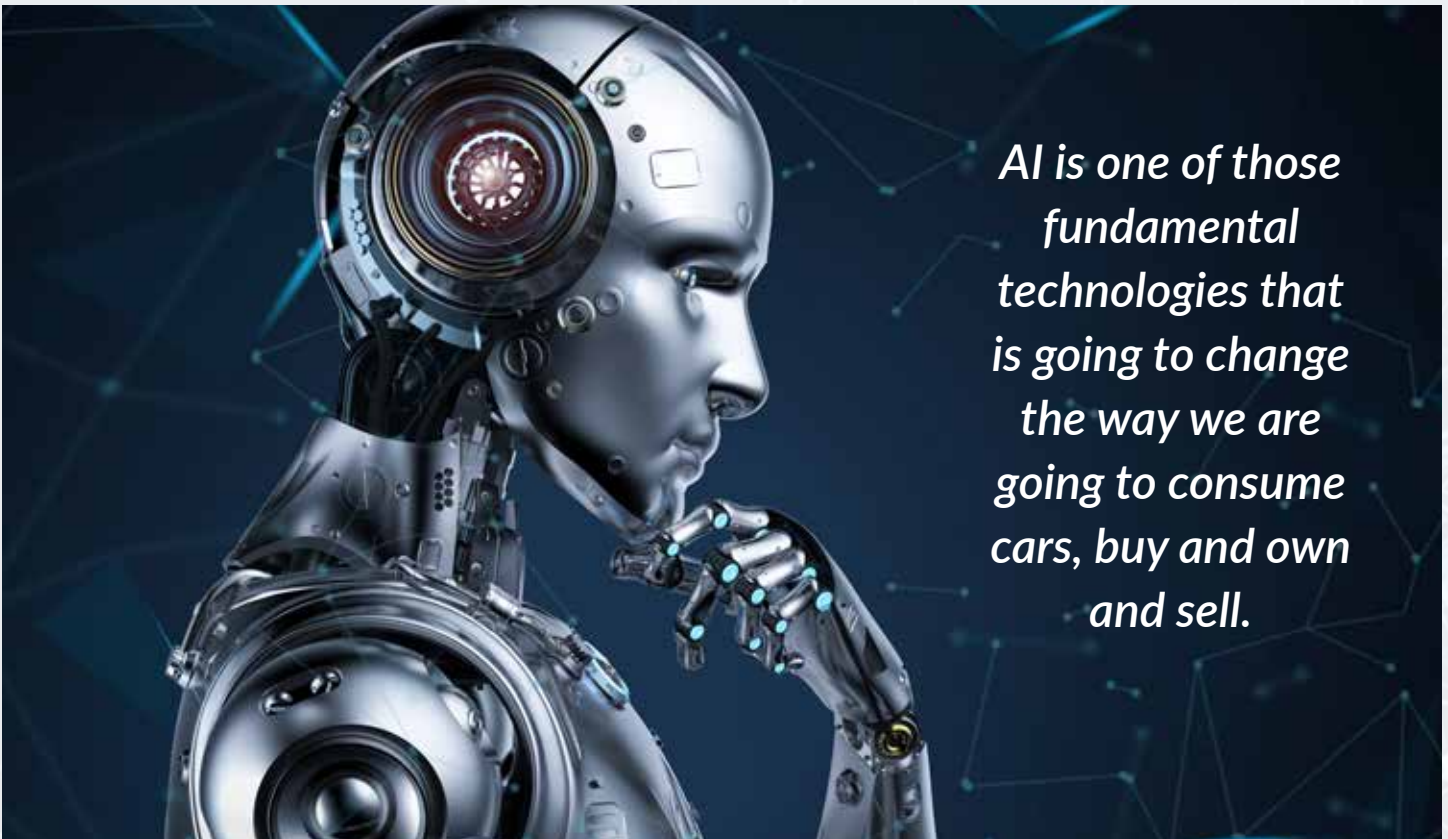
The Used Car Dealers of Colorado Charity Fund is honored to support PeaceWorks and their vital work providing crisis intervention, advocacy, and safe spaces for survivors of relationship violence, sexual assault, and trafficking. Since 1986, they've served individuals, children, and even pets across Colorado, helping communities heal and thrive. (Pictured L to R are board member John Lindberg, PeaceWorks Executive Director Sabrina Fritts and CIADA CEO David Cardella.)



# HOW AI COULD HELP IMPROVE DEALER OPERATIONS

*Dealers and vendors are testing powerful new tools for sourcing and selling more vehicles, as well as improving customer satisfaction.*

By Alysha Webb



*AI is one of those fundamental technologies that is going to change the way we are going to consume cars, buy and own and sell.*

Artificial intelligence is changing the way consumers shop for cars, and dealers who take advantage of AI can use it to make those consumers more satisfied.

But that just scratches the surface of the impact AI can have on a dealership's operations, industry experts told WardsAuto. From the showroom and service departments to used car operations, AI can give dealers new tools to sell and source more vehicles as well as keep customers coming back for service.

"I think AI is one of those fundamental technologies that is going to change the way we are going to consume cars, buy and own and sell," Arun Kumar, a partner and managing director in the automotive and industrial practice at consultancy AlixPartners told WardsAuto in a Zoom call.

Dealers' first AI investment should be on the front end of dealership operations, to enhance sales, Kumar said.

When a customer arrives at a dealership, AI can help a dealership maximize the chance of converting that visit to a sale by making sure the salesperson has accurate data reflecting what the consumer has already learned online, he said.

That not only helps drive more throughput, it reduces the number of people needed to make the sale happen so the dealership sells more cars with fewer people. "I think that, to me, is pretty number one," Kumar said.

AI can also make a dealership's salespeople more effective communicators.

Brendan Harrington, president of dealership group Autobahn Fort Worth, told WardsAuto on a Zoom call that he is working with a developer on a prototype AI agent that provides prompts for salespeople.

As a customer asks questions, the "AI angel" shows the salesperson answers to straightforward questions such as, "Is that blue Toyota Camry still available?" as well as potentially unexpected questions like, "How big is the trunk?"

"So, you sound really intelligent," Harrington said.

**Communication is the most common AI usage at dealerships, Erin Lomax, Cox Automotive vice president, operations, consumer marketplace & AutoTrader, told WardsAuto on a Zoom call.**

"I think it's one of the easiest and most common entry points to understand, like, 'OK, how can I automate these communications that were once manual?'" she said.

Cox Automotive's Auto AI Readiness in Auto Retail Study, conducted in three phases between April and August of 2025, found that 52% of the 537 franchised dealers who participated were using AI to engage with customers 24/7 using real time text, chat or email.

Another 48% were using it to create personalized email and text while 39% used AI to predict which consumers are ready to buy

and target them with personalized messages.

AI is a "key enabler to removing friction out of employee, dealer and consumer processes," Lomax said.

### **The case for AI in the service department**

Given the number of customers in a Dealer Management System, and a dealership's weekly volume of service appointments, "it's pretty difficult to overstate the ROI of AI in fixed operations and service," Devin Daly, co-founder and CEO of AI service platform Impel, told WardsAuto on a Zoom call.

Impel mines the DMS to find customers who are due for service and contacts them with personalized offers, he said. It schedules appointments, sends follow-up messages, and answers all voice mails.

"It provides a significantly better customer experience," Daly said.

Numa, another AI-enabled software, uses AI to centralize service department communication with customers, picking up missed calls, routing calls to the correct service advisor and making appointments

### **Stocking the right used inventory**

AI is also infiltrating the dealerships' pre-owned operations, helping them decide what used vehicles to acquire.

CDK's Vehicle Inventory Suite includes AI that uses CDK's "vast amount of data" to help dealers make better purchasing decisions, Dan Doolin, lead product marketer

at CDK Global, told WardsAuto on a Zoom call.

If a dealer is considering acquiring a used vehicle on trade-in or at auction, AI can see if the model sold well at other dealerships and show what the retail and wholesale pricing has been for the past six months as well as where it is predicted to go for the next 90 days, Doolin said.

"It can help a dealer determine a unique vision of what is going to happen with the pricing related to the vehicle," he said.

### **It's all about the data**

While 74% of dealers in the Cox Automotive AI Readiness study thought AI "has the potential to generate more benefits than risks for my dealership," 25% are still taking a "wait and see" approach to AI adoption.

The dealers want to trust they are getting compliant solutions that adhere to privacy and anti-discrimination laws, Lomax said. Crucial to that is what data the AI is using, she said.

"There's a ton of companies out there pitching these great solutions," Lomax said, "but where is the data coming from?"

The use case can also be different depending on the dealer size and segment, she said.

"But the underpinning of all of that, you know, what you continue to hear and read about, is that the data quality is what matters the most, right? And making sure of that because AI is only as good as the data that fuels it," Lomax said. ■



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# Why Independent Used Car Dealers Must Modernize Their Software and Buying Experience

BY ZACH KLEMPF, FOUNDER & CEO, SELLY AUTOMOTIVE CRM

The used car business has always rewarded hustle and personal relationships, but in today's digital-first world, that alone is no longer enough. Independent and Buy-Here-Pay-Here (BHPH) dealers, once able to compete on location and inventory alone, now face buyers who arrive informed, connected, and demanding speed. The traditional ways of selling cars—waiting for walk-ins, relying on cold calls, and managing leads on paper—are not keeping pace with the way buyers shop today.

Almost every car purchase now begins online. A report in the Wall Street Journal noted that more than 95% of used car buyers start their research on the internet before ever stepping onto a lot (WSJ). Whether browsing inventory on Facebook Marketplace, checking prices on Kelley Blue Book, or scrolling Craigslist, buyers form impressions long before the first phone call or handshake. If a dealership's digital presence is outdated, or if inquiries go unanswered, that buyer is lost before the salesperson has a chance to connect.

Speed of response has become just as important as inventory. According to data from the National Automobile Dealers

Association, 72% of buyers expect a response from a dealership within the same day (NADA). For many, "same day" really means "same hour." Yet independent stores with lean staff struggle to keep up, juggling calls, emails, texts, and walk-ins. Every hour that passes without a response increases the odds that the buyer contacts another dealer.

The gap between buyer expectations and dealer realities is widening. Research from CBT News and Autotrader found that 92% of vehicle sales are influenced by interactions that never get recorded in a dealer's CRM (CBT News). That means dealerships may be losing sight of nearly all their customer touchpoints. A quick text, a Facebook message, a missed call—each can influence a sale, yet without the right tools, these interactions disappear into thin air. Dealers who cannot capture and organize them are essentially blind to the majority of their sales funnel.

Communication channels themselves are shifting. Email, once the mainstay of digital sales, is steadily declining in effectiveness. Studies show that dealership emails average a 6–10% open rate,



memory, spreadsheets, or sticky notes—a strategy that inevitably leads to missed opportunities and disorganization.

Dealer-focused platforms are emerging that are tailored to the realities of independent stores. By combining CRM, communication tools, text marketing, and proposal management into one system, they remove the chaos that often defines smaller operations. These platforms centralize all interactions, integrate directly with dealer management systems, and even use artificial intelligence to automate routine tasks like follow-ups or conversation summaries. Instead of overwhelming small teams, they make lean operations more efficient, giving them an edge in a market where every lead counts. It's also clear that text communication is not a trend—it is the standard. A dealership that sends a professional text campaign announcing new arrivals or a limited-time discount will likely see responses within minutes. Compare that to waiting days for an email reply, and the difference in lead conversion is dramatic. For independent dealers who cannot afford to waste time chasing unresponsive leads, SMS marketing is the most efficient way to get buyers to act.

Large franchise groups will always have bigger budgets and more staff, but independent dealers do not need to compete on size. They can win on speed, personalization, and customer experience. Buyers are not loyal to the biggest lot; they are loyal to the dealer who made their purchase fast, easy, and trustworthy. That means the independent store that responds first, presents professional proposals, and stays connected across multiple channels can outcompete even the largest groups.

This is the reality that Selly Automotive CRM was built to address. Unlike generic platforms, Selly was designed for independent and used car dealers from the ground up. It centralizes texts, calls, and emails into one dashboard, integrates with major DMS providers, and empowers sales teams with AI-driven automation. It provides branded, customizable proposals that elevate professionalism and powerful SMS tools that reach customers where they actually respond. Most importantly, it delivers these capabilities in a way that is affordable and accessible to smaller dealerships.

while 98% of SMS messages are opened, most within three minutes (Demand Local). For used car dealers, that gap is enormous. A dealer who relies only on email campaigns is leaving money on the table compared to one who sends timely, relevant text messages. This is not just about convenience—it is about reaching buyers where they actually respond.

Independent dealers know they need to modernize, but the options have not always been attractive. Many generic customer relationship management (CRM) systems are designed for enterprise sales teams or large franchise groups, not for used car dealerships. They may be bloated with features that don't apply, priced beyond reach, or missing integrations with the tools dealers actually use, such as Frazer, DeskManager, or WebManager. Others attempt to run without any CRM at all, relying on

**The future of the used car business will not be defined by who has the largest inventory, but by who manages leads most effectively and delivers the best customer experience. Independent dealers who modernize their processes with the right tools will not just survive—they will thrive in this new era. Those who cling to outdated systems, on the other hand, will increasingly find themselves left behind by competitors who move faster and communicate better.**

For independent dealers ready to modernize, Selly Automotive offers a proven path forward. To learn more about how Selly can help your dealership capture more leads, respond faster, and close deals more professionally, visit [sellyautomotive.com](http://sellyautomotive.com). ■

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