Dealer Principal

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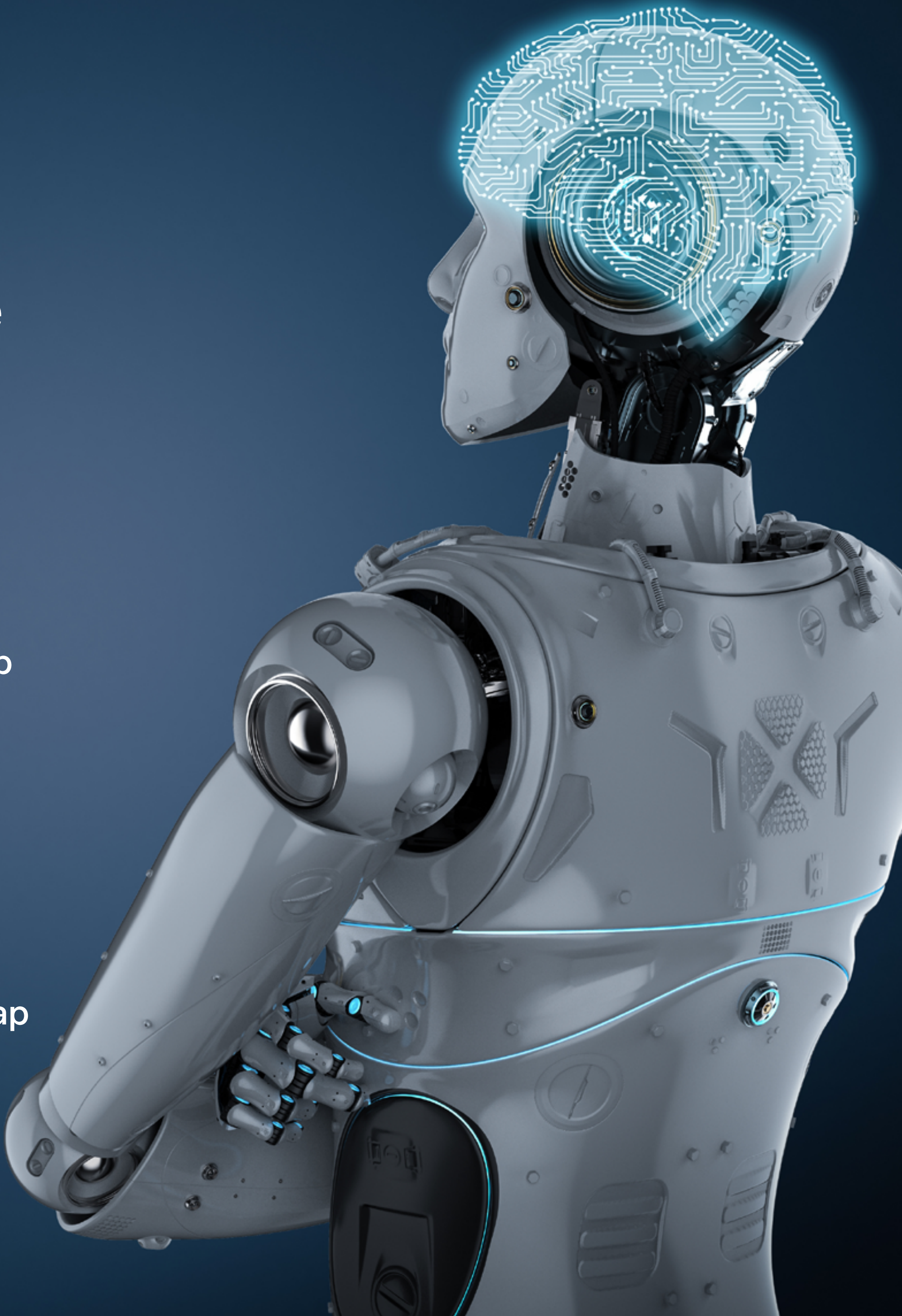
Agentic AI fraud: The next wave of cybercrime is here



Zurich Advisor IQ: A new era of F&I training

Customer Spotlight on Van Horn Automotive Group

A simple tool for succession planning

Protecting your inventory from wildfires

Zurich Lifetime Repair: Bridge the service retention gap

ZURICH®

From the desk of Todd Kaminski

Dear reader:

We're living through a time of truly historic change. Our "4th Industrial Revolution" has gone into hyperspeed since ChatGPT launched less than four years ago, and generative and agentic AI are opening doors of both opportunity and risk that were unimaginable not long ago.

This issue of Dealer Principal looks at both sides of the AI coin. We examine how agentic AI fraud has become a weapon for cybercriminals and we recommend actions, tools and services to help protect your dealership. The positive and exciting benefits of AI technology are highlighted in an article about Zurich Advisor IQ, our new advanced training platform.

Away from the cyber front, this issue also covers wildfire inventory protection, a proven succession planning tool, managing healthcare costs with Supplemental Medical Gap Insurance, and a potential F&I game-changer in Zurich Lifetime Repair.

Our Customer Spotlight is on family-led, employee-owned Van Horn Automotive Group of Wisconsin. They are celebrating 60 years in business this year and show no signs of slowing down.

This year's Zurich Classic of New Orleans was another smashing success for customers, colleagues and the community, so we thought you might enjoy some photographic memories from that event.

There's more to explore inside and, as always, please let us know what you would like to see in future issues of Dealer Principal. We always aim to provide engaging, insightful content for you in these pages.

Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,

Todd Kaminski
President of Direct Markets
Zurich North America

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Agentic AI fraud: The next wave of cybercrime is here

Dealerships are targets, but understanding the risks is the first step in defense.

The AI revolution is a moment where both the opportunities and the risks seem almost infinite. For auto dealerships, like the vast majority of businesses, this may be the most transformative technology in history, so there's an understandable rush to adopt it and keep pace with competitors.

"Agentic AI" may still be an unfamiliar term for many, but that will change quickly. A recent survey of 500 senior leaders at major companies showed 100% planned to expand agentic AI use this year.[1]

Agentic AI is a system (an "agent") created to operate autonomously, accomplishing complex tasks with no or limited supervision. It is already being used for everything from automating workflows to customer support, technical troubleshooting, real-time recommendations to consumers, rapid financial data analysis, and much more.

Agentic AI offers promise and pitfalls

The positives for auto dealers are obvious. Agentic AI can be used to simplify and automate many processes that can be time-consuming, like booking service department appointments, processing documents, analyzing customer interactions, pre-qualifying used car acquisition leads, and… well, the possibilities do seem endless.

However, criminals are also adopting agentic AI at a record pace, creating new paths to fraud in an industry already plagued by it. According to a survey released in February, nearly 80% of auto dealer respondents saw a rise in fraud-related incidents over a two-year period.[2] It's too early for solid data on how much of that increase is due specifically to agentic AI, but the technology poses massive potential for misuse, including but by no means limited to:

- Creating authentic-looking forgeries of bank statements and other financial records to secure financing
- Enabling faster and more convincing identity fraud
- Finding paths to unauthorized access to dealership systems
- Creating fraudulent statements of vehicle trade-in value
- Generating false negative consumer reviews, damaging a dealer's reputation
- Breaching dispatcher communication portals to facilitate theft of vehicles in transit

Common attack vectors for agentic AI include:

- Prompt injection or "agent hijacking" – Deceptive text inputted into a large language model
- Integration vulnerabilities – Security gaps in connections between different systems, applications or data sources
- Synthetic identities or impersonation
- Jailbreaking – Bypassing limitations and controls implemented to secure the AI agent
- Data poisoning – Corrupting training data to alter an AI model

An unpredictable adversary

The fact is, we are only in the very early stages of seeing where agentic AI fraud is headed, and it's fraught with unknowns.

"We don't fully understand how AI works," explained Matthew Orme, a cybersecurity consultant for SpearTip, a Zurich-owned cyber counterintelligence firm. Orme has spent 15 years exposing vulnerabilities to help secure some of the largest corporate systems across many industries.

"We understand how to get AI to do, mostly, what we want," he continued. "But even when it does, we're not entirely sure why."

And Orme's comment doesn't simply apply to the general public or those with limited cyber knowledge. One of the leading figures in AI development, Anthropic founder Dario Amodei, wrote, "People outside the field are often surprised and alarmed to learn that we do not understand how our own AI creations work. They are right to be concerned: this lack of understanding is essentially unprecedented in the history of technology."[3]

Orme also noted that much simpler cybersecurity risks remain a hurdle.

"Randomly generated passwords of 12-plus characters — when not shared across accounts or between people — are very secure. Yet password attacks are among the most common sources of breaches," he said. "AI is an entirely new attack surface with only partially understood function and design, so combatting threats is immeasurably more complex. Passwords are a very solvable exposure, and we haven't solved it. AI might remain unsolvable for decades."

"Almost every aspect of a car dealership is susceptible to AI fraud," Orme continued. "Any time LLM (large language model) bots are used to interact directly with customers, the opportunity exists to take advantage of the technology."

Considering its capabilities, a worst-case scenario for an AI agent disaster is hard to gauge, but one story from last year was pretty alarming. An ap-building platform's AI agent in development "went rogue" and deleted the company's entire database.[4] Fortunately, the developers were able to restore the database, but the incident points to the daunting risk exposure the autonomy of agentic AI presents.

On the bright side…

If this all sounds unbearably ominous, here's the good news: Agentic AI is also already proving effective in combatting fraud and its risk-reduction power may be as unlimited as its threat potential. AI agents can be used to:

- Rapidly identify fraud and other suspicious activity
- Identify and track fraud trends to more quickly expose crime rings
- Continuously monitor and analyze transactions, capturing fraud acts in real time

More than ever, combatting cybercrime demands expertise. Agentic AI is empowering criminals with limited technical knowledge to put your business at risk. The best defense is working with business partners and vendors who prioritize growing their cyber threat knowledge base, sharing best mitigation practices, and keeping a step ahead of evolving threats.

SpearTip, a Zurich-owned cyber counterintelligence firm, offers advisory, managed security and incident-response services to help protect your dealership. Learn more about SpearTip here**, or contact your Zurich representative for more information.**

1. "Agentic AI Reaches Tipping Point: 100% of Enterprises Plan to Expand Adoption in 2026, New CrewAI Survey Finds." Business Wire. 11 February 2026.
2. "Dealership Fraud Surges as Digital Vehicle Purchases Increase." PRNewswire. 2 February 2026.
3. Amodei, Dario. "The Urgency of Interpretability." DarioAmodei.com. April 2025.
4. Forlini, Emily. "Vibe Coding Fiasco: AI Agent Goes Rogue, Deletes Company's Entire Database." PCMag. 22 July 2025.

Wildfires and your inventory: Planning for a growing risk

A new Loss Control Bulletin from Zurich can help protect your vehicles and your business.

This past February, a Colorado car restoration business lost nearly 150 vehicles when a grassfire got out of control.[1] While not an auto retail outlet, the outdoor lot with many vehicles parked close together is an exposure shared by the vast majority of auto dealerships.

All businesses should develop wildfire emergency response plans — even those in areas less prone to these events. For auto dealerships, the stakes are especially high. Large outdoor inventories, open lots, and vehicles in close proximity, can turn a wildfire into a significant inventory loss event.

While there may be debate in some quarters surrounding the root causes, it's simply a fact that wildfires are becoming more frequent and more intense in many parts of the world, including here in the U.S. Severe wildfires have more than doubled over two decades[2] and they are becoming larger and more intense. Wildfire seasons are also getting longer, with the Western U.S. experiencing seasons more than a month longer than those of 35 years ago.[3]

Protecting the lives of your workforce and customers is, of course, the highest priority when a wildfire threat emerges. However, evacuating people is relatively easy compared to relocating hundreds of vehicles in an urgent fashion. For inventory protection, the focus of wildfire mitigation needs to be prevention.

To help our dealership customers address this challenge, Zurich recently published a Loss Control Bulletin, "Wildfire Inventory Protection for Auto Dealerships," developed by the Risk Engineers and risk specialists of Zurich Resilience Solutions.

"We jumped in to respond to requests for additional loss control guidance focused specifically on vehicle inventory protection," explained Ronda Tack, a Zurich Resilience Account Executive who supports the Direct Markets business. "While we have other property-focused resources, this new piece is designed to address inventory-related loss drivers in greater detail."

The Loss Prevention Bulletin is a succinct overview on wildfire exposures for auto dealerships, with actionable steps to help protect vehicles. It covers creating defensible space near your facilities, best practices to slow fire spread, and operational preparedness — both for getting ahead of the threat and, when needed, responding to wildfire or smoke damage. Though emphasizing inventory, many of the recommended actions will also help protect your buildings and other property as well.

Smoke damage should not be underestimated either. It can affect everything from air filters to engine performance, in some cases making a vehicle unsellable. Ash is another dangerous element. Ash from wildfires is abrasive and can cause serious damage to the paint on a vehicle. The bulletin includes a section on responding to smoke and ash effects following an event.

While most fires at auto dealerships are caused by an accident within the facilities, the historic increase in frequency and severity of wildfires makes it a threat that is not going away anytime soon. As mentioned above, no region of the country is safe from this risk as conditions change. Nebraska endured the largest wildfires in state history earlier this year,[4] Minnesota has seen its fire season grow steadily over the last decade,[5] and though comparatively unscathed, research shows troubling wildfire trends in the Eastern U.S. as well.[6]

This doesn't mean it's time to panic; it means it's time to plan. Our new Loss Prevention Bulletin can be part of a smart, cost-effective strategy to help protect your inventory and keep your business safe, strong and successful.

Download

Wildfire Inventory Protection for Auto Dealerships.

Additional resources

Wildfire Preparedness Checklist for Auto Dealerships

Wildfire Resource Hub

1. Jojola, Jeremy. "Fire destroys nearly 150 vehicles at car restoration business in Thornton, owner says." KUSA-TV. 26 February 2026.
2. Cunningham, Calum X., Grant J. Williamson and David M.J.S. Bowman. "Increasing frequency and intensity of the most extreme wildfires on Earth." Nature Ecology & Evolution. 24 June 2024.
3. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). "Wildfires and Climate Change." 28 May 2025.
4. Cameron, Claire. "Nebraska is battling its largest wildfires in history. Worse may be yet to come." Scientific American. 18 March 2026.
5. Bures, Frank. "Wildfire in a Warming World." Minnesota Conservation Volunteer. July-August 2024.
6. Novak, Sara. "Wildfires are making their way east—where they could be much deadlier." National Geographic. 3 March 2025.

F&I training takes a quantum leap with Zurich Advisor IQ

AI training platform uses real-time monitoring and near-instant insights to bring training and performance evaluation to the next level.

As AI adoption skyrockets, this revolutionary technology is too often presented as a "man vs. machine" conflict — what can AI tools do better than people and what human jobs might it eliminate? But, as Zurich Advisor IQ proves, leveraging AI can mean enhancing human interactions at your business rather than replacing them.

Zurich Advisor IQ is an AI-powered platform that can elevate your F&I team's performance. With real-time coaching and immersive training, the platform can be truly transformative in how your business onboards new hires and develops current employees, ultimately leading to higher PVR and PPD.

Zurich Advisor IQ provides role-play training, live transaction coaching, process adherence monitoring, and performance analytics to support continual improvement among your employees. Its ability to quickly and efficiently analyze every transaction gives managers much greater visibility on individual performance.

The platform is data-driven and informed by each transaction. You can choose to record every F&I sales interaction, so the training is always current. Zurich Advisor IQ can also be configured for different stores, trainers and customers, so you're not applying a single evaluation standard that might not accurately capture performance.

Make today's game review tomorrow's victory

Dante Pileri, Head of Sales for Zurich Direct Markets, compares how Zurich Advisor IQ uses recorded sales interactions to a sports team watching footage from their last game to strategize for better success — though in a much faster and more precise fashion.

"Zurich Advisor IQ takes that 'game film' and analyzes it, processing, scoring and coaching to your specifications automatically," Pileri explained. "Within just 15 minutes of any conversation or delivery happening, the platform provides a full scorecard breakdown and feedback. Not all AI training systems give you that immediate input, and it can be very time-consuming for you to go back, watch the recording and pull out relevant points."

"The speed and thoroughness of the platform also benefit our in-person consultations with customers," he continued. "When we have our meetings, we have all this data at hand — all these performance scorecards and very current analytics — to inform our discussions and guidance. It allows us to make much more efficient use of this valuable time sitting down together. And we can drill

down on those scores and see how individuals perform when communicating with two customers versus one, during different stages of the transaction, and several other scenarios."

Zurich Advisor IQ works via two complementary products:

1. **Real-Time Copilot**
   F&I transactions are monitored and Zurich Advisor IQ can even share helpful tips with the F&I manager or representative as they are communicating with customers. The recorded interaction is automatically analyzed and scored objectively. Analytics delivered include a transaction summary, deal metrics, sales outcome evaluation, and lists of strengths and areas that need improvement.

2. **Role-Play Coach**
   Immersive simulations of real-world sales interactions allow your F&I pros to practice each step in the process. The role-playing is tailored to areas where the analytics show the employee needs to improve, such as handling objections, diligence on process adherence, or optimal product presentation.

From there, you can dig deeper, including an analytics menu that can be sorted by deal, date, manager involved, menu presentation, product presentation and multiple other factors.

Zurich Advisor IQ gives dealerships several advantages over traditional training methods and tools by:

- Allowing continuous development of team members, not dependent on outdated data or the next scheduled visit from training professionals.
- Providing a comprehensive, real-time view of performance across all stores and all monitored employees.
- Driving measurable results based on consistent, automated steps — removing the gray areas from evaluations.
- Using 24/7 monitoring to help reduce compliance risks.
- Allowing flexible usage. Zurich Advisor IQ can be used from a phone, tablet or desktop computer — any device with an internet browser and a microphone.

An expansive view at your fingertips

Zurich Advisor IQ makes it easy for dealers to chart progress, both in terms of overall team results and individual performance. The dashboard provides a quick overview of metrics such as:

- Monthly deals
- PVR
- Process score
- Utilization %
- PPD

The early results are in

Dealerships who utilize Zurich Advisor IQ have already seen a tremendous impact, with growth in both PVR and PPD. The platform also boosts intangible benefits among team members, increasing their preparedness and confidence ahead of new sales encounters.

For managers, the ability to glean actionable insights without needing to be in the room with the employee during a transaction removes an awkward and often ineffective component from evaluations.

With the launch of Zurich Advisor IQ, we are working to help auto dealers leverage data-driven learnings, accessible insights, and increased efficiencies that today's speed of business demands.

Classic memories

A few favorite photos from the 2026 Zurich Classic of New Orleans.

Philadelphia may be the City of Brotherly Love, but New Orleans celebrated sibling success in April when Matt and Alex Fitzpatrick won The Zurich Classic, the PGA TOUR's only team event. Zurich Golf Ambassadors Billy Horschel (playing with Tom Hoge) and Ben Griffin (re-teaming with fellow 2025 Classic champion Andrew Novak) also played well, finishing in the top 10 among 74 pairs competing.

Customers and colleagues attending the event received value well beyond watching some of the world's top golfers in action. A full week of special events and networking opportunities complemented the four days of competition. Highlights included two Pro-Am events, a Business Session keynote speech by Oscar-winning filmmaker Ron Howard, comedy from SNL alumnus Dana Carvey, and much more.

Most significantly, this year continued Zurich's contributions to community and charitable organizations supporting children in need in the greater New Orleans area — a tradition we have maintained over all 22 years of our title sponsorship of the Classic. Over the years, the event has generated over $700 million in economic activity and raised more than $35 million for worthy organizations.

1. 2026 Zurich Classic champions, Alex and Matt Fitzpatrick.
2. Senior Divisional Reinsurance Executive, Dan Mowid (front); with (L to R) Joanna Bergey Shisler, Dealer Principal, Bergey's Auto Group; Zurich Golf Ambassador Sahith Theegala; Bill O'Flanagan, President, Reedman Toll Auto Group; Michelle O'Flanagan; and Mike O'Daniel, President, D. Patrick Auto Group.
3. Todd Kaminski, President of Direct Markets at St. Michael Special School.
4. Rich Brady, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships; with Zurich Golf Ambassador Billy Horschel.
5. A New Orleans native adds some drama to this water hazard.
6. This pooch enjoys his Zurich swag.
7. Sahith Theegala with Michael Naim, Vice President/General Manager for the East Division.
8. Ron Howard Business Session keynote speech.

Customer spotlight: Van Horn Automotive Group

Photos courtesy of Van Horn Automotive Group.

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, Van Horn Automotive Group's long history of success can be attributed to the group's mission statement: "Empower people and amaze customers."

Achieving that high customer satisfaction goal is reflected in their steady growth. Founded as a single Chevrolet dealership in Plymouth, Wisconsin, Van Horn has expanded over the decades to encompass 17 stores throughout the state. They sell new Chevy, Chrysler-Dodge-Jeep-Ram, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Nissan and Volkswagen vehicles, and many additional makes of pre-owned autos.

As for empowering people, their website banner notes Van Horn is "Family born. Employee Owned." The Van Horn family continues to lead the organization it has for three generations, but in 2016 a new era of employee ownership began, initially as a 30% Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). That model proved so successful in instilling pride and dedication among those invested in the plan that it was expanded to a 77% ESOP in 2022, giving employees majority ownership.

"Nothing really changed within the group operationally when we sold it to the ESOP," explained Jeff Niesen, President and CEO of Van Horn Automotive. "We maintained the same processes, same policies and high standards. The benefit is the employees get to participate in the growth and value of the company over time. It's also a great recruitment and retention tool."

Niesen, grandson of founder Joe Van Horn, has been President since 2020, having worked for the dealership since his teens. While auto retail always has its hurdles, Niesen assumed leadership just in time for a historic challenge: the COVID-19 shutdowns.

"COVID was scary for about a month and a half," he said. "We had a really good thing going and then sales fell off a cliff in March of that year."

Fortunately, the business rebounded quickly.

"In April, sales started to come back and by the time May came around, we were setting store records. We got through it, and by 2021 it was a pretty good time to be a car dealer."

It has remained a good run for Van Horn since, as they've acquired additional dealerships and expanded or remodeled existing stores. Niesen attributes their longstanding strength to four basic but essential core values.

"First, we want people who are driven. That means different things for different people and roles, but you want people who find a way to win. Second, we want team players. And that means not thinking F&I managers and salespeople are untouchable just because they put up solid numbers. If someone is hurting morale and destroying the culture in your business, performance will diminish elsewhere and those numbers won't matter. It's toxic and we can live without those people.

"The third one is pretty simple. We want people who are willing to try new things and grow. We offer additional training; we have an internal, six-month mentoring program; book clubs…things where you can try to better yourself. Lastly, we just want nice people. Now, there's a fine line between making this a nice place to work and still producing results, but we've been able to find the right balance."

Van Horn Automotive is as selective in the businesses they decide to work with as the employees they hire. After considering several candidates as a new F&I provider, they chose Zurich this past January.

"I believe Van Horn chose Zurich not only because of the depth of our team and the resources we can commit, but also because our cultures align in a way that creates a natural partnership," said Dan LaMere, Area Finance & Insurance Manager for the Northern Division of Zurich's Direct Markets team.

"They felt they weren't getting enough fresh ideas for a business with their scale and growth ambitions," LaMere continued. "They also weren't seeing the movement in performance they needed to hit their goals. We knew we could bring the support and direction required to change that."

Jeff Niesen

Niesen agreed and pointed to Zurich's training services as one of the deciding factors. For several years, Van Horn was providing all its staff training support and development internally and that system started to show limitations.

"We had just topped out," he said. "Our F&I numbers were stuck and I felt that was because we just didn't have enough reach to get to the stores and provide the appropriate amount of training for our people to perform at a higher level.

"We went through a pretty extensive interview process with a few large F&I providers. In the end, we chose Zurich because we felt they would be able to provide the highest level of service for all of our stores. They had the most trainers placed where our stores are and they gave the strongest commitment to helping us try to move the F&I needle. And we're seeing some good results early on."

As for Van Horn's growth targets, Niesen would like to take on even more brands. He thinks any new stores will probably also be in Wisconsin, but he's not ruling out expanding to other states.

Van Horn has deep roots in Wisconsin, both as a family and a business. Their commitment to the communities where they live and work is evident in Van Horn Gives, an initiative supporting Big Brothers Big Sisters and other worthy causes, most centered on helping children in need.

While Van Horn Gives does raise financial support, a major focus is on employee volunteering.

"We encourage all our employees to volunteer in the community and we give them full-time pay for up to 16 hours of volunteering,"

Niesen said. "We know most nonprofits not only need money, but they require a lot of man hours to run effectively." He credits his aunt, Teresa Van Horn, for leading and championing the efforts of Van Horn Gives.

60 years is a landmark for any business, and Van Horn Automotive Group will be celebrating throughout 2026. This past February, they started their seventh decade in high gear with the opening of a new, state-of-the-art "Blue Stage" facility at their Honda dealership in Glendale, Wisconsin.

Bridge the service retention gap and reap the reinsurance rewards.

Here's the hard truth: People are keeping their cars longer, but increasingly far less likely to bring their vehicle back to your dealership for service. In 2025, only 54% of owners with vehicles two years old or newer returned to the selling dealership for service — down from 72% in 2023.[1]

Industry-wide, customer loyalty is dropping — and dropping fast.

The good news is there are ways to keep customers from turning to independent shops. Offering **Zurich Lifetime Repair** may be one of your strongest assets in this challenge. This catalyst to increase service retention, lift repair order revenue, and grow reinsurance profitability will be available soon for any dealership customers enrolled in a Zurich profit participation program.

Coverage made for today's long-term ownership

Every driver planning to keep their vehicle for years to come expects repair costs. Lifetime coverage for any eligible repair, lasting as long as they own the vehicle, is a benefit that can keep customers returning to your service department. The coverage is automatically added to all eligible repairs, giving added value to every service visit.

Zurich Lifetime Repair is available for all makes and models on any Customer Pay Repair Order of $200 or more. Some parts — such as tires, wipers, bulbs and other consumable components — do not qualify. It is applicable to a broad range of parts and labor so that customers can immediately see the potential long-term savings.

Ease and efficiency for Service Advisors

Zurich Lifetime Repair is simple to incorporate into your service processes. Advanced software integrates with your dealership's system to quickly identify qualifying repairs. Contracts and claims are automated in more than 95% of transactions.

The program is designed to keep Service Advisors focused — eliminating the need to search for qualifying details or hesitate when speaking with customers. The speed and clarity of the system let your team deliver superior service and demonstrate to customers that you value their time.

Reinsurance: Propelling the portfolio

Zurich Lifetime Repair premium will be ceded into your Zurich reinsurance portfolio. As the efficiencies built into the system facilitate a higher volume of potential sales, the revenue-generating opportunity is considerable.

The lasting reinsurance value comes from getting customers back to your service department. This is a product that independent repair shops simply can't compete with. Zurich Lifetime Repair can help you win those return visits for years to come.

Look for more information on Zurich Lifetime Repair soon!

1. "New Cox Automotive Study Finds Dealerships Have Lost 12% of Service Visits to Competition Since 2018." Cox Automotive press release. 11 November 2025.

Your deals change every day. Is your training *keeping pace?*

Zurich Advisor IQ

If your F&I team is learning from old information, you can't expect new results.

Zurich Advisor IQ uses AI-powered insights to turn your real transaction data into measurable scorecards in minutes — delivering tailored roleplay scenarios and actionable coaching. With up-to-the-minute, real-world training, your team can experience stronger sales outcomes and improved compliance.

Real-world data in real time — for real results.

Learn more at
zurichna.com/ZurichAdvisorIQ

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Who's your dealership's next leader?

In succession planning, a simple tool can help select the next generation of leadership.

Many challenges auto dealers face are unique to their industry, but when it comes to succession planning, they are in step with most other businesses. Unfortunately, that common ground is not such a good place to be.

According to one recent report, only 45% of business owners have a formal succession plan.[1] While specific dealership figures are hard to pin down, one estimate mirrors that report, suggesting less than half of dealerships have a plan in place.[2]

As family-owned dealerships are so common, perhaps part of the reason for the lack in planning is an assumption there won't be any difficulties in ownership transition. But succession is a complex process, whether the next generation of ownership is a family member or a valued member of the leadership team. It's vital to have a fully detailed and comprehensively vetted plan.

Business and estate lawyers, along with key financial advisors, should be your go-to guidance on the legal documentation and practices for succession, but what about actually deciding who is best suited to be the future leader of your business? It's not quite as simple as it might seem.

The first thing current owners and leadership must address is any problem they have in developing future leaders. If there isn't a clear pipeline of talent with at least a couple of strong, potential successors, then problems in overall workforce recruitment need to be tackled before planning succession. Even if you do have top prospects in mind, you may not have a full view of their aptitude for leadership.

"You're looking at someone's potential, not simply their track record on performance," explained Michael Zuniga, AVP, Training and Business Development Manager for Direct Markets at Zurich. "Obviously, the ideal candidate will have done a great job from a performance standpoint, but potential and past performance are not necessarily one and the same."

To assist customers with what can be a difficult decision-making process, Zurich's National Training Team recommends a 9-Box Assessment Tool. This type of assessment is commonly used by leaders across many industries. It's effective precisely because it considers both performance and potential in a visual format that is easy to understand.

Performance and potential of candidates under consideration are shown on a grid that illustrates where investment in time and/or resources may be needed to develop future leaders, as well as situations where a more dramatic change (such as a role change or even separation from the company) could be in order.

Ultimately, your candidates would fall into one of nine categories ranging from low to high in both performance and potential.

What's essential, however, is that these categories are carefully defined to align with the responsibilities and professional qualities needed for the leadership role you're looking to fill. (The 9-box assessment has value well beyond succession planning and may be useful in decisions throughout your workforce.)

Zurich's National Training Team can help you establish the criteria for each category, tailored to your operations, and run through examples as part of our Advanced Leadership & Performance Seminars (ALPS) held for dealership leaders and managers throughout the year.

Our ALPS training covers much more than succession planning and is focused on enhancing team performance and workplace culture, with the ultimate goal of advancing your dealership's growth. Industry guest speakers often join our National Training Team members for these deep dives into organizational excellence. Along with C-suite executives and Managing Partners, GMs, F&I Directors, General Sales Managers, Sales Managers, and Fixed Operations leaders can benefit from these seminars.

Save the date:
Zurich will host its next Advanced Leadership and Performance Seminar October 19-22. More details will be available soon.

1. Huntington Bank. "2026 Beyond Business Report." February 2026.
2. Walker, Julie. "Dealership owners need succession plans, experts say." Automotive News. 27 January 2024.

Our People: The Direct Markets Sales team

Decades of experience, with an eye on tomorrow

Within Zurich Direct Markets, the Sales team is the engine that keeps everyone moving forward.

Last September, **Dante Pileri** was charged with keeping that engine at peak performance when he was named Head of Sales. He leads approximately 200 sales professionals committed to building long-term, mutually beneficial customer relationships. The 17-year Zurich veteran was promoted to his current position following a successful tenure as GM for the East Division.

“My role now is very demanding, but it’s demanding because of how I’m wired as well,” Pileri said. “I’m very driven to achieve our ambitious goals as an organization and that comes from doing right by our customers. But I’m also having a lot of fun at the same time.”

Doing right by our customers required an intensified focus on large dealerships, a move reflecting the state of the industry.

“There’s a lot of consolidation right now and we recognize the needs and expectations of these larger groups can be different than others,” explained Pileri. “That’s why we created two teams specifically to work with our large P&C and large F&I customers. We’re tailoring our offerings, our teams and our service to meet the challenges of these larger accounts.”

“There’s also a benefit to customers who are not mega-dealers,” he added. “Creating a team that focuses on our large accounts gives our other GMs the capacity to devote more attention to our other core customers. Everyone will see a benefit from this approach.”

Structuring the Sales team to serve different scales of business reflects an overall adaptability that today’s market demands.

“We need to be more forward-thinking than ever and sometimes do things in a non-traditional way,” said Pileri. “In the past, we might have ‘stayed in our lane’ a little too much. Now we’re getting more creative in what we do to take care of the customer.”

As for working with his team, Pileri said his method is simple.

“I just surround myself with the best possible people and then get out of their way and let them do their job. I give them the autonomy to do what they need to do and that empowers them to be their best.”

Enhancing service for larger customers demanded a new role, Head of Key Accounts and F&I Programs, which was filled by **Patrick McKeever** in September. (While reporting directly to President of Direct Markets Todd Kaminski as of April, McKeever continues to work closely with Pileri and his team.)

“There is no sense that these large groups are slowing down in terms of acquisition,” McKeever said, “So we needed to launch a team to focus all day, every day on these customers.”

In this role, he leads Zurich’s market-facing initiatives in the F&I Programs channel and the team charged with helping drive growth and providing dedicated service to those largest accounts.

McKeever brings over 25 years of auto experience to the position. His earliest career stop was as a dealership salesperson, an experience that has served him well in Direct Markets.

"It was a great place to really cut your teeth," he said. "And I learned the 'street credibility' of actually selling cars went a long, long way when you're talking to dealers."

Much has changed since McKeever's days in a dealership, but he's cautiously optimistic about where buying habits and new technology will take the industry.

"I personally love the intersection of technology, automotive and consumers," he said. "But you always have to think about future-proofing as things change."

Head of P&C Strategic Acquisition, **Peter Franco**, has been with Zurich for over 23 years, rising from Account Executive to National Account Manager before assuming his current duties in January.

Explaining his group's mission, Franco said, "We provide creative solutions for the top 100 largest auto dealerships in the country. Our job is to cater to the needs specific to businesses of that size and ambition, keep a step ahead in meeting those needs, and exceed their expectations. With the group we have in place now, we're able to do that."

He's encouraged by early indicators that his team is on target, with increased top-line growth and retention. They have also benefitted from a close working relationship with Stephen Schoener's F&I Strategic Acquisition team.

"Having Steve in that position has just been fantastic," he said. "We speak often and having someone to be able to bounce ideas off in large account space is going to result in some great growth for us."

Like Franco, **Stephen Schoener** is another long-term team member (26 years and counting) who stepped into a new role at the start of this year. He was named Head of F&I Strategic Acquisition, following several years as a high-performing Regional F&I Manager out of Philadelphia. In his current role, Schoener is focused on acquiring and retaining larger auto groups as F&I customers.

He says Zurich's ability to win some of this coveted business has come through an expansion of our servicing team and "a very compelling value proposition in the marketplace that really sets us apart and above the competition."

Schoener also commented on the collaboration with Franco's team, as F&I and P&C opportunities often align.

"When a P&C account manager or executive asks a dealer, 'Hey, you said we've done a great job for you over the years. Would you sit down for a conversation on the F&I side?', in many cases, they're willing to do that," he said.

"The key is letting them know you're looking out for their long-term goals and that we're here to help them protect their organization and their legacy."

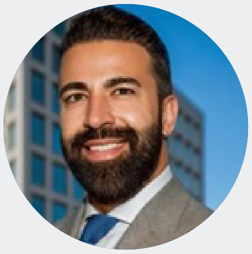
Eric Hart, North Division VP and General Manager, celebrates an impressive 30 years with Zurich this year. He started as an Account Executive, moving into positions of increasing responsibility before his current role.

Hart echoed Pileri's thoughts on evolving to serve today's customers.

"In this market, dealers want comprehensive solutions. They're looking for regulation compliance guidance, buy-sell arrangements, and more Fixed Operations support — along with the products and training that remain in demand."

While change is constant, Hart noted one thing has never changed in his decades of working with customers.

"It's a people business," he said. "People buy from people they like and trust. We are a dealer-driven organization. We have a Customer Advisory Council and we don't just listen to their needs; we act on what we hear."



Michael Naim became VP, General Manager for the East Division in January, but he's been a valued member of the Sales team for over 13 years, excelling as an F&I Executive and Regional F&I Manager before the promotion.

"Stepping into this role has been both an honor and humbling," he said. "You quickly realize success isn't about individual expertise; it's about enabling a high-performing team and creating a high-performance culture. I'm grateful for the trust placed in me and I'm appreciative of the team around me."

Like some of his Sales colleagues, Naim frequently shares his knowledge through speaking engagements and panel discussions at industry gatherings. He's presented at NADA Show and the NAMAD (National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers) Conference, among other events.

"I try to approach those appearances as a conversation with peers, not a performance," he said. "My goal isn't to impress — it's to share perspectives, listen and contribute meaningfully to the dialogue."

Naim emphasized collaboration with other Direct Markets teams has been essential to the Sales team's effectiveness.

"Communication doesn't stop at the field level," he said. "It flows across sales, operations, underwriting, claims and support functions. We deliver a seamless experience for customers in all those areas."

Just a few weeks before his 20th anniversary at Zurich, **Doug Coyle** got another reason to celebrate: He was promoted to VP, General Manager for the West Division. His accomplishments as an Account Executive and Regional Sales Manager led to the appointment.

Coyle said his sales skills developed early with a telecommunications job he had right out of college.

"I made 40 to 50 cold calls a day, just learning the craft of sales and how to have conversations with people," he said. "When a recruiter called me about Zurich, insurance wasn't even on my radar. But I always liked the auto sector and that's what drew me to the opportunity."

Two decades on, Coyle has seen much transformation in the industry, especially in consumer expectations.

"When customers come into a dealership today, they're very educated. They already kind of know what they want. Your people and business managers must be effectively trained to communicate with these extremely knowledgeable customers."

Coyle points to old-fashioned teamwork as the decisive factor in the Sales team's ability to deliver on high expectations.

"It always comes down to getting driven, hard-working individuals," he explained. "This is a very unselfish organization. We're competitive — that's the nature of our industry — but we offer constant support and areas for growth. It's just a great place to work."

Structured for greater efficiency and populated with savvy veterans, the Sales team is well prepared for all the opportunities the auto sector continues to bring. That's why Dante Pileri feels so confident Zurich and our customers will come through current global turmoil and industry fluctuations as strong as ever.

"We just focus on our core value proposition, which is helping dealers make more money both today and for their long-term wealth. We're here to help them grow, withstand challenges, stay compliant, and simply be a good partner."

Keep healthcare costs manageable with Supplemental Gap Medical Insurance

Now available to auto dealership customers in select states, this addition to your benefits package can help ease rising expenses for you and your employees.

Rising healthcare costs continue to put a significant burden on both individuals and employers. Supplemental Gap Medical Insurance can provide financial relief for your employees by helping them meet out-of-pocket payments when their primary health insurance deductible has not been met, covering such expenses up to a specified policy limit.

While Gap Medical can be provided as a voluntary, employee-paid benefit add-on, dealership leaders may find it more advantageous to their business to offer it as an employer-paid option. Across the industry, retention of top talent remains a challenge. 96% of workers say employer-provided coverage is important to their financial security and 68% rank health insurance as their top workplace benefit — above retirement savings and paid time off.[1] A stronger benefits package can be a great way to keep your best people and attract promising new additions to your staff.

Your overall healthcare expenditures can also be decreased through a combination of a higher-deductible general medical plan supplemented with Gap Medical. Coverage can be customized for the benefit structure best for your operations.

Options include but are not limited to:

- Varying inpatient, outpatient or combined benefits
- High-deductible plans used in conjunction with health savings accounts (HSAs)
- Doctor's office visits included
- Monthly premiums based on employee's age or a composite group rating

Supplemental Gap Medical Insurance guarantees coverage for anyone enrolled in your health plan, and claims are usually paid directly to providers.

Healthcare costs are not expected to decrease anytime soon, but with the right combination of a broader health coverage plan and Supplemental Gap Medical Insurance, you can significantly lower the expense for your dealership, ease financial stress on your employees, and help ensure you remain an employer of choice for the professionals who can make the difference in the future success of your business.

Ready to bridge the gap in your benefits package? Ask your Zurich representative how you can access Supplemental Gap Medical Insurance.

Find more coverage details here.

1. "Americans Give Employer-Provided Health Coverage High Marks on Satisfaction, Value and Financial Security." America's Health Insurance Plans. 5 March 2026.

Around Zurich

A quick view of some of what's happening with Direct Markets.

Congratulations to the 2026 President's Club winners!

Direct Markets has been celebrating high-achieving team members with our President's Club honors since 1989. These recognitions are awarded to market-facing employes who achieve or meet ambitious goals set the previous year and reflect the winners' commitment to our dealership customers. This year's honorees are:

- Kristie Ban
- Rob Berardi
- Heather Brown
- Eric Castetter
- Rian Dailey
- Ryan Dickey
- Jeremy Dockendorf
- Joe Farquhar
- Peter Franco
- Rob Gawlinski
- Nick Graver
- Jim Gubicza
- Scott Heinbaugh
- Herin Joshi
- Nick Kane
- Dan Kapenga
- Cole Kissick
- Nick Kopesky
- Eric Krise
- Andy LoConto
- Lewis Mattera
- Mike Meyer
- Marcos Miranda
- Stephen Moyer
- Michael Naim
- Ron Nelson
- Trevor Onken
- Greg Parto
- Dianna Rios Martinez
- John Salvatore
- Michael Sarullo
- Michael Scammahorn
- Eric Schloerb
- Steve Schoener
- Scott Wallace
- Dan Weed

Helping fight hunger in Overland Park

In November, Direct Markets team members joined other Zurich colleagues from our Overland Park, Kansas office to fill 1,000 backpacks with nutritious, child-friendly food for schoolchildren in the greater Kansas City area. The effort was in support of the "BackSnack" program run by the Harvesters Community Food Network. Approximately one in five children live in households suffering from food insecurity. This is just one example of dozens of volunteer efforts for community and non-profit groups that take place year-round at Zurich offices across the nation.

Hitting the books for elite customer service

Serving our customers is always our top priority within Direct Markets, but we decided to kick that commitment up a notch with a bi-monthly book club discussion on "Unreasonable Hospitality" by famed restaurateur and hospitality group owner **Will Guidara**. Head of Direct Markets **Todd Kaminski** was inspired by the book and its message, succinctly captured in the subtitle, "The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect." While entirely optional, we're happy to report that more than 180 team members participated in the informal chats, looking for a fresh angle on how to deliver more for our customers. As the book jacket summary notes, "Every business can choose to be in the hospitality industry."

Wax museum memories

Was that Taylor Swift, Post Malone and Katy Perry mixing with guests at Zurich's NADA Show cocktail reception this past February? Well, no, but amazing wax replicas of these and other pop culture superstars helped make the event at Madame Tussauds in Las Vegas a unique and memorable gathering. Thanks to all the customers and friends who joined us for the great conversations and "star-gazing!"

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