

## “NOW” is the Time for the Aftermarket



### View from HQ:

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As 2008 fades off into the sunset, I am not certain how many of us are going to be sad to see it go. After all, we have seen one of the most tumultuous six months to close out the year that the industry has endured in many, many years. Possibly the worst it has ever seen. But we are not alone, so many industries have experienced unprecedented downturns that it has ceased to be headline material.

It has all sent prognosticators and pundits down paths attempting to determine how prolonged our downturn will be and what will be the signs to show us we are coming out of it. All of this is valuable, of course, but speculating about the length and depth of our woes will not help us one bit in alleviating them. I spoke with RVAA's Education Chairs Aaron Engberg from Winegard Company and Kevin Phillips of Thetford Corporation about this in Louisville.

The nature of my concern was a combination of industry scuttlebutt combined with a little bit of history. First, the rumors... it was continuously lamented throughout December that a prolonged downturn would have a terminal effect on many of the nation's RV dealers. Few are willing to offer hard numbers as to what the final toll could be – but there is little reason not to suspect that a portion of the industry's “frontline” – the dealership community – will cease to exist when the economy gets its wheels turning at full steam once again.

I thought about how this aligns historically with what the automotive industry went through some time ago when it was facing a similar dealership reduction. What steps did the automotive industry take to make certain as many of its dealers survived as possible? Are these steps taking place today in the RV industry today?

What did the automotive industry tell their dealers? Focus on the aftermarket – focus on parts and accessories. These areas will provide your dealership with the ability to survive and make it through the downturn. And is this happening in the RV industry today? Not enough.

And so after lengthy discussions with RVAA's Education Chairs, our President Piar Adams and with the approval of the RVAA Board of Directors during their December 14, 2008 Board of Directors meeting, RVAA has committed to begin a broad-based industry outreach program which will start in January 2009. The mission of this campaign? To present to the dealership community a consistent and repeated message – NOW is the time to focus on the aftermarket.

It is a simple message, but a message that the dealership community is not hearing loud enough these days in a world where it seems national associations focus on words, revised forecasts and wishful thinking. A revised shipment forecast won't help a dealership survive through a prolonged recession – only revising strategies will help some dealerships on the edge make it through the coming months.

The “Aftermarket NOW” campaign will feature a deliberate targeted messages through multiple media channels as well as targeted directly to dealers through emails and links to a special “Aftermarket NOW” website. Here we will also post educational pieces which will give dealers quick and tangible tips for improving their aftermarket stores written by members of RVAA. We will also feature a listing of all RVAA member suppliers, distributors and agents to let the dealership community know the most reliable aftermarket companies with which to do business.

All of these efforts will be utilized to help the dealership community understand that they cannot lose connection with their customer base during this downturn. As consumer confidence wanes and RVers are more satisfied with their existing units rather than purchasing a new one – dealerships face a potential damaging loss of connection with their customers. The aftermarket can help bring them back to the dealership and keep them connected to dealers until they are ready to buy their next RV.

Ultimately, the campaign is good for everyone – the suppliers, distributor and agent members of RVAA – and of course, those dealers who hear the message and take action. Watch for updates on the campaign in future issues of the RVAHQ Bulletin, and also consider helping out with educational articles or participating as a volunteer member of RVAA's Education Committee. To become a member of this committee, simply send an email to [karl@rvaahq.com](mailto:karl@rvaahq.com) and I will happily include you on the committee roster.

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