

# Shoppers Are Looking. They're Just **Not Buying.**

The Summer 2026 market brief and action plan for used car managers — the data behind the slowdown, plus the sourcing and follow-up moves that keep you selling when the urgency disappears.

**-30%**

Shopper index off its spring peak — buyers are browsing, not transacting

**\$7,214**

Average negative equity on trade-ins (Q4 2025, all-time record)

**\$49,461**

Average new-vehicle transaction price (April 2026)

**105%**

Wholesale value retention index — above every year since 2014

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- 01 The Affordability Squeeze.** The negative-equity, new-car-price, and truck-incentive data behind why buyers are stalling.
- 02 The Action Plan.** Three moves to work leads harder, source without the auction, and stop self-inflicted margin compression — including the outright-seller script.
- 03 The S.P.A.C.E.D. Framework.** The needs-assessment tool that gives your team something to say on every follow-up.

PART 1 — WHY THIS SLOWDOWN IS DIFFERENT

# The buyer is stretched thinner than the headlines suggest

Customers are still online (SRPs and VDPs are up), but the fear of missing out that drove the spring season is gone. Inventory is back up, the shopper index is down roughly 30%, and a financially squeezed buyer can take their time, send a dozen leads, and wait you out. Here is the data that proves now is not the time to do what you have always done.

**NEGATIVE EQUITY** Nearly 1 in 3 trade-ins is underwater

| Metric                            | Figure          | Context                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Avg. negative equity on trade-ins | <b>\$7,214</b>  | Q4 2025 — all-time record (Edmunds)       |
| Share of trade-ins underwater     | <b>31.9%</b>    | 4-year high                               |
| Payment w/ neg. equity rolled in  | <b>\$916/mo</b> | \$11,453 extra financed vs. typical buyer |
| Underwater by \$10,000+           | <b>26.6%</b>    | Often not structurable at market price    |

**NEW CAR PRICE** \$50K is the new normal

- **\$49,461** average new transaction price (April 2026), up **3.5%** year over year
- **19%** of new loans now exceed \$1,000/mo — it was 4.8% in 2020
- That value gap is your closing argument: a clean 2–3 year-old version at \$30–35K sells itself

**USED IS THE VALVE** Where the buyer lands

- Average used loan: **\$27,070** at **\$531/mo** — a realistic number for most markets
- Nearly **1/3** of used payments are still under **\$400/mo** — stock that band
- Wholesale values are softening into late July / early August — get lean and be ready

**TRUCK WATCH** New-truck incentives are crushing used truck values

| 2026 Model      | New Listings | Best Rate (72mo) | Max Cash           |
|-----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Ram 1500        | 21,759       | 2.9% APR         | <b>\$11,250</b>    |
| Silverado 1500  | 19,045       | 4.9% APR         | ~\$7,250           |
| Ford F-150      | 16,454       | 5.9% APR         | ~\$4,500           |
| GMC Sierra 1500 | 15,746       | 2.9% APR         | ~\$6,600+ w/ trade |

When a buyer can take \$11,250 off a new Ram, your used Ram appraisal has to account for it. First 30 days is critical on any truck you acquire — the new-truck math works against you if it sits.

## PART 2 — WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT THIS WEEK

# Get proactive, source smarter, stop bleeding gross

When the customer stops coming to you, you go to the customer. Three moves separate the dealers who keep selling through the summer from the ones who complain about it.

## MOVE 1 — Work every lead like the spring season never ended

- **Zero uncontacted leads after a price change.** If you dropped a price, every customer on that unit hears from you. That number should be zero, all the time.
- **Touch active leads every day or every other day** until they set an appointment or tell you to stop. The math is undefeated: more attempts to more contacts to more appointments to more shows to more cars sold.

## MOVE 2 — Source without defaulting to the auction

A \$25,000 car is a \$25,000 car no matter where it comes from. The difference is **cost of ownership** — the auction adds buy fees, PSI, transport, and holding cost while the car sits in transit. Two lanes most dealers leave on the table:

- **Buy aging units from reputable OEM dealers in your competitive set.** They are already serviced and frontline-ready. Build the relationship and they will send you their end-of-month list.
- **Mine your own CRM for trades and outright sellers.** Pull every recent lead with no trade attached, look at what they were shopping, and start the conversation below.

### THE OUTRIGHT-SELLER SCRIPT — TURN A LEAD INTO A BUY

"Do you have a vehicle you're selling outright yourself?" *If yes but they're firm on their price:*

"Perfect. We get hundreds of customers through our doors. If I run across someone looking for a vehicle like yours and I don't have it, would you mind if I sent them your way?"

Then capture it: *year, make, model, options, color, odometer — and how much are you selling it for?* Log it in the CRM trade screen and build an internal run list with no plus-plus-plus fees.

Now your buyer can call: "I see you're asking \$35,000. In case it doesn't sell, I'm a player on that rig at \$32." That spread is your gross — no buy fee, no transport, no PSI, no holding cost.

## MOVE 3 — Kill self-inflicted margin compression

Before you blame the market, run two reports out of your DMS on your last 20 deals. The leakage is often in-house.

### Trade Variance

Trade allowance vs. trade ACV. Over-allowing by \$3,000 a deal is a coaching point on defending trade value, not a market problem.

### Price Variance

Contract price vs. advertised price. A \$5,000 delta means you are not defending the value of the car you are selling.

- **Stop changing the price every five days.** Educated buyers watch your drops and wait you out. If you have leads on a unit, work the customer before you touch the price.
- **Run the "money, machine, or me?" check.** If a customer raised their hand on a unit in their budget, it isn't the money or the machine. It's a "me" problem, and that's coachable.

## PART 3 — BRING VALUE, NOT PRESSURE

# The S.P.A.C.E.D. needs-assessment framework

In a slow market, the rep who brings value wins the deal. Stop opening with "What time can you be here?" and "Are you still in the market?" Instead, find the buyer's hot buttons across these six areas, then follow up with information they actually want. You will never run out of things to talk about — and you will separate yourself from the pack.

## S SAFETY

What safety features matter most? Young kids, elderly passengers, highway or bad-weather driving? *Matches them to the right trim and class from the start.*

## P PERFORMANCE

What are they hauling, towing, or off-roading? Power, smooth city driving, or all-weather traction? *Engine size, drive type, and transmission live here.*

## A APPEARANCE

Color, trim, wheels, interior, body style. *Often the emotional anchor — buyers who feel the vehicle reflects their identity rarely unwind the deal.*

## C COMFORT

Heated seats, sunroof, CarPlay, third row, premium audio. *Ask what they have now and what they'd miss — that's the minimum bar for the next vehicle.*

## E ECONOMY

Fuel economy, total cost of ownership, insurance, operating cost. *Primary driver for some, secondary for others — either way it shapes the right fit.*

## D DEPENDABILITY

Annual mileage, primary use, past vehicle problems. *Then present warranty and maintenance proactively — this is where the F&I conversation is seeded.*

### How to run it

- **Start every up with S.P.A.C.E.D.** The 5–10 minutes you invest before walking to inventory eliminates wasted demos and objections later.
- **Use it as a handoff tool.** A completed profile gives the next person in the deal instant context — no re-asking, no gaps.
- **Revisit it during objections.** The answer to "why aren't they buying" is almost always hidden in one of the six categories.

## Want a coach to walk through this with your team?

LotWalk pairs the data and the playbook with 1-on-1 accountability coaching. Book a no-pressure walkthrough at [lotpop.com/estimate](https://lotpop.com/estimate)