

Stop Paying the Frankenstack Tax on Your Time

Walk any showroom or service lane on a Saturday, and you will not find a lazy person. You will find sharp people stuck in bad systems. Sales toggling between CRM and desking, F&I chasing missing short-term incentive plans (STIPs) in a DMS screen. Advisors clicking through three different service tools for a simple status update. None of that shows up on your vendor invoices. It shows up in minutes lost, deals delayed and annoyed customers who decide the grass may be greener at the dealership down the road. That is the real Frankenstack tax.

Most stores did not choose it on purpose. They added one CRM, then an internet lead tool, then a chat widget, then a service scheduler, then a connected car app, then an AI assistant off to the side. Each tool solved a narrow problem. Together, they created a maze. The bill is due in time, not just money.

THE HIDDEN TAXES OF DISCONNECTED TOOLS

The most expensive software in your store is the one your people have to work around. Those workarounds are taxes you pay every day across sales, marketing, service and operations.

- **The Re-keying Tax:** A shopper starts online, hits your website, then shows up in the showroom. CRM has one version of the customer. DMS has another. Service lane has history in a third screen. Your people become human middleware, retyping the same VIN, payoff and contact info into multiple systems.
- **The Swivel-Chair Tax:** Your team spends their day bouncing between CRM, desking, marketing dashboards, service apps and inventory tools to answer basic questions.
- **The Reporting Tax:** Sales pulls numbers from CRM. Service pulls them from the lane tool. Accounting pulls them from DMS. Marketing exports spreadsheets from three vendors. The numbers do not match. Leadership meetings turn into reconciliation instead of decisions.
- **The Training and Burnout Tax:** New hires learn your official process, then the workarounds that actually keep the store moving. Veterans burn out because they spend as much time fighting systems as serving customers.

Those taxes land hardest where customers feel them: a slow pencil, a missed follow-up, a no-show service appointment, a recall that never got communicated.

WHY AI MAKES THE FRANKENSTACK PROBLEM WORSE OR BETTER

Every dealer is getting pitched AI right now. Smart lead routing, AI BDC, AI pricing, AI service schedulers. On paper, it sounds like free productivity. In a disconnected environment, it becomes one more widget that needs feeds, logins and exceptions.

AI is only as good as the context it can see and the workflows it can move. If CRM, DMS, marketing, service lane tools and

connected car data are not speaking the same language, AI has to guess.

The flip side is powerful. When your core systems share a clean customer and vehicle record, AI stops being a gimmick and starts acting like a real teammate:

- CRM that knows the last RO and miles on the odometer before it sends a sales follow-up
- Marketing that targets real ownership and behavior, not just last website touch
- Service lane tech that sees equity and warranty status before recommending next steps
- Connected car data feeding operations, so you know which vehicles on your lot need attention.

In that world, AI does not live in a separate app. It sits inside the steps your team already takes, taking work off their plate instead of adding more.

THE SCALE AND SCOPE DEALERS SHOULD DEMAND

The next generation of winners in dealership technology will not be point solutions that do one trick well. It will be partners with enough scale and data to connect the whole operating model.

When you evaluate partners, the first question is no longer, "What does this tool do?" It is, "How much time does this give back to my people?"

Efficiency and time-back: your new buying criteria.

The industry has spent years chasing shiny features. The next few years belong to dealers who chase time.

INSTEAD OF ASKING, 'WHAT DOES THIS FEATURE DO?' ASK:

- How many minutes does this save my sales team per deal?
- How many calls and clicks does this remove for the service advisor?
- How much faster can F&I fund a contract with cleaner data?
- How many reports and logins does leadership no longer have to reconcile?

If a solution cannot show where it gives your people time back, it is adding another tax to your Frankenstack. Future-proofing is not about hoarding more tools. It is about picking a small number of partners with the scale, data and embedded AI to simplify your store, not complicate it. The payoff shows up in faster handoffs, less rework, shorter training curves and a customer experience that feels connected instead of patched together.

Dealers are not hurting for more software. They need their time back. ■

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