

TITLE: The Trust Factor – Why American Dealers Follow People, Not Programs



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About the Author:

Russ Ziegler is the Founder of Connect Sales, Coaching and Consulting. He helps international manufacturers enter and succeed in the U.S. dealer market through education, operational alignment, and measurable accountability. With more than fifteen years in the dealer distribution industry, Russ has trained hundreds of professionals and supported manufacturers in building stronger networks and healthier dealers.

In the United States, dealers follow people they trust more than programs they are told to follow. For international OEMs, understanding how to earn and sustain that trust is essential to long-term success.

The Missing Ingredient in Many U.S. Market Entries

It is common for international manufacturers entering the U.S. market to lead with process, pricing, and product. Those matter—but they are not enough.

What often separates the brands that thrive from those that fade is something harder to measure: *trust*. Dealers in the United States will sell harder, invest deeper, and remain loyal longer when they trust the people behind the brand.

Why American Dealers Follow People, Not Programs

The U.S. dealer landscape is built on relationships. Most dealers are privately owned, family-run, and independent by nature. They are accustomed to working with multiple manufacturers and have options.

They decide where to place their focus based on who they believe will act in their best interest—especially when problems arise. A dealer’s commitment grows not from corporate presentations, but from consistent, authentic interaction.



America Ready

In short, American dealers will follow people they trust even when the program is imperfect—but they will resist programs they do not trust, no matter how strong the product may be.

The Cultural Gap: Control vs. Connection

In many regions of the world, manufacturers lead through authority—directives, structure, and compliance. That model does not translate well to the United States.

Here, leadership credibility comes from responsiveness and follow-through. Dealers expect clear communication, realistic timelines, and someone they can reach when things go wrong. They will test that reliability before they invest their energy.

To succeed, an OEM must balance professional systems with personal connection. Dealers want to know there is both a strong process *and* a dependable person on the other end of it.

How to Build Trust with U.S. Dealers

Trust cannot be mandated, but it can be built intentionally. The most successful OEMs entering the U.S. market tend to share these practices:

1. **Be Transparent** – Share what you know, admit what you do not, and explain the “why” behind decisions.
2. **Be Consistent** – Deliver the same message through leadership, marketing, and the field. Inconsistency is seen as instability.
3. **Be Responsive** – Answer questions quickly, even if only to acknowledge receipt. Silence creates distance.
4. **Be Human** – Visit dealers, listen to their story, and show that their business matters. The American market values presence and authenticity.

What Trust Produces



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Once trust is established, everything else becomes easier:

- Dealers adopt programs faster.
- Service and parts compliance improves.
- Feedback becomes honest and useful.
- Brand loyalty increases.

Trust turns transactional relationships into partnerships. It transforms compliance into collaboration.

Connect's Perspective

At Connect, we help international OEMs build trust-based systems for U.S. success. Our programs strengthen the connection between corporate strategy and dealer reality by combining process, communication, and field enablement.

We help your team lead with confidence—and be the people your dealers want to follow.

Programs change behavior temporarily. Trust changes it permanently.

Accelerate your entry into the U.S. market with clarity, alignment, and measurable performance. Explore additional America Ready insights, dealer development tools, and U.S. market strategies at www.Connect-CSCC.com.

