

BREAKING NEWS

Indiana Firm Marketing Used Unit Floor plans

Joe Bohn

RV Business

Friday, January 4, 2008

Tracking down floor plan data on older recreational vehicles has been an ongoing, frustrating problem for buyers and sellers.

To fill that void, Norlander Information Services Inc., Middlebury, Ind., in 2001 began collecting a historical database of floor plans and obtaining copyright releases to reprint and publish that data. The firm, founded by industry veteran Norm Frohreich, now has over 4,000 floor plans for each model year of RVs, covering 98% of the units produced in the U.S. and Canada dating back to 2002.

In a further refinement of the information's availability and potential use, its "Floorplan Trader" data is now available in the form of brochures, including custom-made dealer flyers, as well as CDs and hard copy books. Also available is a web page service that provides floor plans for dealers to add to their own website's posting of used inventory data.

In CD and hard copy format, the Floor plan Trader information is issued in four editions on an annual model year basis, including fifth-wheel, travel trailer and motor home editions, as well as a "Special Edition" which includes camping trailers, hybrid trailers, towable toy haulers and truck campers. The yearly subscription fee is \$695.

Once a dealer subscribes, he has license to use the floor plan data for his operations in any way he likes. "We basically transfer the license to use the data," said Frohreich.

He noted that the customized flyers increase the marketability of used products for dealers. "If you go on a dealer's website, you can see his (used) merchandise, description and cost," he said. "We now take that, put a floor plan with it and produce a flyer for the dealer so the customer can leave with all the pictures, information and floor plan. It becomes a highly effective marketing tool."

Custom-made flyers for dealer units and brochure copies are only available to members at an additional charge to cover production costs, added Frohreich, who has served as an executive for several RV manufacturers. "We offer those services as an extra benefit to our members, and we're trying to do it at cost," he said. "There's no real mark-up in that."

Frohreich said that floor plan data can be used in various other ways to help market a used RV, such as e-mailing it to prospective customers or providing copies on trade-ins to be used by sales people to call their leads and "pre-sell" the unit before it arrives. It can also help a dealer evaluate trade-ins from customers who may not remember a lot of details about a unit.

Potentially, a parts and service department can also use a photo of the floor plan for greater accuracy in getting a replacement part on an older unit, such as a damaged cabinet door.

Frohreich reported Norlander's subscriptions have been growing steadily as a reflection of dealers' increased interest in used RVs. And the proliferation of floor plans, changing yearly, only promises to fuel increasing demand for the data.

BREAKING NEWS

'Floorplan Trader' Available in CD Format

Bob Ashley
RV Business
Friday, January 6, 2006

RV industry veteran Norm Frohreich has launched a CD version of the "Floorplan Trader," a soft-cover book he first published in 2004 that features more than 98% of the floorplans produced by major manufacturers in 2002.

Within the next year Frohreich, president of Middlebury, Ind., consulting firm Norlander Information Services Inc. (www.nis-info.com), will release 2003 and 2004 versions and then follow with once-a-year releases aimed at the dealer sector.

Frohreich's intention is to sell dealers annual subscriptions to the "Floorplan Trader" for \$695 to use as an aid to increase their used RV business.

"We are trying to close an information gap," said Frohreich, who spent more than 30 years in various RV manufacturing positions. "Right now the industry is really not doing a very good job in the pre-owned market. One of the major issues is knowledge."

The publishing effort is being headed by Frohreich's wife, Peggy, vice president of Norlander.

A recent marketing study for the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) by economist Richard Curtin of the University of Michigan found that dealer sales of pre-owned RVs increased from 14% to 21% of the total used market between 2001 and 2005 versus transactions between private individuals.

The "Floorplan Trader" for 2002 models features 3,800 floorplans in PDF format on four CDs – motorhomes, fifth-wheels, travel trailers and specialty trailers, the latter of which includes truck campers, hybrid trailers, towable sport utility RVs (SURVs) and folding camping trailers.

Each listing contains a line-drawing of the floorplan, model number, original MSRP, dry weight, hitch weight, GVWR and cargo capacity. For motorhomes, the chassis and engine also are listed.

"Floorplan Trader" makes no effort to determine a specific floorplan's current value. "I don't have access to the data to prove the value," Frohreich said. "The key value is the floorplan itself. If someone calls a dealer and tells him he has a 2002 fifth-wheel that he wants to trade, the dealer can have a better idea of its value if he knows the specifics of the floorplan.

"The appraisal guides have nothing other than straight-line depreciation on RVs. That has no bearing on the value of a specific floorplan."

With a couple of exceptions, manufacturers who sell their products through dealers are providing floorplan information for the "Floorplan Trader," Frohreich said.

"It took us three years to get the copyright releases," he said, noting that the collection of historical data began in 2001.

Frohreich said his agreement with manufacturers is that standard-run floorplans won't be published for nine months after their model year has expired.

Annual editions are expected to be published each spring.