

**W**ith the onset of e-rating, e-contracting and e-remittance capabilities, picking the right menu is no longer just about preference. This month the magazine goes one-on-one with Patrick DeMarco, president of Ristken Software Services, to talk about the behind-the-scenes battle being waged by menu providers.

**F&I: So, is Ristken a menu company or something else?**

**DeMarco:** We certainly offer a menu, but we're much more than that. We're a technology service provider that was founded in 1998 on a F&I reporting tool called ProTracking. It helped

**F&I: And is your growth these days driven by the F&I reporting tool or your menu?**

**DeMarco:** Actually, a lot of our growth over the last 12 months has come from our work with providers in e-contracting. Our aftermarket network, which we call SPAN (Service Provider Access Network), has really taken off.

**F&I: So, which providers do you work with?**

**DeMarco:** I'll just say that we work with most of the leading providers in the industry. And just so you're aware, we look at e-contracting in three modules: the e-rating module, the actual e-contracting and the e-remittance of

**DeMarco:** We definitely fall into the "good-better-best" approach, and we do that for a couple of reasons. For one, you can't sell products that aren't offered, and the good-better-best option approach allows for more products to be presented to customers.

Now, I will say that, in a lot of cases, it is much easier for an F&I manager not to use the good-better-best approach. However, our feeling is that, if you use a consistent selling approach — where you're offering all products to all customers — you're providing a solid sales experience.

Now, if you look at our menu, we do take a different approach. We use a single-screen configuration, which means a F&I manager doesn't have to

# The Menu Battle

Ristken Software Service's top executive sits down with the magazine to talk about an aspect of the menu business that hasn't received much fanfare. **By Gregory Arroyo**

dealers better manage their F&I departments, and it was a Web-based tool before anybody was offering anything on the Web.

The application was updated about a year and a half ago, and, in my opinion, it's unparalleled in the industry. It allows our customers, such as Ford, Zurich, Protective and numerous general agents, to be better consultants and better income-development specialists by allowing them to review their dealer customer's performance and identify areas that can be improved.

**F&I: You refer to F&I providers as customers. Why is that?**

**DeMarco:** Our distribution model is not a direct-to-dealer model, per se. We understand that dealers are the heartbeat of our company, but we sell directly to our service provider partners that bring us to the dealership. Think of us as a technology company that pulls up alongside these companies and gets their agenda to market.

that contract. We have providers that utilize our solutions end-to-end. Other providers may use certain modules of SPAN. Again, we are focused on assisting each of these providers with their electronic initiatives, regardless of where they are in this process. We certainly provide our input, but, at the end of the day, we provide the technology and implement the business rules to power their system.

**F&I: Do these companies mandate that dealers use your menu?**

**DeMarco:** We're a little different in the fact that we're providing a back-end solution which certainly integrates with our menu, but it doesn't have to. So, if a dealership is using a competitor's menu, they will still have the ability to e-contract through us.

**F&I: You're taking part in a panel discussion at our conference that will tackle that all-important question: What makes for an effective menu? What is Ristken's approach?**

toggle back and forth between lease mode or retail mode. And with our menu, the F&I manager can quote four different payment plans with multiple options in about three seconds.

**F&I: Integration is also a big consideration these days. Where does Ristken stand?**

**DeMarco:** The thing is, to compete in today's market, companies have to not only provide an application that is of value to the dealer, but they must also be viewed as a trusted partner by the Reynolds, ADPs and Arkonas of the world. I'm sure that's not a popular sentiment.

**F&I: I think it depends on what side of the fence you're on.**

**DeMarco:** Listen, you have two choices, you either certify and pay the associated fees or you operate in a nonsanctioned way and risk potentially shutting down your entire customer base. For Ristken, that's a risk we just can't afford to take. ■