

SPOTLIGHT ON: TRAKA

Key-ping track

A safe and secure way to store keys in your dealership has arrived. **James Batchelor** reports on how Traka can help save you hassle

It's funny to think that a car dealer's business relies upon looking after little pieces of metal. Misplacing or having keys stolen can cause disaster to a car dealer's business as losing them means stock cannot be sold or a customer cannot have their car back. That's not to mention the fact that insurance companies are tightening up their rules, stipulating that if a car key is stolen as a result of a dealer being lax, they won't pay out. Luckily, there is one firm based in Britain who can help out. Traka was started by John Kent two decades ago and has provided key management to everyone ranging from Tesco to the Metropolitan Police's Royal Protection Squad – and now they are launching a major drive to assist car dealers too.

'Around 20 years ago British Airways came to me to solve a problem they had in managing the keys of their support vehicles at airports,' explains Kent. 'Employees would start work in the mornings by grabbing the keys to the cleanest and newest vehicles, stick them in their pocket or desk drawer and at some point in the day use the vehicle.'

'This, naturally, starts a habit with everyone

else doing the same thing so there ends up being not enough keys due to this private reservation habit. What followed was a pressure to acquire new vehicles – but BA didn't need new vehicles, it was just that they weren't being used properly.'

British Airways ended up buying 40 systems from Kent's firm as they found that the Traka system enabled them to better utilise their fleet of vehicles, and their vehicles remained in service longer because they were in better condition.

So, what is Traka? Put simply, it's a vending machine for electronically-tagged keys. At the heart of the whole process is the iFob or 'silver bullet' which, once attached to car keys, becomes electronically tagged. It's then placed into a very secure cabinet that can only be opened by a key, a swipe card or a finger print – it's usually the latter in car dealerships – and as a key is taken from the cabinet it is recorded by the electronics in the silver bullet and by the software in the cabinet.

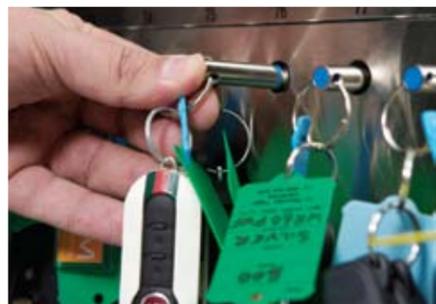
The advantages? Well, the most important one is there's a history of who has taken the key – and there's knowledge of who has the key at any given moment.

'For instance you might be a small to mid-sized dealership in London and you could have

one of our 50-key systems which could cover all of your vehicles and perhaps your service vehicles,' explains Kent. 'If you were a bigger dealership, you might have a multiple number of our cabinets. You might even have them spread around the dealership, so there could be a cabinet in the service reception area, one in the sales department and another in the valet bay and so on. The idea is that this allows the dealership staff to move the keys around the dealership securely, and the process is all logged and managed by our Traka32 software system.'

Modern cars are built in a way to make it difficult to hot-wire them, and the key is needed to start them. While this is to be celebrated, thieves now realise that it's the key they need to steal the car. 'If you don't look after keys, they will get stolen and thieves are becoming wiser on how to steal car keys. Insurance companies are now

Traka key cabinets can be operated by fingerprint recognition and will help keep a log of who has the keys to which vehicle



'Silver bullet' is the brains behind system



Fingerprint recognition releases keys

Key vending

How it works in dealerships

A GOOD example of a dealer using Traka is Wollaston BMW. They've been using the Traka32 audited software, are impressed by it and find it a straightforward system to use. Their experiences have been improved by the BMW Key Reader which, by inserting a customer's key, can pull out the VIN number, mileage, colour and any other relevant details, and populate that straight into the Traka32 database. The dealership also uses the iFob reader which can link the database to the iFob, and finds the process streamlines vehicle movements. Watch the video at bit.ly/TrakaBMW to find out more.

telling dealers if the keys are stolen, we cannot cover you,' says Kent.

The process of looking after keys needn't be mentioned to customers as it can form another part of your excellent customer service. But Kent believes it should be marketed to customers: 'With customers, there's always that worry "who was driving my car at lunchtime?" and "I'm sure my car had less miles than it has now". Traka gives an audit of who had the key – and if that staff member knows that their boss knows they're driving a customer's car, they are far less likely to be irresponsible. If I was a customer and I knew there was an audit trail, I would feel a lot more comfortable.'

A number of large dealership groups already use Traka products. 'Jardine uses our product in almost all of their sites, so does Dick Lovett, Sytner and a McLaren dealership. Kia, Fiat and

Ford dealers use it too, but predominantly it has been the premium brands. Cargiant also uses our product and Carshop currently uses our product in four of their five sites and will soon be installing it in the fifth,' says Kent.

You might think there isn't a price on security, but with Traka there is. Prices for the product are dependent upon the number of keys a dealer wants to look after. The firm now has a rental scheme in place that works out at around five pence per key per day. 'That is a very variable number but for about five years the all-in costs are five pence per key per day,' explains Kent.

'Historically, in other sectors businesses pay out a capital amount of money for our product, and they might spend anything between £5-50,000, with the average cost per key being 40p. But it's the rental scheme we think dealers will be interested in.' [CD]