



VAN 2026 · HIRING KIT

The Vehicle Acquisition Specialist Hiring Kit

Everything you need to hire, pay, and onboard a top-performing private-party buyer — backed by the VAN 2026 National Compensation Study.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Pay-Plan Templates · Sample Job Description · Interview Scorecard
30/60/90 Onboarding Checklist · KPI Tracker · Resume Red Flags

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INTRODUCTION

A Vehicle Acquisition Specialist — the person dedicated to sourcing used inventory directly from private sellers — is one of the highest-leverage hires a dealership can make. But it's also one of the easiest roles to get wrong. Most dealers hire the wrong profile, pay them the wrong way, set the wrong KPIs, and churn through three specialists before landing one who sticks.

This kit is built to stop that cycle. It packages what works at dealerships across the country — grouped by what you'll actually use in the hiring process:

- **Pay Plan Templates** — three battle-tested structures with real dollar figures you can plug into your store.
- **Sample Job Description** — a modern, honest JD that attracts the right candidates (and scares off the wrong ones).
- **Interview Scorecard** — 8 questions designed to predict performance, with green/red flags and a 1–5 scoring rubric.
- **Resume Red Flags** — what to look for on the page before you call.
- **30/60/90 Onboarding Checklist** — what to teach and measure in the first 90 days.
- **KPI Tracking Template** — the weekly and monthly metrics that matter.

About the research. The benchmarks in this kit are drawn from the *VAN 2026 Vehicle Acquisition Specialist Compensation Study* — a proprietary analysis of 67 live job postings across 25 U.S. states, cross-referenced with U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data on employer costs. KPI benchmarks reflect VAN's Path to Purchasing™ framework and aggregate performance across dealerships sourcing via 25+ FSBO sources.

How this kit fits VAN's Path to Purchasing™ framework. VAN's methodology covers four phases: (1) Acquisition Analysis™ — evaluating if private-party sourcing fits your store; (2) Acquisition Game Plan™ — strategic launch of your buy center; (3) staffing — either an in-house Vehicle Acquisition Specialist or a Managed Buyer™; (4) Dedicated Coaching with an Acquisition Coach™. This Hiring Kit supports phase 3 for dealers building in-house.

Every section marked with *yellow italics* is a placeholder you should customize for your store.

COMPENSATION

Based on the VAN 2026 study, the national average on-target earnings for a Vehicle Acquisition Specialist is \$69,100/year. Top performers in high-volume markets earn \$110,000–\$200,000. The structure you choose matters as much as the number — a \$70K specialist on the wrong plan will behave very differently than a \$70K specialist on the right one.

Below are three proven structures. Pick the one that matches your volume, your cash flow, and your appetite for risk.

Plan A: Base + Per-Car Bonus (Recommended for most dealers)

The most common and most stable structure. Livable base keeps your hire from starving during ramp; per-car bonus scales with performance. This plan works for stores targeting 15–25 acquisitions/month.

Component	Amount	Notes
Base salary	\$42,000/year (\$3,500/month)	Paid regardless of production
Per-car bonus	\$150/acquired vehicle	Paid on vehicles delivered to inventory, not appointments
Monthly bonus kicker	\$500 at 15 cars · \$750 at 20 cars · \$1,000 at 25+ cars	Stacked — pays only the highest tier hit
Benefits	Standard store package	Health, 401(k), PTO

OTE at target volumes:

- 15 cars/month: \$42K base + \$27K bonus + \$6K kicker = **~\$75,000 OTE**
- 20 cars/month: \$42K base + \$36K bonus + \$9K kicker = **~\$87,000 OTE**
- 25 cars/month: \$42K base + \$45K bonus + \$12K kicker = **~\$99,000 OTE**

Target OTE at 15 cars/month (\$75K) aligns with the \$69,100 national average from the VAN 2026 study, with upside as volume scales.

Plan B: Base + Uncapped Commission (For high-volume stores)

Higher ceiling, more aggressive. Suited for high-performing markets or experienced hires who have proven they can produce. Used at dealerships where top performers regularly hit 25+ cars/month.

Component	Amount	Notes
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Base salary	\$55,000/year (\$4,583/month)	Higher than Plan A to offset variable risk
Commission	\$300/acquired vehicle, uncapped	No tier gates — every car pays
Acquisition gross kicker	10% of front-end gross above \$2,500/unit	Rewards buying at a lower cost-to-market
Benefits	Standard store package	Health, 401(k), PTO

OTE at target volumes:

- 20 cars/month: \$55K base + \$72K commission ≈ **\$127,000 OTE**
- 30 cars/month: \$55K base + \$108K commission ≈ **\$163,000 OTE**

Plan C: Recoverable Draw + Commission (Aggressive performer plan)

Highest ceiling but highest risk. Appropriate only for candidates with a verified track record who want to bet on themselves. Not recommended for first-time acquisition hires.

Component	Amount	Notes
Recoverable draw	\$3,500/month	Recovered from commission each month; if commission falls short, draw rolls forward
Commission	\$400/acquired vehicle	Uncapped
Benefits	Standard store package	Health, 401(k), PTO

Earnings at volume:

- 15 cars/month: \$6,000 commission (covers \$3,500 draw + \$2,500 net) = \$72,000/year
- 25 cars/month: \$10,000 commission = \$120,000/year
- 35 cars/month: \$14,000 commission = \$168,000/year

Avoid pure commission. "Eat what you kill" plans incentivize buying bad cars, churning through hires, and quitting in month two. The best-performing buy centers pay livable base compensation and reward volume on top.

Plan selection framework

Your situation	Recommended plan
First acquisition hire, single-point store	Plan A
Multi-store group, established buy center	Plan A or B

Experienced hire with a portable book	Plan B or C
Zero-experience hire (former bartender, realtor, etc.)	Plan A — always
High-volume store targeting 30+/month	Plan B

RECRUITING

Use this job description as a starting template. Fill in the yellow placeholders with your dealership's specifics. Copy-paste into Indeed, ZipRecruiter, your career site, or LinkedIn.

Vehicle Acquisition Specialist — *Your Dealership Name*

Location: *City, State* · **Employment type:** Full-time · **Compensation:** *\$75,000–\$120,000 OTE (base + per-car bonus)*

About the role

Your Dealership Name is hiring a Vehicle Acquisition Specialist — a dedicated role responsible for sourcing pre-owned inventory directly from private-party sellers. This is **not** a car salesperson role. You will not be working the showroom floor. Your entire job is to find, contact, and buy vehicles from consumers looking to sell their cars.

You'll work a daily pipeline of private-party listings across online marketplaces and consumer listing sites, engage sellers by phone and text, present offers, set appointments, and coordinate purchases. Our used-car manager handles final appraisal and paperwork. You handle everything before that.

If you're a phone-first communicator who can handle rejection with a smile and thrive on hitting daily activity numbers, this is one of the most lucrative roles in automotive you can find.

What you'll do

- Source a high volume of private-party vehicle listings daily using our acquisition platform — top performers work 50+ contacts a day
- Send personalized outbound messages and follow up with sellers by phone, text, and email
- Present market-based offers and ranges to qualified sellers
- Set and confirm appointments for on-site and remote purchases
- Coordinate remote vehicle pickups with our driver team when needed
- Maintain a disciplined follow-up funnel across 5-, 30-, 60-, and 90-day touchpoints
- Track daily KPIs: outbound contacts, two-way conversations, offers presented, appointments set and shown, vehicles bought

What we're looking for

- **Phone-first communicator.** You're comfortable making 50+ calls a day and prefer a conversation to a text chain.
- **Resilient under rejection.** A 2% close rate doesn't rattle you. You work the next lead without hesitation.

- **Self-directed work ethic.** You hit your activity numbers on a Tuesday morning with nobody watching.
- **Detail-oriented.** You verify VIN, condition, and history before making an offer.
- **Comfortable with technology.** You can learn a new acquisition platform and CRM quickly.
- **Valid driver's license** with a clean driving record.

You don't need

- **Prior automotive experience** is not required. Many of our best hires came from bartending, real estate, call centers, or B2B sales.
- **A degree.** Performance in this role has nothing to do with credentials.

What we offer

- *Competitive base + uncapped per-car bonus (see compensation above)*
- *Health, dental, vision, 401(k) with match, paid time off*
- Full training on our acquisition platform and process
- Ongoing coaching with dedicated management support
- *Opportunities for advancement into used-car management*

How to apply

Send your resume to hire@yourdealership.com. In your cover email, answer this one question: "What's the longest streak of rejection you've ever pushed through in a job, and how did you keep going?"

4 · Interview Scorecard



8 QUESTIONS THAT PREDICT PERFORMANCE

Use this scorecard during every interview. Score each answer 1–5. Total the scores at the end. Any candidate scoring below 24/40 is worth a second look elsewhere. Candidates scoring 32+ are usually worth a second interview within 48 hours.

Candidate: _____ Date: _____ Interviewer: _____

Q1. "Describe an object in this room without naming what it is."

Tests their ability to describe a vehicle condition clearly to a seller who can't see it.

Green flags: Specific details, orientation, size, color, purpose inferred. Coherent structure.

Red flags: Vague, rambles, gives up, names it by category instead of describing.

Score:



Q2. "Walk me through the worst rejection you've ever had in a job. What did you do the next hour?"

Tests resilience. Listen for recovery speed, not story drama.

Green flags: Specific example, took ownership, recovered quickly, kept working.

Red flags: Blames someone else, shut down for a day, "took a mental health break," can't think of an example.

Score:



Q3. "How many outbound calls did you make on your best day in your last role?"

Tests activity threshold.

Green flags: Specific number, 50+, unprompted detail on conversion, knows what "a good day" looked like.

Red flags: Single-digit daily call volume is a strong signal this isn't the right role for the candidate. "I don't really track that" or vague "a lot" also suggest misalignment.

Score:



Q4. "When you get a 'no,' when do you follow up next — and why?"

Tests whether they have a system, not just instinct.

Green flags: Specific cadence (e.g., "5 days, then 30, then 60"), reason behind the timing, acknowledges B-road vs. A-road.

Red flags: "Depends on the mood," "I just try again later," no concept of a follow-up funnel.

Score:

1 2 3 4 5

Q5. "A seller texts back: 'What's your offer?' What's your next move?"

Tests whether they price on data or instinct.

Green flags: Engage first, ask clarifying condition questions (VIN, mileage, tires, interior), then price with a range or firm offer based on market comps.

Red flags: Fires a number back cold. Gives a lowball "to see where they're at." Doesn't ask for the VIN.

Score:

1 2 3 4 5

Q6. "Tell me about a time you changed someone's mind about something they felt strongly about."

Tests the consultative approach that wins private-party deals.

Green flags: Used data, facts, a third-party comparison, or empathy. Didn't push — educated.

Red flags: "I just kept pushing," can't think of an example, "I don't usually argue with people."

Score:

1 2 3 4 5

Q7. "What's your process for keeping track of 200 open conversations at once?"

Tests organizational system.

Green flags: Names a specific tool or method (CRM, spreadsheet, notebook system, color coding), describes how they prioritize.

Red flags: "I'd figure it out," "I have a good memory," blank stare.

Score:

1 2 3 4 5

Q8. "If I hire you, and in 90 days you've bought 5 cars, what's the reason?"

Tests accountability vs. blame-shifting.

Green flags: Takes ownership ("I wasn't making enough calls," "I wasn't following my process"). Asks what they'd need from you.

Red flags: Blames the market, the leads, the tools, the pay plan. Won't consider the scenario.

Score:

1 2 3 4 5

Total score: ____ / 40

24–31: Borderline. Consider another round with scenario-based questions.

Below 24: Consider continuing the search.

PRE-SCREENING CHECKLIST

Before you even schedule the call, scan the resume for these patterns. Two or more of these is a signal worth investigating on the call — not because the person is unqualified, but because they may struggle to survive the first 90 days of this role.

Red flags on the page

- **Short stints at multiple phone-based roles** (BDC, call center, telesales) without explanation. Suggests they burn out on high-rejection work.
- **Job gaps of 6+ months without a clear reason.** Health, family, school, military — fine. Unexplained — ask on the call.
- **No phone-heavy or outbound-heavy roles anywhere in history.** This role is 80% phone and text. Zero history = steep learning curve.
- **Only commission-based roles where they didn't stick.** Indicates they can't handle variable pay without a livable base.
- **"Customer service" with no sales or acquisition experience.** Different muscle. They're used to incoming, not outgoing.
- **No numbers on the resume.** Top performers quantify: "50 calls/day," "top 10% of rep class," "\$80K earned." If nothing is measured, nothing was measured.
- **Previous "car salesperson" with no indication why they want to leave the floor.** Ask early — if they hated the showroom, acquisition may or may not fix it.

Green flags on the page

- **Quantified achievements.** "Booked 80 appointments/month," "closed 15% above team avg."
- **Roles with heavy outbound and rejection:** bartenders, realtors, recruiters, SDRs, insurance agents, fitness coaches selling memberships.
- **Stable 2–3+ year tenures in prior roles.** They stick.
- **Promotions within a role.** They produce.
- **Self-described as "phone-first" or "prefers calls."**

FIRST 90 DAYS

The first 90 days set the trajectory for this hire. Rush past the fundamentals and you'll spend the next 12 months undoing bad habits. Use this checklist weekly with your new specialist.

Coaching cadence. VAN's proven rhythm for new buyers is **daily check-ins during weeks 1–2, weekly coaching for the rest of months 1–3, then monthly strategy reviews** — the same cadence our Acquisition Coach™ team uses with Managed Buyers™. Use it for your in-house hire.

Days 1–30: Foundation

Week 1 — Environment and tools

- Workstation, phone, and CRM access configured day one
- Acquisition platform login and training access granted
- Introduction to used-car manager, desk, service, F&I, and title clerk
- Shadow the used-car manager on 2–3 appraisals
- Read this Hiring Kit front to back
- Daily 10-minute check-in with manager

Week 2 — Process and scripts

- Review the three word tracks: initial outreach, VIN request, offer presentation
- Practice roleplays with a manager (10 scenarios minimum)
- Observe an experienced buyer for a full day (if possible, ride-along or Zoom observation)
- First outbound messages — supervised at first, then solo
- Daily 10-minute check-in with manager

Weeks 3–4 — First acquisitions

- Target: 20 outbound contacts/day by end of week 2, 50/day by end of week 4
- First appointment set by end of week 2
- First vehicle purchased by end of week 4
- Transition from daily check-ins to scheduled weekly coaching review

Days 31–60: Ramp (Weekly Coaching)

- Daily outbound count: 75–100+
- Weekly coaching session** — review KPIs, recent buys, word track refinements, blockers

- Begin working long-tail follow-up (day 30+ touchpoints)
- First 30-day retrospective: what worked, what didn't, what to change

Days 61–90: Independence (Weekly Coaching)

- Daily outbound count: 100+ consistently
- Month-three target: 10–15 acquisitions
- Continue weekly coaching — goal is to graduate to monthly reviews at day 90
- Specialist runs daily huddle themselves (reports numbers, doesn't receive them)
- Begin tracking front-end gross and cost-to-market by unit
- 90-day performance review against KPIs and pay plan

Day 91+: Steady State (Monthly Strategy Reviews)

- Transition from weekly to monthly coaching rhythm
- Monthly strategy review: funnel analysis, profit trends, source mix, market conditions
- Quarterly pay plan review to ensure incentives are aligned with performance

If they're below 5 acquisitions by day 60, the issue is almost always activity, process adherence, or coaching — not talent. Audit their outbound count and conversion funnel before making a personnel decision.

7 · KPI Tracking Template



THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Print this or recreate in your CRM/spreadsheet. Specialists fill it in daily. Managers review weekly. The math doesn't lie — if the funnel numbers are there and the purchases aren't, something is broken downstream (offer quality, appointment confirmation, appraisal speed). If the funnel numbers aren't there, something is broken upstream (activity, process adherence).

Daily tracker

Day	Outbound contacts	Two-way conversations	Ranges / offers given	Appointments set	Appointments shown	Vehicles bought
Mon						
Tue						
Wed						
Thu						
Fri						
Sat						
Week total						

Weekly conversion ratios

Ratio	Formula	Healthy benchmark	Your number
Contact rate	Conversations ÷ Outbounds	40–55%	
Range rate	Ranges ÷ Conversations	40–60%	
Appointment set rate	Appts set ÷ Ranges	15–25%	
Show rate	Appts shown ÷ Appts set	70% avg · 85%+ elite	
Close rate	Bought ÷ Appts shown	40–50%	

Monthly summary

Metric	Target	Actual
Vehicles acquired	20	
Average front-end gross per unit	\$3,525	
Average cost-to-market %	95–100%	
Average days-to-sell (private-party units)	~31 days	

Why these targets matter — the private-party gross premium. VAN's published data shows private-party-sourced vehicles deliver an average front-end profit of **\$3,525 per unit**, compared to roughly **\$1,050 per unit** on auction inventory. Privately sourced units also sell in **~31 days on average versus 43 days** for auction cars. The specialist you hire is moving units into the higher-profit, faster-turning category.

Volume benchmark — Elk Grove Subaru. Published on buywithvan.com: Elk Grove Subaru consistently acquires 28 private-party vehicles per month with two Managed Buyers™ working the pipeline. A single fully ramped specialist hitting 14–20 acquisitions/month is on pace with this benchmark.

THREE PATHS FORWARD

You now have everything you need to hire a Vehicle Acquisition Specialist the right way — a fair pay plan, an honest job description, an interview scorecard that predicts performance, a red-flags checklist, a 90-day onboarding plan, and a KPI tracker to keep them accountable.

Three legitimate paths forward, depending on your store's situation:

Run the playbook in-house

Customize the yellow placeholders for your store, post the job description, and use the interview scorecard on every candidate. The kit is designed to be used as-is — the right fit for dealer groups with HR infrastructure, strong local hiring pipelines, or existing BDC/phone-room operations.

Deploy a VAN Managed Buyer™

For dealers who don't have the recruiting pipeline — or who've tried in-house and churned — VAN's Managed Buyers™ are pre-trained private-party buyers coached on the Path to Purchasing™ framework by a dedicated Acquisition Coach™. Deployment typically under two weeks, with no job posts, interviews, or ramp cycle required on your end.

Request the full national research

The benchmarks in this kit come from the *VAN 2026 Vehicle Acquisition Specialist Compensation Study* — 67 live job postings across 25 states, cross-referenced with BLS data. The full national study with state-level breakdowns is available on request from our team.

Questions on any of this?

Whether you're building in-house or exploring a managed buyer, we're happy to help you think through the right path for your store.

buywithvan.com · 855-952-4949

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for Employee Compensation, Q4 2025. This kit is provided as a practical tool for dealerships and does not constitute legal or HR advice — consult qualified counsel before finalizing pay plans or employment terms.