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WHAT CONSTITUTES A GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?

The quality of your dealership's customer experience is ultimately determined by the way customers feel after their last interaction. If the customer is unhappy, your dealership's customer experience is bad. If the customer doesn't have a feeling one way or the other, your dealership's customer experience is mediocre. If the customer feels good, your company's customer experience is satisfactory. In today's economy, as we attempt to encourage more customers to return to our dealerships for service, *none* of these experiences will accomplish our goal. We need the customer to feel "delighted" — this will provide a substantial competitive advantage.

Your customer's experience and their feelings about their interactions with your dealership are actually driven by several specific factors:

Time

Most people today suffer from "time poverty." Time is the one thing that most customers don't have enough of. So customers' perceptions about your dealership customer experience are largely influenced by time. This means you have to reduce the time it takes for them to get in touch with you, as well as the time it takes for them to communicate their need.

Competency

Customers need to believe that your dealership employees are good at what they do. They must perceive that your personnel are well informed about the services offered by your service department. So, to project a perception of competency to your customers, you must make sure that each member of your staff who interacts with your customers is fully empowered with information that is complete, accurate and up to date.

Personalization

Customers don't want to be treated like a number. The differentiation of the experience your dealership delivers will be contingent on how well your customers feel recognized when coming to your dealership for service.

Care

14 Customers like knowing that you care. This feeling of care can be projected through

courteous language and empathetic tone. It can also be projected through proactive contact with the customer, including timely follow up to inform them of the areas of concern once their vehicle problem is diagnosed, having their vehicle ready at the promised time and explaining thoroughly the repair and associated costs.

A J.D. Power study makes some significant points as to the importance of service satisfaction:

- Customers satisfied with their service experience are more likely to return for service.
- Customers satisfied with their service experience are more likely to repurchase the same make.
- Customers satisfied with their service experience are more likely to recommend the make, leading to new vehicle sales.
- A gain in CSI score of 10 points is estimated to add \$40 to \$300 per customer annually.

As you look at addressing these factors that affect your customer satisfaction, what are some proactive steps you can take?

1. Offer your customers the ease and convenience of making a *confirmed* service appointment from your Web site 24/7. This will allow your customer to make their appointment at *their* convenience — not yours — and eliminates the need for them to call the dealership for a service appointment. According to GM, 35 percent of calls that come into the dealership for service are either dropped or the customer is placed on hold and hangs up before speaking with someone. Also, as more and more customers begin making their appointments online, in-bound telephone calls are reduced, lessening the number that do not get answered properly.

2. Keep and maintain an appointment schedule, and schedule your customers in properly, so they do not have to wait in line on the service drive to be greeted by an advisor. According to Auto University, the average wait time for write up is 11 minutes. When we consider this number, keep in mind we can assume the first person in line was written up right away; so consider the length of time some of the customers have to wait in order to achieve this average wait time. When a

customer calls for service, it is tempting to tell them to "come on in"; however, if we can't accommodate them and complete the service on their vehicle properly and timely, we've not only possibly lost a service customer, but also damaged customer satisfaction. Train your advisors to greet the customers by name — with a smile — so the customer feels they are important and the dealership personnel are pleased to serve them. I had a friend of mine ask me recently, "Why do service advisors always seem to be in a bad mood?" If this is the impression your advisors give your customers, some attention needs to be directed to this area immediately.

3. It's important that the customer understand there are services that should be performed to prevent a safety or mechanical problem. Always take the time and provide a full explanation of what you are recommending, why you are recommending it and the benefit to them of having the service performed. We *must* earn the customer's trust by only selling needed services. Trust is a huge deciding factor in a customer determining whether or not to return to a dealership for future vehicle services and vehicle purchases.

4. Remember how critical the *last* impression is. Be certain the last words the customer hears when leaving your dealership are "Thank You, Mr./Mrs...." Also, when you utilize an online appointment system, you can customize an automatically generated pre-CSI e-mail to the customer after the vehicle is picked up, thanking them for their business, letting them know they may be receiving a survey regarding their satisfaction with this service and requesting they contact the service manager with any issues or concerns.

Constant attention to these areas can lead your dealership to increase your service business, service CSI and service efficiency, along with providing "a great customer experience."

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