



What Truly Matters to Your Customers?

Successful businesses have always understood the business motto, “find a need and fill it.” Traditionally, for dealerships, this meant taking a *product-centric* approach that focused on matching the right type of vehicle with the types of consumers it would appeal to. Emphasis was on the features and functionality of each make and model and how those vehicles matched a buyer’s lifestyle. A good, quality product helped create brand and dealership loyalty that would span generations.

Times have changed, however, and loyalty has greatly declined. As technology breakthroughs have leveled the playing field and the automotive supply chain has diversified, vehicles (products) have become more similar than different. Longer supply chains and cost pressures have also led to a decline in quality. Even allegiances to dealerships’ service departments have declined as independent repair facilities continue to attract more business.

As a result, it is becoming critical that a dealership transforms itself from a product-centric to a customer-centric company. A *customer-centric* approach requires you to adapt to changing customer behavior and expectations. You must be ready to quickly get to know the individual that walks through your doors and be able to work with them based on their own personal values, beliefs, and attitudes. You not only need to find the right vehicle for them, but make sure they’re convinced you are the right dealership to sell them that vehicle. It is all more tightly intertwined.

So, how do you make the change? One place to start is in understanding the basic core values of each customer. These values represent the aspects of people’s lives that matter most to them. Discuss personal values with your employees and how to recognize them in other people. Also, talk about how to interact with a customer differently based on some of those values.

Trust Matters

Trust is one of the core building blocks of a relationship. Most customers walk into a dealership with a negative bias. They don't trust the dealership, so they don't enjoy the car buying process.¹



Buyers want transparency regarding the cost of the vehicle, as well as a fast, but no-pressure, sales process. They don't want to haggle and they don't want any surprises once they've gotten their hopes up that they may have found the right vehicle. Today, a buyer will be quick to walk out the door if they decide you have breached their trust.

To address these concerns, sit with your employees and talk with them about how to gain and keep trust. Get their input on what you could be doing differently. For example, some dealerships realize that they are losing more and more sales due to customers' mistrust around quoted trade values. So, they have begun to assess the value of the trade before showing any new cars. Vin decoder software allows those dealerships to start the process quickly and be clearer about how they came to value the vehicle.

Other areas to address for transparency include the presentations of both the sales menu (have your sales person do it during the sales process), and the financing options.

For additional tips on trust, download the industry feature, ["7 Steps to Earning Trust in Your Sales Process."](#)

Family Matters

Children, pets, and relatives make up another value area that dealerships need to address: Family. When a parent walks into your dealership with kids in tow, be ready to go into “family mode.”



Most dealerships know there is no single vehicle that solves all the complex needs of every household. Different buyers will put a different level of emphasis on safety, storage, drivability, comfort, ease of loading children, etc. You need to carefully listen to each customer, understand the ages of the children involved, and be ready to present a variety of options. Your sales team should also be able to articulate how the features of the vehicle benefit the family buyer. If you own a multi-rooftop dealership, be ready to show them vehicles across the distinct brands you sell.

And don't just talk about features, roominess, etc. Offer to install the kids' car seats into the vehicles they are looking at. Show off the in-vehicle entertainment system. Consider having luggage and groceries on hand so buyers can get a true feel for the vehicle. Try different things. See what appeals best to families and keep evolving the pitch.

“Family mode” at your dealership goes beyond the vehicle, however. Parents have also come to expect a kid-friendly environment. The true test for parents is how your staff *interacts* with their children. A misstep here, and they will be heading elsewhere. Be sure your sales people can get along with kids, talking with them, having fun with them, and asking them what features they would like their next vehicle to have. Everyone needs to be tolerant of fussiness, interruptions, or a child who's having a meltdown.

Finally, remember that pets are also an important part of many people's lives and families. Pets travel now more than ever, whether it be to the store, to see family and friends, or to the park. A smart dealership will ask about pets and be able to advise whether a vehicle is pet friendly.

Connectivity Matters

According to McKinsey & Company in their article, "What's driving the connected car,"² today's vehicles have the computing power of 20 personal computers.



While much of that power was intended to operate internal functions of the vehicle, technology providers (and OEMs) have come to realize that a significant portion of the buying public expects that vehicle technology will enhance safety, convenience, and social needs. In fact, one quarter of survey respondents reported that they prioritize connectivity over traditional features such as engine power and fuel efficiency.

Fans of the connected car are often driven by one of three benefits. First, a connected car is safer, proactively helping them avoid accidents. Second, a connected car can help them stay on top of things by predicting if a problem is arising with the vehicle or if service maintenance is needed. Third, a connected car can help make life a little bit easier. Built-in Wi-Fi allows passengers to stay connected to their favorite social media sites. Appointments can be uploaded and linked with the in-vehicle navigation system to plot the most convenient path. The Connected Car even eliminates the need for keys. (For more on the "connected car," see our blog on www.autosoftdms.com/blog).

While many people appreciate these features of the connected car, others are more cautious. About 37% of those surveyed reported that they would not even consider purchasing a connected car, due to concerns about hacking and privacy. So, before diving into the benefits of connectivity, make sure you understand the perspective of the person you are currently dealing with.

Respect of My Time Matters

Finally, it's important to recognize that younger generations measure how much respect you have for them as a customer by how much value you place on their time.



Keep in mind that many buyers today do their homework in advance and come in prepared¹ (although not always with a perfect sense of reality). Be a good listener and identify what the buyer is telling you regarding their preferred style and features, whether they have a trade, and what their preferred price and financing options are. You then need to tailor the selling process based on what you're hearing.

Also, remember that the younger generations believe the use of technology is a primary method for making an effective use of time. If your dealership continues to run a pencil and paper business, you keep running into the back room to consult, or you seem chained to your desk, you'll appear outdated and inefficient. Instead, be technology-friendly. Use mobile technology at every step, from the minute you meet the buyer in the lot, to the moment they sign the deal. Utilizing features such as driver's license scanning, VIN explosion, and chat will get their attention in a positive way.

In sum, automotive dealers have already realized that they need to be more customer-focused in terms of both selling and servicing a vehicle. The challenge is making it happen. Start with understanding what is important to each customer. Make sure your staff is ready to show customers that they understand their wants and needs, and can help make sure they find a vehicle at a dealership that brings it all together: your dealership.

¹ 2016 Dealership Action Report

² www.mckinsey.com/industries/automotive-and-assembly/our-insights/whats-driving-the-connected-car



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