

8 Proven Ways to Enhance Your Customer's Service Experience

For most dealerships, the revenue from fixed operations (parts and service) is the true lifeline of the business.

Fixed operations can be more predictable and generate stronger margins than variable operations, and if a dealership can deliver a consistent and meaningful customer experience, service customers will keep coming back.

When choosing a service facility, consumers look for providers they “feel good” about. Trust and transparency are critical factors for feeling good, and as the good feeling gets better, customers are not only more likely to return, but also to buy additional services and recommend the facility to others. These are the customers you need to embrace and impress.

So, how do you take your game to the next level? We've done the homework for you. In this whitepaper, we look at a few top companies, outside of the automotive industry, that are considered world class leaders in the customer experience. We discover eight concepts for creating a better customer experience in your dealership.



1. Listening to Your Customers

One critical lesson that the most successful consumer packaged goods companies have learned is that you need to be constantly listening to your customers, making sense of the information they provide and taking actions that truly move the needle.

You need a listening program that is systematic and unearths meaningful details that you can leverage to achieve superior service.

Seventy-six percent of consumers expect organizations to understand their individual needs,¹ which means you must gain true insights into consumers' feelings and translate those feelings into achieved customer expectations.

What areas should you focus on? Well, consumers tend to have special expectations regarding:

- How your website should function
- How they should be able to communicate with you
- What conveniences should be available
- How long things should take
- How the recap/payment process should work

Consumers expect you to meet their preferences in each of these areas. And if you want to create truly loyal customers, you will need to consistently exceed expectations. So, take some time to develop a listening program that will provide valuable insight into your customers' expectations in the areas listed above.



"We're not competitor obsessed, we're customer obsessed. We start with the customer and we work backwards."²

- Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and CEO

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Amazon can teach us many lessons on listening well. They aim not only to meet but anticipate a customer's wants and are steadily raising the customer service bar. For example, in their new grocery store, Amazon Go, they eliminate the need to wait in line for checkout. The customer simply walks out the door with their groceries after scanning their Amazon Go app.

Amazon knew that customers did not like waiting in line and took the initiative to improve the customer experience by eliminating the line. Amazon's founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, explained their mission best when he quipped, "We're not competitor obsessed, we're customer obsessed. We start with the customer and we work backwards."²

2. Giving Communication Options

Today's consumers are more tech savvy, regardless of their age. When communicating, many rely on a combination of email, text, chat, phone, and online self-service. Consumer goods companies have found that if the consumer inquiry/request is simple, consumers prefer an electronic or self-service approach.

As things get more complex, or if they find they want to escalate an issue, then consumers prefer to move to chat, then email, and then phone communication. Of course, consumers want to move between these options easily, so it is beneficial to have all contact options clearly spelled out in one spot.

Consumers also like to have a more "personal" experience. You can deliver a more personal experience simply by making sure that your emails, texts, and chats are clearly identified as coming from your dealership. Communication templates should be warm and friendly, and URLs and email addresses should make sense. Consumers also prefer using forms that allow information to quick- or pre-populate.



A few other consumer preferences to keep in mind include ways consumers prefer NOT to communicate. Consumers do not like to leave voicemails. When they call, they want to speak to a person. They do not want to navigate cumbersome phone trees. They also do not like dealing with automated voice systems. Lastly, consumers prefer not to be required to input information prior to being connected to a live person.

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

One communication option that is gaining popularity among consumers is the ability to schedule a precise time for a callback from a business. Disney, telecoms, and consumer electronics leaders like Best Buy, have all adopted this approach. The key to success with this method is to make sure that the service rep calling back is the right person to resolve the issue, preferably on that first call.

3. Re-arranging the Website

If you look at most websites built to target consumers, you will notice one commonality: Over 90% of the site is dedicated to new product sales. The billable services that these businesses provide are usually down in the footer or in the back pages of the site. This type of site organization is especially true in the automotive retail industry where new and used vehicle inventory dominates the virtual landscape.

But today's consumers want to see their service options and offers right up front. If they can't quickly locate these choices on your home page, they will simply jump to another provider's website. Consumers will also commonly use Google to search for service options. As a result, many businesses are investing significant marketing dollars into search engine optimization (SEO) and AdWords programs for billable services.



Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Best Buy is a leading provider of consumer electronics. Traditionally, they have been viewed as a one stop shop for all your electronic needs. Consumers can choose from leading manufacturers, brands, and products. But Best Buy is re-inventing itself around the services it offers. Their tagline now is "Expert Service. Unbeatable Price."

The services they offer are prominently featured on their home page right next to products, brands, and deals. A consumer can easily chat with a support agent, track a repair, and schedule/manage appointments. Purchase, service history, and warranty information is also available. Taking it to the next level, Best Buy actively promotes its Geek Squad—technicians who come to the consumer's home at a time that is most convenient for the customer.

4. Interacting on Social Media

Social media has become an essential aspect of all businesses, big or small. From articles to infographics to funny cat videos, social media is a great way to share it all. With so many platforms and possibilities, it is often difficult to know where to start. One important thing to remember is that social media is not only a great way to share information, but also to interact and form relationships with your customers.

One Hootsuite survey reports that 59% of Americans with social media accounts think that customer service through social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, has made it easier to get questions answered and issues resolved.³



Your dealership should take the first step and begin using social media to build relationships. Start by responding to customer complaints and questions or to any post referencing your dealership or the services you offer. You will be amazed at the positive results when you begin engaging with customers through social media.

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Take a lesson from JetBlue Airlines. JetBlue is famous for their customer engagement on Twitter and often respond to customer's posts within seconds. According to Laurie Meacham, JetBlue's Leader of Social Media and Customer Commitment Team, "JetBlue's social media goal is for a truly organic experience—people talking to people."⁴

JetBlue cares about the quality of their responses and not necessarily the quantity, aiming to build relationships with the customers rather than fill a quota.

5. Proving You Value Time

Most successful consumer companies have discovered that consumers highly value their time. If they feel that you don't value their time, they will take their business elsewhere. To show that you value your customers' time, take the first step to identify all the areas where a consumer spends time with your company. These areas include on your lot, in your store, over phone calls, on your website, with social media, and over text messages.

The website experience is especially critical. Consumers want to find contact information quickly and easily. They want to understand service options and specials, as well as schedule services, without hassle or confusion. Your website must be fast and responsive. Believe it or not, a slow website could actually cause them to seek out another dealership for service. That's how much consumers value their time. For all other interactions, wait time is equally important. You must do everything in your power to minimize it.



81% of consumers demand improved response time.¹

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

According to one study, 81% of consumers demand improved response time.¹ Nordstrom is one company delivering just that. Nordstrom, well known for empowering their employees to use their own best judgement in all situations, extends high-quality customer service to all aspects of their business. Their customer service staff are trained to answer calls by no later than the second ring and are available 24/7 via live chat, e-mail, phone, and social media.

Like Amazon, they are also eliminating the line and can check customers out with mobile technology, so you can pay wherever you are. Overall, Nordstrom is making all aspects of the shopping experience quicker and more efficient.

6. Marketing at the End of the Product Lifecycle

Leading consumer companies fully understand the product lifecycle of the goods they sell, how long the consumer will keep the product, and what opportunities they will have to interact with the customer along the way. While they begin marketing to their buyers nearly immediately after selling the first product (add-ons, warranties, sister-products), they really turn up the targeted marketing in the second half of the lifecycle. The goal is for the company to "jump the curve" by capturing additional shares of the wallet and keeping the customer active right up to the minute they choose to replace the initial product.



Dealers should follow suit, especially since many dealerships lose a too-large portion of their service business after the warranties expire. So, try to determine when a customer gets about 70% into the lifecycle of a vehicle, then increase your service marketing and offers at that time to that segment. And don't forget that the *quality* of service delivered must be strong—or none of it will matter.

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Apple is an excellent model for targeted marketing during the second half of a product's life-cycle. Most iPhone users, for example, have received that annoying pop up saying that their iCloud storage is full and they need to purchase more space. Those pop-ups are all part of pre-designed marketing. Apple also conveniently sends you ads for their new products when your current products are beginning to slow down and become outdated. They target customers who are ripe for re-purchase.

7. Accepting Mobile Payments

Mobile payments are becoming commonplace across industries, especially for items under a few hundred dollars. With the popularity of e-commerce increasing, companies are speeding up the checkout process with the use of mobile payments from a customer's smartphone. In 2017, about 77% of U.S adults owned a smartphone, and this percentage continues to increase.⁵

Mobile phone users are a huge potential market for dealerships to tap into and there are several reasons why you should make your payments mobile, including that:

- Faster transaction times result in improved customer satisfaction
- Convenient mobile payments result in increased revenue
- A wider target reach of clients results in the increased possibility of a sale



Millennials and the iGeneration, specifically, want more technology and will not settle for a strictly brick and mortar interaction if the competition offers mobile service. Automotive dealerships should consider following the mobile trend and incorporate mobile payments in their sales and service departments, allowing customers to pay for parts, services, or car payments through a mobile app.

Customers are using their phones to research vehicles, schedule service, and get directions to your dealership, so why not complete the package and offer mobile payment options?

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Many businesses, including coffee giant Starbucks, have adopted mobile transactions. For Starbucks, an astonishing 30% of their transactions occur through their mobile app, resulting in \$5.7 billion for the company.⁵ Customers can order and pay for a handcrafted beverage on the app and pick it up in store just minutes later, bypassing lines and a complicated order explanation to the barista. The speed and convenience of the mobile process results in increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

8. Providing Entertainment

iPads and tablets have many uses, including pure entertainment. While most waiting areas still have TVs and kids' toys, many businesses are putting out tablet stations where people can play games, check their social media and email, shop, and watch their favorite shows. These entertainment options can greatly improve the customer experience, especially if children are involved.



In addition, such entertainment makes the time fly and customers feel less troubled by the wait. Some businesses even ask their customers for an online review and provide the option of using the tablet for payment. Just remember to keep customer internet access on a different channel than your DMS and the rest of your business.

Proven strategies from outside leaders:

Casual dining restaurants such as Chili's and Applebee's have experimented with providing tablets on their tables. Guests can play games or engage in other activities while they wait for their food. According to Charlie Jones, the executive director of digital and guest-facing technology for DineEquity, "More than 70 percent of diners interact with the tablets, and more than 50 percent of those guests will use it for payment."⁷

The opportunities are unlimited, and the tablets can even be used to gather customer information by offering incentive—you could continue playing a free game or receive 15% off your bill when you enter your email for coupons.

How Will You Take Your Dealership to the Next Level?

Consider these eight concepts and the ways they have been implemented outside of the automotive industry to generate customer satisfaction and loyalty. Then, follow their examples to create your own plan to enhance the customer experience at your dealership. If you keep up with current customer needs and exceed expectations, you will be well placed to overcome your competition and keep revenue high.

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- 6 Taylor Soper, "Mobile payments now account for 30% of Starbucks transactions as company posts \$5.7B in revenue," *Geek Wire* (blog), July 27, 2017 (1:41 p.m.), <https://www.geekwire.com/2017/mobile-payment-now-accounts-30-starbucks-transactions-company-posts-5-7b-revenue>.
- 7 Whitney Filloon, "Why Tablets on Restaurant Tables Are Here to Stay," *Eater* (blog), October 5, 2017 (4:01 p.m.), <https://www.eater.com/2017/10/5/16428750/tablet-technology-restaurants-applebees-outback-steakhouse>.



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