



GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS MORE THAN A FREE BOTTLE OF WATER

As seen in AutoSuccess

How many times have you visited a business that specializes in big purchases — a title company, a bank, a dealership — and been offered a bottle of water or a snack while you wait? Whether you took advantage of the offer or not, did the bottle of water affect how you viewed that business?

It's become common practice among dealerships to offer customers a bottle of water. I've even seen some dealerships go all out with coffee bars, bakeshops and gaming areas for the kids. It's a little (or sometimes big) touch that might help ease some of the stress of buying a new car or having to wait in a service department lobby for repairs.

You might be one of those dealerships with a fridge full of water bottles, but providing a great customer experience to your customers shouldn't end there. Several small bad experiences can cascade into a disastrous one-star review regardless of how the deal shakes out on the sales floor.

Here are some simple ways you can provide your customers with an experience that makes the perceived hassle of buying or servicing a car at your dealership less of a headache.

Pay Attention to Your Bathrooms

Customers are going to need to use your dealership's bathroom facilities, especially after a couple of bottles of water during the three to four hours spent completing a purchase. I know it's easy for your bathrooms to become an afterthought, but a dirty and cluttered bathroom might be affecting your customer experience more than you think.

A recent study by Bradley Corp. revealed that almost half of the Americans surveyed said they would "definitely" or "probably" spend more money at a business with clean, well-maintained bathrooms. Almost 60 percent said they make conscious decisions to visit businesses they know have good bathrooms.

We have a popular regional travel stop chain here in Texas that's known for its well-maintained bathrooms. Employees frequently visit the spacious rooms to do everything from general cleaning to drying water splashes on the counters. The chain actually advertises its

bathrooms' quality on billboards hundreds of miles away, and customers will hold off on stopping until they get there.

You don't need a dedicated bathroom attendant, but regular attention can go a long way in improving your customer experience. After all, how likely are *you* to return to a business that has poorly maintained bathrooms?

Adapt to Customers' Needs

A recent Nielsen study revealed that around half of prospective car buyers have decided on the type of vehicle they plan to buy at any given point on the sales path. That's easy to see when you consider that Autotrader says millennials — the largest generation of consumers — spend around 17 hours researching new vehicles online before contacting a dealership.

Though more and more of your customers know what they want when they walk in your doors, I know it's easy for many dealerships to fall into old habits like pushing different vehicles or ignoring the customer's requests and needs entirely. If you can't find a way to work with these customers, they'll likely walk away and go to a different dealership — even if it means traveling hundreds of miles just to get a certain vehicle brand.

This concept of adapting to your customers' unique and individual needs holds true across industries. I recently heard a story about a family that had brought special food for their child's dietary needs to a hotel on Bali. The food had spoiled in transit and replacements couldn't be found on the island, so the hotel went out of its way to fly in ingredients from Singapore. By meeting this family's unique needs, the hotel chain likely earned lifetime customers and garnered plenty of positive publicity. Likewise, putting your dealership's customers first instead of pressuring them for things they don't want leads to a better experience and pays off in the long run.

Automate Processes to Save Time

Your employees are busy. Whether your sales department is juggling leads while talking to walk-ins or your service techs are trying to keep up with a rush of oil changes on the weekend, your staff has a lot to manage — so much so that it's easy for things to slip through the cracks.

Misplaced repair and purchase orders, lost customer contact and credit information or even archived paperwork that needs to be retrieved from storage can cost you sales and ding your reputation. The data tells us customers are generally unhappy with the 3.6-hour average it takes to complete a car purchase, and outdated manual processes only add to that time.

Automating some of your processes (data collection, key management, etc.) and digitizing old paperwork saves time and makes it easier to retrieve critical information when you need it. You could even use an automated system for making service or sales appointments. That's exactly what a well-known utilities company recently did to improve customer service.

Don't Forget the Small Things

Sure, water bottles won't make everything better, but just as clean bathrooms play a role in the overall experience, those drinks and snacks help too. Try to find some other small luxuries you can offer your customers to improve the overall experience. Free Wi-Fi, for example, appeals to service customers waiting for repairs or maintenance, especially those with busy schedules or kids.

Also consider using technology such as tablets and mobile devices while your salespeople walk prospects through the sales process and even after the sale when your vehicle experts explain new vehicle features. Customer service doesn't end when the deal is signed. It's about the overall experience.

The little things matter, but don't assume you're doing enough because you're offering every customer a bottle of water and a donut. Continue to look at simple ways to provide a better overall experience — even if it means a few extra trips to the bathroom. ○

 ARE
NOW

ACERTUS
Relentless Drive to Deliver

The only company in the industry
that promises complete,
end-to-end services across the
entire lifecycle of a vehicle.

ACERTUSdelivers.com