



7 Ways to Boost Customer Experience



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Customer Experience (CX) is a relatively new phrase to describe an old concept. Business owners have known for years that a fundamental component of any successful business is happy customers. Happy customers are repeat buyers and a great source for referrals, both of which shed a positive light on a brand. Dealerships with a rich internal culture often shine in customer experience due to the close-knit and happy nature of their employees. Staffing changes and the fast-paced nature of the automotive world can make cultivating and sustaining a customer-focused culture challenging. Fortunately, technological advances in artificial intelligence and data processing have created many new ways to analyze customer interactions and predict outcomes with surprising accuracy. These new technologies provide many insights into customers' experiences from a historical perspective and also in real-time. Leveraging these new solutions can augment sales and service initiatives resulting in higher CSAT scores in variable and fixed operations. In some cases,

companies are pioneering solutions to replace humans as their customer-facing component to chat, SMS, and phone conversations. In this paper, we will explore ways to take advantage of technological advances to boost the value in customer experiences.

InteractiveTel has been at the forefront of customer experience research in areas related to the conversations car dealers have with their customers. In 2013 we brought the first and only solution to automotive that records every inbound and outbound call at a dealership regardless of the type of phone system they have. Over the years we have analyzed over 400 million calls spanning all departments and that are both inbound and outbound. Our research and analysis of the data we've collected has led to many insights. One conclusion we've arrived at is that the best possible outcome for a positive customer experience is a highly trained staff together with technology that measures how they are doing, help them be better at what they do, and catch any slippage that happens as a result of the human factor.

Customer Experience

The experience a customer has with a dealership is determined by many factors. In the automotive industry, there are usually a limited number of reasons a person will call a dealership. To generalize, callers usually have an initial expectation of receiving information or achieving a particular aim. It's also worth noting the caller may already be fraught with preconceived negativity based on prior experiences. Overcoming any bias and leaving a customer feeling delighted by interacting with your dealership should be a high priority and efforts to achieve that end will stretch marketing dollars surprisingly far.



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CX Exercise 1

This exercise will touch on key components that affect the customer experience on an inbound sales call. Consider a customer who just called your dealership to inquire about a car they saw on your website. The moment after they dial the number and initiate the call the scorekeeping starts.

You are starting with a score of 100.

How many rings before the phone is answered?

- More than 3? Deduct 10 points.
- Each ring is approximately six seconds.
- 18 seconds is a long time to wait.

Hold your breath for 18 seconds. You can do it sure, but did that first breath afterward feel normal?

When the phone was answered was it an IVR or a staff member?

- If IVR, deduct 20 points.

People want to talk to people. Given the impossibility of doing so or a painful experience, a machine is better than nothing if the callers' need is high enough. Our research shows that dealerships with IVRs have a 15% higher abandonment rate than dealerships that use staff to answer calls.

When the customer is greeted by a staff member, did they sound pleasant and happy to receive the call? This means they didn't speak the dealership name hyperactively and didn't follow the greeting with a please hold.

- If you can't say yes, deduct another 20 points.

If the staff member who answered the phone can't satisfy the initial expectation they must transfer the call.

- If the call is transferred, subtract 5 points. Any additional transfers later in the call will also deduct 5 points.

Every minute on hold deduct 15 points.

If the call is transferred and the customer has to repeat any part of the initial conversation, deduct another 5 points.



Scoring

50

The good news is that with some changes you can expect better numbers.

60

There is room for improvement and better results will follow.

70

A couple of changes could make a positive impact.

80

You are on the right track and are likely a high performer.

90

It doesn't get much better than this. **A tweak or two and you are there.**



The more points you were able to preserve the better your customers' experience will be. This exercise is not comprehensive but aims to drive home a key point. Leads and customers are yours to lose.



Measuring Customer Experience

Measuring the customer experience of callers is best approached holistically. The customer and the dealership staff are participating in an interaction and they both must be considered to give the most accurate assessment. AI really shines when it comes to detecting the following:

- ✔ Determining if the caller engaged in meaningful conversation.
- ✔ Determining if a call resulted in reaching a voicemail and indicating whether or not a message was left for both inbound and outbound calls.
- ✔ Determining if an outbound call resulted in a conversation with the customer.
- ✔ Determining if an inbound call is abandoned.
- ✔ Determining if a call is a spam call.
- ✔ Determining and counting interruptions from both caller and callee.
- ✔ Determining how long it takes a customer was to speak to a live person.
- ✔ Determining if a caller was placed on hold and for how long.
- ✔ Determining if a call was a missed sales or service opportunity.
- ✔ Determining if a caller is upset or angry in real-time.
- ✔ Determining if certain words or phrases are said in real-time and alerting management of the event.
- ✔ Monitoring and measuring phone activity with AI while giving further human scrutiny to subsets of these calls is one recipe for a high-value, reasonable-cost approach to taking customer experience to the next level.

Total Call Volume

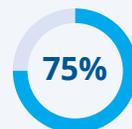
Consider that an average size dealership will have around 80,000 inbound and outbound calls in a given month. Think about that for a moment. A small percentage of those are dealer trades, calls to banks, insurance verification, and other calls from non-customers. The bulk are calls to and from customers. What kind of data do you think can be found by analyzing those numbers further? For example, if you were to group those calls by phone number to see how many times a customer called that month you can start to make some interesting deductions.



- ❓ How many callers called greater than 15 times?
- ❓ How many callers only called once?
Of those, how many received a call back?
- ❓ How many callers spent more than 45 minutes that month on the phone with the dealership?
- ❓ How many callers spent less than 1 minute?

Before we dive into those questions there is one more that is of particular interest. Of those unique phone numbers from customers that called looking for a vehicle, how many actually bought one from that store? This is where technology that can provide oversight pays the most immediate dividends.

65% of callers who have called more than 15 times in a given month are agitated and have had to call back several times over several days to achieve their desired outcome.



75% of callers who have only called once are customers who desired to have a need fulfilled by your dealership but didn't.



44% of callers who spend more than 45 minutes on the phone with your dealership in a month are likely to have inquired about a vehicle that they purchased and had a service issue.



74% of callers who spent less than 1 minute on the phone abandoned the call.

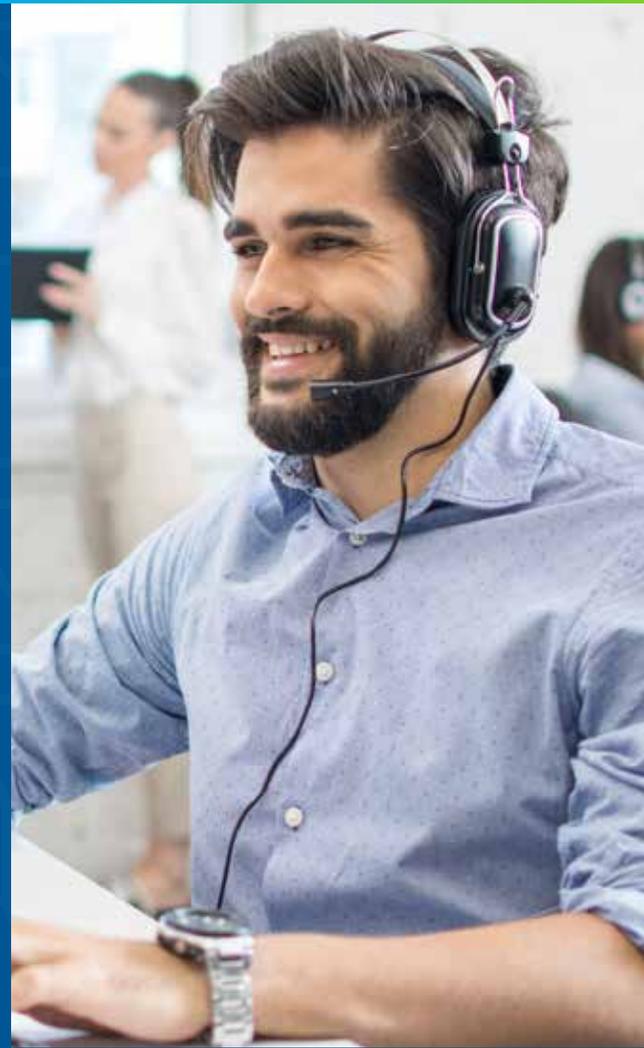
CX Exercise 2

When speaking over the phone, voice inflection is an important part of effective communication. Sounding monotone or misplacing pitch can change the customer's perception of the conversation and its meaning.

Try the following exercise to demonstrate the importance pitch can have in a conversation.

Say slowly, and out loud,
this sentence:

"I did not say we have the car."



Each time you say it, put the inflection on the underlined word.

"I did not say we have the car."

(If not you, who said it?)

"I did not say we have the car."

(Maybe you wrote it?)

"I did not say we have the car."

(I guess someone else has the car.)

"I did not say we have the car."

(Perhaps he gave it away?)

"I did not say we have the car."

(Gee! I hope he didn't lose the car!)

Using pitch effectively will go a long way to deliver the best possible experience to your customer's and avoid confusion along the way.

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1

Great Customer Experience Starts at Hello

The first impression is often a lasting one. Greeting customers with happy and helpful staff amplifies the buying posture of your customers whether in sales or in service. Customers will drive to another dealership further away for a better experience. Consider structuring your departments to receive calls directly from customers that can address the purpose of their call. Train customer facing staff on how to properly answer phones and convey that they are genuinely happy that the customer called your dealership for their needs.



2

Training is Only as Good as the Outcomes it Delivers

Training your staff on scripts is extremely rigid and fails in the presence of change. We have heard from many dealer's whose staff faltered during Covid's effect on supply chains and ultimate inventory shortages, when they were trained to use a script based on vehicles in inventory. Most vehicles were sold before they hit the lot and there was no script for that. Prerecorded video training is also a wanting approach. It is rigid and doesn't have a feedback mechanism that measures adherence to any concepts taught during the video. Seek training that isn't script based, has built in measurement, and uses a methodology that is founded in firm social science and psychology.



3

Every Call Matters

Call tracking providers typically capture 15% of total inbound call volume. These are typically warm leads from ad sources and aren't indicative of the remaining 85% of calls that come in through the main number to the dealership. The most effective customer experience improvement initiative will provide 100% call capture and monitoring of ALL calls to and from ALL customers.

4

AI is Good, Humans are Better, Humans with AI is Best

There are solutions on the market today that can handle overflow calls with AI based voice agents that can schedule service appointments. These solutions are great for dealerships that need a solution today, however they are a runner up to a staff member in almost every way. There are no AI solutions for sales calls.

Staff members are ideal, but churn and the need for training and oversight constrain and complicate their ability to service customer inquiries in a timely and consistent manner. Staff deficiencies and etiquette often go unnoticed until a customer complains to management based on an experience they had. As a result, managers are managing by exception. The true loss, however, are those customers whose voices are unheard and express their discontent by buying or servicing their vehicle elsewhere.

Staff members who are professionally trained, but also have their calls monitored by AI provide the best possible customer service today.



5

Effective Management starts with Real-Time Data

Once a customer hangs up the phone after or due to a bad experience the likelihood of resurrecting their interest in doing business with a dealership nosedives and continues to decrease as the minutes go by. In contrast, the ability for management to engage with a customer moments after the call begins to go south increases the chances of a successful intervention. Look for a call monitoring solution that provides real-time intervention into phone calls in progress based on keywords, sentiment, and other events that may indicate a caller experience issue is in progress.



6

Ask Clarifying Questions

When a customer calls in looking for a price on a specific vehicle, clarifying questions can reveal opportunities that would otherwise have been missed. It also shows that the dealership staff is engaged in the process on the customer's behalf. Here are some examples:

“Oh, you like two door coupes?”

“That blue is really nice, is that the color you typically look for?”

“Seating for 7 is really accommodating, is that what attracted you to this vehicle?”

Responses to these kinds of questions can lead to alternative vehicles that also meet the customer's primary needs and most of their preferences.



7

Control the Pace to Direct the Outcome

Motivated customers with a focused buying initiative seek availability and pricing information at a fast pace. Training staff members to use techniques to slow them down while explaining how they are working in the customer's best interest puts the dealership in the driver's seat of the customer's experience and gives the dealership the best chance to drive towards a desired outcome.

In summary, customer experience is the sum of interactions a customer has with the dealership. Focused initiatives on improving the customer experience must have a way to measure effectiveness and chart progress in order to be successful and deliver outcomes that benefit the customer first and the dealership as a consequence. Processes must reinforce the necessity of proper etiquette and empower dealership staff to take control of interactions in order to deliver the value the customer called the dealership to realize. Providing the best customer experience possible is not a destination, it's a journey that must constantly be adapted.