

Lexus Crafting a New Approach to Customer Relationships

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TORRANCE, Calif., March 29, 2012 — When Lexus was established 23 years ago, it was dedicated to providing the best customer service experience in the industry. Lexus' commitment to that goal is reflected in its top position in the J.D. Power and Associates Customer Satisfaction Index for 15 years, including the past four in a row. Now, Lexus is raising the bar again by partnering with its dealers to create two new certified dealership positions. The Vehicle Delivery Specialist (VDS) will introduce customers to their new cars and review the features of each vehicle. The Vehicle Technology Specialist (VTS) will serve as a resource for customers who have any questions about how to use the advanced functions of their vehicle, including the new Lexus Enform telematics system.

“With the advent of more technology in luxury cars, customers often have questions about their navigation system, establishing a Bluetooth connection for their phone or managing other telematics systems,” explains Mark Templin, Lexus group vice president. “While we're happy to answer their calls, we think it will be much more beneficial to have experts at our dealerships who can establish and maintain relationships with customers to answer any questions about their cars.”

With the launch of the new 2013 GS, training for the VDS and VTS positions is now taking place across the country. To emphasize the importance of these customer-facing positions, Lexus is applying the philosophy of “takumi,” or master craftsman, to their jobs. Dealership associates are trained to treat customer service as a craft and are given advanced tools to help them go the extra mile with customers. Much of the training for the dealership associates is accessed through interactive iPad apps. The product information apps, including one specifically for the GS and also for Lexus Enform, include training exercises and are available for customers to download. Or, if a customer prefers, he or she can use iPad features like Facetime to contact their dealership and receive a remote personal tutorial in their vehicle.

“Lexus customers are becoming more and more technologically savvy and we want our dealership associates to be able to communicate effectively with them throughout the sales, delivery and ownership process,” says Vince Salisbury, Lexus College dealer training manager. “Customers can access the information on their own, come in to the dealership or contact their dealership via phone, e-mail or iPad to get the answers they need. The idea is to give them what they want, when they want it, and how they want it.”

In addition to providing technical training, Lexus is training dealership associates to recognize verbal and nonverbal feedback to customize each customer's experience. Some industries have more experience in this arena, so in addition to identifying the best people currently at their dealerships, some Lexus dealerships are looking outside the automotive realm to recruit and train for these new positions.

Alex Oger, a Vehicle Technology Specialist who was recruited to Sewell Lexus in Dallas, Texas, from a local Apple Genius Bar says, “Every customer has a different comfort level when it comes to technology and it's my job to find out what the customer wants to know and then explain it in a simple way. My philosophy is ‘let's discover this together.’”

Oger also meets with customers at their first service after they've had a chance to drive their vehicle for a little while. He reviews the features and answers any questions they may have.

Dr. Thomas Trillin, a former podiatrist and passionate Lexus owner, is now a Vehicle Delivery Specialist at Superior Lexus in Kansas City. “I had owned five Lexus vehicles and loved the brand, so when I retired, Superior Lexus hired me to introduce customers to their new car. I always try to read the customers and make the process personal and enjoyable. Some people want to spend a long time and some just want the keys to drive out the door. I make sure the customer knows they can always come back for more information. This is not a one-shot deal.”

To ensure best practices are shared throughout the dealer network, Lexus is establishing an on-line forum of customer issues and solutions where associates can ask questions, offer suggestions and provide support to one another.

“At the beginning of each training session, we welcome dealership associates who are already the best in the industry. We introduce technology and tools to help make them even better,” said Salisbury. “When they leave, they understand the commitment we’re asking of them and they’re excited to become customer service ‘takumis.’”

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