

S:GNALS

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The New Customer Experience: Are You Missing An Opportunity?

By Suzanne Corrin

Increasingly customers of all walks and stripes are looking for greener and more sustainable products and experiences when it comes to making their purchase decisions. Consumers are making changes, and you see the evidence everywhere. People are opting for thermoses for their daily coffee fix instead of throwing away paper or Styrofoam coffee cups, refilling water bottles instead of buying and disposing of them after each use, and bringing reusable bags for their trips to the grocery store. Retail shops, grocery stores, big box warehouses, and the like are responding to the consumer's desire to be more environmentally conscious with greener products and more sus-

tainable ways to purchase. Buying a new car is of course a significant purchase decision, and here too consumers respond to dealerships that they see to be proactive in the move to be more green.

But what are the best ways to address this sustainable evolution customers are on the search for? The New Car Dealers Association includes the full spectrum of established operations, through to newly constructed facilities that have taken advantage of new greener building practices. Far more dealerships are located in buildings constructed long before we really started to see the growth in sustainable building. The good news is that no matter

what type of building your business is located in, legacy or modern, there are still many valuable ways you can re-look at your business and its sustainability practices. Making the most of this opportunity can ensure the 'customer experience' your customer has while at your dealership leaves them feeling they are choosing to do business with a progressive company who shares their concern for the environment. And the even better news is, that by choosing sustainable ways of doing business, it can save you money.

A Better Customer Experience

Your customers can typically spend a good deal of time at your dealership during both the car buying process, and the after sales services. One example of how to better your customer's experience is more simple than you think. During this initial 'customer experience' at your dealership, your potential customers can spend time in your waiting rooms, your customer lounges, and your washroom facilities. Dealerships are increasingly adopting ways to make these customer touch-points more sustainable, and therefore a more positive customer experience. Some of the easier to implement changes that offer an opportunity to touch your customers include items like disposable coffee cups and other containers, paper towels and other paper products including bath tissue. Given the choices out there in the marketplace and all of the "green washing" (defined as the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service) that seems to be a growing concern, how do you go about making decisions and changes in an informed manner? So if you take the example of your dealership's waiting rooms, customer lounges, and washroom facilities you may want to consider the following:

Ready, Set Green

"Recycled" Paper Products such as paper towels and bath tissue:

When purchasing paper products it is important to understand the "recycling logo" and it's meaning. Paper that is designated as "recycled" can be a mixture of virgin wood fiber, pre-consumer waste and /or post-consumer waste. It is important to consider that producing recycled paper produces 74% less air pollution, 35% less water pollution, and creates 5 times the number of jobs than producing paper from virgin paper sources - trees. It saves old-growth trees, forest ecosystems, native habitat and biodiversity - providing an all around much better choice for increasingly green conscious customers.

The difference between Pre-consumer and Post-consumer content in recycled paper: Pre-consumer (sometimes referred to as Post-industrial) content is paper made out of paper scraps and trimmings left over from the paper manufacturing process. These paper scraps and trimmings are easiest to recycle, as they do not have to be collected, separated, de-inked etc. Post consumer waste (PCW) is paper that has been used by the end consumer and then is collected for recycling from various recycling programs. This is the best paper to buy, as it uses and creates demand for paper that would normally end up in the landfill and no trees are cut down for making the paper.

When looking at the labeling on paper products we look for 2 numbers - the first expresses the percentage of total recycled content and second number shows the post-consumer waste recycled content. For example on a label that reads 50% recycled 20% PCW, this means of the 50% recycled content, 30% is pre-consumer recycled and 20% is post-consumer recycled, leaving 50% of the content coming from virgin fiber. 100% post-consumer waste (PCW) is of course the best environmental choice.

Chlorine in Paper

Chlorine and its derivatives (such as chlorine dioxide) are used in paper manufacturing as a whitener, and are very harmful to the environment, particularly the aquatic environment, and produce dioxins linked to cancer. In order to reduce potential risks, a number of paper manufacturers have switched to chlorine-free technologies. There are 3 types of chlorine labeled paper out there:

- TCF (Totally Chlorine Free) paper is produced with pulp that has been bleached without any type of chlorine, or that has not been bleached at all. To date, unfortunately this paper does not usually contain recycled content.
- ECF (Elemental Chlorine Free) paper is produced from pulp that has been bleached with a chlorine derivative such as chlorine dioxide (ClO₂), but without elemental chlorine (Cl). ECF papers still uses chlorine derivatives— so while less harmful to the environment elemental chlorine—still produce toxic chlorinated organic compounds, including chloroform, a known carcinogen. These compounds are released into waterways as effluent from the bleaching process, where they produce environmental damage.

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- PCF (Processed Chlorine Free) paper is made using no chlorine during manufacturing. A note here is that since some of the pre or post consumer waste paper being recycled may previously have been bleached with chlorine to begin with, recycled paper labeled PCF can not be labeled 'totally chlorine-free', but the current 'process' they use allows them to label it "Processed Chlorine Free".
- Paper products labeled PCF (Processed Chlorine-Free) are the environmentally preferable choice because it has not had chlorine or its derivatives used during the manufacturing process, and utilizes recycled content.

Styrofoam Free Zones

The customer lounge, customer & employee cafeterias and waiting rooms are all customer experiences waiting to happen, and here again is an opportunity to make the experience a better one. Before offering a nice hot cup of coffee to a customer in a Styrofoam cup, consider this:

- Foamed polystyrene is made from a mixture of petroleum-derived chemicals, many of which pose significant health risks to humans. Polystyrene is produced from styrene, a known human neurotoxin and a known animal carcinogen.
- Alternative containers to Styrofoam are made from bio-renewable raw materials such as simple starches or sugars, and can easily displace traditional plastics and Styrofoam that are derived from petroleum.
- Wastes such as used containers made from bio-renewable sources are treated as an organic substance, and will biodegrade in landfill, or can be composted in a managed program. On the other hand, traditional plastics are not generally recycled, and can last for hundreds of years in our landfills. Styrofoam will last indefinitely.
- Many items traditionally made from plastics such as coffee cups, drinking cups, straws, cutlery, food containers, napkins and garbage bags are all now available in biodegradable and compostable forms.

Involve your Customers ... and Employees

Taking steps to improve your dealership's environmental position and thereby increasing your customers experience during their buying process and

after sales service has many benefits. But one of the most important steps you can make in the process is to include your customers and employees. By participating in the segregation of papers, plastics and organics customers and employees actively help close the loop in the recycling process, and learn about the process. You can increase the success of your on-site environmental programs, and the customer's awareness of your programs by including visible recycling containers and tasteful signage with information on how you and they together are helping move to more sustainable ways of doing business.

The Payoff

Moving to more sustainable ways of doing business, such as purchasing paper products and bio-renewable containers with the least harm to the environment and people, and ensuring materials are recycled within your operations can deliver value to your business in many ways.

By making choices that reflect consideration for the environment in the areas your customers frequent, you can do more than make a positive change in your operations. By making these changes, you provide your customers with the ability to include your operation in the daily decisions they make in the "greening" of their own lives. As customers increasingly seek out companies that align with this new green consumerism, making basic changes that are real and measurable, can differentiate your business, improve your environmental stewardship, and give your customers another reason to choose a "green" business to deal with.

The deliverables of a sustainable automotive business include; improved environmental standing with your customers, employees & shareholders, improved OH&S, a reduced environmental footprint, and increased efficiencies & reduced operational costs. Wisent Environmental is the Sustainability Advisor for members of the New Car Dealership Association of BC, and works with businesses in the automotive market to deliver sustainable solutions for the way they purchase, manage, use and dispose of their facilities supplies and materials. ■



Wisent Environmental works with businesses in the automotive market to deliver sustainable solutions for the way they purchase, manage, use and dispose of their supplies and materials. For more information, visit www.wisentenvironmental.com, or contact us at info@wisentenviro.com or 604.628.9028.