

By KELLY MATHISON



through your customer's eyes



Neat, clean and orderly displays make a great impression with customers.



Using space wisely allows dealers to display a variety of products and specialty items in showrooms.

Equipment dealership showrooms have come a long way in the past 15 years. During the most recent “boom years,” many new facilities have been built with attention focused on the showroom and display areas. Kudos to dealers who have paid attention to the details to create an environment that is welcoming, clean and organized, while maximizing the retail potential for this valuable space.

Not all locations have the luxury of a brand-new facility, but that does not mean the space cannot be effective and welcoming.

Customer first impressions

In WEDA's Dealer Institute Parts Management and Front Counter Sales Programs, we challenge participants to look at their dealership through the customer's eyes. We provide an easy to use “self-evaluation checklist” to draw attention to allow dealers to focus on the areas such as signage, parking, showroom cleanliness and display effectiveness.

As employees or managers, we may become complacent or overlook things when we walk by them every day. Customers may see things much differently, especially if they only visit every few months to see the same tired old displays or outdated signage.

Two merchandising musts

There are two simple rules to follow with showroom displays – **keep them “Clean and Priced.”**

It doesn't take long for dust to accumulate on displays or shelves. A conscious effort must be made to make sure items are free of dust and all displays look fresh.



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Retail space is at a premium. Customers may pick up items such as shop supplies, cleaners, safety, and seasonal items while in your store. Customers report they are less likely to buy an item if they must ask the price. Every item should have the price clearly marked and updated regularly.

Customer flow

Hall of Fame baseball player Yogi Berra got it right when he said, “You can learn a lot by just watching.”

When was the last time you stood back to watch customer flow through your dealership? Consider the following:

- **How are customers greeted?**
- **How long does it take?**
- **Is signage clear to direct them to the correct department?**

Sam Walton, founder of Walmart, had a simple “Ten-foot rule.” He expected his employees to promise that when they were within 10 feet of a customer, they would greet them with a smile and ask if they could help them.

Are your customers being greeted with a smile every time?

Staff professionalism

Are your frontline people identifiable? There is no shortage of branded apparel from most manufacturers or industry providers. In many cases customers, walk in the door wearing T-shirts, jackets or hats sporting a manufacturer’s brand or the name of the dealership (sometimes you can’t tell the staff from the customers).

Frontline staff should be clearly identifiable with guidelines about whether shirts should be tucked in or untucked, whether name tags should be worn or whether staff is allowed to wear hats.

Non-negotiables

Although some behavior may have been overlooked in the past, today’s organizations need to ensure they have a baseline of employee conduct that is “nonnegotiable.” This should include no foul language, no sexist, racist or dis-

crimatory comments, plus strict confidentiality of customer and company information.

It could also include rules about bad-mouthing another staff member, department, suppliers, or competitors. Employees need to understand that breaches in these areas will not be tolerated.

Today’s customers compare their experience with everyone they deal with. Your dealership is no longer compared with the competitor down the road. You are being compared with the local grocer, clothing store, farm supply outlet, or online shopping experience, which includes Amazon.

Many companies are proactively looking at every customer touchpoint to ensure it is frictionless. They are not waiting for customers to complain to correct the problem, they are identifying it in advance and training their frontline people to recognize and address poten-

tial problems before they have an effect on customer satisfaction.

The Parts Counter Sales Program and Service Counter Sales Program organized by WEDA’s Dealer Institute have been a huge success. In the past 18 months, we’ve had almost 2,000 students attend these informative, one-day programs. Dealers realize their aftermarket departments are the backbone of their dealerships.

Your frontline people have more interaction with customers than anyone else in the dealership. Invest in ensuring they are the best they can be. **WED**

For more information on upcoming Dealer Institute programs, visit www.dealer-institute.org.

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Looking professional still matters to customers.