

The Real Case for Consistency

To gain sustainable and profitable trust, dealers must create customer-focused consistency



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In his book, “The Trust Edge,” author David Horsager documented consistency as a pillar of trust, saying that without consistency you are not truly trusted. This is an important lesson to remember as a tire and auto service business.

No customer likes surprises when it comes to doing business with any type of service provider. When the customer can count on consistently great service each time they do business with you, their confidence increases and they are far less likely to shop around for their tire or vehicle service needs. But when the customer’s experience is inconsistent – exceptional one visit and so-so or poor the next – the customer’s confidence is compromised and, influenced by the perceived risk, they are more likely to consider competing alternatives.

Lack of consistency is one of the biggest problems facing multi-location tire and service businesses. In this case, customers view each store location as an extension of the same company. They do not place less importance on consistency because there may be a less experienced manager or novice employee at a particular location. If they see your corporate brand displayed outside, they go in and expect the same quality of service every time.

Independent tire dealers are regional businesses, and multi-store dealers have stores typically located a short distance from one another, so it’s fairly easy for customers to shop your company against itself, traveling only minutes down the road to another store. Or, even faster, they can shop by smartphone at light speed.

When customers receive an inconsistent experience between your locations, they might have mixed emotions. This will give them the impression that your company is not a professionally managed organization.

Simply put, if the customer doesn’t trust that your business will consistently meet or exceed their expectations to deliver great results, they will not consistently return or become loyal customers.

Lessons: Outback Steakhouse

Outback Steakhouse is a great example of a company that uses consistency as a business advantage. No matter which Outback location you visit, domestic or abroad, the customer experience is generally the same.

Like most major chain restaurants, the tangibles of the facility – layout, design and décor – are virtually identical. Additionally, what the customer experiences when interacting with employees is consistent. From the door greeters to the friendly wait-staff that looks customers in the eye to the manager’s involvement when there is an unhappy customer, everything tends to be choreographed with precision.

Done this way, customers become familiar with the business. Familiarity makes the customer comfortable and confident that wherever and whenever they visit Outback’s chain of restaurants, there will be no surprises.

Consistent Relationships

Success in any business comes mostly from building and maintaining relationships with customers. Once those relationships are built, customers expect that relationship will exist and be

consistent when they return for future tire or vehicle service needs.

One of the things that can quickly damage customer confidence and perceptions of consistency is when a store manager or personnel that the customer has built a relationship with over previous visits is relocated to work at another location.

This situation often leaves the customer feeling abandoned and frustrated that they need to start over again with someone new. Of course, the relocation of personnel is sometimes necessary to replace personnel that may have left the company, to staff new locations and to fill other requirements. However, unless it is absolutely necessary, these types of personnel transfers should be avoided to maintain and build consistency with customers.

Institutionalizing ‘Wins’

It is important to recognize that de-

→ TAKEAWAYS

- CONSISTENCY HELPS PREVENT UNPLEASANT SURPRISES
- TREATMENT SHOULD BE THE SAME FROM STORE TO STORE
- INSTITUTIONALIZE ‘WINS’ TO BUILD BEST PRACTICES
- STAY ON POINT

livering consistency means doing the right thing regularly. It is easy to fall into the trap of a routine where you're doing the same things over and over, regardless of whether these are the best things to do for the customer.

To achieve world-class customer service, you must be consistent with the

tomers' wheels and apply tire shine/protectant on each tire because he thinks it's a good idea. But at another location within the same chain, the employees aren't necessarily doing that and, in many cases, the manager at one store doesn't know what the other one is doing.

shine/protectant to each tire is a great model of a "win" that can be institutionalized. As this behavior improves the customer experience, the company would institutionalize this activity as a best practice standard for all its stores.

Consistency Creates Excellence

A successful college football coach once said, "You have to perform at a consistently higher level than others. That's the mark of a true professional."

It's true. Anyone can have a "good day." True professional organizations and the people in them achieve excellence by consistently executing proper behaviors, though.

Inconsistency is a main reason training initiatives fail. All too often, companies treat customer service training like an event. They conduct a training session and, assuming it was good, participants get energized with new insight, techniques and tools. Then, with no real follow-up program in place, participants will fizzle out and return to the same level of performance they were at prior to training.

Training research has revealed that, without ongoing reinforcement, 90% of what is learned is forgotten within 60-90 days. Like physical fitness, it doesn't matter how good your workout at the gym is today. If you don't continue to exercise on a consistent basis, you will never truly get in shape and stay that way.

It sounds simple, but training only works with consistent training. True ownership of learning is created with consistent exposure and application of the skills over time. World-class sales and customer service companies recognize this and typically engage their employees in 100 or more hours of training in their first year with ongoing training in the years ahead.

Achieving and sustaining success in your tire/auto service business requires discipline and commitment to continuous improvement, along with consistent training and reinforcement. ■

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BEHAVIORS THAT IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE INSTITUTIONALIZED AS 'BEST PRACTICE' FOR ALL LOCATIONS.

positive aspects of your customer interactions and inconsistent with (or eliminate) the negative aspects.

Store managers and employees regularly do wonderful things to improve the customer experience, earn customers' business and maintain their loyalty. But often those feats of greatness are confined to individual stores and not spread among all locations.

As an example, one store manager may be effectively managing his or her team members to clean cus-

To achieve consistency and world-class customer service, top-performing companies institutionalize their wins to create best practices. The principle is easy to understand: If a given behavior is producing positive results such as enthusiastic customers at a particular location, that behavior can (and should) be duplicated across all company locations to achieve the same result.

The earlier example of the store manager that is managing his employees to clean customers' wheels and apply tire

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