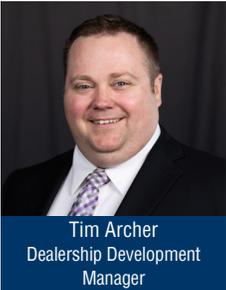


Increasing CSI in the Business Office



It is a harsh reality of the automotive industry that many customers are resistant to the business office. The process of selecting a new vehicle is often exciting to the customer, while the idea of a trip to see the business manager can seem like a trip to the dentist's office. To improve the experience, many dealerships have found ways to increase their Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) in the sales department but still struggle to find a way to push satisfaction in the business offices to higher levels. There are voices in the industry

that suggest electronic menu platforms, e-contracting, or other technological advances are the answers to the CSI concerns of the finance department. Technology will certainly have a big role to play in the future of the business office, but there is still no replacement for low-tech, old fashioned, customer service skills. Here are three areas to focus on to improve your CSI.

Become an expert in your field

The very best business managers are extremely knowledgeable. Being fun, smart, or charming is good but knowing your financial institutions, products, and policies from top to bottom will save the customer time. The time it takes a customer to move through the F&I process is a major factor in CSI. In fact, according to JD Power, the majority of customers think that the entire car buying process should take less than two hours and would allot only half an hour to the F&I process. If the F&I process is going to happen quickly, it will be as a result of a business manager who is knowledgeable across all scenarios and opportunities. Ongoing learning through research and interactions with your training and development partner, lender representatives, service technicians, customers, and other F&I managers will allow your finance department to be a source of knowledge and move quickly. Customers will find value in giving time to professionals who can help them by offering reasonable ideas and answering their questions. In addition to saving the customer time, the educated business manager is in a position to be a consultant to the customer. Rather than being viewed as another salesperson, a consultant is a source of thoughtful answers and advice. By answering the customer's questions confidently from a broad base of knowledge, you can expect the customer to not only drop their guard against the process but also to value your opinion on their decision.

Give yourself a "check-up from the neck up"

A negative attitude is almost impossible to mask from the customer. Some days it is not just the customer who enters with a negative attitude, it can happen to the business manager as well. Due to the customer's reservations about the finance department, it is critical to have a positive attitude every time you greet a new customer regardless of how your previous deal, week, or month was. If the attitude on both sides of the desk is negative, it will never produce a positive result in terms of customer satisfaction. When you find

yourself being negative, give yourself a "check-up from the neck up." This means acknowledging your negative attitude, realizing that it will prohibit you from best serving your customer, and finding a way to move past it. As customers, we rarely enjoy going to a place where the staff have a negative attitude. This is a major purchase for your customer and they are most likely thrilled at the prospect of taking delivery of their new vehicle. Match the customer's enthusiasm for their deal and they will take notice. Make sure that your attitude is one of professionalism and excitement for the customer and you can make yourself an asset to your CSI.

Get everyone on the same team

Have you ever been to a place of business where the staff did not seem to be pulling in the same direction? We all have and it is never fun. The departmental structure of a dealership can increase the severity of this issue. When the customer feels passed from person to person it can create a sense of confusion and frustration, which will lower your CSI. Make yourself a presence on the sales floor during times when you are not conducting business in your office. Introduce yourself to customers as soon as you can, even before deals are locked in. Being visible in the showroom can eliminate the "man behind the curtain" feeling that people have about F&I.

The customer can sense the sort of relationship and respect that you and their salesperson have for each other. Earning the respect of your sales staff by attending their meetings, helping them close deals, and taking an interest in their development is crucial because that respect is transferred from the salesperson to their customer. If the salesperson is endorsing you as a valued member of the team before you ever meet the customer, it can put you miles ahead when you introduce yourself. Rather than someone from a different department who just wants to sell you something else, you're now a trusted and helpful member of the salesperson's team. Eliminate the gap between finance and the sales department and the CSI will rise.

Technology will be critical to the future of the finance department and when used properly, it can have a positive effect on the satisfaction of the customer. It can save time and decrease errors, which will always be appreciated. However, what continues to define a truly great experience in finance is the knowledge, attitude, and personality of the true finance professional. As the CSI becomes more and more important in the industry, set yourself apart by being an expert, presenting a positive attitude, and immersing yourself in your team. The dealership's CSI will increase and you will look a little bit less like the dentist the next time you shake hands with your customer.

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