

The Evolving Customer Experience

The best way to control your customer's experience is to create it.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on customer behavior in 2020 was immediate and widespread across almost every industry. Health and safety became the top priorities and customer expectations were elevated. Sanitation protocols and contactless transactions became the baseline. Almost all businesses had to reassess their interactions with customers and rethink their delivery models.

Amid the rapid shift in customer expectations, many industries were negatively impacted. The car buying customer experience, however, fared well — with recent studies suggesting that the car buying process improved in 2020. The 11th annual Cox Automotive Car Buyer Journey Study found that both new and used-vehicle buyers in 2020 reported the process took less time and was more efficient than before and that overall, buyer satisfaction reached an all-time high.¹

Dealers responded quickly to evolving customer needs early in 2020, offering more tools and product information online and leveraging virtual experiences — including virtual presentations, virtual test drives and virtual delivery options — to replace what had previously been in-person visits to the dealership. Consumers appreciated dealers who prioritized their health and safety and offered alternatives to the traditional delivery model. Customers also appreciated a more streamlined experience through virtual transactions.

Creating a superior customer experience can offer rich rewards for dealerships at a time when more customers have come to prioritize experience over brand or price.

Consider this:

54% of consumers would buy from dealerships who provide better experiences compared to lower prices.²

72% would visit dealerships more often if the buying process was improved.²

Customers no longer base their loyalty on price or product; they stay loyal to companies **based on the experience they receive.**⁴

According to Walker's Customer 2020 Progress report, **customer experience overtook price** as the key differentiator in late 2020.³

With consumer experience driving change to business models across all industries, dealers can capitalize on the opportunity to create a superior experience at every interaction along the customer journey.





How does the car buying experience at your dealership measure up?

Conduct a self-assessment:

- Does our platform make it easy for customers to access information throughout all stages of their car buying journey?
- Do we offer complete, consistent and transparent tools, product and pricing information?
- How do we learn what tools our customers are looking for? Are we offering those tools?
- Do we offer comprehensive training for our sales and service staff that will help them deliver a superior customer experience

Five ways to deliver an exceptional customer experience: ⁵

1. Create a tech-forward, personal impression.
2. Make information easy to access and understand.
3. Ensure transparent, face-to-face conflict resolution.
4. Keep skills and knowledge current and relevant.
5. Keep your team positive and motivated.

The Evolving Customer Experience *Continued*

Take advantage of the customer experience evolution by harnessing opportunities to connect in a more authentic manner than before. The personality and energy of your team are your best assets when creating a memorable, enjoyable experience in the showroom and on screen. Focus on ways to keep the personality and energy of your team front and center wherever interactions take place; and encourage your team to look for opportunities to build and nurture the consumer connection.

Here are some tips:

Create a tech-forward, engaging, personal impression that lets customers see who you are, get to know you and visualize the team or person they will be working with:

- Make sure your website includes a robust “About Us” section.
- Include photos, personal stories, community involvement activities.
- Include a short video introduction for each team member.

Make the information you share on your website and in your showroom easy to access and understand.

- Include clear and transparent product, pricing and customer education tools.
- Make sure your offers and specials are complete and up to date.
- Recognize that every customer likes to receive information a bit differently, so be prepared with digital and hard copies of desk deals, financing, F&I menus, legal notices and service menus to easily share in the preferred format.
- Get used to a blend of old school and new school communication methods.

Commit to personal, face-to-face conflict resolution.

- We know that caring attitudes and personal relationships help customers feel more comfortable during their car-buying experience. Don't hide behind email or texts if problems escalate.
- Connect face-to-face to ensure authenticity of message and your tone is not misunderstood. Personal interaction can help reset the situation and will give you a chance for your skills in service and knowledge to take the spotlight.

Keep your skills and knowledge current.

- Refresh your talk tracks and sales tools to address current customers' concerns and needs.
- Understand that buying decisions are greatly impacted by everything from job stability and politics to safety and economic outlook.
- Be aware and knowledgeable of all the opportunities your customer can take advantage of, such as the latest finance rates, OEM deals, service loyalty programs, insurance options, etc.

Keep your team positive and motivated.

- Everyone is at risk of burnout or getting stale. Keep your team's skills sharp and spirits and motivation high with regular professional development and training.



1. Cox 2021 Car Buyer Journey Study. <https://www.coxautoinc.com/news/cox-automotive-study-finds-car-buying-process-improved-during-covid-19-pandemic>. 23 February 2021.
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3. Customers 2020: A Progress Report. Walker.com. <https://walkerinfo.com/cxleader/customers-2020-a-progress-report>
4. “37 Customer Experience Statistics You Need to Know for 2022.” SuperOffice.com. <https://www.superoffice.com/blog/customer-experience-statistics>. 24 June 2021
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