



## 'MOMENTS OF TRUTH'

### How to create positive impressions for your customers

Last month, Tim Bryant looked at the critical 'physical elements' required to create positive first impressions for your customers. Here, he examines how sales consultants can maximise the 'emotional elements' involved in creating positive impressions, and how these relate to key Moments of Truth within the very first phases of a sales process.

Psychologists today state that strangers form an opinion of us within seven to 17 seconds of first interacting. So it really does appear that "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Why are positive first impressions so critical for customers?

Most of us have three major 'comfort zones' – at home, in our cars, or at our place of work. When we're in these places we feel comfortable mainly because we don't feel at all threatened – we can simply be ourselves. As a result, customers naturally tend to feel more tense and on guard than usual when they walk into business premises such as a dealership. Put simply, the customer is now on unfamiliar territory. They are outside one of their comfort zones.

At this point, the sales consultant's challenge is therefore very straightforward: To remove any psychological 'barriers' the customer may be experiencing, and help them to feel as comfortable as possible, as soon as possible.

However, where exactly are these psychological barriers, and how can a sales person remove them for the customer quickly and effectively?

Here are three critical 'Moments of Truth' for a sales consultant to harness the power of the positive first impression, and then transfer the positive emotion seamlessly into the sales process itself:

#### Immediately acknowledge the customer's presence

So simple to get right, so easy to get wrong. I mentioned in Part 1 of this series that an 'acknowledgement' is different from a full blown 'welcome'. Customers will be feeling a little more tense than usual as they walk into your dealership, so the goal is to make them feel at ease as quickly as possible. A simple smile, or a "Good morning / Good afternoon" as they enter, will do wonders to ease any tension they may be experiencing, making them visibly more relaxed immediately. Remember, beforehand, in the customer's mind, they had imagined you 'pouncing' on them as soon as they entered the dealership. You didn't. They'll feel relieved. First psychological barrier overcome.

#### Encourage your customers to browse

What's the first response that a customer will most frequently offer a sales consultant? We've all said it for sure as customers ourselves... "I'm just looking thank you". What was the question from the sales consultant? "Can I help you at all Sir/Madam?" The difficult concept to grasp here is that the question, when viewed in isolation, appears to be absolutely correct and appropriate. In fact, it's considered very polite to offer your assistance. The problem is not the question itself, but rather how the customer is 'feeling' when the question is asked.

When a customer utters the words "I'm just looking thank you", they're



not necessarily rejecting your advance; what they actually mean is "Leave me alone, I'm not ready to talk to you yet". The solution to this common problem is surprisingly simple. Instead of "Can I help you at all Sir/Madam?", simply begin by saying "Hello, please feel free to browse and look around. If you have any questions I'll be over here". This initial welcome pre-empts the usual negative response of "I'm just looking thank you" into a much more positive light. It's virtually impossible for a customer to respond "I'm just looking thank you", which is what they were preparing themselves to say, and more importantly gives the customer the impression that it is absolutely fine to simply browse and look around at their own pace.

#### Follow up with the customer after they have browsed

Having browsed freely for a few minutes, most customers will naturally want to ask a few questions. For example, "Is this available as a diesel?" The key for a sales person is to be alert and ready to follow up with the customer after they have finished browsing. This doesn't mean waiting at a desk at the other end of the showroom leaving the customer to locate the sales consultant. It means being nearby and visible, but sufficient distance away so that the customer has felt comfortable to have browsed freely. In this way, when a sales consultant follows up with an open question such as "What do think of the car?", it's not seen as intrusive or pushy, but one that shows interest in the customer's thoughts and opinions.

Critically, having created the correct environment for the customer to feel comfortable enough to ask their own specific questions, the sales consultant can comfortably begin asking questions in return. In short, the crucial 'qualification' phase of the sales process has begun. In this particular case, quite effortlessly on the part of the sales consultant.

In the third and final part of this series, I will be exploring the Moments of Truth that encourage a customer to become a client of the entire dealership. Creating a customer who uses the dealer's services for their servicing, accessories, and repairs. Ultimately of course, to return once again to purchase a new vehicle in the future.

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