

Whistle in Tune and Customers Come Running

How to Use Multi-Channel Communications to Earn More Business

For those of us 'mature' enough to remember the old Andy Griffith Show, who can forget that whistled tune that opened and closed every episode? It is instantly recognizable, in part because it is catchy. In the same way, Catchy and memorable is the goal you should set for your customer communications if you want customers to respond and open their wallets to you.

Just as a tune can be whistled or played on different instruments, your customer communications can be delivered in more than one 'instrument', or channel. A channel is a medium or communications pathway to a customer. A single channel strategy uses one medium, direct mail for instance. A multi-channel strategy uses two or more, say direct mail, email and the dealership website.

Two events can create a memorable customer communications experience. First is the use of a multi-channel strategy. The second is to have a coherent roadmap for communicating specific messages to customers at critical touch points. When you get these two events lined up, you'll be whistling a more harmonious tune that will build relationships, solidify your brand, and drive business into your showroom and service drive.

Whistle Many Tunes

Your multi-channel strategy should include online and offline mediums. Include as many channels as possible to help you reach customers wherever they are and however they prefer you to communicate with them. In other words, use both online and offline technologies to give your customers more ways to do business with you.

Offline channels include direct mail, print ads and billboards, as well as voice mail. Online technologies include email, social media, text, blogs, videos, e-zines, and your website.

Your multi-channel communications plan, regardless of how you mix and match offline and online channels, must delivery a consistent message and brand impression to the customer across *all* the channels you use. This doesn't happen by happenstance; it comes from having first established a communications plan and strategy for your dealership – and a punch list, if you will, of the individual touch points your communications needs to hit with different customers at different times in their ownership experience with you, from purchase to trade in.

Analyzing, designing and implementing this communications roadmap can be challenging; many dealerships prefer to get help from their marketing agencies and/or through their ownership lifecycle management provider, if using one. This is not to say that a successful multi-channel communications strategy cannot be done in-house, but the expertise that is required to analyze and design a lifecycle that encompasses all customer touchpoints and utilizes a multi-channel communications strategy is challenging. If you are unsure, let the experts help.

Whistle in Tune

When you “talk” to your customers, make sure you whistle a tune they’ll receive. In other words, be sure that your communications not only communicates your overriding message theme and branding, but does so using different mediums or channels to reach customers in the right way. This “right way” means messages that are sent via the channel or channels preferred by each different customer.

For instance, some customers prefer a video e-mail and others direct mail -- You’ll find that the open rates of your communications improve when you communicate with customers in their preferred format.

When used in a cross-channel fashion, multi-channel communications will help nudge reluctant customers and revitalize inactive or lost customers. Try this test: Send an email or direct mail offer to a select group of customers. For those who do not respond, send a reminder voice mail within seven to 10 days. Don’t be surprised if you see response jump from just a few percent from the first channel effort to 9 to 12 percent after the second channel effort.

Maestro Not Needed

You needn’t be a maestro to orchestrate a catchy and memorable communications campaign. Consider these steps:

1. Choose an owner/administrator for the program. Be careful to choose someone with the proper skill set, choosing someone without the expertise who benefits from the program will ensure that the program is short lived. The administrator’s *discipline* in conducting and carrying out this assignment in consistent accordance with your customer communications strategy and plan is essential.
2. Work with your vendor to Map out or use your customer communications technology’s templates to help with letter and email message creation or phone scripts and for automating the layout and design of these pieces (consistency in image builds brand identity).
3. Brainstorm compelling communication offers or incentive ideas with your staff and vendor. Place these ideas into a communications chain that touches customers at key points in their relationship with your store.
4. Be sure to give customers opportunity to tell you how they want you to contact them. Does your system make it easy for you to capture and automate all the different ways and combinations they may request? Here is where a technology solution can save you time and ensure communications consistency and compliance.
5. Monitor and measure results. Measurement should include not only increases in traffic and sales, but in communications response rates.

To improve response and open rates to the communications you send to your customers, leverage the impact that multi-channel customer communications can have. Its correct use will help you build relationships, solidify your brand and whistle a harmonious tune that will have more customers running to you.

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