

Ford's Innovative Customer Relations Programs Increase Owner Satisfaction and Promise 20 Percent Reduction in Annual Savings

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME
Ford Motor Company

INDUSTRY
Automotive

- CHALLENGES**
- Improve customer and dealer experience
 - Open new communication channels to customers
 - Lower operating costs

- SOLUTIONS**
- Self-service Websites with intelligent Q&A provide real-time answers to customer and dealer questions
 - Cisco Unified Communications across channels helps consolidate call centers, reduce staff, and enable flexible business model
 - New chat room and analysis of car-related blogs help Ford gather customer feedback and assess customer satisfaction
 - IP-connected vehicle to offer another interaction channel with consumers

- RESULTS**
- Tripled visits to www.customer-saskford.com and achieved a 5 percent cost savings
 - Estimated annual savings of 20 percent when dealer support calls move to www.dealersaskford.com
 - Improved company image and products via feedback from blogs and chat rooms

Ford Motor Company launched several programs designed to increase car-owner satisfaction and the experience customers have with Ford after their purchase. Two new self-service Websites, www.customersaskford.com and www.dealersaskford.com, allow visitors and dealers to easily find the information they need. In addition, the company is expanding into Web 2.0 communication channels to establish a direct dialogue with owners. These efforts will be integrated across channels to help Ford improve customer and dealer satisfaction while lowering overhead costs.

Business Challenges

When buying a car, the perception is that people make their decision by kicking tires, taking a test-drive, and obsessing over colors. But one of the most important factors in determining brand loyalty and future purchases is the customer care the buyer receives after his or her last purchase. "People spend more time interacting with the dealer and manufacturer after they buy a car," says Rosemary O'Malley, manager of customer and dealer contact at Ford. "If they had a good experience every time the dealer changed the oil and tuned the engine, that builds brand loyalty and repeat business."

O'Malley adds, "That's why Ford is taking steps to streamline and improve customer care using Web-based tools and other high-tech devices that its customers expect from a leading-edge car manufacturer."

Not long ago, Ford customers seeking information about warranties, maintenance schedules, and other information had to navigate a rather complex Website. If they could not find the information quickly, they logged off and called the company's toll-free customer service number. "Maintaining multiple call centers with 800 employees was not only expensive," says O'Malley, "but it sometimes confused customers because the call center databases did not store the same information as the Website databases. As a result, car owners could receive conflicting information, which affected our customer satisfaction rate."



Solutions

Ford engaged the Cisco® [Internet Business Solutions Group](#) (IBSG) to resolve these issues by developing a comprehensive plan to open new communication channels with car owners, plus improve customer and dealer support while lowering costs. IBSG has the business expertise, knowledge of best practices, and proven methodologies and governance models to help Ford achieve these goals. Additionally, Ford engaged IBSG to create the innovative automotive “customer experience demo,” highlighting the IP-connected vehicle, a vehicle that includes a broad spectrum of enabling technologies, as yet another channel to interact with customers and demonstrate the future vision for real-time collaboration between the dealer and Ford during vehicle service. “When it comes to customer relations,” continues O’Malley, “Cisco understands the issues and solutions. They helped us put a vision in place and then act on it.”

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Manager of Customer and Dealer Contact, Ford Motor Company

Darryl Hazel, president, Ford Customer Service Division and vice president, Ford Motor Company agrees with O’Malley and feels that the relationship between Cisco and Ford has strengthened the relationship with its car owners and dealers. “Using the latest Web and phone technologies by Cisco,” explains Hazel, “we are transforming the customer and dealer experience across the enterprise, while at the same time reducing costs. Additionally, Ford benefits from other Cisco capabilities such as agent virtualization, which gives us global flexibility within our business model.”

Self-Service Website with Intelligent Q&A Increases Customer Satisfaction

The first step was to make the [www.customersaskford.com](#) Website more visible and user friendly, then integrate the Website and call center databases. O’Malley’s team also added an online form that allows visitors to e-mail questions directly to a customer relationship agent, who places them in a higher priority for when customers do call the center.

Plans are underway to replace the form with a click-to-call feature that lets visitors click a button on the Website, type in their phone number, and receive a call from an agent within 30 seconds. “Another benefit of the click-to-call functionality,” explains O’Malley, “is that agents can teach customers who call in how to find the information they want on [www.customersaskford.com](#), so the next time they need the same or similar information, they won’t have to speak to a live person. The customer will receive faster self-service, and we will lower our call center expenses. Yet another way to lower expenses is by using Cisco technology to route the call to the right agent on the network as quickly as possible reducing the customer’s hold time. The main focus of our effort is to improve each customer’s experience when they contact Ford, and we are doing just that.”

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Ford Customer Service
Division and Vice
President, Ford Motor
Company

Dealer Website Improves Support

IBSG identified dealer support as another area where Ford could lower costs and improve service to its dealer base and, by extension, its customers. Currently, dealers interact with Ford by calling a toll-free number. Live agents staff over 40 call centers coast to coast, but because there is no central knowledgebase for agents to pull data, dealers sometimes have to be put on hold while agents find the information, which may not always be up to date. “We are currently building a database of information for our agents to use,” says Mary Baumgartner, manager of the Business Assistance Center, “and we will use that same database on our new dealer self-service Website, www.dealersaskford.com, which will be launched soon.”

Blogs and Chat Rooms Provide Valuable Feedback

Instead of waiting for customers to contact Ford, the company is expanding into new communication channels that allow the manufacturer to receive feedback directly from customers on specific car models, features, service experiences, and more. For example, Ford is monitoring 20 leading car-related blogs to see what bloggers are asking or saying about Ford vehicles; a Ford representative responds when appropriate. “It’s a great way to connect with Ford owners, establish a one-on-one dialogue, and correct any misinformation or misperceptions that may be in the marketplace,” says O’Malley.

Ford is also implementing a chat room centered on its new in-car communications and entertainment system called Sync. This factory-installed, Bluetooth system allows car owners to connect almost any mobile phone or digital media player into a Ford vehicle and operate it through the speakers and other dashboard devices by voice command, steering wheel, or radio controls. “The chat room will be another direct link to owners,” states O’Malley. “It will give us an early indication of any concerns with the Sync product and be a good way to gather ideas for future enhancements that our customers want.”

Business Results

The changes IBSG suggested Ford make to its customer self-service Website produced results faster than expected. Visits to www.customersaskford.com more than tripled from an average of 80,000 a year to 250,000. And since assimilating the Website and call center databases, Ford eliminated information conflicts and the cost of maintaining two separate databases. “With regard to answering customer questions via our Website and call centers,” notes O’Malley, “satisfaction levels have increased significantly, along with the positive opinion car owners have about Ford.”

“We value Cisco IBSG’s collaborative role in this endeavor. They are an integral part of the Ford team, and we can always count on them to give us cutting-edge advice and show us the art of the possible.”

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Improved Dealer Experience Leads to 20 Percent Cost Reduction

By 2008, one-third of Ford’s dealer calls will be moved to self-service Websites and Cisco Unified Contact Center Enterprise, a customer contact management application. The switch will lower costs over a 3-year period by 20 percent. But even more important, thanks to integrated communications across channels, Ford will improve its dealer experience and provide them with the information they need faster.

By monitoring consumer blogs, Ford has seen a 4 percent improvement in “sentiment towards Ford.” A company’s relationship with its customers is important to its long-term success. Tracking, evaluating, and improving that relationship “is a never-ending journey,” says Hazel. “And it gets more exciting with each new idea and high-tech innovation that lets us better serve our loyal customers. We value Cisco IBSG’s collaborative role in this endeavor. They are an integral part of the Ford team, and we can always count on them to give us cutting-edge advice and show us the art of the possible.”

More Information

The Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the global strategic consulting arm of Cisco, helps Global Fortune 500 companies and public organizations transform the way they do business—first by designing innovative business processes, and then by integrating advanced technologies into visionary roadmaps that improve customer experience and revenue growth.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg>



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