

The Secrets Behind Tesla's Great Customer Experience

By Paula Tompkins

You would think I would be the ideal automotive customer. After all, I have worked in the automotive industry as a supplier of digital sales and marketing solutions for over 30 years. But I confess that my husband and I are a car dealer's worst nightmare.

Until recently, we drove a beautiful dark blue Jaguar XJ8 that was 18 years old. The car only had 45,000 miles on it and was in mint condition, but it did not have any of the latest and greatest features. So, we decided to take the plunge and buy a new car.

Even though I knew what to expect, I truly hoped the experience of buying a new car was improving. Like 90 percent of consumers, I spent countless hours researching vehicles online. The state of most of the brand Web experiences was disappointing. The websites lacked a rich, quality experience and did nothing other than provide a lead to a dealer.

In addition to our Web research, we spent eight hours in the local dealerships of five different luxury manufacturers. Funny, you would think that one of the sales people we met with, and in some cases took test drives with, would have called or emailed us to follow up. Sadly, none did.

My husband and I are not alone in our experience; 75 percent of participants in a 2017 [Accenture survey](#) said they would like to trade in the car dealership experience for an online car--buying process. It can be done. And it can be a very satisfying experience for the car buyer. I know because I did it.

We had come very close to purchasing a conventional luxury vehicle when my husband suggested we test drive a Tesla.

An Omnichannel, Digitally Driven Experience

From our first visit to the Tesla website, our car buying experience felt different. It was empowering. While the experience was not perfect, it was a testament to the power of a digitally driven omnichannel experience.

I have distilled the secrets behind why I think the Tesla customer experience is so great. It really has nothing to do with their direct--to--the--consumer sales model. It has everything to do with Tesla's skill at developing a customer--centric experience.



Tesla's secrets are not so secret. J.D. Power, Accenture, Forrester, Gartner and many other research analysts have been telling us for years what motivates consumers to check the top boxes for a satisfactory vehicle purchase experience. Tesla has managed to integrate many of these consumer requirements into a great customer experience.

What the Automotive Industry Can Learn from Tesla

1. Provide pressure--free, proactive customer contact

On the home page of the Tesla website, you can click a button that says, "Schedule a Test Drive." I clicked it and filled out the very simple form, selected a showroom in our local mall across from the Apple Store, and selected a day and time for our testdrive. Seconds later, I had a text confirmation for my test drive.

From the very beginning, Tesla engages the customer and is proactive. The staff is as responsive online as they are on the phone and in the showroom. Throughout the 10 days we took to place our order, we visited the website and called and emailed Tesla with various questions. Each time we received an informed and timely response — without sales pressure.

Five of J.D. Power's top [customer satisfaction KPIs](#) focus on making customers feel comfortable (not pressured) and confident that they are receiving accurate information during their decision--making process. A great vehicle shopping experience must make a customer feel comfortable.

2 Provide a self--service source for information

When we got home from our test drive, we had received an email with a link to MyTesla.com that let us learn more, configure, price and finance our car. We could save configurations and read about the various options in detail. The majority of consumers ([73 percent](#)) say that valuing their time is THE most important thing companies can do to provide them with good customer service.

Robust online self--service tools are a great way to respect a consumer's time and reduce the sales pressure. In fact, Forrester reports that 70 percent of customers prefer to use a company's website to get answers to their questions.

All the information we wanted to know was in one place, including the finance information. This was a huge time--saver and helped us make an informed decision.

3 Offer transparent and easy online financing options

J.D. Power's 2015 U.S. Sales Satisfaction Index Study gives insights on how to create a winning F&I process. The study points to two factors that negatively influence customer satisfaction: high--pressure sales techniques and long wait times in the dealership to get into the F&I office to process the paperwork. Tesla uses a self--service online finance experience, which means no waiting, no pressure and no time in the F&I box! In fact, we never actually met with or talked to an F&I specialist.

The interface for ordering a car is almost as simple as placing an order for consumer goods on Amazon.com. You make your selection, add your financial information and get real--time approval. Once you place your order, like with Amazon ordering, you receive an

email confirmation. Another nice bonus — we could use a credit card for the vehicle deposit.

The online process gave us several financing choices and shared the different rates; the process was 100 percent transparent. J.D. Power's 2015 satisfaction survey findings reveal that when F&I product and pricing/payment options are provided on a computer or tablet, satisfaction is higher than it is for printed materials, verbal quotes/descriptions and handwritten figures.

Transparency fosters trust. Trust is the foundation for loyalty.

4. Focus on the customer, not the product

My buyer's journey started with an owner advisor. Tesla says the role of the owner advisor is to "build customer relationships, educate them about electric ownership and match the benefits of our cars to the needs of customers." I think the key phrase in this description is "match the benefits of cars to the customer needs." We asked our owner advisor about adding the all-wheel drive option and larger wheels. After talking with us about our driving habits, he recommended against getting the all-wheel drive option. He referred us to the service advisor for the answer on the wheel size. While the owner advisor is a sales position, his/her focus was on our needs, not the bottom-line.

The whole buying process was personal. After we submitted our order online, a delivery experience person reached out to guide us through the delivery process. We also received a series of emails. They thanked us for our order. Reminded us that we had five days to modify the order. Reminded us that we needed to get electrical set up in our garage. Notified us that our car was due to go into production. Provided us with our VIN number and offered several dates to take delivery. We opted for delivery at the factory versus the delivery center so we could take the tour and see how these exciting vehicles are produced.

When we arrived to pick up our car, they were ready for us. We registered, provided our driver's license, down payment check and signed all the paperwork, which was printed and available in a nice branded folder.

At the conclusion of the factory tour, we were taken to a large, clean, branded room where our vehicle was waiting and plugged in. There was only one other delivery taking place at that same time. There was a printed sign with our names on it; a branded gift bag that contained a

Tesla mug, umbrella, pen, and two bottles of Tesla branded water. They took our photo with the vehicle and encouraged us to name the vehicle (we call her Tessie). They really made us feel special and appreciated.

They provided a detailed overview of the vehicle, starting with how to plug in and unplug the vehicle from its electrical outlet. There is a tremendous amount to learn about this vehicle. We also have a 24/7 tech support line, which we have used once.

We have received the typical post-purchase surveys. On one survey, I rated the company low in one area. Within a few days, I received a personal email asking me how the company could improve.

Recently, we received an invitation to attend the reveal of the new Tesla Model 3. It was a special event held in Los Angeles.

AutoTrader says customer satisfaction is at its highest within the first [90 minutes](#) on the day of purchase. Satisfaction quickly declines afterwards unless an automotive company makes a point to engage the new owner. From the very beginning, Tesla's customer-centric process provides a top-notch experience that is designed to drive loyalty. We could interact and access information using any device and any channel. This incredible experience sets the tone for sustaining satisfaction well beyond the day of purchase. It is not the typical automotive product-driven, transactional event.

Ernst & Young's Future of Automotive Retail report stresses that dealers and automakers need to shift toward an omnichannel strategy. They are absolutely right. Traditional automakers and dealers must work together to develop a personal and unique relationship with a customer. The technology is available to do it.