

Let valeting add value to your 'customer journey'

Valeting was once perceived as "little more than a necessary evil", but the rise in the importance of the customer experience and the ability to upsell other revenue-generating services are changing that perception among dealers.

Like many long-established companies, Autoclenz recognised the need to reinvent itself to meet changing market conditions. The main challenge, it said, was to unlock itself from the confines of being just another car valeting supplier and offer customers a 'turnkey' entry to its entire service portfolio.

Sales director Martin Peters explained: "We carried out an independent study that perceived valeting to be little more than a necessary evil, a mere commodity that was determined by price with little or no thought given to added value. Also, a lot of our services operated under different brands that confused people."

Those findings followed a management buy-out of the 40-year-old company in 2012 and prompted a fundamental re-think of how it should position itself. With the customer experience and customer journey now an integral part of car retail, Autoclenz decided to embed itself in that approach and offer

all its services, ranging from meet-and-greet, delivery and collection and premises cleaning to imaging and SMART repair, to dealer partners.

Autoclenz also handles pre-delivery inspection for a large car importer and during a recent new model launch event for the media in Spain provided all support services, including catering.

Valeting, though, remains the core activity, accounting for £25 million of its £36m turnover. Of that, most is generated through retail networks, with Autoclenz working with six of the AM100 top 10 dealer groups. Daily rental (Europcar) and auction (BCA) account for a further £7.6m along with, more recently, manufacturer PDI, technical services and SMART at a further £3m.

With more than half of dealerships still opting to carry out valeting in-house, Autoclenz sees continued scope for growth in outsourcing.

"Even employing a couple of valeters means a dealership is under-resourced for at least two months of the year because of holidays, and that doesn't take into account sickness," said Peters.

"With Autoclenz, there is no fixed overhead – our pay-per-vehicle policy ensures that clients draw on our resources only when needed, regardless of forecourt traffic or seasonal fluctuations."



Autoclenz on its outsourced valeting service: 'Customers provide the electricity and we provide everything else, from the machines to the consumables'

He also pointed to three compliance issues: health and safety (coupled with environmental regulations over the use of water, power and chemicals); the minimum wage; and the status of

non-British operatives. Autoclenz has about 1,400 valeters working as self-employed sub-contractors and a significant number of these are non-EU nationals. As part of the recruitment process, all operatives are subject to immigration and work eligibility checks.

On the latest minimum wage legislation, Peters said outsourcing freed its customers from the prospect of having to manage incremental rises in costs until 2020.

The management of people and processes, and their associated costs, are a big part of the company's message. Autoclenz achieves this using what it calls 'transparent' invoicing, developing two online systems, the Paperless Vehicle Management System (PVMS) and Autoclenz MI, to give clients control of their spend and service delivery.

As for the company's contribution to the customer experience and journey, Peters said it follows a set path.

First, there is a meet-and-greet, where the customer's car is examined for any scuffs, dents, scratches, etc. Not only is this a precautionary measure to avert the risk of any complaint about damage while in the dealer's care, but it also presents an upsell opportunity for SMART repair,

a service normally viewed as part of part-exchange preparations. Rather than having to re-book a time for this, it can be carried out on the same day, said Peters.

On the meet-and-greet, he added: "It's personal touches like these that make all the difference when it comes to generating customer satisfaction."

As for the actual valeting, he said the importance of valeting's visual and tactile impact could not be over-emphasised.

"The purchase of a new car is a positive for the consumer, but its ongoing maintenance tends to be a negative. While acknowledging the need for oil changes, new filters, pads and so on, owners can't actually see what they are paying for.

"Contrast that with the tactile and visual pleasure of seeing the car in almost as good as new condition when collected – gleaming paintwork and alloys and thoroughly vacuumed interiors. It even smells like new, with essence holders that come as part of the service.

"Valeting may be just one of 30 or so issues addressed in the service follow-up questionnaire, but we maintain that its value comes high on the list in the customer experience."

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Martin Peters, sales director, Autoclenz

The same importance attaches to used car sales, said Peters.

"With a full valet costing around £20, we believe that's a relatively modest investment when a dealer is looking for a margin of £1,200 to £1,500 on a typical used car."

For part-exchanges, Autoclenz not only provides the prepping, but also offers an imaging service, taking stills or video for immediate uploading onto the dealer's website.

All services are supported by a field management team, with a weekly audit for quality control.

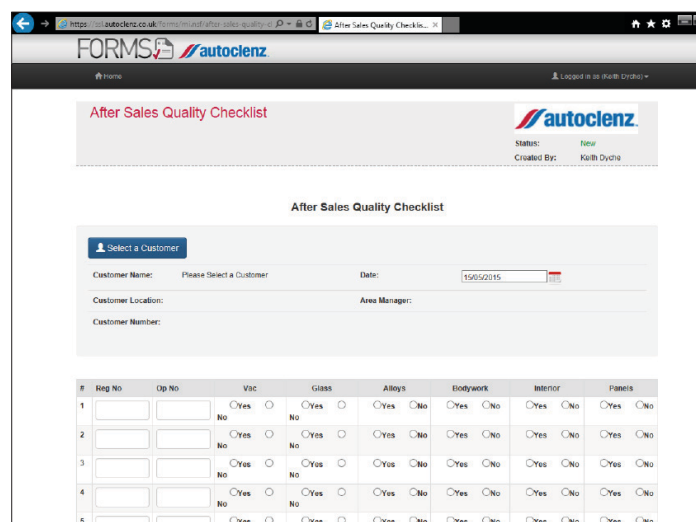
"The business is not about operatives going from one site to another in vans, but a full implant service," said Peters. "Customers provide the electricity and we provide everything else, from the machines to the consumables."

Whereas valeting traditionally tended to be in the realm of the dealership sales manager, it's now also part of the aftersales department's remit.

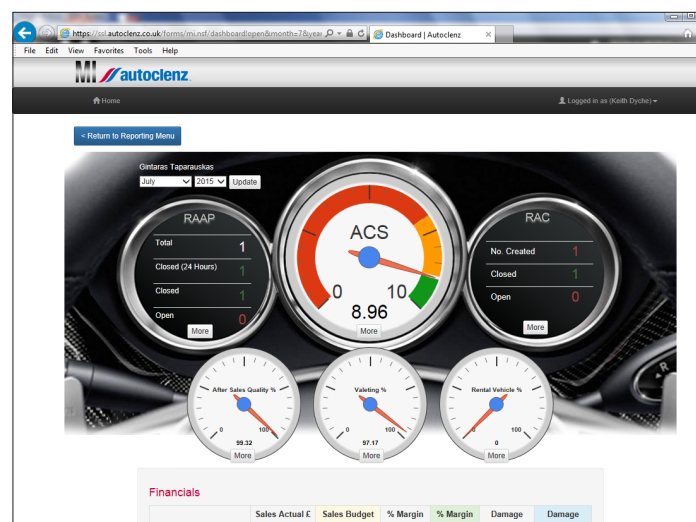
"They recognise the opportunities to impress customers and that valeting is not 'low rent', but a secondary workshop activity, taking up ramp time," said Peters.

"It's not unusual for us to look at an in-house operation and assure prospective customers that we can increase productivity by one third."

Standards of service and delivery have made Autoclenz a four-time winner of the Institute of Transport Managers' annual award for Best Vehicle Valeting and Preparation Company. It has also received 'outstanding' accreditation by IIC Investors in Customers for its service standards.



With customer experience surveys and scores now an integral part of car retail, Autoclenz has decided to embrace that approach



For more information on the difference at Autoclenz, visit our website: www.autoclenz.co.uk or call 01283 554682

