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Harness anticipation to boost customer satisfaction and profitability

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Matt Appleman runs a very small custom bicycle shop in Minneapolis, specializing in hand-built carbon-fiber bicycle frames. Matt's business may be small, but he has adopted an important sales tool — anticipation — that you can

apply at your dealership too.

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Matt describes how he builds bicycles like this: "Upon approval of the design, the fun starts for me, and the anticipation begins for you! As the frame is being built, I'll keep you up to date with pictures of the framebuilding process ..." There's that word, anticipation. He goes on to describe how in time the bike will be delivered to the new owner. You can bet also that when he sets a delivery date in the future he will stick to that schedule — under promising and over delivering.

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Back to our question ... How can we harness "anticipation," and for that matter, Matt's successful process, at a motorcycle dealership?

First, recognize that a customer having to wait for delivery — for sales, service or parts — does not have to be a negative experience for the customer. In fact, ironically, waiting for something can make a customer enjoy it even more.

But a customer having to wait can also be a disaster. What's the difference?

Three important steps:

1. Set time expectations up front. Always under promise and over deliver.
2. Take the time to keep your customer updated while they are waiting. Give them interesting facts while they wait. Or even better, with today's easy-to-use smartphones, snap a photo of progress and email it to them.
3. Deliver on time. The only way anticipation continues to be a positive is if in the end the delivery is on time.

Your best customers are the ones who are loyal, repeat buyers. Grow more of them by throwing in a little anticipation.

Fran O'Hagan is president & CEO of Pied Piper Management Company LLC, a Monterey, Calif., company that works with motor vehicle manufacturers and dealers to maximize performance of dealer networks. One of Pied Piper's most popular services for the powersports industry is Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI) sales mystery shopping to help turn more motorcycle shoppers into motorcycle buyers.




Custom bicycle builder Matt Appleman builds on customers' excitement by keeping them updated about the progress of their bikes.

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