

IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Muller's Woodfield Acura credits its 30 years of success to a simple strategy: treat employees and clients like family, and they'll return the favor

In today's competitive auto business, Muller's Woodfield Acura stands out by treating clients—and employees—like family.

The Mullers have been in the auto business since 1975, when Mike Muller became a Honda dealer in the Chicago suburbs, and in the Acura business since 1986, when he and son Scott opened one of the first Acura dealerships in the Midwest. Known to staff and clients respectfully as “Mr. Muller,” the patriarch focused on client satisfaction—he started the area's first free service loaner program—and the new Acura business took off.

Though now in his 80s, Mr. Muller is still active at the dealership, and his insistence on always doing right by clients and employees alike is the backbone of the business. “One of the things that Mr. Muller instilled in us is that at the end of the day, the only thing we have left is our reputation,” says long-time service director Mark Dettlo. “How we treat people is what they're going to remember.”

SECRET TO SUCCESS

From relationship building to sales, the team from Muller's Woodfield Acura share their best practices.

Easy listening. From their advertising to their showrooms, the staff focuses on putting clients in what Scott calls a “comfort zone,” with the goal of maximizing repeat business and referrals, which are easier to close than first-time sales. Their radio spots are famous for reassuring listeners that “there's always a Muller in the house” and “you will not



be disappointed,” but also for never discussing price or promising discounts, and for years, the sales team decorated the showroom for events like March Madness and a Hawaiian month.

Even after the sales closing, salespeople are trained to “plant a seed” and talk to clients about what to expect when they meet with the finance department. “This way, when clients go in to do paperwork, it's not a complete surprise,” says Scott Muller.

Focusing on the comfort of visitors and buyers alike is a smart strategy for today's hyper-competitive auto industry, according to assistant zone manager Dustin Noble. “The best way to differentiate a brand or dealership right now is by creating a client experience that is second to none,” he says. “Every car manufacturer is making a high-quality product, so the experience the client has is going to be a major factor in their decision to purchase.”

Long-term relationships. Many Muller employees have been there for more than 25 years because anagement prioritizes long-term retention over short-term profit. During the early “lean years” with the young Acura brand, general manager Chris Eugenis says he was told to adjust pay plans if necessary to make sure his employees could pay their bills. The Mullers also make sure staff are supported by at least one manager for every three salespeople, rather than the one manager to every five or six salespeople found at other dealerships. “In the long run, [having more managers] pays for itself,” Scott explains.

Keeping it simple. Though they lead the zone in sales, the team has one purpose. “A lot of dealers are extremely numbers- and report-oriented, but we

are not,” says Scott. “The numbers are important for comparison purposes, but the *only* thing we want to do is a little better than the last month and the same month a year ago.” If sales fall above or below targets, management reacts within the month to increase direct mail or radio campaigns, launch a sales contest or hire more salespeople.

Five-star service. It's not just the sales team that's winning over clients; according to Scott Muller, the service department sells just as many cars. To convince existing Honda clients to come over to the new Acura business in the 1980s, Mark Dettlo came up with a pick-up and drop-off service. Buyers would only have to visit the dealership once to take delivery of their new Acura; for oil changes and other services, staff would whisk the cars away and return them to clients' driveways once the service was complete.

The service department continues to innovate, participating in Acura Accelerated Service and holding evening information sessions for clients who have bought new cars in the last quarter. The Muller's staff even calls competitors several times each year to make sure the dealership's prices are in line with what others offer for basic services.

WHAT'S NEXT

With the dealership's 30-year anniversary approaching, the team will celebrate by opening a brand-new Gen 3 facility later this year. “As successful as we are, right now we're almost at a disadvantage because we're in a place that's 30 years old,” says Scott Muller. “We fully expect this dealership to be a showcase for Acura, and we can't wait to see what it does for overall sales.” ⚙

DEALER BEST PRACTICES

WHAT:

Muller's Woodfield Acura

WHERE:

Hoffman Estates, Ill.

WHO:

*Mike Muller, owner, and
Scott Muller, dealer principal*

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

*14-time Precision Team winner.
“The only reason we have won Precision Team 14 times is because our employees care as much about taking care of clients as the Muller family does,” says Scott.*

*10-time Acura Financial Services Council
of Excellence award winner.
They placed in the top 15% of Acura dealers
nationwide thanks to a 93% Acura Care
Vehicle Service Contract quotient, 56% new
contract penetration, 35% certified contract
penetration, and 17% paperwork return.*

*New car sales in 2015 exceeded
their objectives, at 101.67%*

*First in the zone in ACPV sales,
at 174.76% of their objective*

Earned a 94% retail sales effectiveness rating

*Given a 98.9 sales satisfaction profile score,
placing them 52 out of 276 in the country*



*THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT: Chris Eugenis,
general manager at Muller's Woodfield Acura;
Mark Dettlo, service director; Renji George, left,
and Pamela Hernandez check out the vehicles on
the lot with sales consultant Tommy Pililimis.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Dealer principal Scott Muller, who
opened the Acura dealership with his father in 1986.*

Photography by Tim Klein