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Service provider success: story of Liberty Autos

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Service Provider Success: *Story of Liberty Autos*

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Abstract—The elements for success in the service industry for many organizations have been studied and quantified. They range from effective performance evaluation and management to adequately implementing seven P's. However, the success story of every organization is unique. What might work for one organization might not for another as every company is inherently distinctive. In this paper, the strategic framework behind the success of Liberty Automobiles Dubai is captured. The primary data necessary for this paper was collected through in-depth interviews with the managers for sales, service and marketing as well as the group general manager. Subsequently, the key areas that led to the success of Liberty Autos will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords—Services marketing, automotive retailing, and retailer success.

I. INTRODUCTION

WITH the world's economies moving towards services as their major source of income; services marketing is becoming an increasingly important field [15]. Retailing in general and automotive retailing in particular are under the realm of services marketing. The literature on services marketing is still growing. However, there seems to be a gap in the field of automotive retailing. Though there is literature on retailing in general and case studies on automotive brands, focused literature on automotive retailing is limited. As such, this paper aims to add to the literature on the subject by studying a successful automotive dealership in Dubai. The retailer in question is Liberty Automobiles and the strategic framework employed that led to the retailer becoming one of General Motors' (GM) hallmark retailers will be illustrated.

II. SERVICE MARKETING

Service marketing is a sub-category within the Marketing subject. Unlike product marketing, service marketing is not easily defined [4]. John Rathmell, explains services as "acts or process" [19, 34]. More colloquially, services are simply not products [19], [4]. Nevertheless, there are distinct characteristics of a service that can help us define it. For instance, services are intangible and abstract; they are 'performances' that are interpreted as well as judged by the end consumer [11], [19], [4], [2]. Accordingly, Beaven and Scotti describe services as, "processes with outcomes that can

be perceived directly and indirectly, leaving concrete suggestions" [2], [8]. The implication here is that services cannot be perceived like a tangible product such a good. The perception/interpretation of a service is subjective to the customer and cannot be generalized [11], [4], [2]. Moreover, services are heterogeneous outputs that cannot be standardized [11], [2]. Even though most service providers have a script to define the process in the provision of their service, the service itself cannot be standardized [2]. This is due to the fact that no customer is alike and each customer has their own unique set of requirements. The product oriented view towards marketing would view this as an issue. However, from a service marketing viewpoint, the heterogeneity of services is an advantage to create unique personal experiences that are tailored to meet the expectations and needs of individuals. [2].

Services unlike products cannot be possessed by the end consumer; instead they are outcomes resulting from the service process [2]. In addition, services cannot be pre-manufactured and then delivered. The service 'manufacturing' process takes place simultaneously with customer interaction. In fact the customer is part of the service production process and this is called co-production. The consumer plays a role in defining and soliciting the service, which in turn affects the outcome of the service. Since, the customer takes part in the service production process, the onus of providing quality service is placed in the hands of both the provider and the consumer. Nevertheless, the responsibility of providing quality service is placed more on the shoulders of the provider than on the customer. Moreover, because the customer plays a role in the service production process, he/she will be forever ingrained with a memory of the service. [2]. Consequently, Beaven and Scotti define services as, "processes that are created and experienced with outcomes that are often distinct, direct and imperishable" [2], [9]. Furthermore, they go on to suggest that services are, "encounters that afford opportunities for greater satisfaction through consumer participation, shared responsibility and timely feedback" [2], [10].

All in all, service marketing is distinct from product marketing and services can be defined as intangible, perishable acts or performances that cannot be pre-produced and require the participation of the consumer [11], [19], [4], [2]. Nevertheless, there is a further distinction to be made within services marketing. This distinction is based on the intangibility of the product. For instance, a retailer sells tangible products, yet the business is still considered to be within the service industry. This is because the retailer performs *marketing through services*, instead of *marketing of services* [15]. The difference here is that, in the *marketing of services*, the core product is essentially a service such as haircut or financial advice. Whereas, in *marketing through services* the core product is tangible such as an automobile or

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fruits and vegetables; here the service is supplementary to the core product and is used to promote it. [15].

As such, the automotive retailing industry is one that *market's through services*. Automotive retailing is about differentiating the product through service. Nevertheless, since the automotive retailing sector is a service industry that is more, good rather than service dominated. There are more tangibles rather than intangibles. However, the differentiating factor can be said to the intangible of service provision rather than the tangible of the product or vehicle brand itself. As an automotive retailer the precedence should be on services marketing rather than product marketing; since, their core business in their sales consultations and after-sales service entails co-production with the customer and being customer centric. Accordingly it is important to consider the 7P's as it is the cornerstone of services marketing.

III. SERVICES MIX IN AUTOMOTIVE RETAILING

Unlike product marketing which has been characterized by the 4P's, service marketing has been exemplified by the 7 P's [18]. The 7 P's include: product, price, place, physical evidence, promotion, process and participants [21], [18]. These 7P's are part of the marketing mix that helps promote a service [21]. As such, what is interesting to note is how these 7 P's influence customer satisfaction within a service setting.

A. Product

Since most services are intangible it is hard for marketing managers to appropriately understand how consumers will perceive their service [4], [2], [21]. As such in a service setting the manager must focus on providing the customer with a strong organizational image and tangible cues that can materialize the nature of the service in the consumers mind [4], [21]. This materialization of the service can be done through a clear communication of the organization's image and the features associated with the service [21]. In the automotive retailing industry the core product of the vehicle itself is not a point of differentiation. However, the brand and the image associated with the brand must be reflected in the service provided as such supplementary product of customer care becomes the tool through which the brand's image is portrayed. As such, it is not the product or vehicle by itself but the provision of service that materializes the intangibles in automotive retailing.

B. Price

The intangible nature of a service prompts price to become an indicator of the quality of the service to be provided [21]. Since, price becomes a cue for quality, the manager should engage in competitive pricing so as to gain a competitive advantage. However, price will only become a cue for quality when other factors are not present to materialize the service, such as information on features etc. [21]. In automotive retailing price becomes an indicator of quality, brand image and value. Since, almost all vehicles are inherently similar except for distinctive designs and some proprietary technologies; price becomes a major differentiation point.

Furthermore, customers tend to use price as a means of justification for subpar service or as an indicator to expect exemplary service.

C. Physical Evidence

Like price the physical evidence within the service location acts a cue to the nature of the service [21]. As such, the physical evidence should match the customer's expectations of the service, in order to build a positive attitude towards the service that will be provided [21]. Like other service retailers in the automotive retailing the physical evidence or the look and feel of the showroom is crucial to building the image of the retailer as well as vehicular brand. The interior environment sets the tone for the 'shopping experience' as well as builds an image of the retailer and brand in the consumer's mind. All in all, like price, the look and feel of the showroom acts as another cue for the intangibles associated with automotive retailing.

D. Place

Since, services are intangible and cannot be stored or pre-produced, service managers need to be able to make adjustments in supply, to meet the demand for their services [21]. This must be done in order to mitigate the perishable nature of service and enhance the efficiency of the organization. In addition, the convenience of the location and multiple locations can act as motivators for customers to utilize the service. All in all, the service should be conveniently located so as to reach as many of the targeted consumers as possible. [21]. Accordingly, the convenient location of dealerships and in turn service centers is crucial to automotive retailing; as the customers need to be able to easily recognize dealerships and have a hassle free service experience.

E. Promotion

Advertising and promotions can be an effective way to communicate the image of the organization to the customer [8]. Word of mouth communications play a major role in establishing the organization's image in the consumers' mind, along with post-purchase communications [8], [4], [21]. Furthermore, post-purchase communications are vital because it aids customer retention as well as positive word of mouth [21]. Finally, the customer needs to be constantly reminded of the merits of the service so as to maintain and develop their expectations of the service [21]. Promotion is necessary in automotive retailing to entice and draw the customer into the showroom. More importantly, post-purchase communications are crucial to establishing repeat customers as well as 'brand ambassadors'. In automotive retailing the precedence is not necessarily on advertisements and sales but creating positive word of mouth so a strong and budding customer base can be established.

F. Process

Process, pertains to how the service is provided and is an important differentiating factor [21]. A customer will form judgments based on past experiences of the service and these

experiences help the customer form either negative or positive perceptions of the service. Consequently, the front line employees are crucial to building a positive perception in the consumer's mind; as their behavior and actions influence the consumer's opinion of the service and in turn organization. [21]. Thus, training front line employees to appropriately deal with consumers is critical. Since, in automotive retailing the product is marketed through the service, the processes involved in the provision of the service are critical. Consequently, the training of sales consultants and service advisors is necessary to providing exceptional service.

G. Participants

Services are labor intensive and the personnel providing the service directly influence the customer's perception of the service [21], [13]. The service personnel needs to be trained in customer satisfaction and should know how to appropriately handle the customer. In addition, due to the intangible nature of services, the employees themselves become cues to the level and quality of service that will be provided [21]. As such, all employees must be trained and nurtured to carry themselves in accordance with the organization's brand image [21], [13]. Finally, the personal service provided to customer by the employees is a key distinguisher that can lead to a competitive advantage. [21], [13]. All in all, the relationships built with the stakeholders are key, especially relationships built with the customer. As such, in automotive retailing, like any other service industry the people mix or participants are critical to success.

Ultimately, the service mix employed by a provider is essentially an extension of the corporate culture of the provider. Thus, it is important to consider the corporate culture of a service provider in conjunction with the 7P's.

IV. CORPORATE CULTURE

Fombrun defines corporate culture as, "the emergent patterns of beliefs, behaviors and interaction that uniquely characterize the organization as it operates within an industrial and a social context" [7, 139]. As such, the organizational culture within an organization is said to augment its positioning, image and functionality [20], [12]. The organizational culture allows for the complete business to be aligned under one vision and in turn, work together towards achieving that goal [7], [12], [20]. Though the viability of organizational culture as a facilitator to a successful business is in question, however its ability to provide structure to a business is well noted [20]. It is this structure and single vision that allows for a holistic approach to be implemented in achieving common goals [7], [12], [20]. These goals can only be achieved by the personnel within the organization and they are the starting point from which the organization's culture is built [12]. Thus it is vital that they are reflective of the company's culture. In addition the employees of the company are its best ambassadors to the public; so ingraining the corporate culture into the employees is crucial to creating a consistent image of the organization in the consumer's mind. [12]. In order, to be a successful service provider there needs

to be a singular vision or mission along with an all-encompassing corporate culture guiding the organization. This is especially apparent for automotive retailers as they need to establish themselves with an appropriate brand image to be reflective of the product/brand they are selling; and this can only be accomplished with a fitting corporate culture that guides the entire operation. Finally, since corporate culture is the guiding premise of an organization, it can be conducive of such methodologies as knowledge management and relationship marketing.

V. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge management entails the creation, collection, organization, dissemination and use of knowledge [10], [17]. Accordingly, knowledge can be categorized into systematic, relationship, explicit, hidden and tacit knowledge [10]. Systematic knowledge describes knowledge that is learnt by studying patterns. Relationship knowledge pertains to knowledge acquired as a result of relationships and is difficult to communicate such knowledge. Explicit knowledge is what is learnt from listening and reading and can be easily shared. Hidden and tacit knowledge are amongst the most difficult to share as they are the most difficult to understand and communicate. Hidden knowledge comes from socialization and describes the way in which an individual mentally organizes ideas. Finally tacit knowledge refers to the skills one has acquired through experience. This is the most valuable type of knowledge and many organizations try to tap into this through mentorship and training programs [10].

The main premises behind knowledge management are to generate and capture knowledge; provide structure as well as value to the gathered knowledge; transfer knowledge and finally, establish mechanism to facilitate the utilization of knowledge amongst groups as well as individuals [17]. Today, most organizations utilize IT systems to manage and capture the knowledge within the organization and disseminate it accordingly. Having an IT system assists in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. [17]. Nevertheless, knowledge can be managed through the HR practices and organization culture.

The HR department plays a critical role in the knowledge management process as they are responsible for hiring the talent [1], [6], [16]. In order to maximize the talent within the organization the HR department must screen employees for key skills [1], [6], [16]. After which they can develop the skills of the employees according to their human capital level [17]. There are four levels of human capital: idiosyncratic human capital (low value, high uniqueness); ancillary human capital (low value, low uniqueness); core human capital (high value, high uniqueness); and lastly, compulsory human capital (high value, low uniqueness) [17]. The HR department can use this classification to make the most out of all employees and try to establish core human capital in key personnel [1], [6], [16], [17]. Additionally, the HR department also has the ability to organize training and development session that allows the employee to acquire and share new information [1], [6], [16]. Furthermore, the HR department can also provide

employees with incentives to share information, thereby furthering the knowledge management process. In addition, to the HR department the organization culture plays a major role in creating an encouraging environment for learning and sharing of information. Furthermore, a good HRM strategy and organizational culture can prevent from the loss of information resulting from employee turn-over. [1], [6], [16].

The merits of knowledge management are especially evident in today's knowledge society [10], [17]. For a service provider such as an automotive retailer their people mix is critical to their success and knowledge management allows them to best utilize their people. However, knowledge management must be used in conjunction with the appropriate HR practices and in turn relationship marketing to be successful.

VI. RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Berry describes relationship marketing as, "attracting, maintaining, and – in multi-service organizations – enhancing customer relationships" [3, 236]. Yet, relationship marketing does not simply entail building relationships with customers. It also describes forming lasting relationships with channel members and internal customers (employees) [3], [9]. Relationship marketing is about building social bonds between the organization and key stakeholders [3], [9]. As mentioned the key stakeholders are consumers, employees and channel members. The corner stone of relationship marketing is trust [14]. Building a social bond with the consumer based on trust prompts to customer to build a positive image of the organization [14], [5]. In addition, relationship marketing can also build value in the customers' mind [5]. By personalizing the service, and building a social bond with the customer, the consumer will come to see the organization as a friend rather than a business [5]. In addition, this sense of friendship is also translated to the people the customer deals with within the organization. This relationship between the employee and the customer can be a fruitful source of information to improve the service and in turn create a competitive advantage [14], [5], [9]. Moreover, this sort of relationships with the consumer also prompt positive word of mouth and can bring in referrals as well as repeat purchases [5].

This principle of trust also plays a vital role in the relation between the organization and its employees as well as channel members [14], [9], [3]. With regards to the employees, relationship marketing allows the employee to be more in touch with the organization [14], [3]. It provides employer with a more motivated, enthusiastic employee [14], [3]. As such, by forming a relationship with the employees the employer is better able to understand the employee and better motivate them. Additionally, the trust in the relationship allows for open lines of communication that can in turn lead to innovation and development. Similarly, with regards to channel members, trust in the relationship is important. By building a trusting and strong relationship with channel members, the organization can expect higher cooperation as well as increased maneuverability. Furthermore, the organization will also be in tune with the channel member and

can assist them accordingly. This allows for a win-win situation where both parties can look out for their respective best interests. [14], [3]. Ultimately, relationship marketing in automotive retailing is about building relationships with their customers, employees and channel members.

VII. LIBERTY AUTO'S

Liberty Autos was established in 1976 and started off as a small dealership in Sharjah and Dubai. In the beginning Liberty Autos was a small company with a limited brand portfolio. They started off with two showrooms and one service center. Today, they have 7 showrooms and services centers across the UAE. They began with Chevrolet and as off 2001 became the primary retailer for Cadillac across the UAE. Moreover, they also acquired Hummer and Opel, with Opel remaining as one their marquee brands alongside Chevrolet and Cadillac. They went from selling 100 cars in a year to now more than 1200 and the growth has helped them mature as a company. Moreover, they have also established themselves as the primary retailer for Kawasaki in the region. As such, they have earned a reputation for being a successful automobile retailer in the UAE.

Success is a relative concept and depends on how the organization or individual defines success. Liberty Autos defines success in terms of customer service and satisfaction; their goal is to be the customer's choice dealership. Consequently, we can define their success in terms of customer satisfaction and service. Based on customer surveys conducted internally (by the organization) as well as externally (Middle East Automotive Council), Liberty Auto's is amongst the top for customer service as well as satisfaction. General Motors has also awarded them the prestigious position of being one of the top 10 dealers for Cadillac around the world. In addition their exceptional and unique approach to service provision has allowed them to be GM's 'dealer of choice'. Furthermore, they have held the honor of being the Grand Master dealer for seven continuous years and have been the only dealership from the Middle East to do so.

They have achieved such accolades because of their core values and corporate vision. Furthermore, their core values and corporate vision translates into their brand image. As such, their brand image and in turn core values and corporate vision has facilitated their success and allowed them to build a competitive advantage in automobile retailing within the UAE.

VIII. THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

In order to understand how Liberty Autos has established themselves as a successful retailer, the strategic framework has been split into two key sections. The first being how they have established their brand image and the second detailing how they have achieved their competitive advantage.

A. Brand Image

As the literature on the influence of corporate culture suggests, Liberty Autos has used their corporate values as the principles that align the various departments and together

achieve their vision of being the dealership of choice. This vision of being the dealership of choice is the overriding factor that influences the activities of the three major departments within Liberty Autos. The major departments are the marketing, sales and services departments. The corporate vision along with the corporate values permeates through these departments, ultimately influencing how they treat their customers, employees and manufacturer.

The values of loyalty, fairness and commitment stem from the corporate vision and are the founding principles that guide the activities within the above mentioned departments. Liberty Autos emphasizes loyalty and fairness to its employees, customers and manufacturer (GM). To Liberty Autos, loyalty is love, love for work, love of the company and love of the employees. In being loyal they are able to build a family atmosphere within the organization which in turn affects the employee's morale as well as their productivity. Furthermore, their principle of loyalty builds trust and commitment; which in turn breeds strong relationships. Their principle of commitment is about building and maintaining the trust in their relationships. As such, they pride themselves in having strong relationships with GM, their employees and shareholders as well as their customers. Additionally, the fairness value allows them to be empathetic towards their customers as well as employees; thus, allowing them to better motivate their employees. By ensuring they are fair to their employees they are able to ensure that their customers are in turn treated with respect and are provided with excellent customer service. All in all, their corporate culture has allowed them to establish themselves as a quality and value brand.

The importance of the brand image they have built as a result of their corporate values and vision is evident in their success. Liberty Autos has high employee retention rates (95%) and repeat customers who act as brand ambassadors. In addition they are the premier dealer for Cadillac in the Middle East and have been awarded Grand Master dealer for seven years running. These three values of loyalty, empathy and co-operation are conducive to creating an atmosphere through which the major departments (marketing, sales and service) are able to provide a unique customer experience that ultimately defines Liberty Autos' image. As such, how their brand image translates into their competitive advantage will be discussed below using the 7P's framework.

B. Competitive Advantage

Liberty Autos is a service provider who performs *marketing through services*. In essence they augment GM's products with their service. This is because the vehicle is at the core of the transaction between the dealer and the customer. The customer service provided by Liberty Autos is a value enhancing factor to the core product. Their corporate culture and values are indicative of their precedence on customer service and in turn being the dealer of choice. Accordingly, in order to do so they have had to align the key touch points of sales, services and marketing with the common goal of being the dealer of choice. Thus, they have been able to create a competitive advantage for themselves in providing a unique

customer experience. How they have achieved this competitive advantage can be illustrated using the 7P's framework.

1. Product

The core products for Liberty Autos are GM vehicles and Kawasaki motorcycles. The core product for GM has had some issues in the past; but since 2008 GM has been on a trajectory to remodel itself and establish itself as a player in the automobile industry. As such, the quality and workmanship of many GM products have drastically improved. Nonetheless, this is not a reason for Liberty Autos success but merely a contributing factor. Their supplementary product of service provision is the driving force behind their success. Their corporate values of loyalty, commitment and fairness as well as their vision of being the dealer of choice, translates into an environment where the customer is key and is the differentiating factor. Their corporate culture prompts a customer centric attitude that has allowed them to excel at the provision of customer service and is augmented by the other factors in the service marketing mix (7P's).

2. Price

The price of GM and Kawasaki product's play a role in building a value proposition in the customer's mind. Furthermore, the value proposition provided by the products needs to align with Liberty Auto's brand image of quality and value. As such, the price along with the warranty scheme of free scheduled maintenance for 3 years or 100,000Km acts as a cue to the value and quality of the product and in turn reflects on the Liberty Autos brand. Furthermore, customers usually associate a certain level of service along with price, with a greater expectation of good service accompanying high prices. Nevertheless, since customer service is the corner stone of Liberty Autos' business model, the customer is treated to exemplary service regardless of the vehicle they purchase. As such, by providing excellent customer service they are able to build on the value proposition of the product and increase its value without increasing prices.

3. Place

Value is also built through the convenience of locations and Liberty autos have 7 showrooms and service centers across the Emirates. The aim of the organization is to be available at the customers beckon and convenience to the customer in terms of service location as well as provision is a priority for Liberty Autos.

4. Physical Evidence

The interior feel of the location is vital to the value proposition instilled in the customers mind. The physical evidence of the showroom reflects on the brand image of the retailer and on what they can offer. Accordingly, with Liberty Autos the physical evidence within the show room is characterized by the Corporate Identity (CI) provided by GM for each one of its brands. Furthermore, Liberty Auto's CI is designed to augment and be reflective of GM's CI. The physical evidence within Liberty Autos such as the floor plan,

colors used and the dress code of the sales staff all work in conjunction to create an atmosphere that is conducive of sales. For instance, the floor plan and merchandising of vehicles is laid out in such a way that people are drawn to certain areas of the showroom and in these areas the new models are showcased. The colors used within the showroom are designed to be reflective of the design philosophy and CI of each of the brands. Thus, augmenting the brand's image and creating a unique look and feel. Finally, the dress code of the sales team is illustrative of the professional and respectful manner in which they aim to treat their clients.

5. Promotion

Nevertheless, without the adequate marketing communication, the value proposition nor brand image or awareness can be built in the minds of the consumer. Liberty Autos takes part in promoting its sales and products through the traditional media outlets and also uses social media. They utilize social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to open a line of dialogue with their customers rather than create a monologue. In addition they track their competitor's advertisements in order to stay competitive and use competitor intelligence to shape their promotions. Their strongest form of promotion is word of mouth. The organization's goal of being the dealer of choice is conducive to positive word of mouth as they aim to please all their customers and a happy customer will more than likely be willing to recommend. They are able to build this positive word of mouth through, excellent customer service, by building value in the product and rewarding their loyal customers. All their sales consultants are trained to the highest degree and are GM certified. As such, they are not only qualified to provide exemplary service but are prompted to do so. Additionally, Liberty Autos builds value in its product through the provision of service and maintenance schedules as well as a buy back guarantee to ease the cost of ownership and provide the customer with a stress free, pleasurable ownership experience. Finally, they also reward their repeat customers with discounts and a more personalized buying experience. Moreover, they are working on implementing a loyalty program to appreciate their faithful customers. They also employ service expectations to ensure that their customers are happy and are having a pleasurable ownership experience regardless of whether they are first time buyers or repeat customers. All in all, their promotional scheme of positive word of mouth is aligned with their vision of being the dealer of choice and they have used their promotional scheme along with the other marketing mix elements to build value in their services. However, this value creation would not be possible without the processes and participants involved.

6. Process

In order to achieve the vision of being the dealer of choice Liberty Autos implements knowledge management. Though an explicit organizational effort has not been made to institutionalize knowledge management in the organization, it has been very well practiced. As such, even though they do

not have a dedicated IT system to organize, gather and disseminate information from the employees, they do have a decision support system in place to provide managers with performance information. This information is then used to augment the skills of the employees in the areas where a deficiency exists. Additionally, they also employ mentorship programs to train new employees. As such, through the mentorship program they are able to share tacit knowledge from senior employees to new recruits. They also have an open door policy and Kaizen systems in place through which employees can share ideas and provide suggestions for improvement. This openness to employee ideas and suggestions is a key aspect of knowledge management, that also affects the people mix as it influences the employee's sense of appreciation and in turn morale. Moreover, this openness to employee ideas comes from their corporate value of loyalty and commitment; as such one can begin to see the 'trickle-down' effect of the corporate culture within Liberty Autos.

Nevertheless, knowledge management is simply not a one dimensional program about gathering and sharing information. Instead, it also includes the development of employee skills. Accordingly, Liberty Autos understands the need for skilled employees and ensures that all their employees are well trained. For instance their GM certified service technicians are the best in the Middle East, as they have won the GM Middle East general technician skill competition in 2010 as well as 2011 and came in second in 2012. Not only are their service technicians well trained, so are their sales consultants. Every sales consultant goes through a rigorousness training program courtesy of GM Middle East to hone their skills. As such, it would seem that Liberty Autos is trying to ensure that all of their employees develop core human capital rather than compulsory human capital, which is only required for day to day functioning of the organization [17]. Another aspect to knowledge management is preventing the loss of information. The corporate culture of Liberty Autos is conducive to creating a work environment where every employee feels comfortable and appreciated. Consequently, this leads to a high employee retention rate that in turn prevents the loss of information. Thus, the management of skills and knowledge within the organization allows them to develop their employees and work towards the goal of being the dealer of choice.

7. Participants

The relationships between key stakeholders are just as important as the processes involved in the provision of services. In Liberty Autos' case the key stakeholders are the customers, employees and the manufacturer (GM). Relationship marketing presumes that the organization can benefit from building strong ties with the key stakeholders. In Liberty Autos' case this would see true. They have managed to build a social bond with their customers. Their remarkable customer service has prompted their customers to see them not as a dealership but as a 'friend'. They have been able to achieve this remarkable level of customer service by trying to

personalize the service to each individual customer. As such, their sales people are called sales consultants; which is illustrative of the fact that they are trained to advise and consult the customer by listening to their needs and wants rather than push a product onto them. The sales consultants are also encouraged to build social bonds and long terms relationships with their customers by keeping open lines of communication and not ending the 'conversation' after the transaction is completed. In addition, Liberty Autos keeps track of customer information and tries to keep the customer in the loop by informing them about brand related events as well as new product launches. The company also actively monitors its customer's satisfaction level. Every month a random sample of customers are called and surveyed on their perception of the service provided. This done to ensure that all customers are satisfied if not elated with the level of service provided. This precedence on customer service stems from their overarching corporate vision of being the dealership of choice.

Nevertheless, relationship marketing also concerns itself with the internal relationships of an organization. The internal stakeholders for Liberty Autos are its employees and GM. They understand the importance of the people mix and as such have built strong relationships with their employees. They have done this by having open lines of communication and assisting them in achieving their career goals as well as helping them develop their skill sets. Additionally, they see their employees as the primary service provider and they understand that the service provided by the employee is reflective of their morale. As such, they screen all their employees for skills and talents that will assist them in their jobs. Furthermore, Liberty Autos offers training and development programs to all their employees to ensure that they are more than capable of performing the tasks assigned to them. They are concerned about employee fatigue and for instance, within the service department they employ job rotation to mitigate against the effects of fatigue. Consequently, they try to ensure that their employees are at their peak. In addition, they utilize a performance based compensation system that motivates the employees to provide the best service possible. As such, Liberty Autos has a less than five percent employee turn-over rate. This illustrates the precedence of the people mix within Liberty Autos and the fact that the employees are clearly satisfied with their work environment.

Moreover, having a good relationship with the manufacturer is also important. As such, they have strong working relationship with GM. The strong relationship between the two is illustrated by the fact that Liberty Autos' corporate identity is reflective of GM's and by the fact that GM sees Liberty Autos as the benchmark for other dealers to strive towards. In addition, the lines of communication between the two are kept fairly open and suggestions for improvement are both warranted and accepted readily by both parties. This strong relationship with GM has allowed Liberty Autos to be invited to take part in corporate meetings and events such as new product launches. Accordingly, their close ties with the

manufacturer allow them to be kept in the loop with regards to brand developments. They then use this information to enhance their infrastructure and develop their services in accordance with the brand's growth. Their relationship with GM has also allowed them to receive market research information via the Brand Health Monitor established by GM; this is a valuable tool to the gauge the market performance of the brands and performance of Liberty Autos as a retailer. As such, they use the BHM to evaluate their standing in the market as well as their performance. Ultimately, the close ties with their stakeholders are an integral part of how Liberty Autos established itself as the dealer of choice to both its external and internal customers.

Ultimately, Liberty Autos have been able to establish a competitive advantage in being able to build value through offering an exceptional customer service experience. This was possible as a result of the service mix utilized, being reflective of their overarching corporate culture.

IX. CONCLUSION

Services marketing is a field filled with intangibles. Accordingly, being a successful service provider is no easy task. Liberty Autos through their strategic framework have been able to integrate sales, marketing and service portfolios of the organization to satisfy their ultimate goal of being the dealer of choice. Adding to their integration effort, the corporate culture as well as their utilization of the services marketing mix has yielded them enduring success. Thus, Liberty Autos has been able to build a competitive advantage of providing exemplary customer service that cannot be easily duplicated by their competitors.

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