TRANSFORMING A TRADITIONAL, FAMILY-RUN CAR DEALERSHIP INTO A DIGITAL-ERA MODERN SERVICE PROVIDER

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Abstract: The automotive industry today faces multiple challenges. The automotive market is characterised by frequent changes and technological developments in comfort and safety of travel by all types of vehicles. The division between traditional and modern services is related to their susceptibility to technological progress. We should differentiate between two types of technology: technology used directly in vehicles and technology utilized in the delivery of products and services, which is transforming today's automotive sales. It is the technological sphere that has contributed to numerous changes, the cumulative effect of which affects the perception of services as 'modern'. Nowadays, customers expect a modern approach to sales, including the possibility of transferring the car sales process to the Internet, a virtual world in which, in the 21st century, state-of-the-art, immediately accessible solutions are expected. It is thus necessary to move traditional automotive sales online (always accessible location) in order to create a more convenient way of buying a car, regardless of restrictions such as those that emerged due to the outbreak of pandemic. This article presents a pilot study conducted in a family business specialising in the sale of new and second-hand cars. The study revealed a need to change car sales processes over the next few years and introduce modern automotive services. Purchasing a new or second-hand vehicle online no longer seems like a distant future.

Keywords: modern service, family company, design thinking, car sales

Introduction

The automotive industry today faces multiple challenges. The automotive market is characterised by frequent changes and technological developments improving comfort and safety of travel by all types of vehicles. As Dominiak (2017, p. 82) points out, the division between traditional and modern services is related to their susceptibility to technological progress. We should differentiate between two types of technology: technology used directly in vehicles and technology utilized in the delivery of products and services, which is transforming today's automotive market. Kotler et al. (2017) also indicate that it is the technological sphere that has contributed to numerous changes, the cumulative effect of which affects the perception of services as 'modern'. Nowadays, customers expect a modern approach to sales, including the possibility of transferring the car sales process to the Internet, a virtual world in which, in the 21st century, state-of-the-art, immediately accessible solutions are expected. It is thus necessary to move traditional automotive sales online (i.e. to an always-accessible location) in order to render them a "modern service".

Simultaneously, analysis of the 2020 report by Simon Kemp shows that the share of Internet users using computers is decreasing year on year (in 2016 by -20%, in 2019 by -6.8%). Interestingly, a noticeable decline (-27% from 2018) in tablet user activity can also be noticed. Hence, a considerable increase in mobile phone Internet user activity, (+8.6% year-on-year in 2020), comes as no surprise. Markets are becoming more saturated and customers, thanks to instant internet access, have a wide choice of products and can easily compare offers (Petrykowska, 2013), which facilitates making informed purchasing choices. The same applies to the automotive market (new and second-hand vehicles), where the customer, before buying a vehicle, performs a thorough market research on the Internet, browsing technical specifications, reviews, videos and photos of the vehicles.
A study by Deloitte shows that more than 96% of customers use the Internet to find information about products, offers and available financial tools. In terms of digital impact, automotive industry enjoys one of the higher scores across all age groups (62%). It is ahead of such categories as children's and baby products (61%), clothing (58%) or food (50%). As emphasised in the Deloitte study, the most popular vehicle purchasing model is using the importer's direct sales website, preferred by nearly 32% of potential car buyers.
A study by Ernst & Young (2019) shows that around 80% of customers still choose to buy a car at a traditional dealership, although the younger the customers, the keener they are to buy online. In the 45+ age group, the percentage of online buyers is only 4%, but in the 25–35 age group the proportion reaches 10%. Importantly, the EY study found that 31% of customers at least consider buying a car online.

Given the above context, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How can a company operating in the automotive industry (car sales/automotive services) prepare for different market situations including economic crises (e.g. caused by pandemic)?
2. What technologies can a company selling new and second hand cars use?
3. How can the use of the latest technology change the traditional car sales process?

The family company XYZ decided to find answers to these questions and identify relevant solutions in order to become a modern enterprise, flexible and prepared for various market situations, including economic crises.
The R&D work carried out at XYZ forms the bulk of the case study presented in this article. The aim of the process was answer the questions as formulated above, and thus acquire new knowledge in order to improve the existing processes and services, as well as to introduce new services to the range offered by XYZ.
The R&D process specific to XYZ was preceded by analysis of existing studies and conceptualisation of "modern services" to provide the foundation for addressing Question 1 listed above.

Results of research work

Transforming a traditional service into a modern one

The development of mobile technologies and the increasing focus on convenience of Internet users has forced the creation of a new (mobile) sales channel. A large number of companies which have so far offered traditional sales service will follow the trends set by Internet users, and mobile applications will create additional channels for sales of their services (e.g. reservation/purchase). Some services can be delivered fully online via the apps, as is the case for digital products, which do not require delivery or handling, e.g. ordering and delivery of an electronic birthday card (offered by Envelo – Polish Post Office) or the increasing popular Software as a Service (SaaS) software sales model can serve as an example. Table 1 presents the most important attributes distinguishing a traditional service from a modern one.

Table 1. Attributes defining traditional and modern services

Attributes	Traditional service	Modern service
Access channel	Personal, telephone	Personal, telephone, electronic
Technology used	Core technologies used only for the service process	IT technologies, mobile technologies, Internet
Knowledge saturation	Negligible	High
Mobility	Lack of mobility	Availability of mobile applications
Flexibility	Low	Tailoring to customer expectations (readiness to individualise the offer, service and communication with the customer)
Interactivity	Poor, contact-based purchasing	Strong, in customer relationship
Inter-industry	N/a	Combining different services from different industries
Self-service	Not available	Self-service channels available
Multichannel	Up to 2 communication channels available	At least 3 communication channels available, e.g. SMS, chat, phone
Relational mechanism	Underdeveloped	Developed, also through IT means

Source: Own study based on Ostrowski (2020) p. 19.

Thus, according to Table 1, modern services can be considered to be those that belong to knowledge-based services, are supported by technical/technological progress and are developing dynamically (generating GDP, rising employment). In the context of this study, modern services are understood as traditional services provided with the use of interactive technologies.

Modifying and improving traditional services, modernising the ways in which services are provided, implementing new services/service process technologies, increasing the number of access channels and introducing self-service and personalisation are some of the possibilities that can turn a traditional service into a modern one.

Gałązkiewicz (2017) points out that it is modern interactive technological solutions that support consumer experiences, help to build image capital and help to gain knowledge about the service consumers. On the other hand, however, technology alone will not perform these functions, and therefore it must form a hybrid in which it benefits from a direct relationship with the environment.

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), a hybrid service consists of both services and tangible goods, e.g. a restaurant. In the case of modern services, a hybrid service can be provided partly in a traditional way and partly online, i.e. using the Internet or another electronic channel. Blended services can also be distinguished, characterized by the use of different channels for access and management (telephone, Internet or personal contact), e.g. of a bank account (Kieżel, 2004).

Table 2 shows the distinguishing features (attributes) of a modern service categorised into essential (and often also available in traditional services) and optional attributes. Essential features of a modern service must be present during or after the provision of the service, otherwise we are dealing with a traditional service. The optional features of a modern service, on the other hand, do not need to be present to conclude that a service has a modern character.

Table 2. Essential and optional features of a modern service

Distinguishing features of a modern service	
Essential	**Optional**
Electronic channel of communication with the customer	It is possible to order/commission the service via a remote access channel (also the method of service delivery)
Website	Use of Big Data and analysing customer data, sales data, aggregating information from different sources
Social media profiles	Establishing customer relationships through social media
Mobile website	Mobile application
Customer data management	Using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
Ensuring customer loyalty	Having a loyalty programme
Conduct customer satisfaction surveys/studies	Keeping the customer engaged
Service provider's response to complaints	Building the relationship with the customer after the service provision
Multiple payment options available, including online	Flexible working hours/ 24h customer access
High data security	Ensuring a pleasant experience
Protection of anonymity	Dedicated "personal account manager" for the customer
High credibility	Rewards for recommending the business to others
Convenient service ordering	SMS channel for customer communication
Keeping promises	Keeping customer informed about the current status of the service
Keeping the customer satisfied	Continuous interaction with the customer
Easy to make comparisons and choices	Possible customisation
Easy shopping and payment	Opportunities for the customers to participate in the design/improvement of services
	Use of geolocation in the customer service process
	Provision of rich content (tutorials, guides, valuable information)

Source: Own study based on Ostrowski (2020) p. 19.

The analysis of Table 2 above shows that a regular, traditional service can be transformed into a modern service if, for example, an electronic communication channel is created, the company appears/is visible in social media, has a mobile version of its website, manages customer data (e.g. CRM system), as well as takes care of customer satisfaction by responding to complaints or conducting regular electronic customer satisfaction surveys. Skillful identification of market niches and an attempt to integrate traditional services with modern technologies (especially

interactive ones) increases a chance of achieving market success (PARP, 2011, p. 52).

The attributes listed in Table 2 show that the use of interactive technologies is a significant component of a modern service, and often a necessary condition for its functioning on the market and reaching customers.

Car sales and service processes related to the after-sales service should be provided in a modern manner, using state-of-the-art technologies and paying attention to the elements presented in Table 2. Each of the elements should be used to modify the existing traditional sales and service processes, e.g. lockers available 24h/7, where one can leave the keys to his/her car and collect a replacement vehicle without human presence at any time of day or night.

An automotive sales business such as XYZ will face specific challenges related to moving from "mostly-traditional" to "modern" service model, but the general principles governing digital communications, multi-channel sales, developing and managing interactive customer relations etc. still apply.

Field research: data collection

The project was carried out in two stages between 17.08.2020 and 27.08.2020. Stage I included preparatory work for the R&D part in the form of Design Thinking Sessions. Design Thinking (DT) is a methodology for identifying problems and finding solutions aimed at satisfying user needs (Brown, 2008). The DT methodology was chosen for this project due to the fact that its aim was to find solutions that are: desired by users; technologically feasible; and economically viable. The purpose of the DT sessions was to gather information, understand the needs of the prospective customer and examine the current values and processes at XYZ.

The session was held at the XYZ head office with eleven participants from the XYZ staff. The session was moderated by the author of the article.

Table 3. List of participants in the Design Thinking session

Item	Position / function
1	Owner
2	Branch manager (in another city)
3	Service manager & workshop master (also responsible for warranties and product safety)
4	Showroom manager
5	Marketing
6	IT specialist
7	Quality management, training management
8	Showroom manager, Nadin dispatcher, online ordering
9	Showroom manager
10	Service manager
11	Chief Accountant

At the beginning of the session, the moderator presented the plan of the session and introduced the participants to the Design Thinking method and discussed the phases of a Design Thinking session, as follows:

1. Empathise – the challenges we face to solve are rarely our own, so to design well you need to understand who you are designing for and what is important to that person. Empathising is the process of understanding people in the context of a challenge: the ways and reasons for their behaviour; their physical and emotional needs; their ways of thinking about the world and their values.

2. Define – the process of understanding and clarifying the challenge (synthesis stage), based on: for whom we are designing, what their needs are, what context should be taken into account.

3. Ideate (create solutions) – the process of creating a large number of solutions. This becomes the starting point and material for "processing" in the subsequent verification and selection of the most appropriate solution for prototyping.

4. Prototype – the process of creating a physical "sketch", model, prototype of a solution that should be verified as soon as possible. Prototyping allows you to deepen your knowledge of the solution – questions can be asked that go deeper and deeper to verify the validity e accuracy of the idea.

5. Test – the process of obtaining feedback on the prototype from the users for whom the solution is being developed.

Following the introduction to the technique, the presenter moved on to the first phase of the Design Thinking method, i.e. "Empathising".

During this phase, customer satisfaction survey results were used to identify three factors important in automotive services/modern vehicle sales, to be used subsequently to create so-called "customer personas", i.e. personifications of typical showroom customers.

-What annoys the customer?
-What are the customer's expectations?
-What are the customer's aspirations?

The whole group jointly identified and roughly characterised 4 basic personas, with two main ones fully developed and selected for the subsequent stages of the DT Session.

PERSONA 1: Middle-aged man (up to 50 years old), married with two children, self-employed, living in the city.

PERSONA 2: Middle-aged woman (up to 50 years old), single, no children, working in a school as a teacher, living in a rural area.

Later on Persona 1 was modified from a self-employed business owner to someone employed in a mid-management position as participants noticed that the attitudes of business owners were different from employed people.

The next step confronted the participants' first ideas of the 'draft personas' with data obtained from actual customers. In order to do that, 13 in-person interviews with the customers of the showroom were conducted by the participants of the Design Thinking Session. The interviews were qualitative in character and concerned pain points, expectations and aspirations in relation to car sales.

The participants used paper questionnaires with questions covering the three aforementioned key elements. This data collection took approximately 30 minutes, which allowed for gathering fairly extensive information from each respondent. Collected data was then summarised jointly by the group with the support from the moderator.

The information obtained allowed the group to better understand Customers in terms of:

-the ways and reasons for their behaviour,
-their physical and emotional needs,
-their ways of thinking about the world and their values.

The "empathising" phase was followed by defining the challenges and developing the personas for further work. During this phase, a group of Participants drew up an "empathy map" (using the mind map technique) for "Persona 1" that concerned the collection of the car during the sales process. The mind map shows what the Persona:

-thinks and feels,
-hears,
-sees,
-speaks and does,
-fears,
-aspires to.

Having gained a more nuanced understanding of the customers' perspective and the context, the group progressed to the "Ideate" phase of the DT session, during which solutions to the posed challenge were generated. The "Ideate" phase allowed the group to generate multiple solutions of varying quality. This phase typically stimulates creativity at different levels. It is worth noting that it is often the most unusual ideas that result in innovative solutions ("thinking out of the box"), by allowing us to look at the problem from a different angle.

The ideas generated during the "Ideate" phase could be grouped in the following broad categories:

-Car collection/handover,
-Application/website,
-Managing the buyer's time (while in the showroom).

The participants voted for the two aspects to be worked on during the next phase of the DT Session, with the following results:

-Car handover – 8 votes,
-Application/website – 5 votes
-Managing the buyer's time – 2 votes.

Based on the vote results, handover and application/website were selected for further work.

The next part of the DT session skipped the first two phases of DT and began directly in the "Ideate" phase, starting with car handover. As a result of brainstorming, teamwork and then grouping the elements, five areas related to the handover process were identified:

-Vehicle presentation,

-Making friends,
-A happy moment,
-The setting,
-The finishing touches/thank you.

The "Ideate" phase was then repeated for the functionality of the application and the website. As a result of brainstorming, teamwork and then grouping the elements, seven areas related to the functionality of the application/website have been identified:

-Functionalities,
-Calendars,
-Call Centre,
-Remote communication,
-Repair process,
-Forms,
-Other (e.g. marketing stickers to encourage downloading the app, adding Google reviews and maintaining the CRM system).

Following the second part of the "Ideate" phase, the presenter summarized the results obtained during the day.

Identifying customer needs

Digitalization of traditional sales processes or new services starts with identifying the target market not just in terms of demographics or locations but values, needs and expectations of the customers. The works completed during the Design Thinking session provided information on the expectations of XYZ's, emphasizing the expectation of a car dealer that is innovative, provides modern automotive services and can be accessed online.

Customer expectations can be categorized into 10 categories:

- Security: family security, taking care of health, improving the quality of life, social status, taking care of the family, peaceful retirement;
- Modernity: new technologies, remote access, mobile payments, electric/hybrid engines;
- Time: the shortest possible waiting time for purchase/procedures, fast car pick-up, the shortest possible repair/servicing time, immediate response, parking space available for the customer with an appointment, indicated with the customer's name;
- Reliability and professionalism: good relationship/cooperation between the seller and the customer, competence, reliable and professional advice, taking time to establish the customer's needs and suggest optimal solutions, comparison of models/brands, suggestions for possible trim/equipment configurations, honestly presented photos of the vehicle together with an

accurate and honest description (credibility), including photos of parts that were damaged or replaced;

- Ecology: environmental friendliness, care for the environment, use of renewable energy sources;
- Reliability: previous experience, stereotypes, technology, guarantee of mobility, ease of use, quick resolution of basic problems/failures, for longer repairs – provision of a replacement vehicle;
- Communication: availability 24h/7, immediate contact, good Seller-Customer relationship, implementation of online processes, ongoing automatic feedback, establishing customer's needs and making suggestions based on those, opportunity to watch the vehicle during repairs;
- Decision: focus on growth (new customers), acknowledging all decision makers involved – taking care of the relationship with them (wife, children), in case of negative assessment of the financial situation – helping to solve the problem,
- Wow effect: in today's "rush era", the collection of a newly purchased vehicle (new or second-hand) should be a "ritual" to be remembered by the customer and his/her friends and family, the customer's waiting area;
- Price: good and cheap product, everything is too expensive, possibility of price negotiation (building customer satisfaction).

These results contribute to answering the research Question 1: How can a company operating in the automotive industry (sales of cars / automotive services) prepare for different market situations, including economic crises (e.g. caused by pandemic)?

Identifying the needs of the customers is the first step in designing the processes of selling products and services adapted to those needs, including the possibility of executing these processes remotely, i.e. online.

Design Thinking Session results

The session led to the identification of the processes to be implemented when designing a modern car sales process, both offline and fully-online.

Traditional sales – offline

Several factors were identified as having the potential to improve the traditional offline sales process.

The WOW effects at the handover time

When considering the collection/handover, ways to make the moment more attractive and memorable in order to achieve a WOW effect were investigated. Five aspects of the handover that could contribute to the WOW effect were identified:

1.A happy moment

2.The setting
3.Vehicle presentation
4.Making friends
5.The finishing touches/thank you.

Modern customer ''waiting area''

Research into the process of waiting for a repair/appointment was aimed at identifying ways to make the time spent by the customer in the showroom more appealing so that any waiting time passes in a positive atmosphere, does not drag, and does not feel like wasting time. The following five elements essential for the modern wating area were identified :

1.Rental
2.Pleasenters (diversions and attractions outside the showroom, including substitute mobility)
3.Substitute mobility
4.Test drives of other vehicles while waiting for service
5.Attraction vouchers

Fast track options

When analysing the process of purchasing a new and second-hand vehicle and its possible financing, it was examined how to meet the expectations of customers who do not have enough time to visit the dealership or want to complete all the steps online. The result is a solution that combines fast-track functionality with a CRM system.

CRM System

The analysis also included examining how to store existing and potential customer data in one place accessible to all employees, including data on customers interested in second-hand vehicles. This resulted in a solution that combines the functionality of a CRM system with an interactive platform, described in the next section of the article

ONLINE SALES

The study allowed answering research Question 2, i.e: What technologies can a company selling new and second-hand cars use? The answer to this question is the use of the Internet for customer-supplier communication (Ostrowski, 2020) and the use of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality technologies, thanks to which it is possible to view offers of new/second-hand vehicles without leaving home.

In addition to supplementing offline car sales with solutions utilising modern technology the study allowed for the identification of technologies to be used in the design of a modern car sales process that will be carried out fully online:

- Images of a new/second-hand vehicle in a 360 degree view
- Vehicle presentation using Virtual Reality / Augmented Reality (in the showroom)
- Use of virtual reality technology for vehicle presentation (online)
- Accurate, honest and full description of the technical condition (second-hand vehicle sales)

- Database of vehicles available “off the shelf” including details of their configurations.
- Online reservation and payment - fast and convenient.
- WOW effect on the delivery of a new/ second-hand car.
- Door-to-door service (collection of the car/test drive, servicing).
- Modern waiting room
- Fast track option
- Re-lease (“get to know your new car better” session)
- Modern, remote trade-in process
- CRM system – including wishes and expectations of customers as well as their contact or purchase data.

Research question 3 (How can the use of the latest technology change the traditional car sales process?) was answered by identifying elements/factors, which have been formulated, analysed and developed on the basis of the identified needs of customers and distinctive features of modern services, presented earlier in Table 2. A list of component processes/services that will make up each of the e-services was developed as a result of the project, but remains confidential to XYZ pending implementation.

Conclusion

The study made it possible to understand the expectations of customers connected with modern automotive market, which was used as a basis for a R&D process aimed at identifying factors necessary and desirable in designing a modern automotive showroom or developing new automotive services.

Purchasing a new or second-hand vehicle via the Internet is no longer a distant future. An online car sales service with which the customer can communicate via an application is a modern solution that companies competing in automotive sales market must implement.

In addition, the key processes such as collection/delivery of the vehicle, which will be carried out in modern, specially prepared facilities or in a place indicated by the customer, are moving form “premium services” to becoming a standard in the industry.

Limitations

Among the major limitations affecting the scope and the course of this study was practical access to company and people (car dealer's clients) willing to make their data and information available. The research was necessarily limited to one car dealership in Poland also providing car services. The managers responsible for key processes agreed to participate in all stages of the study utilizing Design Thinking method. The qualitative-only approach adopted in the study, although suitable for the main purpose of the project, (finding answers to research questions), entailed that the results were not tested quantitatively and have a prevailingly descriptive character. The main limitation of the study was related to the purposeful selection

of the company that agreed to conduct the research utilizing the Design Thinking method and restrictions regarding the disclosure of information. The research questions streamlined the research in an appropriate way and can be used for further large-scale research. Data obtained from the company and generated during the DT session brought results that indicate the direction of development and possible modifications of processes in the car sales. However, as some of the research results are trade secrets of the company, not all elements could be discussed in detail.

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CYFROWA REWOLUCJA W PROCESIE SPRZEDAŻY SAMOCHODÓW W RODZINNYM SALONIE SAMOCHODOWYM

Streszczenie: Świat dzisiejszej motoryzacji stoi przed wieloma wyzwaniami. Rynek motoryzacyjny jest rynkiem częstych przemian i zmian technologicznych w aspekcie technologii, które są wykorzystywane, aby poprawić komfort czy zadbać o bezpieczeństwo podróżujących. Podział na usługi tradycyjne i nowoczesne jest związany z podatnością tych usług na postęp technologiczny. Technologia w pojazdach to jeden aspekt, ale technologia w dostarczaniu produktów i usług to drugi aspekt, który zmienia dzisiejszy rynek sprzedaży. To właśnie sfera technologiczna przyczyniła się do wielu zmian, których skumulowany efekt wpływa na postrzeganie usług jako „nowoczesnych". To właśnie dziś Klient oczekuje nowoczesnego podejścia do sprzedaży, w tym również możliwości przeniesienia dotychczasowego procesu sprzedaży samochodów do Internetu, świata wirtualnego, od którego w dobie XXI wieku oczekuje się najnowocześniejszych rozwiązań oraz natychmiastowego dostępu do nich, niezależnie od pory dnia czy dnia tygodnia (24/7). W związku z tym niezbędne dziś jest przeniesienie tradycyjnej sprzedaży w branży motoryzacyjnej do Internetu (miejsca, które będzie zawsze dla Klienta dostępne), aby stały się wygodniejszym sposobomem na zakup samochodu niezależnie od ograniczeń

np. takich jakie pojawiły się po wystapieniu Pandemii. W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowane zostanie badanie pilotażowe, przeprowadzone w firmie rodzinnej specjalizującej się w sprzedaży samochodów nowych i używanych. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że w ciągu najbliższych lat należy zmienić procesy sprzedaży samochodów oraz wprowadzić nowoczesne usługi motoryzacyjne. Zakup nowego lub używanego pojazdu przez Internet to już nie tak odległa przyszłość.

Słowa kluczowe: nowoczesne usługi, firma rodzinna, design thinking, sprzedaż samochodów