

Re-opening case study

Specialist Cars

June 2020

Introduction

Umesh Samani is a well-recognised personality within the UK's used car sector. The current chairman of the IMDA, Umesh and his Specialist Cars business based in Stoke-on-Trent have received multiple awards for their approach to used car retailing. The recurring features of these awards are Umesh's capacity to embrace change and care for his customers. The current environment is a platform for these skills and unsurprisingly, Umesh has been busy throughout the lockdown, emerging on June 1st ready to engage with customers; embracing social distancing and promoting reassurance.

As a smaller dealer, the steps taken by Umesh provide a great template for the broader small dealer community. Here are his tips to help dealers.

Tip 1 – Lead from the front

For smaller car dealers, personality and culture can be invaluable assets and this can often be the business leader. Umesh proudly fronts his business and works to meet and greet every customer. This personal care which has always been important is even more critical as the UK emerges from lockdown.

Customers are looking for reassurance, care and thoughtfulness. Get it right and as these two Google reviews in May demonstrate, the response can be raving fans;

 The owner is a really reasonable bloke helping at all costs with regards to situation we are in at moment I would highly recommend.

 If you are in the market to change your car you could do a lot worse than take a look at Specialist Cars run by Umesh Samani in Stoke on Trent. My wife and I were looking for an SLK200 online which there were quite a lot and found one at Specialist Cars. The car was overbooked in price but was in 'mint' condition with low mileage as all his cars are in 'mint' condition. This is a good place to purchase any car, very helpful, considerate, not pushy. Would definitely go back there as one of the best places I have bought a car from and there has been too many to count. Thank you Umesh.

As they both make clear, **price is not everything.**

Tip 2 – Communicate, communicate, communicate

Throughout the lockdown, Umesh kept communicating; indeed, he stepped up activity with customers, IMDA colleagues, business partners and collaborators. This reassurance message will continue to be every bit as important in the months ahead.

Much of Specialist Cars' communication takes place on social media, but reassurance is also prominent on the business' home page.

Self-filmed videos, regular comments and quick responses are all part of Umesh's social media approach and while he will happily accept that he is not a digital native, he is very clear that everyone can leverage the platforms.

To add the personal touch, Umesh has fronted a campaign that informs customers of all the steps they have taken to be ready for social distancing sales and sanitisation. The latest video to go online is great video of the 'Sany Car' ozone generator he is using to remove bacteria and allergens from every car for sale or going through his workshop. A comment on his LinkedIn post noted to support his approach; **“Retail customers are nervous at the moment. Any promotion of good practice will be a real benefit.”**



Tip 3 – Watch your cost base

Buying, preparing, stocking and marketing used cars can be a cash flow challenge. Lockdown meant ageing and depreciating stock which made the challenge even greater.

Umesh has a twin approach to cash flow; cost out/value in. In short, Umesh has long worked to undertake much of his preparation and marketing cost on a DIY basis that can add value.

- 👉 **Preparation** – with a modest in-house aftersales capacity he can keep costs down and use the aftersales team as a stand-alone profit centre that also supports customer retention and enhances lifetime value. **“Some customers may put off their next purchase, but I can still stay connected to them and make some money by meeting their aftersales needs.”**
- 👉 **Maximise in-house marketing** – while Umesh displays stock on car aggregators, he continues to assess the cost/value continuously and is increasingly focussing on social media. Umesh is active on all of the main platforms, where he has control of the content and where the business personality and culture can shine through.
- 👉 **Customers are your best sales people** – Umesh encourages every customer to share their experiences on social media and to post reviews

This combined approach has contributed to a healthy reduction in costs and a move away from leading on price alone.

Tip 4 – Transparency

Linked to communication, Umesh is passionate about transparency, something he believes will become more important as consumers look for their next car post-lockdown.

Umesh’s highly effective and simple approach to transparency is to embrace the principle in everything and make this approach central to his marketing content, for example:

- 👉 *“There are never any hidden charges on the purchase price;*
- 👉 *We provide a full HD video walk around with up to 50 images and cutting edge 360 degree interactive interior pictures – a fully transparent buying experience. You can buy your car from the comfort of your armchair;*
- 👉 *When you buy from me you know you are dealing with a reputable dealer, in a no-pressure environment, a dealer who has built his business on trust, integrity and respect. Have a read of my customer reviews at #raving fans.”*

Tip 5 - Embrace digital

Umesh has a won plaudits for his commitment to digital and has championed the use of technology in dealer marketing 'videos sell cars' is one of his favourite calls to action. To dealers who feel videos are too difficult and time consuming his simple message is; **"a 3 minute video takes 3 minutes (yes, some I do take more time if they are special with editing) however majority are 2-4 mins and that's all it takes; instead of having that extra coffee, do a video."**

The website is packed with other neat digital touches to help people buy and sell cars, and we particularly like the very personal and authentic messaging in the "About Us" section; it brings Umesh's approach to life and is very compelling. But does it work? Well how about this review posted on June 2nd:

“ Saw a lovely BMW 5 series at Umesh Samani Specialist Cars in Stoke but living in Scotland and Covid 19 we couldn't get down to see it. Umesh described the car to us on his walk round video, 360 images and lots of pictures. We bought the car on his description and trusted his word without seeing it. We had the car collected on 1st June 2020 and it was exactly as Umesh had described it on the video. A really genuine honest guy who goes the extra mile to make sure you are happy with the car can't praise the man highly enough and would recommend him to anyone.



Tip 6 – Seek out support and collaborators

Being a small dealer means many do not have the resources or expertise to embrace change. Right now, change is coming from all angles so, seeking help and best practices should be a priority.

Some options:

- **Join the IMDA** – Formed by dealers, for dealers, the Independent Motor Dealers Association provides a range of support tools and initiatives
- **Speak to your suppliers** – a good supplier will often be able to provide added value support; training, F&I expertise, digitisation support and tools and marketing help .
- Ask for insights and feedback on social media, notably the B2B platform LinkedIn

Conclusion

Umesh closes by reflecting:

“ There is no question that COVID-19 is a challenge for car dealers; it is also an opportunity for forward-looking dealers to leverage the value of that vital commodity; trust. From the day I opened the doors, trust-building was something that I was sure would be a differentiator. Transparency and fairness in everything is central to what we do and how we do it. We have worked to make buying a car easy; not on price, but on the quality of the car and buying experience. It is embracing this ethos that will be critical for dealers in the months ahead and into the long-term

Contact us

MotoNovo Finance Ltd
One Central Square
Cardiff
CF10 1FS

www.motonovofinance.com

