**Are Your Customers Satisfied With Your Availability?**

 ***By Valerie Ziebron VRZ Consulting Co***

 Spring has officially arrived. Temperatures in most parts of the country are beginning to rise, and most parts of the country are beginning to rise, and people are ready to get outside and enjoy the nice weather ahead. In fact, many southern states have already seen temperatures in the 80's, perfect weather for boating. Spring also brings daylight saving time to most states in the U.S., and with the time change, many customers are likely to be out shopping a little later than normal due to the fact that we have sunlight for a longer period in the evening. While you are no doubt familiar with these facts, have you made the changes in your dealership's hours of operation to accommodate them?

    If you are looking to improve your customers' perception of your hours of business, the real question to ask is "what's within your control?" Are there ways you can make your dealership more accessible and convenient for your customers? These days, customers are looking 24/7 access. While that may seem like an impossible task, there are ways to create a 24/7 impression without draining yourself, your staff, or your resources.

    Let's take a look at your hours of operation first. Here's a common sense approach. Restaurants that serve breakfast are open in the morning since that is when most people eat breakfast. Are you open during the hours when most people use their boats? It's important to ask yourself why it is that you choose to keep your current hours of operation. Is the schedule convenient for staff or for the customers? Could you possibly stagger shifts to keep your doors open a bit longer with your existing staff?

    Often, we see a lower CSI score in the area of business hours because a dealership was not open during the hours posted in the front of the store or promised to a customer. Here are a couple of easy ways to avoid this confusion:

**Check the posting of your hours** on your storefront, on your website and on the Yamaha site that customers see when they use the dealer locator. Make sure the hours match your current hours of operation and if not, change it immediately. Also, make sure everything is updated as soon as you make the change from your winter to summer hours.

**Communicate changes in hours** so that your customers are aware of them as soon as possible. You can communicate your hours on your site, in a newsletter, in the window of your store, and in your hold message on your phone system.

**Keeping your doors open later**, hiring staff to accommodate the longer hours, or changing your location does take investment on your part. And anytime you make an investment like that, it's important to look at the return or the potential return. When it comes to hours of operation or location, look at investment opportunities that allow you to offer services that make your dealership easier to do business with for your customer. Have you considered the following?

**Improving your delivery services to include weekend hours:** Would it make sense to schedule some deliveries for Saturdays as well as Sunday afternoons?

**Creating or improving upon mobile service:** Do your customers know they can call and depend on you for service matters during weekend outings or tournaments?

**Adding after hours drop off and pick up:** This is a great, easy way to work with customers who may not be able to get to your dealership during your normal hours of operation.

**Establishing an emergency, after-hours phone service:** With this service in place, customers can use to reach someone from the dealership anytime. Make it easy on your staff by rotating the person responsible for answering the calls.

   Setting up effective auto-responses for your website and expanding your online offerings: Remember, your website and email is open 24/7 is always considered to be open for business 24/7. Can your customers order parts, schedule service, set up a demo, get information about products or ask questions and get answers through your site? If not, it may be worth the investment to put some of these things in place so you are less likely to miss a qualified lead.

   Remember that being open and available for your customers not only increases their satisfaction, and thus your CSI scores, but also builds loyalty and serves to increase sales and profitability. Though these may seem like basic changes, sometimes the simple solutions provide the greatest return on investment. Take a few minutes to make sure your meeting your customers' expectations when it comes to availability, and you will thank yourself at the end of a busy and successful high-season.