



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Investing in your Employees

Whether it's called professional development, continuing education or lifelong learning, today's businesses need to invest in some form of ongoing training for their employees. Not only does it show that employers care, but that they require staff who are more experienced and capable in their roles, resulting in employees that are not only more engaged but happier and therefore more productive.

In most jurisdictions across Canada, it's mandatory for auto salespeople to complete a certification process that includes an educational component. But for smart employers, there are other professional skills, talents – and benefits – to be developed.

Encouraging employee retention

At the Automotive Business School of Canada, Georgian College, there are a variety of courses available to auto industry employees. "It's important to train employees in a way that not only recognizes individual needs, but also ensures everyone is meeting the same standards," says Heather Ummels, manager of continuing education and workforce development at the Automotive Business School of Canada.

Ummels says companies invest in professional development in order to encourage employees to be engaged, since it's often been shown, they're more likely to remain committed to both their job and the company as a result. "[Professional development] shows you have an interest and investment in a person, and that makes them want to stay," she says.

Currently, the courses at the school can be delivered online, which is very appealing to the auto industry. "We're marketing courses outside of Ontario, since we can customize training based on need," Ummels says. "If an auto dealers' association from out west asked us to package specific courses for them, we can create a custom online portal for that group."

Appealing to Generation 'Y'

Gerlinde Herrmann, a human resources consultant who specializes in retention consulting, says no matter what the sector is, retention issues tend to be similar.

"Professional development is a good way to combat turnover, especially if you're targeting the younger market," she asserts. "That's a group [which] looks for change, new challenges and new excitement."

"Often kids go into dealerships because they don't know what else to do," says Herrmann. "If you're going to hire a bright young person who doesn't know yet what they really want to do, wouldn't it be better to help them make a decision to stay there?" she asks. "You want young kids who are interested and ambitious and eager to get better – after all they could be your next generation of managers."

Driving positive outcomes

"When sales people become certified through our learning solutions, they have the knowledge and skill to perform more effectively for consumers," says Paul McCallum, group account director at Maritz Canada Inc., an organization specializing in consumer loyalty marketing, employee engagement and sales channel performance. "A certified salesperson sells twice as many cars as a non-certified salesperson."

Maritz delivers an annual certification program that involves quarterly milestones and objectives throughout the course of the year, and ultimately, a certification.

"We design and develop programs on behalf of the auto manufacturers, and take input from them as well as the dealers," says McCallum. "We listen closely to what the dealers' needs and requirements are, and work with the manufacturer to align priorities. You can't do it in isolation."

The critical building blocks include product knowledge, the value proposition for the consumer, and effectively communicating with them. "We see considerable increase in overall

customer satisfaction when [such a process] is delivered by certified salespeople and service advisers," says McCallum.

Going beyond product knowledge

Vancouver's OpenRoad Auto Group dealership was recently named one of the top 10 best employers in Canada by Aon Hewitt – for the third year in a row. OpenRoad has nine locations in Vancouver, selling Audi, BMW, Honda, Hyundai, Lexus, Mazda, Mini, Scion and Toyota, which employ over 500 staff.

Sharon Rupal, director of human resources at OpenRoad, says the organization is humbled by the recognition. "It means so much to us that over 93 percent of our employees participated in this national survey, that gauges employee engagement," she says.

OpenRoad feels strongly about self-directed learning, offering educational subsidies, training and development within the organization as well as what Rupal explains, are called "lunch and learns."

"We just launched an overall health and wellness information session with a 21 day challenge," Rupal says. "It's about learning and understanding

“Training that incorporates product knowledge and customer handling skills drives results in the marketplace.”

— Paul McCallum, group account director,
Maritz Canada

the benefits of eating right and exercising – for 21 days there are certain things you can and can't eat. It's fun and really interests people.”

Rupal also notes that there is an annual awards banquet where employees are awarded for service and other accomplishments. “This year, we have 55 people who are celebrating a milestone anniversary with us – we've had a couple of employees who's celebrated their 30th anniversary with [the Open Road Auto Group],” she says.

Management training

At the Montreal chapter of the Corporation des Concessionnaires d'automobiles du Quebec (CCAQ), dealers across the province are flocking to a course that's been

developed in partnership with the U.S. National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA). The CCAQ is a car dealer organization which offers training programs and continuing education tailored to the Quebec auto industry.

“We offer four different programs at the management level which are three days long,” says Tamar Kantarjim, director of communications. “Our organization is the only one that can offer this program in French, which is very important in Quebec.”

The courses are for vice presidents, financial controllers and department heads, and have been adapted for the Quebec market. “It's an intensive three day course,



and offers NADA certification,” observes Kantarjim. “We've had an excellent response to these courses, and hope to develop more programs at the management level.”

Meeting consumer expectations

McCallum observes that as cars have become more complex, today's consumers have developed higher expectations. “These days, a salesperson has to not only explain an increa-

singly complex product and a value proposition to a customer, but do it in a way that makes it feel personal to the customer,” he says.

“In order to do that, you have to understand your customer, you need to understand how to utilize the vehicle as a tool set and resource into that customer's life,” he continues.

“It's a fascinating time to be in this industry.”

Krystyna Lagowski

ADVERTORIAL

AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESS SCHOOL OF CANADA

Rebranding Connects to New Generation

On February 17, Georgian College launched a new brand – the Automotive Business School of Canada – at the Canadian International Auto Show (CIAS). The new edgy yet classic imagery targets a new student generation.

A strong heritage

Georgian College's Canadian Automotive Institute (CAI) has a strong 27 year history, which was incorporated into the new brand. “We wanted to keep that nostalgic connection, so our images have a classic feel,” says Jennifer Sheremeto, marketing specialist at Georgian College.

The intention was not to change the name, but after working with ad agency Young and Rubicam and doing focus groups, it became a necessity. “There was some confusion since we are a business school, not a technical school – as some may have thought,” notes Sheremeto. “Our students and alumni are very pleased with the way the re-branding has drawn on our heritage.”

Unique students

The college is constantly working to connect with the younger genera-

tion to attract students. “When we go out to speak to students about careers, it's important to understand what excites and motivates them,” explains Sheremeto.

The program's typical student is unique in that he or she loves cars and loves business, explains Sheremeto. The rebranding has a cool tagline, ‘For the driven’ as well as a creed, or a personal philosophy, that is featured in the social media messages, designed to tap into the imagination of a young person.

Program grads work in every aspect of the auto industry across Canada, from dealerships to fleet management, marketing and the aftermarket. “The auto industry will benefit from our rebranding, since we'll be educating more students and they'll be taking that knowledge with them to their jobs in the industry,” Sheremeto notes.

Mix of old and new

Many of the photographs were shot on the Georgian campus, using real students. “We used a classic Shelby Cobra as well as an Audi R8, so that the feel would be timeless,” says Sheremeto. “While we wanted to maintain that nostalgic connection, we didn't want to look dated. It's a mix of the old and the new.”

She adds that the rebranding is unlike anything Georgian has ever done. “We were lucky to work with an agency like Young and Rubicam, who had great ideas and a very collaborative style of working,” Sheremeto says. “It's resulted in an outstanding campaign.”

At the CIAS, she noticed that the event was packed every day. “It's a good sign that this is going to be a good time for our industry – and also a good time for our school.”

Krystyna Lagowski

