

Better customer service pays off for valeting specialist

Car valeting specialist Autoclenz really did hit *Top Gear* when it looked around to see how it could best satisfy its customers' needs as it expanded its offering.

Almost a decade ago, the TV show featured an innovative London business, which sent drivers with folding motorised scooters to return revellers and their cars from nights out.

Driving to customers on the compact machines before folding them into a vehicle's boot and returning car and client home, presenters James May and Richard Hammond demonstrated the efficiencies of a service which required no back-up car and no second driver.

Around five years ago Derbyshire-based Autoclenz – having identified a potential new asset to the services it offers clients – acquired a similar business, The Blue Team, offering corporate clients a solution to their vehicle delivery requirements. It added a further level of care to its spectrum for franchised car dealerships.

Group sales director Martin Peters explained: "We're always evolving to realise greater efficiencies and a broader array of services for our customers and this fitted the bill."

"The motorised scooters have been swapped for electric bikes capable of 30mph and a 25-mile

range as they are more efficient and don't leave the scent of petrol in a car.

"Of course we offer a full range of conventional vehicle collection and delivery services too, but the electric bikes are popular for dealers inside the M25."

Peters said that dealers using the folding bike service realised greater efficiencies as no back-up driver or vehicle was required and an additional job could be tagged on to the beginning or end of each day as the drivers could travel straight from their home on the bike.

The service is just one element of Autoclenz's growing portfolio of dealer services.

The business has over 40 years' experience in providing a high-quality valeting service but now lists vehicle delivery, showroom cleaning, an on-site cosmetic repair service, photo and video creation for retailers' online adverts and concierge-style customer services among its strengths.

As a result, the business – the subject of a management buyout four years ago – now delivers a £36 million annual turnover (2015) with consistent growth of 8% to 10% each year and counts eight of the AM100's top ten retail groups as its customers.

Peters said that he now sees himself as a manager of "people and processes" as Autoclenz

manages 1,800 operators across 340 businesses, adding that a key concern was the "supply and management of labour".

Increasingly, in the valeting sector, Peters said that this has seen compliance become a key component of the role.

Around 70% of labour in the sector is now made up of non-UK nationals and Peters explained that scrutinising documents which prove their eligibility to work was an essential task which many dealerships simply do not have the time to do.

Autoclenz has a 33% rejection rate among applicants and Peters claimed that about 37% of valeting staff employed by many of the UK's retailer network could lack a passport, visa or even a valid driving licence.

He said: "The idea that the person you are allowing to drive a £100,000 Porsche or £60,000 Audi around might be doing so illegally is a scary thought, but it is something that I have become increasingly aware of."

"Our business has changed and taking all the stress and the headaches away from our customers in the services we provide is central to that. If we can guarantee the right people and the right processes to allow them to realise the potential of the business, then we're fulfilling our brief."

Peters said he believed a high-quality car valeting service should be "a given" from the long-



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Martin Peters, Autoclenz

established Autoclenz operation, but an attention to detail which can guarantee retailers top customer satisfaction levels remain a priority.

Peters said: "Over the years Autoclenz has developed a keen knowledge of what retailers need from us and also the wow factors that will really boost customer satisfaction."

"A valet might see a vehicle's contents placed in a clear plastic bag on the passenger seat so that it's clear how thorough the process has been and simple things like a striped pattern on the floor mats can make all the difference."

"At one Audi dealership we even made the four-ringed pattern on the mats and we'd place complimentary water in the car too. The little things add up."

Autoclenz recently took steps to guarantee the level of service that its customers enjoy and ensure that standards are maintained day-in, day-out.

Its new MI dashboard, introduced in January, offers increased transparency, more open communication and constant quality and performance monitoring for its customers.

Running alongside an existing Paperless Vehicle Management System (PVMS), which allows customers to log all work carried out in its valeting bays and monitor expenditure in real-time, the new system logs inspection reports carried out by site operators and Autoclenz's own account managers to give both parties an up-to-date record of the standards it achieves.

The system takes the form of an easy-to-use dashboard-style graphic web-page.

Peters said that any element of Autoclenz's service rated below six out of 10 is issued with a 'red alert' and issues must be solved, or a solution plan put in place, within 24 hours.

He added: "The 'red alert' can only be removed from the system once resolved."

"Since January the effect has been that our 'red alerts' have been dealt with more quickly, with the average time until their withdrawal falling from an average of 4.2 days to 3.5."

Peters compared the MI service to marketing a business via Facebook or Twitter – a process which can lead to exposure to criticism – but argued that this was entirely the point, adding: "We want those red alerts. If we know about them, we can resolve them."

The new technology and breadth of service offered by Autoclenz is a far cry from its roots as a dedicated valeting company and as far from the service delivered by the *Top Gear* team as could be imagined.

But Peters believes that the evolution of the business has been essential as it aims to deliver a "one-stop shop" to dealers wanting to remove the stress of elements of its operation by outsourcing.

He said: "We have evolved to meet the demands of the market and things are going really well."

For more information call 01283 554 682, email sales@autoclenz.co.uk or visit www.autoclenz.co.uk