

Building strong client relationships with a little bit of “muscle”

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I readily admit that I’m a bit of a gearhead. I’ve always loved the “muscle cars” of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the history behind how they came about is almost as fascinating as the cars themselves.

During the 1950s, Detroit produced bigger and more stylized cars to reflect America’s growing prosperity and growing families. But when baby boomers became old enough to learn how to drive, they didn’t want to be seen in their parents’ stodgy sedans and station wagons. They wanted cars that were fun, fast, and affordable.

Pontiac dropped a powerful motor in a family sedan and created the GTO. Ford placed a sporty exterior over the mechanics of a practical compact car and created the Mustang. Chevrolet redesigned an aging sports chassis and created the Stingray.

In each case, these car makers took an existing automotive platform and injected a large dose of boldness. In some ways, muscle cars are the original platform for amazing things.

A successful sales relationship requires the right mix of creativity and boldness to extract the most value out of the solutions you provide. Here are a few ways to build lasting customer relationships “driven” by mutual success.

Listen to your motor—any auto enthusiast will tell you they can instinctively sense subtle changes in their car’s performance simply by listening carefully to the engine. It doesn’t happen overnight, and sometimes it’s more of a sixth sense than anything, but it does require a relationship between human and machine.

Building longstanding partnerships with customers requires a similar approach. It starts at the acquisition phase in which you need to understand what a client wants. The secret behind building long-term value lies in your ability to listen and learn from your customer. If you can’t consistently deliver innovative solutions that will help an enterprise increase revenue and manage costs, it’s almost like failing to change the oil on a regular schedule. The car will run fine at the onset, but it won’t be long before you have a breakdown.

Travel the open road—The beauty of driving a muscle car is when you “open up” the throttle and just go. It clears the head and creates new vistas for your imagination. Our approach is to make sure our client is riding along in the front seat—taking in the view, sharing conversations, and enjoying the ride. The only thing predictable about the 4th Industrial Revolution is change, and our responsibility is to help our enterprises anticipate and seize opportunities.

Here’s an example. People used to move to where the work is. Now work moves to them through high-speed fiber networks that connect remote employees to corporate data and applications, often stored in the cloud. As workers continue to migrate away from traditional urban centers, we can show enterprises how our platform and edge computing capabilities can quickly and securely connect them to remote workers. We provide the “open road” they need—reflecting our continuing investment in tier two and tier three level population centers across the United States.

Sometimes you need a mechanic—No matter how much you know about your car, there will be a moment when it’s time to call in the experts. We are starting see more and more IT departments facing the same challenge. They have the resources to manage their programs, but not enough talent to fulfill their day-to-day obligations. We make it easy for them to rely on us instead, by providing a wide variety of managed network and security services.

We also have open discussions about how network investments can help enterprises meet future business needs. When one of our longstanding customers—a rural hospital network in the Southwest—had literally outgrown a network configuration dating back to the middle of the last century, we worked together to redesign it and invest in new diverse routes to ensure redundancy and provide more capacity for other businesses in the community.

The true spirit of the muscle car is that anything is possible. Client relationships grow and endure because we don't set limitations on what we do, but instead use our creative spirit to reimagine new possibilities. Formula One race car champion Ayrton Senna summed it up like this. "Every driver has its limit," he said. "My limit is a little bit further than others."

So, let's buckle-up and enjoy the ride.

AUTHOR

Ed Morche is President of Lumen's North America Enterprise and Public Sector team. Ed brings more than 25 years of experience to this role which focuses on delivering technology solutions and helping businesses build for the future. His responsibilities include medium, large and multinational enterprise customers, as well as government agencies, large educational institutions and research networks. Ed previously served in several senior leadership roles at Level 3 Communications. Prior to joining Level 3, Ed held global and North American roles at Sprint Corporation, Sprint International, Global One, Teleglobe and Igaea Communications.

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