

GM Dealer Training Goes Global

A photograph showing three people in the back of a car. A man in a white thobe and ghutra is pointing at a map held by a woman in a white tank top and sunglasses. Another man in a white shirt and sunglasses is looking on. The car's interior and the desert landscape outside are visible.

BY JOHN ZONNEVELD

With fierce, growing competition in the global automotive market, General Motors Corporation has streamlined dealer training in its Africa and Middle East (GMAME) business region to help both the GMAME field organization and dealership owners manage their unique training needs more efficiently.

Automaker uses LMS to serve dealers in Africa and the Middle East.

GMAME is part of a business region that represents an overall market share of 16.3 percent. Its largest automotive dealership, Liberty, is located in the United Arab Emirates.

Like all other automotive manufacturers, GM sells through dealerships, which are geographically dispersed, independent businesses with dissimilar business practices. To effectively sell and service automobiles in that environment, GM must systematically identify and transfer to the dealerships information about how to manage and operate a dealership, perform vehicle repair that maximizes customer satisfaction and retention, sell points and product features that will interest customers, and comply with both regulatory and manufacturer-mandated rules.

Unique challenges

To control and manage the dealer channel, many manufacturers implement top-down training and certification programs to encourage certain performance levels that support strategic objectives. For many automotive manufacturers, the traditional training approach has been to assign field reps and teams to work directly with the dealerships.

Distinct cultural differences internationally require different market-specific learning strategies. At GMAME, a district manager oversees the dealer-

ships in a geographic area, and zone managers oversee specific job functions in a district. One sales training curriculum is appropriate for a more price-sensitive market, but another may be a perfect fit for brand-loyal markets.

In a large geographic area such as GMAME that consists of a dozen markets, training is needed for a large number of dispersed learners. Effective and efficient knowledge transfer also becomes more difficult as GM products require more knowledge to sell.

Local learning

The automaker—which was using spreadsheets and manual registration processes to track its dealer training—needed to find a cost-effective, high-quality training system that streamlined learning management across all zones and locations.

With the help of Latitude Consulting Group's Ready Solutions learning management system (LMS), GMAME was able to customize its training to meet the dealerships' local needs. GMAME needed a learning system that could collect, track, and deliver reliable, real-time data to all audiences. Delivery of common, high-quality practices, procedures, and services had to

be simple and trouble-free. GMAME feared that if it was too difficult to manage training or the programs were seen as intrusive and not meeting local needs, dealership owners might resist the training initiatives that could improve customer service and increase sales.

The LMS provides core functionality, including a course catalog; two-step enrollment (supervisor approved self-enrollment); facilities, resource and schedule management; and reporting. Assessment functionality provides an interactive, online test medium that may be used for pre- and post-course tests, prerequisite assessments, and certification programs.

In addition to the core LMS functionality, this system provides tools to help dealerships manage learning in a way that can meet the training needs of different audiences in all the markets.

Each dealership is required to complete a minimum amount of training, which may vary based on the dealership's size and brands. Each area is fur-





ther broken into service disciplines—service technicians take classes on the automobiles' transmissions, body and chassis, engines, and brakes, and sales managers and general managers update their skills on leasing, financing, selling, product knowledge, and warranties.

With the learning system, a manager can enroll himself or subordinates in courses or view the needs list. Dealership owners can review different service technician skill areas to see which technicians have certifications in the skill area and which ones plan to complete training in an area.

Reports, available both online and in print, provide the training status and history at all levels—individual, dealership, zone, or district.

Set-and-forget philosophy

In addition to providing an interface that would make it easier to identify the competency-building needs of dealerships and the markets they belong to, the LMS also manages training schedules and enrollments.

A needs list feature provides a short-listing mechanism. When a manager determines training needs, he uses the needs list to match employees who need training with a list of the courses they need. The LMS automatically schedules individual training according to the courses on their needs list and the dealer's preferred training locations. There are nearly 6,000 users currently registered in the system.

For managers in the field organization, resource allocation, planning, and budgeting is made easier by reviewing submitted needs, forecast-

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ing demand for training content, and making arrangements to meet demand. Also, to help GMAME direct and manage training in its dealer channel, the learning system allows corporate staff to access dealer profiles that include enrollment information and the dealer's preferred training center.

This training program has helped GM teach its employees about the specifications, features, and benefits of new car models. The training courses also cover marketing strategy, product positioning, advertising, the new Alloytec V6 engine, upgrades, and changes.

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