

Programme management

Ford and VODW: more than a decade of successful programme-manager cooperation

With its Ford Authorised Bodyshop programme, Ford has been a leader for years in the Dutch collision repair market. It's an achievement that VODW senior consultant Reggy de Feniks sees as a twin success: "Developing a good concept alone isn't enough: you also have to work with the client to let it take root in the market".

In the late 1980s, major changes took place in the car repair market. Until that time, many car manufacturers simply sat back and waited for customers to come to them, leaving the field wide open for new competitors. Large independent bodyshops began to claim a growing share of the market.

In 1987, however, Ford Netherlands became the first manufacturer to launch a serious attempt at recapturing the Dutch market.

The market as starting point

To work out the right strategy, Ford and VODW cooperated with several other relevant parties in the car repair market, to determine just what customers wanted from collision repair. The premise adopted in this working method added up to a win-win situation for all concerned. Ford and VODW not only took the potential strengths and opportunities of Ford Netherlands and its dealers into consideration, but also focused on the potential requirements and benefits for market parties such as insurers and lease companies. This created the basis for a productive and long-term partnership, as well as for successful strategy implementation.

The result was the development of a total concept: a chain of Ford dealers with a consistent image, and in-house collision repair facilities that met the highest market standards. But Ford and VODW didn't stop there. They recognized the need to develop an implementation programme as well.

Professionalising the dealer network

With the goal of gaining market leadership, Ford and VODW worked with lease companies, insurers and other market players in formulating a programme of requirements

dealing with factors such as operational processes, organisation structure, bodyshop facilities, training, service, marketing and promotion. VODW then assisted the Ford dealers in meeting these requirements and improving their quality and professionalism. The first Ford Authorised Bodyshop (FAB) certificate was issued in 1992: today there are 76 FAB dealers. A key factor in this success was the development of a range of tools to assist dealers. As VODW consultant Coen Bredenoord puts it: "When you're trying to convince dealers, you need to show them financial models and business cases. That's only logical. How else could you expect them to make a decision to invest in the programme"?

In the customer's shoes

The FAB programme continues to be a major success, and VODW is still involved in

managing it. That means continually adapting the concept to a changing market, as well as dealing with very practical issues such as dealer quality audits and the development of training courses and promotional materials. Ford - represented by its programme managers Mr. Willem Jan Homoet and Mr. Ton de Wildt - and VODW work very closely on most issues. And VODW regularly conducts talks with insurers and lease companies on Ford's behalf. "You have to be able to put yourself in the customer's shoes when necessary", De Feniks says. "That's a major prerequisite for successful cooperation and getting things done".

Successful Ford counter-offensive

As the FAB programme progressed, Ford bodyshop sales grew substantially, climbing by more than 27% during the first three years. Ford's market share rose accordingly, from 28% at the end of the 1980s to 39% today. Not only does Ford Netherlands benefit from the increased sales of parts, but the fact that those sales stay within Ford channels also gives them more control. In turn, the dealers benefit from an added business opportunity as they expand their activities with the highly profitable bodyshop business.

The Dutch success has been noted by other countries as well. VODW introduced the concept in Belgium several years ago. At the request of Parts & Service Manager Mr. Dennis McSweeney, a preliminary market survey was carried out for Ford Ireland in early 1998. Currently Ford Ireland is implementing the resulting business plan. Here too, a rapidly changing market calls for market-oriented thinking and actions.



Reggy de Feniks (left) and Coen Bredenoord.