

Is the virtual car showroom a safer option?

 By Naresh Maharaj

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The motoring industry like most of the other industries have taken a massive below the belt punch. The industry is still trying to catch its breath from that punch. Year-on-year new car sales have decreased by as much as 90% and that is a real cause for concern. But, be that as it may, new and innovative ways are fast becoming the order of the day when buying a brand-new car.



Nancy Moodley, senior manager of customer experience at Nissan SA

Nancy Moodley, senior manager of customer experience at Nissan SA shares her views around the 'virtual' experience of buying a car.

■ *These are indeed unprecedented times we live in. Is the virtual experience of buying a new car business unusual?*

Yes, absolutely! From a Nissan perspective, we may have not foreseen Covid-19, but from a strategic perspective, digital transformation across the entire buying and owner process has been a key focus on our side. We have already been working on a number of solutions. With Covid-19, the customer needs and their associated fears have changed overnight. We have done much in a short period of time for customers to experience that virtual experience when buying a new car or having their cars booked for a service; from the comfort of their homes.

■ *The motoring industry has long been an economic indicator. Sales are down significantly. But if one looks at the highways and byways in SA, there are cars, cars and more cars?*

Well, the customer experience is changing the environment. Yes, there are plenty of cars but if you look at the future of how customer experience is going, the value proposition is changing. South Africa is no different to any other country. But the landscape is changing.

■ *Almost everyone is talking 'virtual' these days. What does virtual customer experience mean for Nissan SA?*

It's to do with the transformation being rapid. Customers know what they want. So, if we are not agile enough to give them

what they want, virtual and digitised, we are going to be left behind. So all industries, whether motoring or otherwise, the transformation to virtual is already here.

▣ ***Compared to the actual showroom experience, how does the virtual experience compare?***

The most popular services that you would normally find at your respective dealership is now virtually accessible to you. Covid-19 may have just accelerated the virtual experience of bringing the showroom to you at home. So, some of the services we are providing is online ordering, pre-finance approval, interactive video calls and the likes - so there are a number of benefits to the clients.

▣ ***Is virtual shopping for a brand-new car the new way go?***

Yes, I would say so. We all need to start engaging in different ways, but the convenience of doing business under these Covid-19 times. We want to heighten the customer experience and I believe we are achieving this.

▣ ***Based on what you say, is the actual dealership experience a thing of the past?***

No. I would not say so. Knowing the South African car-buying consumer, physical interaction and the purchasing experience is a memorable one and is not going to go away. Also, if you are servicing your vehicle, having a trusted technician taking a look at your vehicle will also be available. Dealers need to transform and need to find new ways of interacting with their clients. Dealerships will be here for a long time to come.

▣ ***How do we all get back to normality with respect to buying a new car?***

We are aligned to Nissan's Global strategy of providing the best customer experience. Yes, we are in unprecedented times, but we will all return to normality. But for the time being, this is the new normal and we have to grind it out. We must be agile enough to create solutions to match the times we live in.

ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

Naresh Maharaj is a petrol head who loves cars and writing about them. He is also a Member of the SA Guild of Motoring Journalists. Naresh is also an international sports correspondent and an acclaimed corporate MC and voice-over artist. Naresh is a sports/news producer for community radio stations and also an award-winning sports journalist. Contact Naresh on nmaharaj321@gmail.com

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