

The 360-Degree Customer Experience

An Interview with Gary B. Flom,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Bay Ridge Ford and Kings County Chrysler Jeep Dodge Ram



Bay Ridge Ford dealership in Brooklyn, New York

EDITORS' NOTE A former financial analyst at Gulf & Western, Automotive Expert Gary Flom is a two-time recipient of Ford Motor Company's prestigious President's Award and a four-time recipient of the "100 Leaders" Award. Flom previously built a distinguished track record as an executive manager working with brands like Jaguar, Land Rover, Mercedes-Benz, Lexus, Porsche, and Volvo. Born in Russia, Flom served in the United States Marine Corps with distinction from 1983 through 1987 where he was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal. He graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in Business Management.



Gary B. Flom

COMPANY BRIEF Based in the heart of Brooklyn, Bay Ridge Ford (bayridgeford.com) is a state-of-the-art Ford dealership that opened in December 2010. Their cutting-edge Ford facility features a 7,500-square-foot showroom and a large selection of inventory. From the new Ford Escape to a super-efficient Ford Fusion Energy GI plug-in hybrid, Bay Ridge Ford offers a great variety of new Ford cars, trucks, and SUVs to the people of Brooklyn and the surrounding areas. Their service department has trained technicians readily available to assist with routine maintenance or major repairs. In addition, they offer easy online scheduling and regularly update their auto service sales. Bay Ridge Ford can accommodate 25 lifts, with factory-trained technicians who have over 10,000 man-hours of diesel capacity, the largest in the New York area. Bay Ridge Ford can work on anything from a Ford Fiesta to a high-tech police cruiser, heavy-duty ambulance, a bus, or anything that Ford makes.

What innovations are leading to the quality of cars coming out of Ford today?

The quality of vehicle has improved significantly over the past decade, and specifically over the past few years.

With regard to the MyFord Touch and the SYNC system, the innovation of those systems is avant-garde from the connectivity and navigation to ease of use. Ford was one of the first manufacturers to have introduced such a level of convenience and technology in a mass market brand. Until now, these types of sophisticated navigation and infotainment systems were relegated to more expensive luxury brands. Ford brought them mainstream for all customers to enjoy.

We see a significant reduction in warranty work from the manufacturer, which is good news for the brand. Even though that part of the income is reduced for the dealership, as the quality improves, it helps us sell more cars and compete favorably with the imports.

Who is the Ford customer today and how broad is the market?

In New York City specifically, the base of the Ford customer has gotten much broader than before. This is due to significant quality improvements and a wider range of products, especially cars,

in addition to the SUV, which has always been Ford's mainstay of the brand. With these new products, the brand has been able to move up-market like never before.

We see a totally new spectrum of customer coming in – people who would have bought an entry-level Lexus or an Acura are now gladly coming into our showroom and looking at Ford products.

Cars like the award-winning Fusion or Escape are attracting new clients as well as repeat clients into our showroom.

What type of investment did you make in the showroom and service center to create the state-of-the-art feel you're known for?

We firmly believe in enhancing the 360-degree customer experience.

It's not just about the vehicle because customers look at the vehicle specifications and images online; they now know more about the vehicle than ever before.

The look and feel of the dealership has to not just complement the brand but also enhance the customer experience and set the stage.

We designed our buildings to the latest image specifications of Ford Motor Company using aluminum, woods, and fabrics, which are used pervasively in building the actual cars. For instance, the all-new Ford F-150 is the first truck with its body built exclusively from aluminum. When all of these materials are used in the design of our buildings, they invoke a feel of high-technology, innovation, and quality.

Our Bay Ridge Ford showroom was designed to reflect the feel of the brand with the expanse of glass panels, high-tech light fixtures, and showroom furniture that was made in Michigan by American craftsmen. Even the wood veneer finish is the same material used in the manufacture of Ford vehicles.

What makes an effective relationship between manufacturer and dealer?

One of the most important issues is communication. Sometimes, the interests of the manufacturer and dealer differ. The key is to ensure there is enough dialogue and input from both sides that will result in moving forward as one team.

The dealership focuses on delivering excellent customer satisfaction while building a substantial local base of clientele and servicing its territory with distinction, resulting in a satisfactory return on investment. The manufacturer has to deliver high-quality, stylish products that will compete well with the imports and allow the dealership to regain the customers from the imports. In addition, we strive to create effective advertising on the local, regional, and national level that will resonate with consumers.

In leading the dealership, how do you track service standards?

We constantly train our personnel, not only in technical aspects like how to repair a vehicle but also in customer interaction skills. Our goal is that all of our team members recognize the importance of our clients and that customer satisfaction is not just a score for the manufacturer but our lifeline to the future.

How broad is your focus from a geographic point of view?

Brooklyn has one of the largest populations in the city of New York with 2.7 million people, and it's growing. It has become very cool.

We think of ourselves as a local dealership but with a very large market. We penetrate about 95 percent of our market, meaning that 95 percent of our sales are within the larger Brooklyn territory.

We're happy about this because it also tells us that Bay Ridge Ford customers are happy with their experience so much so that they refer friends, family, and neighbors to us. We always strive to find new ways to delight our customers.

Which Ford car is the most popular in an urban market?

Bay Ridge Ford carries a wide range of models. We are very well-represented in every segment of the industry, from the smallest Ford – the Fiesta – to the Focus, to the mid-size Fusion, to the SUVs, which have always been very popular with our customers in our market.

I'm really happy to see that, unlike a decade ago, when Ford was focusing primarily on trucks, now our product range is very well balanced and can meet all of our customers' needs. ●