

Mercedes Benz of Buckhead is using MyDealerLot's RFID-enabled Service Drive Concierge system to identify customers and their vehicles when they come in for maintenance or repairs.

By Claire Swedberg

Mar. 3, 2009—Automobile dealer [Mercedes Benz of Buckhead](#), located in Atlanta, Ga., is utilizing an RFID system to provide personalized service for customers who bring in their vehicles for servicing. Since the system was installed in October 2008, customers' cars move through the service process more quickly. The dealership has also made more automotive sales, because the personalized service has prompted some patrons to purchase new cars, according to Geoff Meeker, Mercedes Benz's parking service director, who oversaw the installation.

The system includes RFID tags and interrogators, as well as several plasma screens that display personalized information for the customer, provided by [MyDealerLot](#), a company set up to provide real-time location systems (RTLS) to car dealers, enabling them to pinpoint the locations of specific vehicles on their lots (see [Atlanta Mercedes Dealership to Adopt RFID at New Location](#)). The infrastructure required for that system, however, is too expensive for many dealers, says George Cresto, MyDealerLot's president and CEO.

What dealers are really interested in, Cresto learned while attending the 2008 National Auto Dealers Association Conference, is a system that would allow dealers selling high-value cars and trucks to provide personalized service to their customers. Based on suggestions Cresto received from some of these dealers, MyDealerLot developed the Service Drive Concierge (SDC) system now in use by several Mercedes Benz dealers in the Atlanta area. The system is also scheduled for installation at a Lexus dealership in Oklahoma.

To date, Mercedes Benz of Buckhead has placed 915 MHz passive tags complying with the ISO 18000-6C standard on the back of the rearview mirror of 1,500 vehicles, including new, unsold cars and those arriving for servicing. The company provides each customer with a tag containing a unique ID number linked to that vehicle's identification number (VIN), as well as to the customer's name in the MyDealerLot software system.

Antennas have been installed in front of each of three service lanes. One interrogator captures ID numbers from tags arriving on all three lanes. The system includes a computer provided by MyDealerLot that links the tag ID to the customer's name, then displays greetings and other information on two plasma screens within 2 seconds of the tag read. The system also alerts staff members that a customer has arrived, and in which particular lane, thereby allowing them to immediately provide personalized service.

If a new vehicle with a tag returns for service, that tag is read at a distance of up to 30 feet at the Buckhead location (the read range is twice that in some locations, depending on the grade of the arrival lanes and obstacles), and the plasma screen displays a personalized message, such as "Welcome, Mr.

Jones." The software system also stores such data as the salesperson who sold that car, and the technician assigned to service the vehicle. An e-mail message can be sent to that technician, alerting him or her that the customer has arrived. In that way, Cresto says, employees can greet that patron by name and begin servicing more quickly.

When the customer takes a loaner vehicle out of the dealership, it is equipped with an RFID tag as well, linked to that individual. When the customer returns to the dealership with the loaner car, he or she is again welcomed back personally on the screen, and a message can be e-mailed to the cashier to begin preparing paperwork, thereby saving the patron time in the dealership.

Mercedes Benz of Buckhead's porters (who receive vehicles upon entering the dealership for service) suggested another feature of the system, Meeker says. Each vehicle that arrives is given a paper tag—displayed on the windshield—with an ID number printed on it. That tag helps porters identify the proper vehicle when customers pick them up. "They said, Wouldn't it be cool if the screen didn't just say 'Welcome back, Mr. Jones,' but actually listed the tag number?," Meeker says. MyDealerLot was able to add the feature.

Mercedes Benz of Buckhead also plans to install a carwash system that can be integrated into the existing SDC system. Typically, at high-value car dealerships, cars are washed after being serviced. With the carwash RFID system, an interrogator would be installed at the carwash exit, and would capture the tag ID number as each vehicle completes the washing process. That data would then be directed back to MyDealerLot's software, which would send an e-mail or cell-phone message to the cashier, as well as to the customer, indicating the car service was completed, and that he or she may now return to the dealer to pick up the vehicle. This service can be provided not only for customer convenience, Cresto says, but also to reduce the amount of vehicles waiting at the lot for pick-up.