

DIRK ZEDLER: COSTLY COMMUNICATION DEFICITS

BETTER CONSUMER COMMUNICATIONS CAN AVOID COSTLY LEGAL TROUBLES



I travelled several hundred kilometres, twice, as an expert witness in court cases to examine a bicycle or e-bike for noise. To my astonishment, test rides revealed that there was nothing but a squeaking chain. In both cases, the claimants confirmed that it was the noise they were claiming as defect. In the presence of the claimants, the defendant bicycle dealers and their lawyers, I greased the chains and everything was ok.

Really ok? Not at all, as the legal proceedings continued. After I had submitted my expert's report, the parties argued about freedom from maintenance offered, workshop visits, promises made by the seller or the mechanic, and so on. As a result, both parties invested a lot of time as well as racking up thousands of euros in legal costs over several years.

This is only the tip of the iceberg of such avoidable proceedings, and court is not the only place where consumers engage in disputes over ranges considered too short, noises of all kinds, and imprecise gears, to name just a few examples.

The court cases where we were called in as an expert witness reveal one of the miseries faced by the bicycle industry (and not only since Corona). In terms of technology, development in the industry is at a very high level in recent years.

However, what has not kept up, by far, is the service for the customer – on many levels.

Rethinking needed: more technology, other target groups and more intensive use "From cyclists for cyclists" has been the motto in the cycle industry for years. Preferred topics in discussions were carbon qualities, rebound and compression damping, wind tunnel results, wheel sizes and even the question where to use aluminium or titanium screws. For many current customers all this is completely irrelevant; what they expect is quite simple: the e-bike should work. They want to be mobile, without any ifs and buts.

It is clear to all of us that customers have to contribute their bit, but at present this is not communicated sufficiently by the industry.

Five points to avoid trouble and increase effectiveness in the trade:

- Make employees fit for customer contact, e.g. by communication training
- Hand over the user manual in the language of the country together with the purchased bicycle or e-bike and have the receipt countersigned by the customer
- Indicate necessary maintenance measures to be carried out by the customer (with reference to the user manual)
- Indicate the observance of necessary service intervals. It is advisable to make an appointment for the first service at the moment



- of selling (with reference to the user manual)
- Always document workshop work

Five points for successful communication by manufacturers:

- Consistent and clear information for customers (and dealers) through social media, the website, the catalogue and the user manual
- Providing low-threshold customer information (enclosing user manual with the bicycle)
- Regional training offers for dealers and their staff
- Ensuring service staff are competent on the phone
- Documenting, filing and evaluating

reports of defects
None of these points are rocket science. These reasonable measures just have to get into the heads of the decision-makers and the corresponding time and financial budgets have to be granted.

With all of our experience, it's surprising how miserable the existence of the most important set of rules between manufacturer/dealer and customer – namely the user manual – still is.

And let's be honest, how many employees of manufacturers or dealers have ever read the user manual of their bicycles?

That's how simple it would be to avoid some trouble. ■ **Dirk Zedler**



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