

Mastery and perfection - the future of car hire

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The Woodford Group has been on a drive to bring mobility to everyday South Africans in a way that improves lives and enhances lifestyles. Its premier division, Woodford Car Hire, is taking this mission to new heights with a number of innovative and game-changing interventions.



When you think car hire, you're likely to think of its many negative associations. Thoughts of surly consultants at a shabby sales desk who force high-priced vehicles on you that you're forced to rent simply because that's all you can get.

Woodford Car Hire is very much aware of the gripes travellers have with the rental business – from red tape and stock availability to deposit queries and damage claims.

"We've been operating since 1991 and we've always been conscious of customers leaving with a positive rental experience," says Owais Suleman, CEO of the Woodford Group. "We believe the best way to do this is to just get the basics perfected and give people what they expect, and maybe a little more."

Over the years, Woodford Car Hire has committed itself to service excellence to drive its growth and differentiate itself from other rental agencies. And it seems to have worked, with Woodford becoming the largest independent car hire company in South Africa.

The company never sits still and has most recently taken on a directive from the Woodford Group to encourage and consider the concept of mobility as its driving force.

"To us, mobility is more than just being about transport and getting from point A to point B," says Mr. Suleman. "It's about a holistic approach to movement and providing people with the conveniences and options they need to live well. It's about providing them with value through movement."

But how does this translate in practical ways to a car hire business?

Woodford believes that this can be done by constantly asking itself a simple, yet far-reaching, question: “Are we doing what we need to be doing to keep people moving?”

The first answer to that meant looking at service. Suleman believes that South Africans have come to expect sub-par service from most service-based industries, and that something needed to change.

As a result, Woodford has worked hard to understand the customer journey and map out what customers want and where their experience can be improved. This has resulted in the launch of a centralised customer service department – one that communicates with people on Google, HelloPeter, Whatsapp, and other channels – to receive and treat feedback.

“We take reviews seriously. It doesn’t matter where you contact us or how you get your message to us, we’re listening and we take action,” says Suleman.

The system has been integrated with an internal incentive programme that keeps staff motivated and management aware of where improvements can be made. From being greeted warmly to ensuring that the booked vehicle is ready and waiting, every aspect of the journey is considered and measured. And the results appear to speak for themselves. Woodford Car Hire is rated as the [#1 car rental company](#) due to these specific efforts.

The second area of focus revolves around the fleet. Having the right cars in the right place is key to keeping customers happy. As has always been policy, vehicles are never more than six months old (so you know you’re getting a new, dependable car) and functionality is as important as availability.

“We know our customers and their needs. We know where business travellers frequent and what cars they prefer, and we know that we need more family friendly vehicles when the holiday season begins. We want to match people with what they need,” says Suleman.

This goes far beyond utility to social and environmental responsibility as well. Woodford has already introduced hybrid vehicles to its fleet, and will soon be piloting electric cars. This ensures that while people are still kept moving, they are also ticking off both personal and business goals and needs.

Another area that Woodford has focused on is location. Historically, car hire has been associated with airports and inbound travel, but Woodford Car Hire wants to bring car rental to people wherever they are and whatever they require it for.

The company has been launching locations in 2022 in places that are accessible to people. A branch at Sandton opened earlier this year that caters to urban and business travellers who are already in the commercial hub. Two further branches are planned for Umhlanga and Pretoria in the coming months.

“It’s all about car hire where you need it,” explains Suleman. “With branches like these, you can hire a car for a weekend getaway or collect a sedan for a business meeting, without going out of your way.”

The move is a potential game-changer in the industry, opening up a new realm of possibility for customers. With branches in accessible and convenient locations, people can make use of vehicles they need, whenever they need it.

The last factor is one that ties all the interventions together – Woodford’s systems, technologies, and key partnerships. Woodford Car Hire has invested heavily over the past decade in world-class systems that ensure that the entire process of renting a car is seamless for the customer.

The website allows users to book a vehicle in under 60 seconds, the centralised booking system ensures that the vehicle is made available at the right place and time, and the entire collection and return experience is paperless. Woodford has also committed itself to key partnerships with both vendors and suppliers, to keep all integrations related to service smooth.

“Overall, what we’ve implemented at Woodford Car Hire isn’t groundbreaking, but we have committed ourselves to mastering these elements,” says Suleman. “We’ve been guided by this vision of mobility in everything we do and our promise is that we’ll provide you with a perfect and positive experience.”

Woodford Car Hire is changing the game when it comes to car rental. Experience it for yourself: www.woodford.co.za.

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