



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

The Magic Pill To Increasing Car Count

The price of gas is hovering around \$4 per gallon. Consumers are driving less, so their time between visits will be longer. What does that mean to you, the auto repair shop owner? Keeping car count consistent in your shop is going to be more challenging than ever! Today, building strong relationships with your customers is critical.

Shop owners constantly tell me they're looking for the magic pill, the secret sauce or the silver bullet to get more cars into their shops. So what's the secret?

My most successful clients, who make high profits and have a consistent car count, don't sell auto repair. They sell a customer buying experience. What's their secret to high customer retention and loyalty? They take the necessary time to build confidence and trust.

So what is trust? It's an expectation of consistent behavior. Your customers gain confidence when each visit is consistent and excellent. Your customers lose confidence when each experience is different or you don't set and then meet or exceed their expectations every time they buy from you.

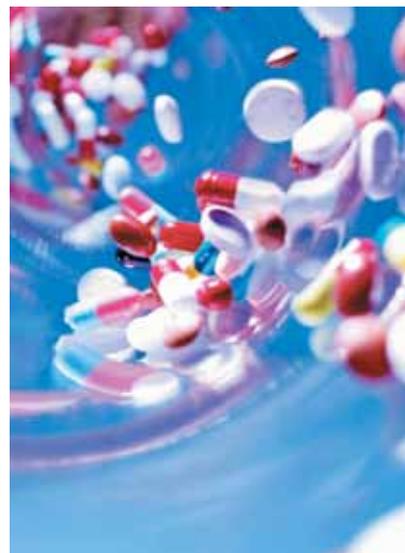
Your customer's buying experience is your brand. If you take the time to create a consistent, enjoyable and friendly buying experience, you'll earn more money, enjoy more consistent income and dramatically reduce your advertising costs.

Marketing

Many owners tell me they "don't do marketing." The truth is, every shop owner does marketing. Every single employee in your company is part of your marketing department. Marketing is all you and your team do to build relationships with consumers. There are five types of consumers.

- **Customers** are willing to pay your price for products and services you provide.
- **Parasites** are willing to pay their price for the products and services you provide.
- **Clients** are customers who have a relationship with you and return for service several times each year.
- **Past customers** are consumers you haven't seen in your store for at least eight months.
- **Advocates** are clients who talk about you and promote your business through word of mouth and word of keyboard by posting positive reviews on websites.

Your three-step marketing process is to meet customers, create clients and inspire them to become your advocates.



You have six opportunities to build your brand and relationship with consumers. Their initial phone call, when they drop off their car for service, your sales presentation, your delivery procedure, follow-up after their visit and your reminder to bring their car in for their next service.

Let's focus on the three opportunities you have for face-to-face communication with your customers.

The Drop-Off

First impressions are lasting impressions. The drop is your best opportunity to demonstrate you want to help consumers and want their business. We teach service managers how to go above and beyond to make consumers feel welcome and appreciated. First up is your sales presentation.

Today's consumers are budget conscious. Money is tight so you want to make your recommendations affordable, but still profitable for you. Offer a pay-

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

Chubby, what is the No. 1 reason why customers don't come back?

ANSWER: Not delivering their car when promised!

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

ment plan, without loaning them money personally. Tell them you can make working their service investment into their budget convenient by taking credit cards and debit cards.

Second, offer third-party financing through GE Capital and other companies that provide merchant credit card services

Third, you can give them choices without lowering your profit margins. You have many opportunities to give your customers good, better and best choices to fit your repairs and services into their budgets.

Fourth, as a last resort, break your recommendations into piles and schedule follow-up visits to get the work done.

You need to justify their investment by creating value. When your customers complain about price you need to change the conversation from what it costs to what they get! Tell them what else they get besides the service to their car. They get your expertise, your equipment and your outstanding warranty. They get to protect the environment because you recycle hazardous wastes responsibly.

Your Delivery Procedure

Today's consumers are extremely busy. Time is their most precious resource. Be sure you deliver the vehicle on time. Keep the consumer informed on the progress of their car during the day. Many of my clients discover they can't reach customers during business hours by phone, so they send emails and texts to their cell phones.

Your delivery procedure is your most important opportunity to separate your shop from other shops and car dealers. Take the time to show you appreciate their business and want them to return!

Why Don't They Return?

Many owners think price is the reason consumers don't come back, so let's review the actual top four reasons consumers don't return for additional service.

No. 1, their car was not ready when promised. No. 2, their bill was over the estimate. No. 3, they just didn't like the buying experience. No. 4, the shop manager answered the phone wrong when they called later.

Let's review. Your customer buying experience is your brand. Take the time to create a consistent, enjoyable and friendly buying experience. Get your employees to focus on serving customers, not just servicing cars. You'll make more money and enjoy more consistent income despite rising fuel costs in an uncertain economy.

This month I have a special offer for *Motor Age* readers: free access to a video we recorded about how to overcome price objections on your parts and still get consumers to buy and return for more service, even in a competitive market. Just send an email to Chubby@autotraining.net. *TL*

Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks, Brian Hunnicutt, Bryan Stasch and Matt Winslow in preparing this monthly column. Contact him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.



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