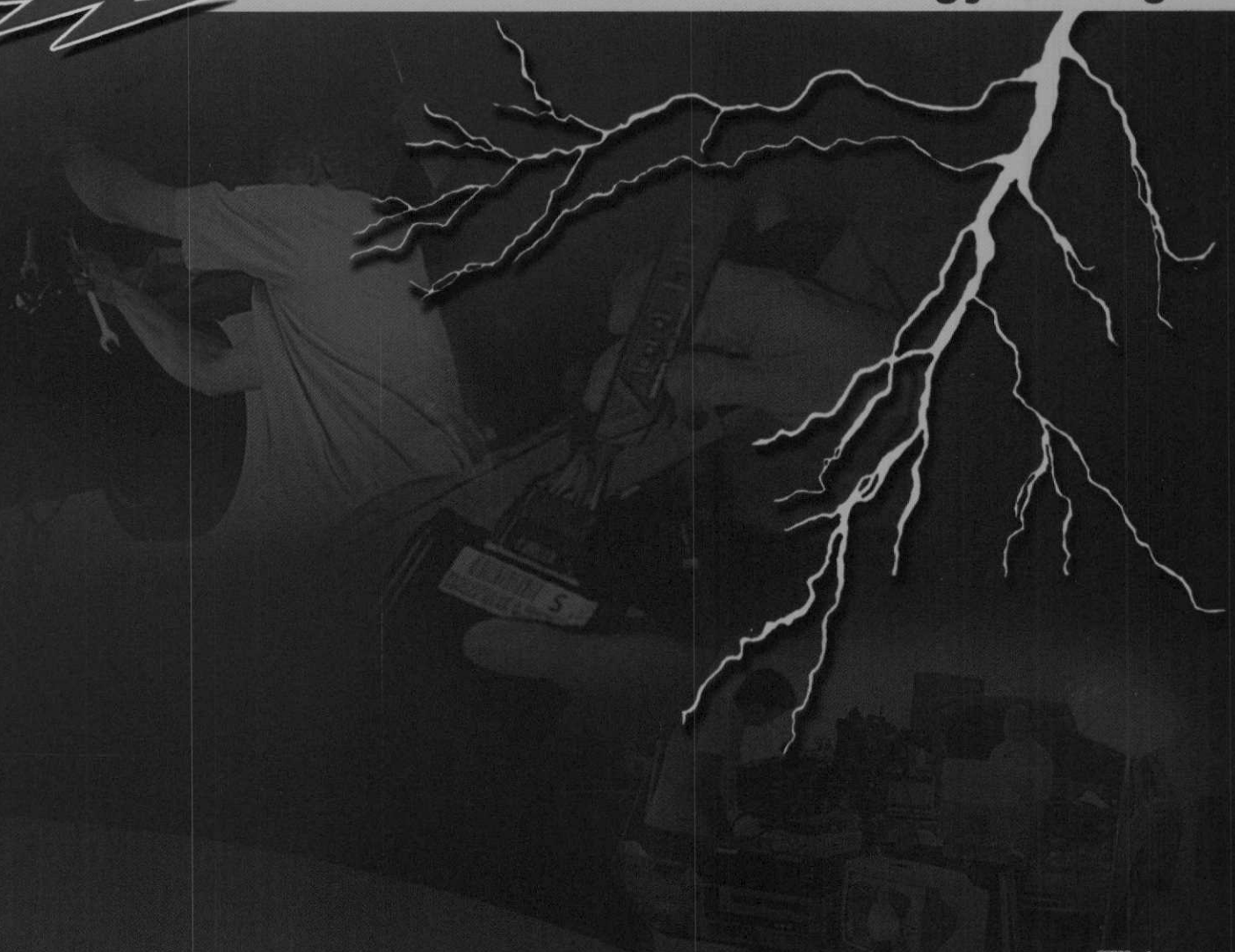




**As Fast As Lightning Strikes...
Automotive Technology Changes.**



**SERVICE MARKETING
FOR THE INDEPENDENT
SERVICE FACILITY
LBT-125**



"Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success."

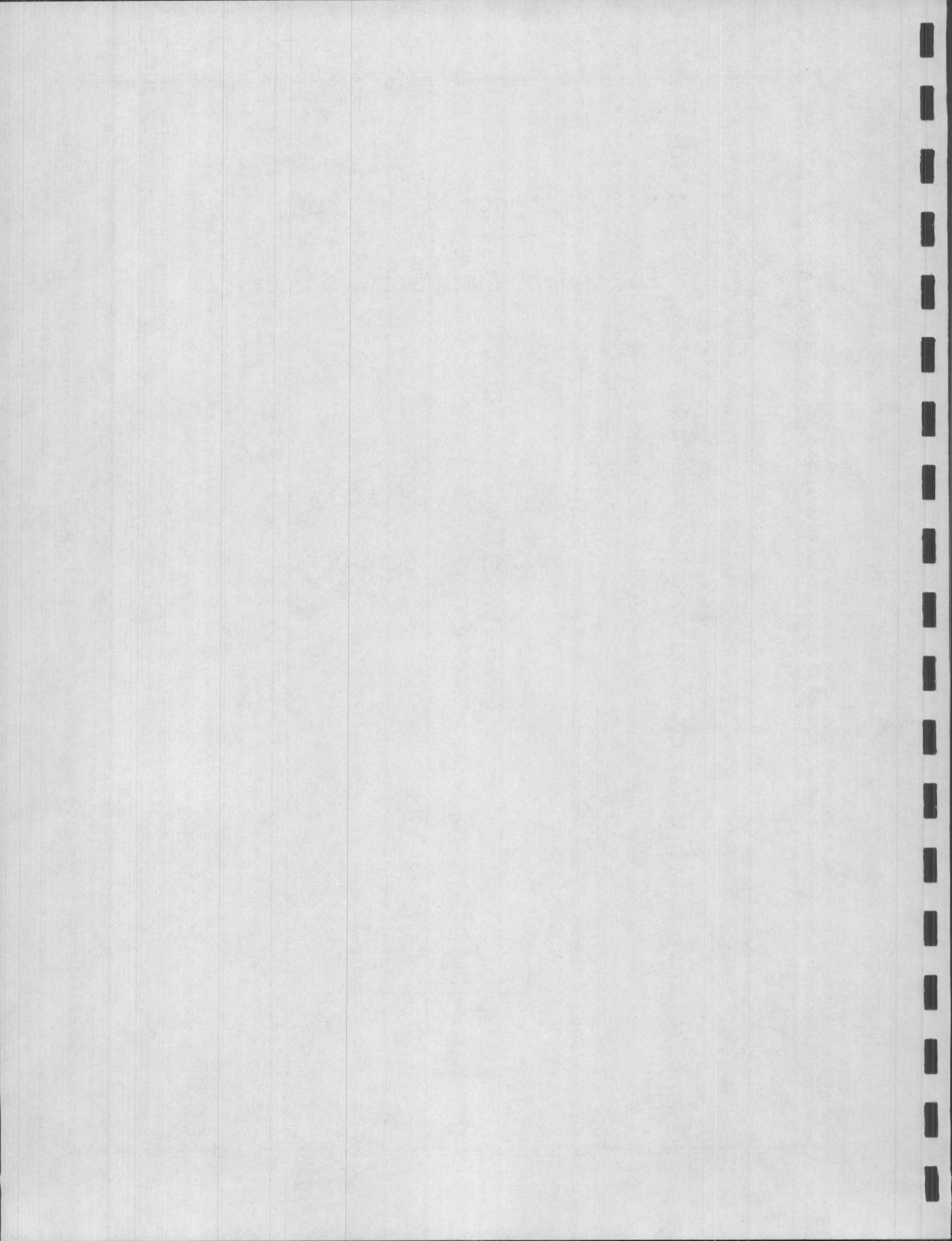
- Henry Ford



Service Marketing
for
The Independent Service Facility

by
George Witt, AAM
Team AVI Seminar





Acknowledgments

Special Thanks to:

Brent Black

for creating and sustaining i-ATN
The International Automotive Technicians' Network
www.iatn.net

Steve Donovan

"Window on Wheels" Newsletter
for providing additional material

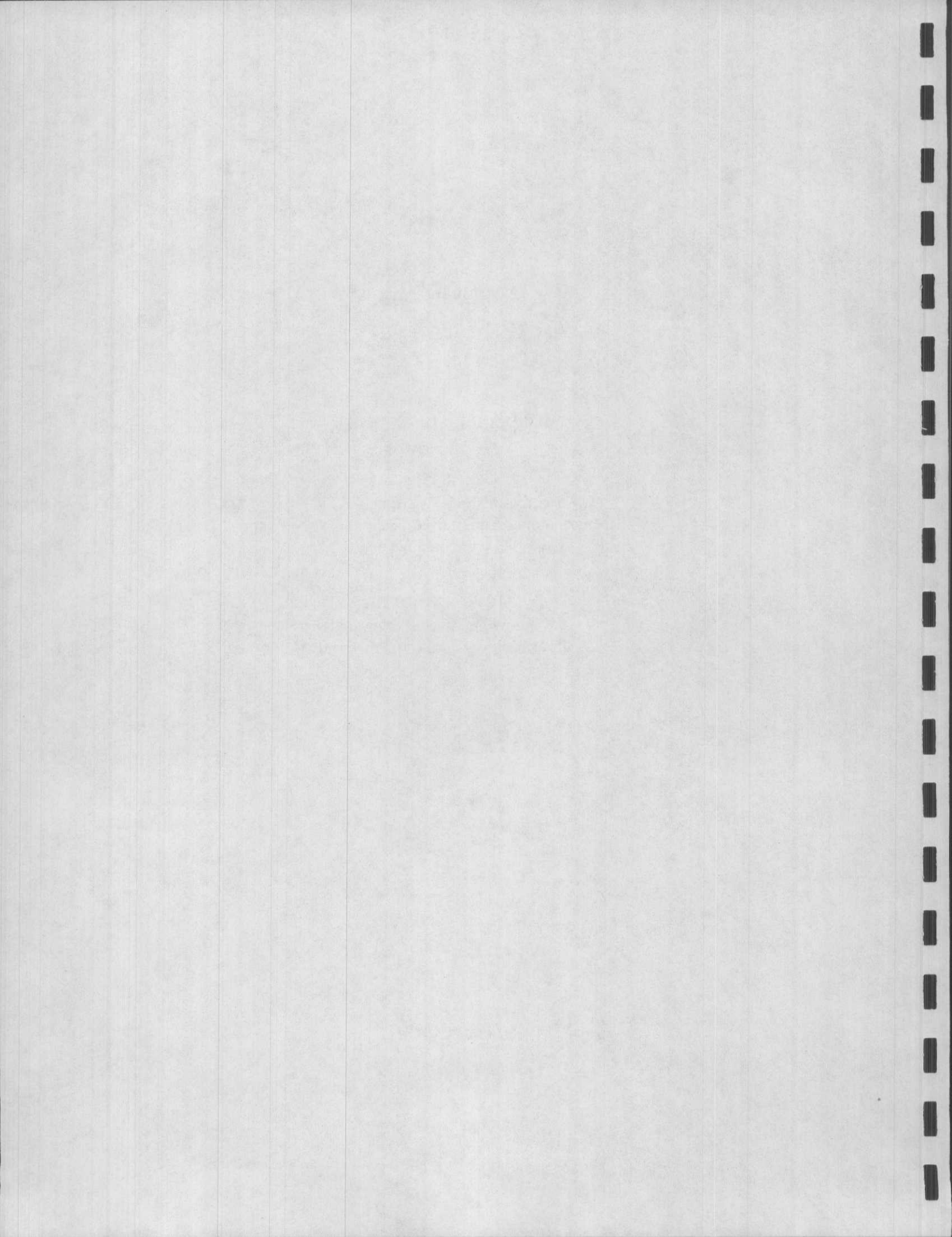


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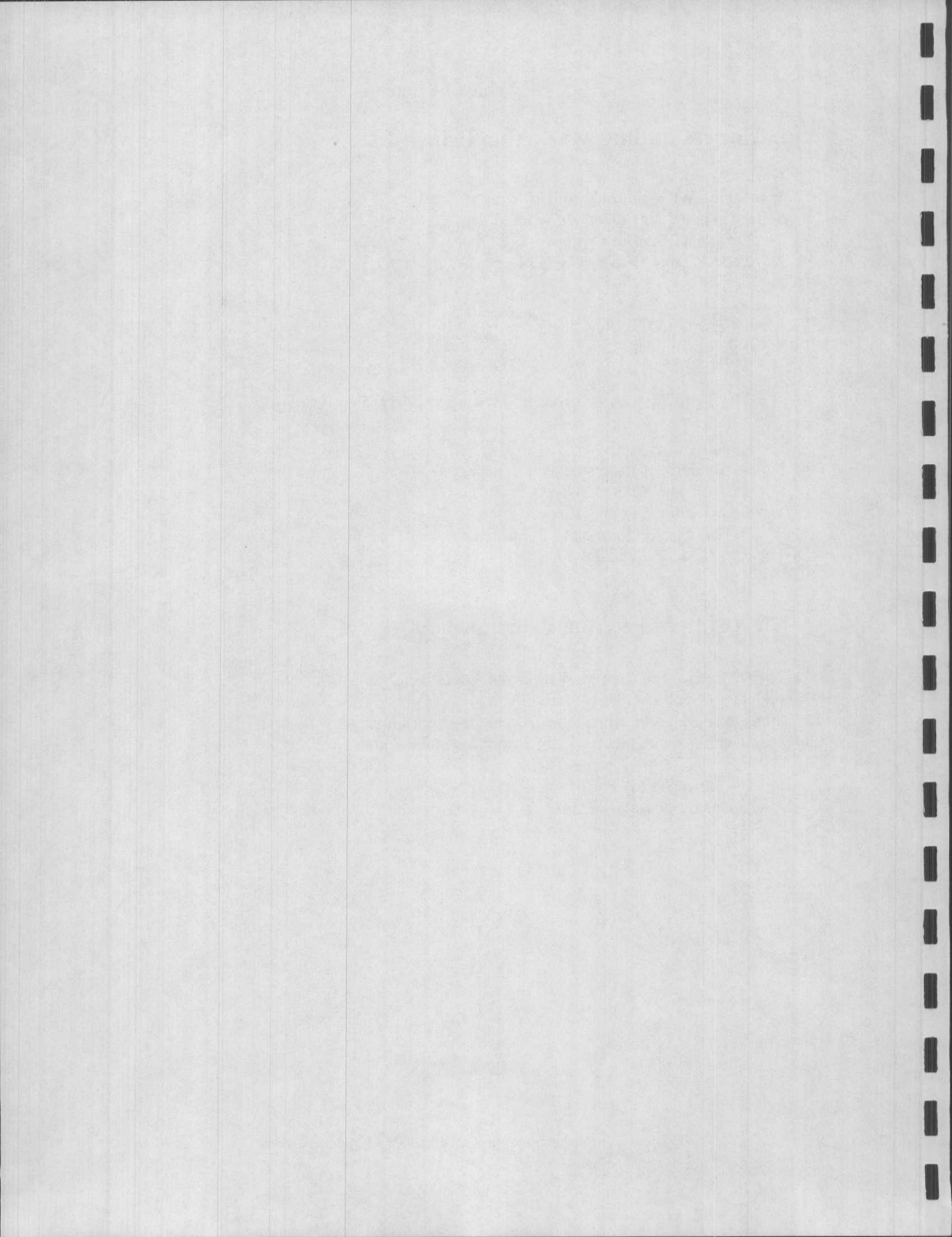
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Best Customer Survey Form
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I. Understanding Marketing Principles

Introduction

This segment introduces basic marketing principles. At the completion of this segment you will identify:

- ◆ customer buying motives
- ◆ what customers want to buy
- ◆ the types of customers
- ◆ how to define your shop's "USP"
- ◆ how to "position" your shop
- ◆ how to assess your shop
- ◆ how to survey your own customers

Customer Buying Motives

The three primary buying motives are:

1. **Price** (P)
2. **Quality** (Q)
3. **Convenience** (C)

As an independent automotive repair facility, you'll find that price is rarely an issue **if everything else is in order**. If you seem to be getting a lot of price complaints, you'd better be looking at the entire service transaction, because something isn't right somewhere.

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Identifying What Your Customers Want to Buy

Surveys have shown that most customers expect:

- ◆ To be written up promptly (C)
- ◆ To have the work completed on time (C)
- ◆ The final price to be within the estimate (P)
- ◆ The vehicle to be fixed right the first time (Q)

These four things must be considered a baseline of performance. If any of these is lacking, expect to lose customers and get a lot of price complaints.

I surveyed some of my own best customers and found that a clean shop (Q), friendliness (Q), prompt write-up (C) and explanation of repairs (Q) were common replies. The customer's perception of honesty (Q) was greatly enhanced when we took the time to prioritize the order and importance of the different needed repairs. One customer summed up the price issue pretty well when she said one of the primary reasons she comes to my shop is, "Cost, I don't feel gouged when I leave" (P). This is a very significant response, since my labor rates are among the highest in town.

The survey I did was a simple question: "What are the things that are the most important to you when you decide where to get your car serviced?" We provided 5 response lines. One of the most common responses was friendly service.

Isn't it ironic that the one thing people seem to want the most and get the least, costs nothing to give—the smile.

Remember, people don't buy from people they don't like. A smile is disarming and immediately puts people at ease. Be happy to see each customer—they bring money!

You'll soon be surveying your own customers. You don't really care what your marginal customers think, you want to focus on the better ones. Your goal is to identify what it is that your better customers want to buy. Those are the people you want to attract and retain.

Selling What Your Customers Want to Buy

We've all had the unpleasant experience of dealing with a

person trying to sell us something we didn't want to buy. You probably get a number of telemarketing calls every day. Anybody can sell a good prospect, one who wants what you have to sell. It's easy to sell Cokes at half-time when it's 100° outside. Nobody can sell a bad prospect, one who **doesn't want what you have to sell.**

After you've done your surveys, you'll know what your customers want to buy. They don't want a new battery, they want a car that starts at midnight. They don't mind spending money, just don't spend their time.

Look at the hassles you put your customers through then design a way to eliminate or minimize them.

Put yourself in your customer's shoes and see if you'd buy your own service.

If you're going to advertise that you're friendly, will your customers get that experience when they come in? Be very careful with this. Don't sell what you don't deliver. The Owner/Manager is totally responsible for setting the customer's expectations. Set them where it's reasonable for you to attain them and, ideally, where you can *exceed* them.

Take the time to fully explain the repairs to each customer who wants to know, some don't care. If they *are* interested, take them into the shop, show them the old parts and give them simple, easy to understand explanations of each repair. This demonstrates your honesty and thoughtfulness. **This is one of the most important things you can do for a positive effect on customer satisfaction. It makes you special.**

“Competition-Proof” Your Shop

There are 2 things that will bond your customers to your shop and make them immune to any competition from any shop: **Friendship and Trust.** If your customers trust you and consider you a friend, rather than some person they do business with, they are less likely to ever even try another shop. After all, trust is a huge issue and it takes time to develop, as does a good friendship.

What better situation can you have than to buy a very important service from a trusted friend? Doesn't a friend smile when they see you? Shouldn't you then always be happy to see your customers? Treat your customers as trusted friends and they'll begin to see you in that same light. A very important thing to remember is that true friends will only act in each other's best interests. This should be your leading core value in your shop operation. You should never sell any operation that doesn't have firm value for both of you.

The Different Types of Customers

One of the ways in which customers can be categorized is by dividing them into three groups:

◆ Active

◆ Inactive

◆ Potential

Active customers are those who are currently coming to your shop. **Inactive** customers have been to your shop before, but don't currently come in. **Potential** customers have never been to your shop, they're currently someone else's customer.

Many shops will undertake marketing efforts aimed only at **potential** customers. The idea is to get more new faces in the door. This group is the most expensive to get. They don't know who you are and currently use someone else. This target audience will yield the poorest response to marketing efforts.

Inactive customers are the second most expensive to target. They may not like you, for whatever reason, or may not care about servicing their car.

Active customers consistently respond the best to your marketing efforts. This is where the bulk of your advertising money should be spent. They already know you, love you and trust you. Many of them will send you referral business. Focus your efforts here for the greatest return on your investment.

More Types of Customers

◆ A

◆ B

◆ C

◆ D

The "A" customer loves their car and willingly performs regular maintenance on a schedule. When something breaks, they have it fixed properly, regardless of the cost. They don't "price shop". They accept your recommendations for additional maintenance and repairs. They are very loyal to you and will probably be your customers for life. This group is responsible for 80% of your profit, even though they're the smallest of the groups in numbers.

The "B" customer knows their car needs maintenance, but they don't always do it. They do want to protect their investment in the car. They can be price conscious and will sometimes shop around. They might go elsewhere if you give them a reason to. There are a fair number of these types of customers.

The "C" customer doesn't know their car needs maintenance. They have too many other priorities in their lives. Some of them will hop from shop to shop, and other times they'll only come to your shop, but it won't be often. You may see them

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once a year for an oil change (ouch!) or whenever the car breaks. There's also a fair number of these.

The "D" customer doesn't care if it leaks, squeaks, rattles or creaks, as long as it starts and moves (stopping safely is optional!). They'll ask for emergency quick service and "patch job" repairs, and are the ones most likely to sue you if it doesn't work. Their cars will show long-standing patterns of neglect. Remember the guy who's been to all of our shops, Everett Sinchoo? You know, "Everett Sinchoo replaced my water pump, my car doesn't run right. Now you fix, I no pay!". In Everett's world the guilty party is the last guy to touch the car. Quote what it will take to properly repair these cars and carefully document your findings. Some "D" customers can be a decent source of profit, but *some* cost more than they're worth. Be careful out there. Realize the difference between the profitable "D" customers and the ones you can't afford to keep.

Our mission is to pamper, care for and nurture the "A" customers at all costs. *Don't ever put an "A" customer's car on hold for a lesser prospect.* Have you ever had more work than you could get done in a day? Have you ever accommodated a "D" customer whose car was broken down by holding over an "A" customer's car? Since the "A" customer never complains, it's easy to do. We just tell ourselves, "the squeaky wheel gets the oil". When having to make this type of decision in the future, please remember to *take care of that "A" customer first.* Surely there's some other customer who's been a little unpleasant to work with—push *their* car outside!

From there, carefully evaluate marketing to the D customer. Try to convert the C's into B's and the B's into A's. This can be done and this is our objective.

Portions of the above material have been taken from the i-ATN postings of Steve Donovan, consultant and technical writer for the **Window on Wheels Shop Newsletter.**

Develop a + Customer Program

Take your very best "A" customers and simply put a + after their name in the database. That makes it easy for everyone in the shop to set priorities on which cars get done first. **Never hold a + customer's car over in order to get a lesser customer's car done.** Your + customers are your best customers and should be cared for in a manner consistent with their importance to your business.

Developing Your Shop's "U.S.P."

USP is a marketing term that goes back 30 or 40 years. It stands for Unique Selling Points. The principle is, if you want consumers to buy your product, your USP has to give them **believable reasons** why yours is better than (or different from) the other guy's. The reasons have to be **believable**, but they don't have to be provable. What is it about your shop that makes it **the one and only place a customer should take their car**? What advantages do you have over the competition? In other words, what are your USPs? To better illustrate this point, here are a few examples for an auto shop: "We're the only shop next to the college campus", "Ours is the only shop in town that's never been sued", "Quality is our most important product". Two of these can be proven. The last cannot. But all can be made believable to your customers through experience.

Actually, if you just focus on the basics of service in the section on Customer Buying Motives, you can come up with a number of USPs. The very fact that you're taking the time to study this material makes you unique in a lot of markets. Concentrate on convenience and quality and make those the basis for your

One of the best USPs to have is the concept of doing it right the first time. Pride in workmanship is an intangible quality. Customers can't SEE it, FEEL it, or TOUCH it when they walk in your door—or can they?

The three key elements in conveying the concept of quality work are:

◆ soap ◆ paint ◆ light

Clean your shop completely and keep it that way. We have a floor cleaning machine and usually clean each bay in between jobs. Paint the ceiling and walls white. Put up brilliant lights. Our shop has 10 bays with a center drive-through lane and 19 "street lights". The lighting level is brighter than the brightest office. During the slow times of the year, clean and re-paint equipment that's showing age. It can be made to look new again.

That image will be dramatic and your customers will be very favorably impressed. It's truly a Unique Selling Point for quality work. I'm frequently asked if our building is new, even though it's probably 40 years old. *Soap, paint and light.*

Image Is *Really* Everything

Take a good hard look at the front of your shop. That's your image. If you're on a busy street, thousands of people drive by every day and get an image. Is it the one you want? We've all gone to a business and noticed flaking paint, cracked glass or other visual items needing attention. Yet we walk by similar things in our own shop every day. Get a camera and take pictures of everything in your shop. Pretend you're on a mission to discredit your shop for a tabloid. Photograph the outside, the office, the shop, the bathroom, the walls, the ceilings, all the corners, under the workbenches, everywhere you can spot anything messy. Develop those pictures and get a clear picture of the image you really present. Cleanliness, clutter (or the lack thereof) and lighting speak volumes. Make sure your image says the right things.

Positioning

Remember the point that your USPs have to be believable, but not provable? This is where positioning comes into play. People flocked to Target because their prices were lower than competing stores such as Sears and Wards. Were they really? No. Comparable goods were comparably priced. But the public **perceived** that prices were lower at Target. Gazillions had been spent to reinforce that position.

Remember my customer who said she didn't feel gouged when she left? Many of my customers cited price as one of the things that was important to them. What they're really saying is that **value** is important. A surly Service Advisor and a job done late will almost always get a price complaint, **even if it's the lowest price in town**. The customer feels they didn't get good value. If they get a warm reception and great service, they'll gladly feel they're getting great value, even if it's the **highest** price in town.

Each one of you can do your own market research, develop your own USPs and then position your shop in your own market. Remember, the **USP** should equal "what your customers want to buy" and the **position** should demonstrate how your business meets those buying motives— "We're selling what you want to buy". You'll get your price.

Let's study this a bit further. There usually aren't enough customers of one type to support a shop. So, we must cross lines to appeal to 2 customer types. For example, a top level shop must attract A and B customers, a middle shop may attract B and C customers and the lower end shop will draw in the C and D cus-

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tomers. How should each shop “position” itself to capture as much of its market potential as possible? Obviously, by selling what their customers want to buy.

The A-B Shop

The A customers want to maintain their car and *prevent* costly breakdowns. They want quality repairs and quality treatment. They want thoughtful personal service and a lot of convenience items. They are more than willing to pay a fair price for all this deluxe service and are very loyal customers.

The B customers want to maintain their car and prevent costly breakdowns, too. They will perform maintenance most of the time. They can be a little price conscious and will go to another shop to get a better deal if they perceive they’re not losing much quality. They also want convenience items if it doesn’t raise the price too much.

Market Position Strategy for an A-B Shop

An A-B shop will be a maintenance shop. Most of the work should be maintenance and some work will be breakdowns. If the majority of your work isn’t maintenance, you stand to lose the best “A” customers because they seek to prevent breakdowns by doing preventive maintenance. Carefully evaluate the breakdown work that you do to see if there are refinements you need to make on your maintenance recommendations.

Always review the maintenance history of each car every time it’s in your shop. Failure to do so may lead to overlooking a needed maintenance item and cause a breakdown. This can cost you a good customer. Always look the car over when you have it in. Inform the customer of the worn belts and hoses or other obvious needed repairs *without fail*. Send out maintenance reminders. Educate them about their cars, either with direct mail, a newspaper column, car clinics or handout pamphlets. Provide rides to and from work and have convenient hours. Give out cell phones or pagers so you can reach them if needed while you have their car. Rental or loaner cars are a big plus. Carefully document your findings and show them the old parts if they are interested. Maintenance promotions can be a big hit. Have your pricing fairly high to pay for all this. Don’t ever cut corners or use cheap parts. Perform first quality repairs that last. Make your shop an attractive looking maintenance shop.

The B-C Shop

The C customers don’t know their car needs maintenance. You

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may be successful in educating them and converting them to B customers. Reviewing maintenance with them will generally fall on deaf ears, but do it anyway. The C customers perceive all shops as about the same, so they frequently base their decision on price.

Market Position Strategy for a B-C Shop

A B-C shop will do a fair amount of maintenance, although it won't be the majority of the work.

Review maintenance requirements for every car. This needs to be done to keep the B customers happy. Many of your customers will ignore your recommendations. You will primarily be in the business of fixing broken cars, with some maintenance work. You'll mostly be a fixit shop. Appearance can be meaningful, but isn't terribly important. Your shop at least needs to be clean. It might be beneficial to give your customers different quality levels in the choices of work. New vs. used parts, top line vs. white box parts and so forth. This way the choice is theirs to make, like a buffet. It's fine to offer a longer warranty with the premium repair and a shorter warranty with the cheaper repair. You should consider Service Reminders and some convenience items. Rides would be nice, but maybe only to a limited area. No loaner cars, only rentals. Discount promotions on maintenance items might work well for you. Discount coupons mailed to your customers could get some of them off the couch and into your shop.

The C-D Shop

D customers aren't concerned with maintenance at all. They don't care as long as it runs. Now, some D customers are more than willing to spend money when the car does break down, they're not all cheapskates to be avoided. In fact, some will pay a *premium price* just to get their car fixed the same day it's towed in and thank you for it. These people consider convenience a real hot priority. Salespeople who use their car in their work and are just too busy to come in for service are good examples of this type. A smart C-D shop owner will recognize this and give fast service at a higher than normal price to retain these customers. These tickets may be a lot higher than average. It's even possible to add on a lot of suggested repairs to these cars. Many D customers are very budget conscious and may frequently want used parts.

Market Position Strategy for a C-D Shop

Almost all your work will be fixing broken cars. Maintenance

will generally be sold only if there's darn good reason, such as burned transmission fluid or maybe a timing belt that hasn't broken yet. You don't need to worry about spending the time to review service histories, it will usually fall on deaf ears. Cheap or fast is the word here. Don't offer any frills and keep the overhead low. It may matter little what your shop looks like, you're a fixit shop. Your business cycles will be up and down. Find the cheapest parts suppliers you can. Cultivate a relationship with the salvage yards, you'll be their best customer. In many cases it will benefit you to repair a component rather than offering an expensive replacement part. Don't offer long warranties, they can cost money and it be ineffective. Surprisingly, a C-D shop can be very profitable if run right. Be prepared for some customer confrontations; some people in this group just want it fixed free. Don't be too slow to fire problem customers like this. There are some customers you can't afford to keep. Some discount promotions may work well. Have a cheap brake or oil change special to draw them in. **Don't** offer credit.

Market Positions Can Be Changed

Just as customers can be educated and converted from one group to another, so can a shop be converted to another classification. Be careful and go slowly. As you move upward, you'll lose some customers who just don't fit any more, so they'll have to be replaced with new customers who do. Converting a fixit shop to a maintenance shop can be done in a couple of years with hard work and diligence.

One Shop's Example

The following is a post from the i-ATN on the topic of converting from a breakdown shop to a maintenance shop. It has been reprinted with permission from the authors and the i-ATN network:

In a previous post, in a negatively charged string, the idea of promoting maintenance rather than repair was brought up. George said that his focus is on maintenance and 60% of his business is maintenance.

I don't think I have ever successfully marketed toward maintenance. I would estimate that less than 10% of the cars we see are for maintenance. We sell a lot of maintenance after the car arrives, but the car doesn't usually come in for it. Most of the cars we work on are older, so that probably has something to do with it. Other repair shops that I have spoken with on this subject are in the same ballpark as I.

*Does Mr. Witt have a monopoly on maintaining vehicles?
(Maybe it is a Nebraska thing) Am I the only one that does
mostly repairs? Am I seriously negligent in educating my
customers?*

Maybe this would be a good topic for the next seminar.

*Darryl Evey
Owner/Technician
Desert AutoHaus
Victorville, California (Southern), USA*

Darryl,

Just read your post and wanted to take a moment and let you know about our shop and how we went from being a break down shop to a maintenance shop.

We decided that we needed to be a maintenance shop and put several steps in place to promote this stance. The number one thing that allowed us to switch was to start looking over every car that came in, make a list of needed items including the next maintenance service, estimating all items, and then just ask the customer to buy. They will not just magically start to buy, but they will see it written on their invoice, and they will hear about it and why it is important at the counter. And then they will see it on their next invoice and their next invoice, etc.

Each time it is written on their invoice, we explain why maintenance is important and cost saving in the long run, etc.

To start selling the bigger services (30-60-90-120-150-180-etc.) we started making a note when the service would be due in the next 2 or 3 oil changes and getting the estimate to them ahead of time. This way they have time to digest the information and to budget for the expenditure.

You must be consistent, every invoice has to have the items listed until they are addressed. Some customers will never buy, most will if they understand the value. We especially like it when we get a customer with a new vehicle, we can easily convince them that the maintenance is important and usually keep the car properly maintained all the way through.

Next most important step, (maybe it should be the first), make sure that all of your staff, especially your tech's are educated and believe in maintenance. If they don't believe, nothing will happen. (For example, if they don't see the need in clean brake fluid, they will never

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recommend a brake fluid flush service, consequently you won't sell it!) Educate your staff first, invite your suppliers in to train them if you can't. We have found that our tech's would much rather maintain a fleet that continually repair it. (When you suggest something to a customer and he stops one of your guys on the parking lot and the tech says that's not important, you loose ALL CREDABILITY. So make sure that everyone is on the same page.)

This change did not happen overnight, it probably took us 2 solid years to get everything geared that way.

The down side, our tow ins' went way down!

Barb Kinder
Greg Kinder
Owner/Technician
Autotech Auto Center
Bridgeton, Missouri, USA

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Steve Donovan's Top Ten List

This is Steve's list of the ten most important things shop owners can do to market their shops:

1. Do research. The more you know about who your customers are and why they come to your shop, the better equipped you'll be to carry out the other nine steps.
2. Maintain regular contact with your customers at least quarterly, whether it's by mail, phone, by having your own radio show or whatever.
3. Provide customers with useful, helpful information about their cars and how to take care of them.
4. Educate them about the importance of vehicle maintenance and repairs.
5. Do things that reinforce their buying decision—give them additional reasons to think your shop is the greatest one around.
6. Show customers that you care about them and their vehicle.
7. Send them something that reminds them it may be time to have their car serviced.
8. Enhance your image in the eyes of the public.
9. Do things that demonstrate your expertise and professionalism in the field of auto repairs and maintenance.
10. Offer customers something they can't get anywhere else.

Each of these steps is probably worthy of a very long discussion. Consider each one carefully. Don't leave any out.

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II. Where Are We Now?—The Current Assessment

The Repair Order (RO) Audit

Before we can move forward with marketing, it's appropriate to determine where we currently are. The following exercise is valuable for revealing what kind of work you're currently doing and what kind of customers you're currently attracting. Take 50 **consecutive** "customer pay" repair orders. Use them to conduct the following assessments:

Separate the ROs into 8 stacks, based on the **year of the car**. Count the number in each stack and enter it in the proper box in the "No. of ROs" column. Multiply each number by 2 to get the percentage and enter the result in the "%" column.

Example: You have 4 repair orders on cars that are 3 years old and newer. Enter the number "4" in that box. 4 multiplied by 2 equals 8. Therefore, 8% of your business is cars 3 years old and newer. Now you know your year mix.

Age of Car	No. of ROs	%
3 years old & newer		
4 years old		
5 years old		
6 years old		
7 years old		
8 years old		
9 years old		
10 years old and older		
Total Repair Orders		100

Next, separate the ROs into stacks, based on the different **vehicle makes or models** as appropriate for your shop. Enter the number of ROs in each stack in the proper box in the "No. of ROs" column. Multiply each number by 2 to get the % and enter the result in the "%" column. Now you know your vehicle mix.

Make of Car	No. of ROs	%
Totals		100

Now separate the ROs into 2 stacks, based on the **primary reason** the car showed up at your shop. If the first line on the RO is something that needs to be fixed, that's a **repair** ticket, even if a maintenance request is also present on the ticket. Calculate your work mix.

Type of Work	No. of ROs	%
Maintenance		
Repairs		
Totals		100

So, what does this Repair Order Audit tell us? First, it tells us where we are in marketing and positioning our shops. For example, if **all** our cars are 10 years old and older, we're clearly not reaching a good target market. These cars are old and hurting, with owners that haven't got much money. If we have NO cars 3 years old and newer, then we haven't reached our true "A" customers. Sooner or later, our customers are going to buy a new car. If they're really impressed with us, they'll continue to come to us, even with that brand new car. Those are just a few things the "Age of Car" audit can reveal.

The "Make of Car" analysis can be a clue for future profit. Are there certain makes or models of vehicles that you really like to work on? Stuff you're good at, make good money on? Look at what percentage of your business those are. Here's a good target market for you to pursue.

The "Type of Work" analysis will show how smart you are at working existing customers. **This is the most important area to audit.** It will show you what kind of shop you now have, a breakdown shop or a maintenance shop. **The easiest money we can make is from add-on sales.** Those people are already in the shop. We just gotta ask for the business! Regular scheduled maintenance is the best money there is. The customers come in on a regular basis and help you even out the ups and downs of the business cycle. If you don't have an honest 60 to 70% of your sales in maintenance, have you got money to make without spending a dime! Just ask, and you shall receive (hehehe).

Further Benefits of Assessment

Ideally, you want to target cars 3 to 12 years old. These cars are old enough to need repairs, new enough that the owners have an investment to protect and the means to afford the bill. You'll find more A and B customers in this group.

The "Make of Car" survey can be helpful when buying a mailing list or in identifying makes of cars to avoid.

Other audits can be done easily. Number of **hours** per RO, although you may not want to get eaten up with this number. The make of car will make a difference, so will a fast oil change program. Be careful what conclusions you make on this one.

The number of **lines** per RO can show you if you're just taking orders or actively selling.

Another analysis that's very meaningful is the "Needs Atten-

tion” items. Almost every RO should show *something* that needs attention now or in the future. Even the first oil change on a new car should have a note that says, “Due for 7500 mile maintenance next service visit”. Too many blanks mean too little future service work.

An audit is a snapshot of your business. The results will vary depending on the time of year or even the time of month. It should be done fairly frequently to be of value. You can record the results on a spreadsheet for long-term tracking.

Surveys are the Keys to Success

Now, you’ve done your Repair Order Audit, learned about the types of customers and understand you must sell what people want to buy. At this point you must further develop those good USPs. This is the hardest thing for a shop owner to do. We must remember that *we aren’t a customer*. The things *we* think are neat about our shop may not mean anything to our customers.

In the back of this book is a sample “Best Customer Survey” and also a “Valued Customer Survey” form. Make copies of them and use them to survey your customers when they come in. Don’t mail them out. Hand them to each customer personally and explain that you need their help. Put it on a clipboard and give them a pen. They already think your shop is the greatest and they’ll gladly help you.

The “Best” survey should only be given to your very best customers. The “Valued” survey can be copied on different colored paper for different levels of customers, if you want to get that scientific. By having different forms, you can still keep them anonymous, which gets you the most honest information. You’ll also be able to better interpret the results. See if the different customer groups have different motives for coming to your shop. This will enable you to determine the USPs that each group desires and tailor the different advertising efforts that you undertake.

It’s important to only give these surveys to your good customers. That’s who we want more of. Each shop has a different market position. Some shops appeal to A and B customers, some to B and C customers, etc. We might define a “best” customer as one we make a profit on when they come in, and who doesn’t take a lot of our time. A “best” customer will also refer other people to us.

These survey forms have no boxes to check, just blanks to fill in. The reason is that we don’t want to “lead” our customers to

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The End of Marketing as We Know It
A book by Sergio Zyman, former Chief Marketing
Officer of the Coca Cola Co.

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The people who work in marketing have long claimed it was an art and that sales didn't necessarily follow a marketing effort right away. Sergio said, "Balderdash", or words to that effect.

He said that if a marketing campaign didn't *immediately* sell product, drop that effort and try something different. Keep trying until you do sell product. This book is well worth reading.

Some gems quoted from the summary on page 232...

"The sole purpose of marketing is to sell *more to more people, more often, and at higher prices.* There is no other reason to do it."

"Keep giving your customers more reasons to buy. You need them to come back more often and to buy more at higher prices."

"Fish where the fish are. Concentrate your sales efforts on consumers who are willing and able to buy your product."

"Think S.O.B.—source of business; where will your next sale and dollar of profit come from?"

"Don't be blinded by visible demand. Preference is perishable. Keep selling the sold."

"Make sure everybody in your organization understands the strategy, the destination, and the business objectives. Then let them execute."

"Reward excellence and punish mediocrity."

"Have a sense of urgency, and work with a passion. Otherwise, what's the sense of getting up in the morning?"

Highlight the phrases that appeal to you and use them to guide and motivate your marketing efforts. This is the serious side of marketing.

Self Test

The three primary buying motives are _____, _____ and _____.

_____ is rarely an issue **if everything else is in order.** (p.4)

The four things that must be a baseline of performance for a service shop are for customers to be _____ promptly, have the work _____, within the _____ and done _____ the first _____. (p. 5)

The one thing that consumers want the most, get the least, and costs us nothing is a _____.(p.5)

People don't buy from people they don't _____. (p.5)

Sell what your customers _____ to _____. (p.5)

Nobody can sell a _____ _____. (p.6)

Customers don't want a new battery, they want a _____ that starts at _____. (p.6)

Do you fully _____ the repairs and take the _____ you need with each customer? (p.6)

The first three types of customers we studied were _____, _____ and potential. (p.7)

The next four types of customers discussed were ____, ____, ____ and _____. (p.7)

The "A" customer is probably responsible for ____% of our profit. (p.7)

We should try to avoid the ____ customer. His name is Everett _____. (p. 8)

Our mission is to _____ the "A" customers at all costs. (Better re-read the text before filling this one out!) hehehe (p.8)

USP stands for _____ _____. (p.9)

Your USP has to give customers _____ why your shop is better than the next guy's. (p.9)

Your reasons have to be _____ but they don't have to be _____. (p.9)

The three key elements in conveying the concept of quality work are _____ and _____. (p.9)

When customers say price is important, what they really want is _____. (p.10)

Your market position should say, "We're selling what you want to _____. (p.10)

Self Test (Continued)

In a shop that attracts mostly A and B customers, the majority of the work is _____ (p.11)

In a shop that attracts mostly C and D customers, the majority of the work is _____ (p. 12)

Maintain regular _____ with your customers, at least _____. (p.15)

_____ your customers about the importance of vehicle _____ and repairs. (p.15)

.....give your customers additional reasons to think your shop is the _____ one around. (p.15)

Offer customers something they can't _____ anywhere else. (p.15)

The easiest money we can make is from _____—_____ sales. (p.17)

Regular scheduled maintenance is the _____ there is. (p.17)

_____ a survey to each customer, don't _____ them out. (p.18)

It's important to only give surveys to your _____ customers. (p.18)

Survey forms should have no _____ to check. (p.18)

The best way to _____ a service business is to attract people in for something you _____ have. (p.19)

III. Using Marketing Principles

This segment explains how to put marketing principles to work.

At the completion of this segment you will:

- ◆ Identify the difference between marketing and advertising
- ◆ Learn how to prepare for an advertising campaign
- ◆ Identify the key elements in a good advertisement
- ◆ Identify which advertising mediums can work best for your shop

The Difference Between Marketing and Advertising

Considerable time and effort has been expended discussing marketing strategies and positions so far. What's the difference between marketing and advertising?

Marketing is the act of selling goods or services. This happens in our shops when we actually "get the money".

Marketing also involves developing USPs, strategies and positions. This is all "behind closed doors" within the company. The general public and your customers know nothing of any of this. We're marketing right now.

Advertising is the method you use to communicate this marketing information to the public. Marketing involves the actual transaction, advertising is communicating the message in order to get people into your shop. All too often a company spends money advertising without any marketing thought behind it. We buy imprinted pens, coffee cups and key chains. We pay for ads in the football program at the local high school. We toss money around like it's going out of style. All in the name of advertising. We know we need to do it—we just don't really know how.

That must come to an end—The End of Advertising as We Know it. We must now look carefully at everything we put out for the public to see. Is it consistent with our overall marketing plan? Does it communicate our USPs? Is it going to sell service? Is it going to put a car in that bay? Will it make the phone ring? More importantly, will it make the phone ring with the type of customers that we seek? That is the ultimate objective of our marketing efforts.

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Prelude to Action

(things that need to be settled before we act)

Image Is *Really* Everything

Take a good hard look at the front of your shop. That's your image. If you're on a busy street, thousands of people drive by every day and get an image. Is it the one you want? We've all gone to a business and noticed flaking paint, cracked glass or other visual items needing attention. Yet we walk by similar things in our own shop every day. Get a camera and take pictures of everything in your shop. Pretend you're on a mission to discredit your shop for a tabloid. Photograph the outside, the office, the shop, the bathroom, the walls, the ceilings, all the corners, under the workbenches, everywhere you can spot anything messy. Develop those pictures and get a clear picture of the image you really present. Cleanliness, clutter (or the lack thereof) and lighting speak volumes. Make sure your image says the right things.

Backing It All Up

Be sure you have the necessary inventory and other needed resources to back it all up. You don't want to spend money to bring people in, only to tell them they can't have it! Don't be out of stock on an advertised item. I have to spread out my newsletter mailings because we can't answer all the phone calls right away and I'm not kidding. There's nothing worse for a customer than being ready to buy when they can't even get in the door. Be prepared.

Don't Even *Think* About Doing Any of This Once or Twice

They don't call it an advertising **campaign** for nuthin'! It's a campaign, a mission, not just an afternoon stroll. If you do any of this once or twice, not much will happen. Keep your money.

Make a commitment to a one year program. Do something every month. Work with a passion. If you're too busy, plan to expand to handle the extra volume.

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Pick The Proper Interval

I found that a good newsletter would make the phone ring for about a month. I tried to do them quarterly, but the phone ran out of gas after a month. When I switched to a monthly newsletter, the response really picked up after about the fourth month. It was like a snowball rolling downhill. Evaluate your own results. Learn what's really right for your own shop.

Put It In The Budget

Budget about 3 to 6% of your gross sales for advertising, depending on how badly you want new business (or just business). This includes Yellow Pages. You may want to raise your labor rate by that percentage to cover this expense. If you're new in business, plan to do some "street fighting"—activities that are labor intensive, not money expensive. The less money you spend, the smarter you have to be and the harder you have to work.

My first few months in business, I had zero customers and no drive-by traffic—I'd rented a one-stall shop in a storage building on a dead-end dirt road, and I'm not kidding. This was in 1995. The rent was only \$165 a month (ya gotta start somewhere!).

My first mailing list was 150 people in my zip code. It was so dead (how dead was it?)—I'd put a note on my door saying I'd gone for parts and would be back in an hour. I'd forward my shop phone to my cell phone and spend the hour putting my newsletters on parked cars. I found *if I tagged 78 cars, I could make the phone ring once the very next day*. One or two phone calls was all I really needed to survive. I was like a desperate life insurance agent, I was pitching everybody I ran into. I met some of my Best Customers in a carwash (and a convenience store and a restaurant and a grocery store and...).

Ask yourself how badly you really want business. I wanted it as much as I wanted air. Don't just say it, **act like it!** Desire can temporarily take the place of money.

Step One

Market to Customers Already in Your Shop

The easiest marketing we can do is to the people who are already in our shop. We don't have to do anything to get them in. They're a ready source of money in the form of add-on sales.

Emphasize the Value of Your Shop

Build **value** to any transaction by listing every single step taken to perform the repair procedure. Even a simple task, like replacing front brake pads, should list every single step taken by the technician. There are a great many little things that are done to insure a quality brake pad replacement job. List them all out. Create a "canned" labor operation on your computer and print it all out on the repair order. If you write a book for every labor operation, it's easier for the customer to see the value in your work. It's one thing you can do that really makes your shop different from all the others. This helps you get more money, that's the objective.

Utilize Check List Forms

Next, develop check-list forms for inspections. I mean for brake inspections, cooling system inspections, leak tests and so forth. They give you a means to give accurate estimates in advance. You won't have to look up the cost of a water pump replacement, you only have to quote the charge to perform a Cooling System Leak Test. They help insure a quality job by making certain you only fix what the customer really needed to have fixed. They also **make your shop different than the others**. Best of all, you can charge money for them! Paper sells and providing your customers with copies of all the things you did is a powerful sales tool. Always refer to them as "tests" or "inspections". Always give the customer a copy of the test/inspection results. The more paper you can give a customer at the end of the day, the more you can charge and the better job you'll be doing in their eyes.

Always Use Measurable or Observable Data

When you report suggested or needed repair items on a car, *always list the reason for the suggestion*. Use data that can be measured or observed. Don't say the car needs front pads and calipers. State the front brake pads are 1.5mm, the wear limit is 2mm and the front brake calipers are both leaking brake fluid. Always try to use data that can be verified by something in print. If you're making a recommendation based on age or

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miles, state that as well. The more information you give at this point, the harder it is to argue the issue. Develop standards for your shop and involve all your technicians in the decisions. They'll be the ones reporting the information, they need to agree on the standards. This is the only way to get consistent reporting.

Prioritize the additional repairs you've found. Safety items are the first priority. Loose tie rod ends or ball joints are good examples. The car isn't safe to drive until those things are fixed.

The second priority is things that will cause additional repairs if they aren't fixed in time. A deeply cracked CV boot is a good example. You can do a boot today or a whole joint later for more money. Both will cost more to fix later than they will now.

The third priority is simply things that are wrong that can be fixed now or later, it doesn't matter. A small hole in the muffler is a good example. If it's not fixed right away, it'll become a big hole, but it will still take a new muffler to fix it. The price is the same.

The final priority on your list is needed maintenance. Always talk about needed maintenance that's due now or will be due next time. By talking about "next time", your customers will have time to allocate the money to do the repairs. Most maintenance sales you make today were actually made 3 to 6 months ago.

By prioritizing the needed repairs and recommendations, it builds trust and shows your honesty to the customer. If they decline to repair a safety item, ask them if they do understand the car isn't safe to drive in its current state. Make a note on the repair order that the car isn't safe to drive and the customer declined repairs, to protect yourself.

Many people feel bad calling people up and giving them bad news (about their cars) all day. It's not bad news, it's just news. It isn't your car, you don't have to pay the bill and you don't own the car. You're simply reporting what you see, that's all. Sometimes we feel so bad about it we don't even have the heart to tell the customer. We want to wait until next time. *It's not your car and it's not your money!!!* It's not your place to make a decision that the customer should be making. If you don't tell them, you've made a decision for the customer. You've decided they should wait until next time to face the facts. That's not right. How do you really know that they're not leaving on a 5,000-mile trip in the morning? You

don't!! Just tell them what you see and don't feel a bit bad about it. **Your job is to give them enough information so they can make the decisions that are appropriate for them at the time.** After you tell them, ask them if they'd like to fix it all—they just might say “yes”. Always ask for the sale.

As you review the 4 priority levels with the customer, don't give them any prices on any of the things you report and don't let them give you an OK on anything until you've given them the whole picture. It only gets them all confused. They'll immediately want to know how much each item is and they'll want to give you an OK on some things. Ask them to wait until you've given them the overview first. It works much better this way. They can simply listen to what you say without the distractions of price. Go through your list, highest priority down through maintenance, and explain each item. You can then finish with, “And if you fix it all, it will cost \$XXX”. You may be surprised at how many people will pause for a moment and then tell you to fix it all. You'll never know until you ask.

There are test strips available for coolant and brake fluid condition. These should be used, as they eliminate the need for subjective opinions. BG Products has some neat white plastic blocks with dimples that enable new fluids to be shown next to the fluids that came out of the car. This makes it easy to show discolored fluids that need replacement.

Next, educate all your staff on maintenance and the proper intervals for each maintenance item. As Barb Kinder pointed out in her i-ATN post (page 13), if even one of your technicians doesn't think the brake fluid should be changed, you won't sell too many brake fluid flushes. And, if your customer stops and questions that tech in the parking lot, you've just lost all your credibility. Everyone on the staff must agree on these issues. If you can't get them to believe it, bring in some outside trainers to get the job done. If this fails, you'll have to get some new staff members. This area cannot be compromised.

Develop a Scheduled Maintenance Menu

Make it easy for your customers to maintain their cars. During initial write-up, give *every* customer a copy of the factory scheduled maintenance that's appropriate for the mileage on their car. First, however, it's important to address yourself to the reasons the customer brought the car in. Don't add on sales until later in the day, when you know what it will take to address their initial concerns. By giving each customer a list of

the maintenance currently due, they'll have time to think about it while you're fixing their car. Providing them with the list **every** time they come in will not only give you a lot of sales opportunities, but your customers will begin to realize maintenance must be important or you wouldn't always be telling them about it. After you've told them about it, always **ask them to buy**. It's as simple as asking, "Would you like for me to do that for you today?" This one thing alone can give you at least one or two additional sales every day. It can easily pay for your electronic information system in a few days a month. You can keep the rest of the money.

I prefer ALLDATA for this function. Other information systems I've seen have things added to the maintenance schedule that aren't what the factory recommends. In my mind, if the recommendations I hand **my** customers don't agree with **their** owner's manual, I've lost some credibility. If my list agrees with the owner's manual, it's hard to argue with the recommendations. ALLDATA seems to do the best job of this, in my opinion.

Use That Electronic Information System

An electronic information system is a great way to market your shop and the services you provide to your customers. To successfully market your shop involves presenting your shop as a knowledgeable service provider. This is the reason for listing all the little things you do on each labor operation. It shows your expertise. In today's complex world of new cars and technical specifications, vehicle owners many times are left feeling frustrated and overwhelmed when it comes to car repair. It's very beneficial to educate your customer about the scope of the work being done on the vehicle, as it will create greater demand for your service and expertise. Customer education will provide personalized one-on-one attention, which is essential in establishing positive customer relations as well as long-term customer retention. Be prepared to spend some time with each customer when they pick up their car, and fully explain exactly what you did on each repair visit.

Help ease customer fears by providing repair diagrams and cost specifications printed out in a clear and organized format. Providing documentation from an electronic information system such as ALLDATA will help to clearly define and justify labor costs. Computer generated documents legitimize your estimate in the eyes of the customer and reduce the possibility of disputes over repair times and parts prices. When things come out of a computer, people tend to believe them. Service Advisors then have the opportunity to show the customer what

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needs to be done and *how it is to be done properly*. Our very best customers come to us because they want their car fixed right the first time. A helpful technique to convey this to a customer is to generate a printed copy of the service diagram from your electronic information system and attach it to the repair order. The customer will see the printed service explanations and realize the value and expertise they have just experienced by doing business with your shop. Customers who encounter exceptional service and quality will be sure to recommend your shop to family, friends and co-workers, thereby fueling your marketing efforts!

Here again, I prefer ALLDATA as the system that most accurately reinforces my expertise and enhances my value to my customers.

Stop Using the “D” Word

When you use the “D” word, people don’t want to pay. They don’t understand “diagnostics” and don’t want to pay for it. Substitute the word “testing” instead. A guy comes in with a “check engine light” on. You used to say, “It’s \$75 (or whatever) for diagnostics”, and they used to scream. The problem is, they don’t have a clue what you’ll do and diagnostic implies that *one* operation will find all the problems in one shot.

Try this: “I’ll run some preliminary tests which will give me some data to analyze. At that point, I may have found some parts that *failed the testing* and will need to be replaced before any further testing can continue. The further testing may show that everything is fine and the car is fixed OR I may have to run additional tests and repeat the process. You see, this is a matter of proceeding down a road of testing where a failed part (never say a bad part, those stay out late and use foul language) stops the testing process. No further testing can occur until those parts are replaced and the new parts are tested to confirm they work as designed. At that point, the original testing can be resumed to its logical conclusion—the fixed car. Now, the initial testing will cost \$XX. I’ll call you and let you know what those tests indicate. It may just require some simple adjustments or parts may need to be replaced, but we won’t know until the first series of tests are completed. When is the best time to call you with the results of the preliminary tests?”

After all this testing, print out all the pages of ALLDATA’s schematics, diagrams and tests to perform. List all the tests you did on the repair order, complete with results. Attach the ALLDATA pages right to the repair order. Give the customer

a book, a highly technical book at that, with each technical repair. You'll make it look like you've done a lot because you have. You've just never fully informed them of everything you've done in the past. Best of all, the testing doesn't paint you into a corner for "fixing" the car with only one part. You've also explained in complete detail why each and every part was replaced.

Check Service Histories for Opportunities

Service histories should be checked on *every* car *every* time. Consistency is the measure of success here. The more consistent the recommendations, the more likely the customer will take them seriously. These are a gold mine of sales opportunities. Past recommendations can be suggested again and the things that will be due on the "next service visit" set up **future sales**. The customer can plan expenses and more sales will result.

Set up a system in your shop management software that carries forward suggested maintenance or repair items and automatically prints them on the next repair order. Make sure that when any of these items are fixed, they are then removed from this list and not reprinted again. Keep the list up to date and talk to the customer about it on every repair visit.

It's very important not to "talk down" to any customer who ignores your recommendations. Don't preach to people. If they want a sermon, they'll go to church. You can give additional reasons for these repairs, that's OK. It can be a long, slow education process for some customers. And, whatever you do, never say, "I told you so" when the car has a failure that could have been prevented (you can hum it after they're gone). They already know you told them so, don't rub it in. Just take the money.

Ask for Referrals

Give every customer 5 business cards and tell them to send in their friends. If done regularly, this works really well. Hand out refrigerator magnets or other appropriate promotional items.

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Quick Recap

11 Things You Can Do to Market Your Shop Now!

1. Build value to your shop operations by writing out in detail all the steps you take for each labor operation.
2. Utilize check-list forms to insure that every car gets the same uniform inspection each time a job is done and another one to see that each car gets some sort of "safety or reliability inspection" on each visit.
3. Develop an "oil change while you wait" program and send oil change reminder cards out weekly or daily.
4. Use measurable data to support your recommendations.
5. Always prioritize needed work with safety first and maintenance last.
6. Never make a decision a customer should make. Tell them what you've found and give them the chance to give you their money to fix it.
7. Educate your customers and your staff on the importance of maintenance. Print out the required maintenance from ALLDATA, give it to every customer and ask them to buy.
8. Charge for testing and inspection and print out all the test sequences from ALLDATA to show the customer how complex the repairs are.
9. Develop check-list forms you can sell that customers have requested, like a "Vacation Check".
10. Simply look the cars over that are in your shop to find obvious, needed repairs or maintenance.
11. Mail a reminder letter to every customer who declined to have any repair or maintenance performed. Maximum 3 items, put prices on them. Wait 30 days to mail, or longer if appropriate.

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Step Two

Advertising to Get Existing Customers into Your Shop

A good friend of mine has a brother with a dairy operation. He was telling me about visiting his brother and working on the dairy farm. He said his brother has developed a method of meticulously caring for his dairy herd that enables him to get an extra milking every day from the same cattle. He gets 50% more milk with *no increase in cattle*. If we care for our customers carefully, we may be able to achieve a similar result.

What is meant by that? We sometimes spend an inordinate amount of our time and money to get new customers to come to our shops in an effort to increase sales. That time and money has a low rate of return. If we carefully cultivate a relationship with our current customers, we'll get the extra sales we're after *with no increase in customers*. In addition, our current customers are so impressed with our thoroughness that they're more likely to tell their friends, which in turn brings in *new referral customers*. Sometimes we have to do the opposite of what seems logical to get the things we want. We want more new customers, so we focus our efforts on our current customers. Wow.

What do you advertise?

- ◆ Things their cars need—Service Reminders
- ◆ Heavily discounted low-cost items
- ◆ Seasonal “demand” items
- ◆ Special “lists” that you’ve made up in response to demand
- ◆ Premiums unrelated to the work
- ◆ Features or benefits that fit with what customers want to buy (Use those customer surveys!)

Service Reminders

The number one highest response rate to any advertising or marketing effort comes from Service Reminders. You’ve already discussed the need with the customer. They want to maintain their car. This is how you make it easy for them to do just that.

This is also how you even out the “peaks and valleys” of the business cycle. Maintenance is due because of time and mileage, not seasons. By consistently emphasizing regular scheduled maintenance to your customers, you’re creating a steady demand for your services. All you have to do now is **consistently mail out Service Reminders**. Do it every week. It will

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become a regular task that will make the phone ring on a steady basis (in much the same way as the cash register will ring).

Sometimes a plain Service Reminder is enough, other times the reminder must have a *compelling reason* to respond. Market forces can change your approach. During very slow business times, you may want to include some sort of discount or other benefit to get them off the sofa. When times are good and people are buying, the reminder alone may be sufficient.

Another compelling reason to respond might be a short FAQ (frequently asked questions) explanation as to the benefits of having the needed service performed soon, rather than waiting. Explain that worn spark plugs can cause expensive ignition failures even though the car may appear to be running OK. Emphasize the damage caused by a broken timing belt.

Discounted Items

This is what we commonly associate with advertising—discount coupons. When properly used, discounts do have a place in our advertising campaign.

My favorites are low priced items that we can heavily discount. The actual cost isn't much that way, but the impact can be dramatic. These can frequently set up some great sales. FREE clutch inspection—basically a road test. FREE exhaust inspection—very easy to do with an oil change. FREE AC check—stick a thermometer in the outlet vent.

Parts can also be a good drawing card. Wiper blades, fuel system de-icer, carbon remover or other low priced items can be made to look very attractive, while not costing a lot on a per-customer basis. This is better than offering 10% off a higher priced item. 10% doesn't seem like a lot, but on a large job it can cost your shop some money, and still not seem like much of a value to the customer.

The coupon is the key when discounting. Remember, we have three buying motives: Price, Quality and Convenience. Price is only *one* of the motives. Those customers to whom Price is a key motivation will bring in the coupon, the other customers probably won't. This means you won't discount that job every time you do it. You won't have to give away profits to people who *don't care if it's on special*. If they don't give you a coupon, it's regular price.

A coupon also has several other redeeming features. First, it has a definite value. It's worth 5 bucks (or whatever). People

cut it out and save it. It becomes a reminder card. They display it on the fridge or in the car to remind themselves to call your shop and set up an appointment. During this time period, since it's on their mind, they're more likely to tell a friend about the great deal, so it becomes a tool to get more referrals. It also imparts a sense of urgency to act, since it has a deadline. If it's not used by the deadline, they lose the great deal. *It's an urgent matter!* Finally, the coupon gives you a chance to be a hero. Some people will forget to bring the coupon in and mention that to you. You can be a hero and *give them a coupon to use*. You'll really make friends when you do this.

We can also make an everyday low price seem like a great deal, if it's constantly advertised and promoted. These "everyday low price" items might be those things you constantly get "shopped" on the phone for. This promotes the "Wal-Mart" theory by giving the "illusion" of low prices. Most people love getting a bargain. Remember, we can give up a few bucks on a popular operation to get a customer in the door, this is OK. If we've structured our prices right, we can easily make it up on other things we do to their car. Wal-Mart and other large "discount stores" do this every day.

Seasonal "Demand" Items

We've already reviewed the idea of not giving away your profit. You don't discount Cokes at half-time when it's 100° outside. However, you can discount this work **ahead of the season**. The price conscious shopper will bring their car in early for the discount and be happy. The other customers will pay full price later. This can also help to even out some of the peaks and valleys of your business cycle. If you aren't too busy in the Spring but get buried every Summer, the discount gets more business when you need it, reducing demand during peak times. You give the "image" of being price competitive without giving too much away.

Special "Lists" in Response to Demand

This is a great one. Several years ago, it seemed all my customers were asking me to "check the car over, I'm going on vacation". We did the job for free. The next year I made up a "Vacation Check" list, priced it at \$30 and sold the daylights out of it. You can make up all kinds of lists for Fall, Winter, Rainy Season, Summer, Deer Hunting Season and so on. Use your imagination, the lists are endless.

Premiums Unrelated to the Work

Discounts can get old and seem meaningless. Use some

creativity to generate some enthusiasm. I ran a special one Spring for a steak dinner for 2 if you spent \$300 or more. The dinners cost me \$30, so the worst I was out was 10%. Another shop owner offered a poinsettia giveaway at Christmas. One lady wanted to make **sure** she spent enough to get that *free poinsettia*.

I've also offered a floral arrangement as well as the steak dinner. I ran an article in my newsletter on quality businesses and used the florist and steakhouse as examples. Just be careful who you team up with. Make sure they're the best at what they do. Not only do we have a good example of a premium giveaway, we have an outstanding message of quality and value as well. Consider the total impact of your message. Say as much as you can with as little as possible.

I've done a free road atlas with an oil change (got 'em for a buck apiece through a supplier). You could also offer a 12-pack of pop with an oil change. Your imagination is your only limitation.

“Features” Customers Want to Buy

This fits nicely with the Yellow Pages or newsletters. We've already determined customers want their car fixed right the first time and so on. These features should dominate your Yellow Page ad. 4 or 5 key points like this can make your shop distinctly different from the others in the phone book.

Your newsletter should always have some information about how you've improved some convenience or quality features of your business. Keep that message in front of them.

Another message your newsletter should convey is how much you *care* about your customers. This can be effectively communicated with articles about how to better care for their car, tips on car usage, safe driving tips, information they need when traveling and so forth. This helpful information indirectly says you want to help your customers. It's easy for any business to *say* they care about their customers, this is a way to *show them*.

Remember the three buying motives and try to address each of them in some way, even on a discount coupon, in every ad you run.

Convenient, Fast Service

Convenience is a huge buying motive today. Try to develop a “fast service” program that appeals to this motive. A fast way

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to write them up on arrival, a fast way to get them to work, a fast way to get the car completed and back to them. The customer who's motivated by convenience is very often willing to pay much more for that convenience. Just look at the crowds at the fast lube places. Most fast lubes charge more and do a poorer job than most Independent Repair Shops, yet they do a good business. Why? Convenience.

Develop your own fast lube service. Most customers are willing to call and schedule this ahead of time. Simply set aside some time to take advantage of this demand. Once that hood is up or the car is on your hoist, your "fast lube" becomes an opportunity to set up additional sales of CV boots, timing belts, scheduled maintenance and other highly profitable, needed service and repairs. In addition, if the customer is waiting, you can bring them to their car and *show them* what needs to be done. When they *see* the cracked CV boot or other worn or leaking part, they are much more likely to buy the repair.

What Your Customers DON'T Want to Buy

They don't care about the double-whammy chrome-plated Model 3001 inverted muffler bearing reliner machine you just bought. It means nothing to them. Even though it's your pride and joy, they don't care.

Now, they *might* care about the **benefits** that machine can mean to them or their car. If it means you can fix the car in half the time, or twice as good, or for less money, then THAT should be the focus in your advertisement.

Remember, a *feature* doesn't automatically translate into a *benefit*. When you're talking features of your shop, you have to go one step further and explain the benefits. They'll buy benefits every time. Just because the benefits are obvious to all of us in the trade doesn't mean the general public will understand. We have to explain the benefits. Keep it simple and direct.

Step Three

Advertising to Get New Customers

Your current customers will read much of what you write. A “prospective customer” (one who’s never been to your shop) is a different matter entirely. They don’t know who you are and won’t read much to find out. This is where the Unique Selling Points you got from your Customer Surveys come into play in a big way. Use those USPs to attract new customers in every advertising medium you use.

Remember, the overall appearance of any ad reflects your image. In general, the less you say in a quick message the better. Resist the temptation to tell them everything. Make one point well. The average reader freaks out when confronted with a whole bunch of copy. They’ll read the first part, skip the middle and read the last part, if they read it at all.

A clean, simple, well-organized ad conveys the image of quality. Use full color photos of your shop, lounge or office area. Spend a little extra on flyers and use white glossy paper. A cluttered ad conveys an image of confusion or low prices. Ad content should reflect your intentions.

It’s perfectly acceptable to include a low priced “take a peek” special as a small part of this type of ad. Give them an overall image of quality and convenience and include an irresistible special limited-time offer. Motivate them to get off the couch and come to your shop.

Consider hiring a professional graphic designer to develop a logo or a “look” for your ads. This one-time expense can really pay off in the long run. When you use the same format each time, your ads will always look professional.

Rely on consistency to reinforce your message. Run your ads frequently. Reading experts claim that the average person has to read something seven times before they remember it. That may be optimistic.

The Phone Strategy

A great many prospective customers will phone first before coming in. For this reason it’s important that you track and identify the competitive labor operations that customers frequently call for prices on. These might be brake pad replacement, tune-up, oil changes, CV boot replacement, alignment and so on. A price structure can be developed that makes your

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shop seem very consumer friendly. Remember, the objective in answering the phone is to convert that call into a **car in the door**.

Many customers call and ask for prices because they don't know what else to ask. The best way to answer a price call is to ask the caller, "**What is it that causes you to believe it needs _____?**" This can highlight your concern for customers and convert the call into a meaningful conversation. This strategy will frequently get you a **car in the door**. We all know we can't always give an accurate estimate on the phone. This is where those "Test" and "Inspection" sheets you've created come into play. Now you **can** give them an estimate to "examine" the car (and help you sell "test time").

Our job is to convince the caller that: 1) We're the shop for them, 2) We care about them, 3) We want to fix their car right the first time, 4) We want to fix the car right *for the least possible money* (no, I'm not nuts, keep reading). That's right, why replace the whole engine if it only needs a water pump? Why replace a water pump if it only needs a hose? Why replace a hose if it's only got a loose hose clamp? Because we're honest, caring professionals, we don't want to replace parts that aren't needed to do the job properly.

Personally, I always try to think of the *very least expensive thing* that could cause the condition they're calling about. Since we don't know what it is yet, your guess is as good as anyone's.

This is also a good time to inform the caller that we have an **electronic information system** with over a million articles and six million graphics to insure that we **can** fix it right the first time. Guesswork costs money. It's less expensive to have a professional determine *exactly* what's wrong than it is to just start replacing a bunch of parts until it's fixed (maybe).

Always smile ☺ when you answer the phone. Always try to appear to be as helpful and concerned as you can, **always ask for an appointment time** and always remember the only reason you're on the phone is to get a **car into your shop and money in the register**.

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Summary

There are almost no shops that truly focus on the maintenance that the car needs. There are even fewer that report everything they see and let the customer decide.

The majority of shops don't even buy training or good tools and equipment.

There is a sizeable market of consumers who desperately want good quality service. These same people are short on time, so they want a shop that makes it easy for them to do business with.

Many people today are fed up with poor service everywhere and they want it bad.

Focus on quality repairs, quality customer treatment, convenience at every turn and you'll be different than every other shop in your area.

Your pricing only needs to be in the ball park on a few common items.

If your shop doesn't currently attract these types of customers, be prepared to take some time to get the job done. You'll lose some of your current customers and you need time to get some new ones.

Make your customers your friends and cultivate a relationship with them.

My own goal has been to offer a level of service that's so good that if my customers ever go anywhere else for service, it's just not the same.

You truly can offer service that's unique and different. Then you won't have to worry about parts stores that "read codes for free". I have one 3 blocks from me and I never even hear about it.

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Best Customer Survey

We consider you to be one of our best customers. As such, we are very interested in your input. To help us improve our business, we need to know what's important to you. Please take a minute to answer this question.

“What are the most important things that you, as a car owner, seek out when deciding where to take your car for service?”

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Thank you for helping us out. We appreciate it and we appreciate your business.

Valued Customer Survey

We consider you to be a valued customer. As such, we are very interested in your input. To help us improve our business, we need to know what's important to you. Please take a minute to answer this question.

“What are the most important things that you, as a car owner, seek out when deciding where to take your car for service?”

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Thank you for helping us out. We appreciate it and we appreciate your business.

General	Good	Fair	Poor	Needs Atten.	Comments
Oil					
Oil Admixture					
Under hood	Ful	Low	Acided	Needs Atten.	
Fluids					
Washer solvent					
Water					
Power Steering					
Brake fluid					
Clutch fluid					
Transmission Fluid					
Condition of.....	Good	Fair	Poor	Needs Atten.	
Drivelines					
Upper radiator hose					
Visual condition of Battery					
Battery Cable					
Air Filter					
Under Car....					
Driveshaft ends					
Exhaust condition					
Alignment (based on tire wear)					
Tire condition					
Tire pressure					
Wheels					
Rear differential level					

Technician

Date

Rate

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We'll be happy to show you any items that you may have questions about. Please don't hesitate to ask.

Date / / Tech Vacation Inspection Repair order #

Item	ROAD TEST	Good	Fair	Needs Attention	Comments
Auto trans. performance					
Clutch condition—5 speed					
Alignment performance					
Braking performance					
Wheel bearings					
Windshield wipers					
Windshield washers					
Air conditioner cools to °F					
SHOP INSPECTION		Good	Fair	Needs Attention	
Horn					
Lights, signals & flashers					
Air in spare tire					
FLUIDS		Full	Low	Added	
Oil					
Coolant					
Power Steering					
Washer solvent					
Transmission					
Brake fluid					
UNDER HOOD		Good	Fair	Needs Attention	
Air filter					
Belts					
Hoses					
Battery visual					
Battery load test					
UNDER CAR					
Tire Condition					
Tire air pressure					
Alignment (based on tire wear)					
Front suspension					
Steering linkage					
Rear suspension					
Brake lines and hoses					
Fluid leaks					
Exhaust					

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Overheating Checklist

Check	Description	Yes	No	Results/comments
Coolant level inspection	Radiator full? Overflow tank full?			Added?
If low—Cold pressure test	Evidence of leaks?			
If low—headgasket test	Chemical or mechanical			
Radiator cap pressure test	Does it hold pressure?			
Cold thermostat test	Does radiator get warm immediately?			
Coolant condition	Color or clarity Proper mixture—Good to _____ °F			
Complaint verified?				
Hose inspection				
Radiator/Condensor inspect.	Free of obstructions/good condition			
Belt inspection	Condition/tightness			
Fan operation	On at _____ °F / Off at _____ °F			
Fan airflow—front & back	volume/correct direction			
Water pump	Leaks/noise			
Heater operation	Output temp _____ °F at idle Output temp _____ °F at 2500 rpm.			
Coolant flow check				
Radiator heat exchange temp	_____ °F behind radiator			
Progressive radiator temp	_____ °F at top— _____ °F at bottom			
Thermostat housing temp	_____ °F			

Technician _____

Additional comments _____

Repair Order Number _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____



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Manufacturer Specific

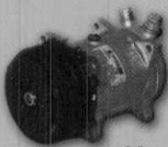


Scan Tool Diagnostics

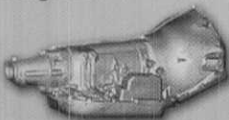
System Specific



4 & 5 Gas Analysis



Air Conditioning



Transmission

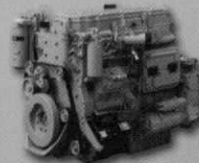


Fuel Injection

Hard-To-Find Info



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Diesel Diagnostics



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