

AUTOMOTIVE



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**The following article was written by Chris “Chubby” Frederick
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THE SECRET TO SELLING AUTOMOTIVE MAINTENANCE

**Learning this lesson now can quickly change
the effectiveness of your sales staff.**

If you want to stabilize your car count and hold on to your customers through their purchase of new cars, you are going to have to be proficient at selling maintenance. I was listening to a story from Nebraska shop owner and ATI coach Rick Johnson, who explained how he coaches service advisors to learn the secret to selling more maintenance. Let's hear what Rick has to say.

As I talk to shops every week, I often am surprised at how a few shops can sell a lot of maintenance and others will tell me that no one is buying. I hear that all the customer wants to do is just the oil change or just fix the check engine light and that's it. I ask them if they are making estimates on the maintenance and they say yes, but that no one is buying. They have all the reasons not to buy memorized, it seems: Christmas time, tax time, too cold, too hot just to name a few. The shops that are selling very often are located in the same state and sometimes the same towns as the other shops that have customers who aren't interested. I find that intriguing, don't you?

This got me to thinking back to when I was the service advisor in my shop and how things changed before my eyes. When I first opened my shop, I never had to advertise the first few years and we were always booked out two or three weeks. Ninety-nine percent of the cars were still carbureted, and most customers just handed me the keys and said something like, "I think the carburetor needs cleaning and possibly a tune-up."

We would bring the car in and sure enough the carburetor was in need of a cleaning and kit, and the spark plugs were black and worn. I would call the customer and tell them what it needed. Nearly every time I got the answer to go ahead, it needs it. That was that! They did not ask for an estimate, did not need explanations of what or why-just do it. Man, those were the days, right?

Sell Yourself First

Then right before my eyes, along comes fuel injection and cars being built better and having fewer breakdowns. My schedule went from being booked out three weeks, to me being happy if we had work lined up for today and a few jobs for tomorrow.

I knew I had to do something, and the industry started talking a lot about the need to sell maintenance. I bought a transmission flush machine and started selling transmission flush service. As time went along, I bought all styles of flush machines and tried to present and sell as many services as I could, as long as they were needed. I did pretty well with some clients, but with a lot of them, I just could not seem to get them to buy, and I didn't know why.

Then one day my flush equipment dealer told me about training it offered to learn more about the flushes. I decided to go, as I realized I needed to learn more about the flushes since I could not sell a power-steering flush or brake flush or an intake cleaning to anyone, it seemed: Christmas time, tax time, too hot, too cold, you know the story.

I attended the one-day training and man, were my eyes opened! I learned the science behind the chemicals and saw firsthand the flushes being performed and the difference they made, and the light bulb turned on. I came home to the shop and started selling flushes like nobody's business. It became easy to sell maintenance.

A few months after I attended this class, my chemical salesman stopped in and said the distributor wanted to know how I was doing what I was doing. I asked him what he meant, and he said that I had become his biggest seller of their products in my state! And all I could tell him was that learning about the flushes gave me the buy-in and the confidence I needed to sell them.

Educate Your Customers

So the other day as I was thinking about this, I realized what the problem really is when it comes to selling maintenance, the "secret," you might say. That secret is education, both mine and my clients'.

I was very lucky or fortunate the first few years I was in business, because my customers already were educated on their vehicles' needs and problems. They already had carburetors overhauled and tune-ups done multiple times. They knew what needed to be done by the way their car ran and what to expect when the repairs were made - that their vehicle would run like new again. So sales were made before their cars were dropped off for the most part.

Now fast forward to today. Most drivers today never have had a carburetor overhauled, and for those who have, it is a far distant memory. Most drivers today have never had a car on the back of a tow truck. They probably have not had their car run rough or not start; and for the most part, every time they want to go somewhere in their beloved car, they put the key in the ignition and gas in the tank and they go!

Imagine having a customer come to your shop today and they have driven the car for

four years. They've never had an instance in which the car would not start, it's never left them stranded, and as far as they can tell, it runs just as good today as the day it was bought. After you perform the oil change and inspection, you tell them that by mileage the car is due for a timing belt and transmission service. The first thing they probably say is, "How much?" You tell them \$1,000 and they say, "No, not today."

You tell your boss, no one is buying maintenance; you know why: too hot, too cold, etc. The reality here is that Mr. or Ms. Customer is thinking my car is running great, seems to be shifting just like it did the day I bought it. They can't understand why you are asking them to spend \$1,000 on a car that, as far as they are concerned, is running perfectly.

To ask for maintenance dollars before educating the consumer is wrong, wrong, wrong. The key is to realize that you need to educate the client on what you are asking them to buy. Go over the features and benefits of the services and make sure that they clearly understand what it is you are asking them to spend their hard-earned money on, and that by investing in maintaining the vehicle, they will prevent more of their money from being spent on expensive repairs. It might sound like a lot to say but shortcut this process at your peril.

Then Talk About the Investment

Now let's get back to our example of the customer with the 4-year-old car needing a timing belt and transmission service. This time we explain to them what a timing belt is and what it does. Use flip charts or one of the many software animation tools that show what it does and what happens if it breaks.

Explain to them that they have an interference engine, and that if the belt breaks it will ruin the engine, and to replace the engine could cost up to \$6,000. Then explain to them what the purpose of transmission fluid is, how the contaminated fluid no longer can protect the transmission and that the transmission can cost upward of \$4,000 to replace. Once you have fully educated the customer and they are fully aware of what these maintenance services will do for them, then and only then do you tell them their total investment is only \$1,000 – 10 percent the price of repair. You have more training and sales tools than ever before, but you have to take the time to use them. I can assure you that you will sell a lot more maintenance if you will only slow down the sales process and educate.

Use a Maintenance Sales Kit

Fortunately, repair work still is sold much the same today as it was several years ago, the reason being that when the car is broken, the consumer already knows something needs to be done to get it going again. Maintenance sales on a "perfectly running car" are not nearly as easy. But the best way to improve those profitable maintenance sales is to educate: educate yourself, your advisors and then your customers.