

## SECURING REPEAT BUSINESS

One formula for success is to get your customers to become repeat purchasers. There are a number of factors involved in getting this to happen: outstanding service, quality parts, competitive pricing and an attempt to “under-promise and over-deliver.”

Making a customer a repeat customer all begins with a test drive and performing a thorough check of the vehicle. Make sure your customer completely understands exactly what his or her car needs. To avoid any miscommunication, getting the customer into the shop for a show-and-tell is always a great way to sell work, schedule additional service, estimate cost, and determine the severity and priority of the repair. Any recommended additional repairs should always be written on the repair order for future reference.

Take advantage of the customers' presence at the front desk when they're dropping off or picking up their cars as an opportunity to build relationships. Handshakes, smiles and a true appreciation for the people who have spent their money and entrusted the service of their car to you can pay big dividends. And stay with the price that's quoted and try not to call the customer more than once, if possible.

Another very important point to remember is the customer's comfort and convenience. Having a loaner car or a rental car available is a necessity today. Providing rides to work or picking them up is another benefit to consider. Offering these services will be very helpful in selling the job. If they have a replacement car and are not inconvenienced, they probably will go ahead with the repair list. Take care of the people who are taking care of you.

Don't forget to thank both customers and businesses, such as the oil change place down the road, for referral work. Sending them pizza for lunch on Friday with a handful of your business cards lets them know

you appreciate the recommendations. Don't forget about the construction business or the fire extinguisher company that has the fleet of trucks you work on — call the owners and send them gift certificates to take their families out for dinner. It's a simple way to say “thank you” for putting their trust in you.

Finally, don't ignore the overall appearance of your employees, your shop and the waiting room; the warmth and first impression of your service writer alone can add — or detract — from your ability to attract and retain customers. Customer retention requires common sense, good communication and a good sense of humor.



*Bring a technician into the conversation when a more thorough explanation of a problem is needed. Explaining repairs one-on-one can go a long way in ensuring customer confidence.*

### Other Tips for Securing Repeat Customers

- Knowing your customer by his or her first name is a great way to develop a relationship.
- Every other week, make a habit of courtesy-calling customers whose vehicles were serviced in previous weeks. Make sure their experience was pleasant.
- Have the car washed and gassed up for the customer upon pickup.
- Get in the habit of giving out priority repair lists to customers after their car has been inspected, so you don't overwhelm them with repair costs.
- Don't charge your regular customers for every little thing; giving them a free bulb or wiper blade, or getting them in with no appointment makes a customer want to return to your shop.
- Having a unique business card is helpful. Ours are plastic and the thickness of a credit card; it stands out in people's wallets or Rolodex.
- Solicit complaints. Thank customers every time they bring a problem to your attention.
- Schedule “customer appreciation” days or weeks on a regular basis. Mark them with celebrations, open

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houses, refreshments or gifts.

- Set up a customer bulletin board, and invite customers to post "for sale" notices, event announcements or other information there.
- Leave a customer "question-and-answer" or "comment" box in your place of business. Offer personal responses to any comments received.
- Follow up every customer complaint with a telephone call and a free oil change to sooth the situation.
- Let your customers benefit from your contacts with other customers and companies you do business with. Networking promotes repeat business at your shop.
- Sponsor an annual customer open house.
- Give your service writers a checklist to make sure they've over-delivered to each customer.
- Offer a "no questions asked" refund on unsatisfactory merchandise or services and follow through on your promise.
- Ask customers, with courtesy and enthusiasm, how you can help them, whether in person or on

the phone.

- Offer customers unexpected gifts of candy, food, T-shirts or coupons when paying their bills.
- Offer a free "assessment of priority service needed" to customers.
- Invite customers to evaluate you and your service every time they deal with you. Pre-addressed, pre-stamped comment cards with an envelope work well.
- Don't make people wait on the phone too long; pick up and give them the option of waiting or calling them back.

By delivering expert repairs and making a conscious effort to let customers know you appreciate their business, you obtain the sought-after dividends of earning their trust, respect and repeat business. ©

*Have any customer service practices that have paid off for your shop? Let us know so we can share them with other ImportCar readers. Send an e-mail to Contributing Editor Debbie Briggs: [dbriggs@babcox.com](mailto:dbriggs@babcox.com).*

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Akron, OH 44333

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