



CAPRICORN

...it's just easier!™

No other resources available for step 4n:

•

Is your customer service keeping up with your customers?

By Geoff Mutton

The huge advancements in automotive technology over the past two decades have required workshops to invest in tools and knowledge if they planned to stay in business.

All well and good for the practical tasks of fixing motor cars, but by contrast, research has shown that the customer service experience has not moved with the times.

A very successful workshop owner admitted that the only thing he does differently from 25 years ago is email customers their invoice and sends SMS service reminders.

While good old face-to-face customer service is still just as important as it ever was, there is a range of new products and technologies that enable businesses to improve the customer service experience, but they are not being readily embraced. In reality, many fear change, and prefer to stick to the same methods they have always used.

These new products are emerging as a direct result of customer demand. Those that reject new business methods need to realise that it's not about them; it's what the customers want.

The new generation of customers has different desires and expectations, so if workshops want their business, they will need to start changing their ways and update some of their antiquated notions about how to relate to customers and keep them happy.

Keeping in contact

Many don't realise that the greatest asset in any business is the customer database.

A neglected database means the workshop depends only on customers finding and using the business. The sensible alternative is to regularly keep in contact to keep your customers close and out of reach of your competitors.

Modern technology makes keeping in contact dead easy, using email, SMS, mail, phone and push notifications on an App. The time to contact customers could include service reminders, 24-hour booking reminders, registration and WOF reminders (location dependant), repair progress updates, repair images, monthly specials and Christmas or other messages of celebration.

This all sounds obvious, but I am astounded at the number of workshops that fail to do any of the above.

Take our advice – the overwhelming majority of customers want it, and even rely on it.

If your point of sale software can't manage it then jump onto Capricorn's Auto Boost which has an SMS reminder facility.

Educating your customers through videos

Customer education videos are all about educating car owners on why certain repairs or maintenance is required, the idea being that the video will do the selling for you.

Let's assume you have a new customer and after performing a service you need to call them to let them know that the timing belt is due to be replaced. Instead of an easily forgotten phone call, the best option is to SMS the service report with a link to a timing belt animation video. You finish the SMS by asking them to give you a call.

Which approach do you think will impress your 30-year-old customer brought up on Facebook and YouTube?

The key with educational videos is to make them part of your process. Once using them becomes habit you won't look back. An introductory free version is available through Capricorn Society www.capricorn.coop/vehiclevideos, and there's an upgraded version with additional functionality via Vehicle Visuals <https://au.vehiclevisuals.com/>. These are now integrated directly into the following software providers; Mechanic desk www.mechanicdesk.com.au, Workshop Software www.workshopsoftware.com.au, and Sam www.sam.co.nz.

Online bookings

This is still a step too far for some workshops, but trust me when I say your customers will appreciate it.

A first-time customer or an existing customer with a serious running issue are very unlikely to book online, but an existing customer who just needs to book a service will very much appreciate the convenience – the key word being convenience.

Today's customers are used to booking haircuts, gym classes, doctor's appointments and just about everything else online. The industry needs to get with the times and start making this service available.

What could be easier for a customer at home browsing the internet and receiving an SMS service reminder containing a direct link to an online booking form. It's a one minute process that's faster than a phone call and more inclined to be acted on immediately rather than having to remember to call up tomorrow during their lunch break.

The office infrastructure required to implement this is not that complicated. There are many online diary platforms that can do this, and if your automotive software provider doesn't offer this function, it might be time to look for one that does.

Finance solutions

Most franchise groups and dealerships are now offering some form of finance facility. Don't confuse this to offering direct credit. With their finance facility, they outsource the collecting of the payment to a third-party finance company. The dealership gets paid up-front less a small agreed commission. Such organisations include Ezypay and AfterPay.

Offering this payment option helps those customers who may not have the funds available today and hence removes the 'I can't afford it' objection.

Unbudgeted repairs are often required, at the worst possible time. Your customers' preference will always be to get it all done today rather than have to bring the vehicle back, so offering a finance solution allows this to be done. It should also help improve your cashflow.

Loan cars

Most workshops believe customers push service due dates because they can't afford the service. From experience, the real reason is that the customer is too busy and they will be inconvenienced if they don't have their car for a day.

Obviously running a fleet of loan cars is a significant cost. That's why it's called a loan car and not a courtesy car. Offer your loan cars for a small nominal fee of say \$10 to \$20 per day, so that it becomes cost neutral.

Offering a loan car will make your customer service experience much more pleasurable and there's the added bonus of your branded vehicle running around town.

Visual triggers

Washing, vacuuming, cleaning tyres, deodourising, cleaning the dash or re-attaching a loose mud guard are all examples of visual triggers. They might seem like a pain to you but it's something your customer will notice and appreciate.

There is no hard and fast rule for visual triggers, but adopt a procedure that everyone can follow. Whatever it is, make sure the technician adds it to the job card so the service manager can point it out to the customer at the end of the day.

Convenience and trust are the main reasons customers choose a workshop. The little extra things are what makes it harder for them to leave you.

So take the time to review your customer service experience. Are you keeping up with the times and grasping new technologies or are you still doing it the same as 20 years ago?

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn

Just go for it!