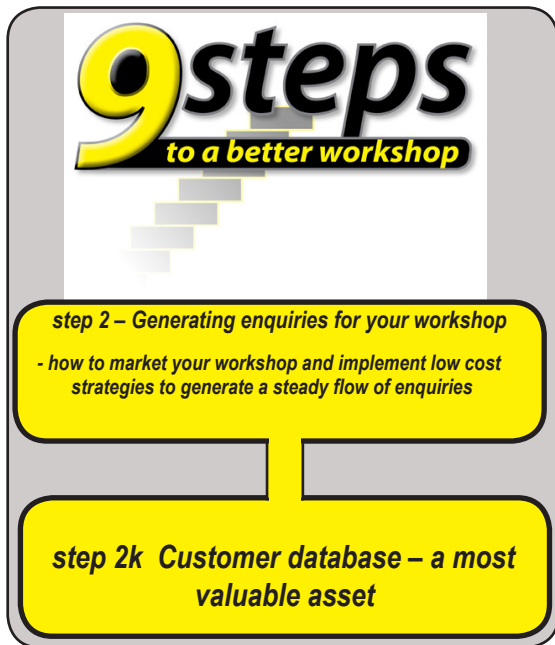




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Customer database – a most valuable asset

by Geoff Mutton

A good database should be the most valuable asset in any automotive workshop. Whether you agree with this statement or not will probably depend on when the question is asked. If the industry is booming, like it is right now, and new customers are ringing the phone off the hook, you might well put a good database at the bottom of your priorities.

But there is nothing predictable in life these days, so perhaps another forced lockdown might make you think otherwise.

The importance of a database is that it helps to keep the workshop connected to those customers who keep your doors open – your existing customers. Most bookings are typically made by existing customers, and around half of the new bookings will most likely be word of mouth referrals.

Existing customers already know and trust you and they will happily buy from you again while you keep looking after them well.

What information should you collect?

Simply put, the more information you collect the better the database will operate.

The minimum:

- name - correct spelling
- mailing address
- mobile number
- work phone number

- email
- vehicle details and history.

Update daily

Databases need consistent daily attention.

Every time a customer makes a booking, their best contact details need to be confirmed, including their mobile number, mailing address and email. If you don't ask, they won't tell.

Also check that you have the latest service or registration/Warrant of Fitness due dates for every customer. Make it mandatory that your technicians check and record this on every vehicle they work on.

Customer contact – how often?

Monthly contact might be too much for some customers, but there is more to keeping contact than just sending an annual service reminder.

Other potential contact points:

- 1) Service reminders – this is a must and should be seen as a courtesy. To increase the effectiveness of these reminders (if your system allows) set the reminder frequency to six, nine or 12 months – whatever frequency matches the customer's driving habits.
- 2) Registration/Warrant of Fitness reminder for applicable states – another courtesy.
- 3) 24-hour booking reminder – life today throws up many demands for attention, so a friendly reminder about an upcoming appointment is usually appreciated. It will also help to warn you about no-shows and allow time to bring other bookings forward if customers can't make their appointment.
- 4) Thank you/review reminder – within 72 hours of a service or repair, take the opportunity to thank your customer for their business and suggest they give your workshop an online review on their preferred platform.
- 5) Service follow ups for the slow-pokes – who knows why many customers tend to ignore the regular service cycles for their vehicles? The medium and long-term consequences of maintenance neglect could cost them dearly, so it is really in their best interests to send them reminders about the importance of vehicle maintenance at the appropriate intervals and these should start going out when services reach three months overdue.
- 6) Holiday messages – Christmas and Easter are good enough reasons to make contact with your customers. Simply wishing them happy holidays and updating them on workshop hours gets your business brand front of mind with customers.
- 7) Special message – there will be other times in the year when a communication with customers is justified. It could be to introduce a new product or service, or related to a local emergency. Don't waste these opportunities, but do it sparingly for the best chance that the message will get read and understood.

The best communication platform?

The three main communication platforms are SMS, email and mail. Each method has advantages and disadvantages.

- Mail – very expensive but very personal
- email – free but likely to be deleted as junk
- SMS – most people will open an SMS but there is limited text capacity.

TaT research tends to nominate SMS as providing the best bang for your buck. It's reasonably priced, gets read most of the time, can be linked directly back to your website, phone numbers or booking portal and integrates well with most point-of-sale systems. There will be times when different mediums will be better suited so use whatever medium works best for you and your customers.

Other databases

So far, the focus has been on the traditional database of past customers but other databases can be generated from any type of information.

For example, if your business operates social media accounts like Facebook and Instagram, your followers are essentially a database of existing and potential customers.

Internet cookies on your website also allow you to capture information on people who have visited your website. Digital marketing can be used to advertise to these potential customers.

These aren't customer databases in the traditional sense, but they are still lists of potential customers who have shown an interest in your workshop.

Those who have been around for a few years will know that boom times don't last forever. Economies fluctuate and nothing is ever certain or predictable.

Regardless of the current status of your business, maintaining and using your database effectively will ensure your business reaches its full potential.

ENDS

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

Just go for it!