Get, keep and grow your customers
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How much do you enjoy going to the dentist when you have a toothache? – In the best-case scenario, it won’t hurt a lot or cost too much. But if you’ve got toothache, your only options are going to the dentist or putting up with the pain.

Many people have a similar relationship with their car service workshop. They want their car to work properly, and if it needs repairs or service they hope it won’t be too expensive.

Car repairs and service are an unavoidable necessity. Just as your dentist must earn your trust, you must earn your customers’ trust. You and all your employees should bear this in mind before your customer comes in. Your customer is as thrilled about coming to your workshop as you are when you visit the dentist. But this needn’t stop them from liking you and your employees. Just as you go to the dentist to keep your life running smoothly, your customers come to you to keep their car and daily activities ticking.

It’s cheaper and more profitable to keep existing customers than recruit new ones. Key points to remember: Your most important customers are the ones you already have. Satisfied customers come back, and are profitable in the long term. But however loyal your customers are, the day will come when they move away or stop driving a car. So while it’s vital to build relationships with existing customers, you also need to be constantly recruiting new ones. Then the worst thing that can happen is that you’ll have to expand your business!

So constantly work to recruit new customers.
Get customers

A funnel is sometimes used as a metaphor for customer recruitment: you try to attract as many prospects as possible, then you qualify them (i.e. determine which ones are sufficiently interested), then segment them into groups (categorise them according to common needs or interests), then entice each group with an irresistible offer.

Needless to say, the original target group will be smaller after each stage in this process. But that's life: You can't win them all, at least not all at once.
01 How many cars are available for your workshop to service?
Well, we can safely assume that your customers own or are otherwise responsible for at least one car. We can also assume that you are equipped to service and repair their car. And it’s also quite safe to assume that your customers live or work reasonably close to your workshop. Of course, what is considered reasonably close depends on the geographic area where your workshop is located and how many other workshops there are nearby.

02 How do we tell the world about our offering and ourselves?
Having a website that tells people where you are and what you offer is a basic hygiene factor in marketing communication. Most people today search the Internet to find answers to their questions. Simply having a website that clearly tells people where you operate, what you offer and who your target group is (e.g. what car makes you service) makes you visible to customers looking for a car service workshop.

03 Make direct contact with prospects
If you can get contact details for people in your vicinity who own or use the makes of car that you service, you can approach them directly with your offering. If not, you will find it considerably more difficult to advertise your services. Besides being a problem for you, this can also lead to a lot of littering in public areas.

04 Advertising
Advertisements in the local press or a direct advertising campaign are two ways of casting your nets wider in the hope of landing customers. If you are lucky, someone will see your advertisement exactly when they are looking for the service you are offering. In that case, your advertisement might be successful. But in all honesty, how often does someone trust or remember an advertisement or a marketing leaflet?
Try it by all means, but don’t expect great results.
Telemarketing

Having an employee or a telemarketing company offer your services over the phone is another possibility. However, telemarketing will only work if you have an attractive, up-to-date offering that is irresistible enough to convince customers over the phone. To ensure that the telemarketing initiative pays off, the caller must gather all the necessary information and actually book an appointment with the prospect during the call.

Recruiting new customers requires being active and smart

To save time and money, put some extra thought into considering your customers’ needs, preferences and situation.

Which potential customers in your vicinity might be interested in having their car serviced by your firm, and what is important to them?

It is important to be able to get a car serviced before an MOT test, or when a problem occurs. If someone can do this in a way that causes minimal disruption in their daily life, they might consider it. In this case, think about whether you can satisfy the customer’s specific requirements. If the customer wants to drop the car with you in the morning and use it to fetch the kids from school at 3 pm, you must be able to meet these requirements.

What companies operate in your local area and what cars do their employees drive? If you see things from your (prospective) customers’ point of view, you can think up an attractive offering. Why not contact nearby companies and offer to service their employees’ cars while they are at work?
A problem – a solution.
The start of a good relationship

If your workshop sells spare parts, there’s a good chance customers will come to you when they have problems. Their car might be sounding strange, a problem might have surfaced during the MOT test, or maybe something just doesn’t seem quite right.

A customer visiting you for the first time has probably made an effort to find a workshop that services their make of car and is located near their home or workplace. If the customer searches for you on the Internet, it is worthwhile having a good website and keyword-optimizing it. Keyword-optimization is simpler than it might sound. In principle, it means including objective, comprehensive information about your offering, your location and the cars that you service.

Trust leads to recommendations

A new customer might come to you because somebody they know (and trust) recommended you. This is known as word-of-mouth marketing. In practical terms, it means that somebody told a friend or acquaintance that your workshop provides good, reliable service.

This is a great opportunity to establish a long, profitable relationship with your new customer. If you gain a reputation as a problem solver, you can be sure this new customer will go on to recommend you to his or her own friends. People find few things more satisfying than demonstrating their good judgement (and good luck) while at the same time helping their friends and sharing useful advice.

Earn a good reputation by doing a good job and taking good care of your customers. Then, work to maintain your reputation.
Get your customers’ contact details

Alltid och i alla sammanhang, se till att alltid be kunder och potentiella kunder om deras kontaktuppgifter i form av namn, adress, e-postadress och telefonnummer. Detta bör göras redan vid första kontakt. Oavsett om det är via din webbsida, telefonsamtal eller vid ett besök i verkstaden.

Skapa möjlighet för kunden att kunna boka tid, få kostnadsförslag eller söka kontakt online. På så sätt kan du samla in uppgifter om både bil och person via formulär som du sedan kan använda för en personlig direkttkontakt via e-post.

Collaborate with suppliers

You can also collaborate with suppliers. Ask them for information about the cars you service and the cars’ owners. In all likelihood, they can help you with marketing material and advice about recruiting new customers in your vicinity.
Keep your customers

Keeping your existing customers is crucial. Your profits come from your loyal customers. You could try introducing loyalty programmes, for example by offering every third, fifth or seventh servicing free of charge. You can also offer a guarantee on the work you perform. For instance, if work you did requires fixing again within a year you can do it for free. Expect a loyal customer to visit you at least three times a year: for annual servicing, to change to winter tyres and to change to summer tyres. With any luck, they might also drop by when it's time to buy a new car. You know the customer's driving habits and individual needs, so your advice is very valuable.

The more you know about your existing and prospective customers, the better equipped you are to make an offer that meets their needs.
Always aim to make add-on sales that benefit the customer

If your business includes selling cars, or if you can collaborate with a car dealer nearby, you might arrange for your customer to test drive a new car in the same category while his or her car is at your workshop for servicing. This way your customer gets a replacement car, while the car dealer gets to demonstrate a new car to a prospect. You improve your offering, your customer has one less problem and your dealer doesn't have to offer balloons and free ice cream to attract a prospect.

Earn your customer’s trust by listening

We are born with two ears and a mouth. For the sake of argument, let’s say this is because listening is more important than talking.

If you start by finding out your customer’s needs, you can offer them one or more solutions. Unfortunately, this isn’t always as obvious as it may sound.

Your workshop can’t satisfy everybody’s needs, but you know what you can offer.

Satisfied, loyal customers are profitable in the long term. That’s why it’s crucial to make sure your customers are satisfied.

You and your colleagues have a lot of knowledge that your customers lack. Share this knowledge with your customers and show you care about them and their cars. You’re there to save them as many car-related problems as possible.

Create a customer register where you keep notes about your customers, their cars and their needs. Keep the register up-to-date. It should be possible to sort the information by customer name as well as car registration number.

The better you know your customers, the better advice and service you can offer.
Of course you need to develop your clients and offer them opportunities to increase their purchases of your services. You can only offer products and services that help them and makes their car ownership trouble free. This you must be well aware of since it is critical for your marketing efforts to the customers you already have.

Just like the dentist you go to must have your confidence, you need to have your client’s trust in order to sell more. This is something you and all who work with you have to keep in mind even before your customer enters your workshop. And as hilarious as you think that it is for you to visit the dentist, precisely as much fun your customers think it is to have to visit you. But that does not mean they necessarily dislikes of you or your staff. For the same reasons you visit the dentist, in order to make your everyday life work, your customers visits you in order for them to have a well functioning car and a hassle-free life.
Add-on sales, upselling and cross-selling

The better you know your customers and their needs, the better suggestions you can make. Your customers will appreciate your suggestions and appreciate you for making them.

Become adept at cross selling and upselling.

Cross selling means offering and inducing customers to buy additional items when they buy something from you. These items may be services or products. Make sure that the things you offer seem relevant to the customer.

Upselling means offering and inducing customers to buy a better item than they originally intended to buy. The item you offer must be perceived by the customer as not only better but also providing some added value.

Here are some examples:

Say you know that a certain customer absolutely despise coming in for repairs. If you anticipate that their car will increasingly need repairs in the near future, you might suggest that they start looking around for a new car. And if they are unsure about whether to buy a new or used car, offer them (if time allows) to check over the used car they consider (at a special deal) before they make their decision. Then you can simply update your customer register with the new car’s make and model year and use the new information as reference for the customer’s future service needs.

Or say you know that a customer is passionate about cars and driving. You might offer them to regularly fine-tune their engine (at a special deal). Keep a lookout for new accessories or models that appear on the market and suggest them to the customer.

Tyre hotels are an increasingly common solution. They are a great way to make customers return - at least to change their tyres between seasons. When they change their tyres, you can offer to check their brake pads since half the work has already been done. If the pads need replacing, offer a special deal. If you have a tyre hotel (where customers store their tyres out of season), check the tyres’ condition before storing them. If they are showing signs of wear, make a note of it.

If you build good relationships with your customers, they will choose you and recommend you to others. You might even end up building a relationship with their car, so that when they sell it they recommend you to the next owner.
You could even organise an evening for your customers (and let them bring a friend or colleague) where you demonstrate which things they can check and fix for themselves (and which things it’s best to have done by your workshop). Cars are getting more and more complex, and drivers generally understand less and less about how they work. If one of your employees is particularly good at something, let them demonstrate and explain it. The fact that you are proud of your staff and trust your customers to visit your workshop in the evening or at a weekend will make both your customers and staff happy.

Why not do what your dentist has been doing for years? Ask your customers if they want a yearly check-up reminder, for example when their MOT is due. Nobody wants to take two MOT tests in the same year. This aspect is especially important when the car manufacturer’s guarantee expires. There’s only one thing worse than having an MOT test: having to retake it! Perhaps your customer will pay for you to take their car for the MOT test (or you might offer this service as a loyalty reward).
Be creative, find out what your customers want and think it over (an extra mile).

View each customer as a separate market segment. Each customer wants to have their unique needs recognised and met.

As with all our choices, we choose our car workshop based on a mixture of facts and feelings. A customer who feels understood and cared about will be a loyal customer.

The better you understand a customer’s motives, the more equipped you are to offer the right services, products, solutions and arguments. To do this, you must listen and learn from your customers. You also need to get as much information as possible about your existing and prospective customers.

Personal relationship marketing

It’s vital to have good knowledge of the products and services you offer. But you must also be able to explain the benefits to each customer according to their specific needs.

Be sensitive to customer needs and act today, not tomorrow! A fast, honest answer makes your customer feel cared for.

You earn trust through actions, not words. See yourself as the person responsible for ensuring that your customer's car works. That's what your expertise and experience is for.

- Be sensitive to needs
- Build trust
- Treat each customer as unique
- Be creative

View this as a general attitude and strategy

Customers expect to be treated and respected as individuals. If you treat your customers as the unique individuals they are, they will come to regard you as a personal asset.

Be open, honest and friendly to your customers. Build relationships with them.
The success of your workshop and business depends on how existing and prospective customers perceive you and your work. If customers feel that you give them more value than they paid for, they will be satisfied. You don't have to be the cheapest.

Read about Autoverkstaden, a successful family business since 1936 (link)