



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

Selling Maintenance to Women

Last year, I was invited to speak to 1,100 of the industry's finest at the AAIA Town Hall Meeting at SEMA. The subject was "Why are we closing the hood on the \$70 billion in untapped maintenance?" There are many issues preventing the flow of cash in our pockets; however, let's first explore who is purchasing this extremely important service: women. Most men believe since they sleep with women, once in a while, they are mental giants when it comes to communicating with them. Our trainers have discovered this couldn't be farther from the truth.

Avoiding the visual of me getting in touch with my feminine side, I would attempt to point no further than the area behind our counters and in our management slots to note that women have quietly — or not so quietly — moved into the previously male-dominated world of automotive repair and service. Just in writing this, I was counseled none-too-gently by a member of the fairer sex and reworded several passages that belied my Neanderthal roots and tendencies. In just the same way women have made a significant impact behind the counter, so, too, have they changed who we are seeing in front of the counter.

Over the past 20 to 30 years, sociologists would tell you that we have undergone a revolution in the workplace — and as a direct result, we have seen huge changes in who is working and who is walking into our waiting rooms. It is relatively unusual to see married couples with a single income, and more and more women are looking after their own and even the family vehicles.

I would hope that this is not a revelation to most of you, that somewhere along the way we have noticed that 60 percent to 70 percent of our customers are women. I hope we have made appropriate changes in how we are interacting with these new customers. In that previous world, it was not at all unusual to have a greasy tech interacting with our customers. To be honest, we guys were probably OK with that — and in its day this approach was effective. That this was unprofessional and bad for our image never entered into the equation. It worked, nobody complained and life was good.

We did a lot more in the way of repairs back then, but just as those greasy paws are as dead as disco, so, too, are vehicle names such as Chevette, Granada and the Dodge Aries (2.2L). Do you remember the

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

What is the biggest mistake you see at the counter selling maintenance, Chubby?

The biggest mistake is not finding the time to get the mileage on the appointment or when a customer first drops off the car. Because maintenance is based on mileage, you want to discuss it early in the write-up process.

*Do you have a question for Chubby?
E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.*

Renault Le Car? The market has changed from the customer perspective, and with much better vehicle reliability, we have been forced to adapt. Repair versus maintenance, along with our selling to many more women, has us challenged although opportunity still abounds.

Women, more so than men, are looking for someone they can count on to repair and service their vehicles. Because they come in the door knowing that they do not know as much as they would like to know about automotive repair and maintenance, they are looking for somebody they can trust to take care of their vehicles. This does not mean women are willing to settle for any rude, greasy slob who looks down his nose at them, but it does typically mean that with appropriate effort at building the relationship and at taking the time to listen to their concerns,



Women are statistically better at keeping appointments than men, and a service reminder sticker can help improve the odds even more.

you have a better-than-average opportunity to build customer loyalty.

All customers want a place to call home, but women will truly respond to your efforts to serve their repair and serv-

ice needs — and will buy into the rationale behind maintenance and the need for scheduled follow-up visits. Women will rely on you to find and recommend the necessary repairs and services to keep their cars safe and dependable.

Conversely, break out those greasy paws or let them see that 1980s guy — and you can count on women taking their valuable business somewhere else. Let them see those old Snap-on calendars or try talking down to them, and you can bet that 60 percent statistic will have nothing to do with your business. You can bet that you will not have to worry about selling maintenance to women for the simple reason that women will not frequent your shop.

In many ways, I would tell you that selling maintenance to women is no different than selling it to men. The reasons for doing maintenance would certainly

remain a constant, no matter the gender, though women are more likely to listen when you start talking “preventive” maintenance. Most women make that connection between trying to avoid breakdowns and doing maintenance, and at the very least are willing to listen while you make the case to sell recommended services.


Women statistically are much more

likely to keep service appointments than men are, and those little oil change reminders we plaster inside our customers’ windshields are of great importance to women in getting them back into the shop. Women consistently indicate in surveys that this is how they know when to bring in their vehicles. Men, myself included, pay little or no attention to these

reminders — and we are terrible for undermaintaining our vehicles. So it may be time to invest in one of those fancy sticker machines so you can customize your stickers with the next maintenance schedule instead of calling it simply an oil change. I would suggest you get out of the *oil change* business and get into the *maintenance service* business.

Responding to reminders, buying into preventive maintenance and a tendency toward keeping service appointments would all suggest that women are looking to us, as an industry, for guidance and structure in our maintenance programs. It is very important that we oblige them in this and reap the benefit of happy, connected customers. Things like clean waiting areas and a play area for children might be worth your consideration.

Women represent a huge and growing factor in the automotive repair and service industries. I have it on very good authority that women are here to stay, that their cars need maintenance just like everyone else’s, and common sense and treating women as you would treat any good customer will go a long way toward assuring customer satisfaction and the viability of your business.

Customers — regardless of gender — will respond favorably to your care, concern and integrity. Wash your hands, hide that calendar, learn to smile and teach them their scheduled maintenance. Though it might be kicking and screaming, it is time to come into the 21st century. Your burgeoning business will thank you. 

Chris “Chubby” Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks and Brian Canning in preparing this monthly column. Contact Chubby at cfriderick@autotraining.net.

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