



# PROFIT MATTERS

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

## Maintenance: A Catch-and-Release Business

In December, we discussed how women have become the No. 1 buyer of maintenance. So this month, let's focus on our sales process skills. I've co-developed the Relationship Marketing System (RMS) to help capture the estimated \$70 billion in untapped maintenance.

The RMS sales process was designed to be a catch-and-release strategy, the objective being to teach our customers to become returning clients who have bought in to maintaining their vehicles' safety and reliability.

The most interesting thing about sales is that most people believe they are an expert or a guru. After spending 35 years of my life in sales, I believe some days you are much better at it than others. During the past decade, I have trained more than 11,000 service managers in the art of relationship-based selling.

I want to remind you, however, that 98 percent of adults cannot learn or improve sales skills with books, tapes, lectures or articles like this. The majority of adults must practice it by role-playing, drilling and changing their presentations over

time. Changing is the ultimate challenge. Because most of us need a coach to mentor us through gradual change, the coach is the most important part of the challenge of increasing the average repair order.

Don't send your service manager to sales school unless you know what is being taught and you can mentor your manager when he or she fails at implementing the change. If you don't know how to coach him or her, you are wasting your money. We at the Automotive Training Institute (ATI) allow owners to sit in the service managers' course at no charge. We also give owners five CDs on "Sales Management at the Front Counter" and allow them to monitor the class through video live via the Internet.

Years ago, when the domestic car manufacturers had more than 100 problems per

100 cars, a nice order-taker was sufficient. The relationship was more about the size of your repair investment.

Today, the domestics average only 18 problems per 100 cars. Vehicles are much more reliable, and your customers are simply in no pain. The new paradigm is 70 percent maintenance/30 percent auto repair. Eventually, we all will be there trying to sell life insurance to replace the repair business.

Maintenance is the ultimate intangible product and requires lots of benefits to sell it. Unfortunately, you can't see it, touch it, taste it or smell it. Even the best order-taker will destroy your sales revenue over time and allow your business to die a slow death. Dodge Ram truck owners do not buy maintenance very often. Unless you are an import specialty shop, your clients are not even thinking maintenance.

Let's face it, the new car dealers, which have taken 26.4 percent of the independent maintenance business in the last five years, tell their customers to come back to them or they may void their warranties. Then there is the manufacturer's commercial that says, "You don't have to do any-

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH

#### QUESTION:

**Chubby, I feel I have all the counter displays to sell maintenance, and my people still can't sell much of it. Any suggestions?**

**Make sure they really believe in it, because most of us can't sell something we don't believe in. We recently did a survey of service advisors, and only 15 percent maintained their own vehicles the way the factory suggested. Shoemakers go without good shoes! I recommend you offer your service advisors free maintenance as a benefit and get your chemical company to get them involved quarterly in evening training until they buy in.**

*Do you have a question for Chubby?  
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thing for 100,000 miles.” I predict this will be the toughest challenge, because this product must be aggressively sold without damaging the relationship we have worked all our lives to develop and maintain.

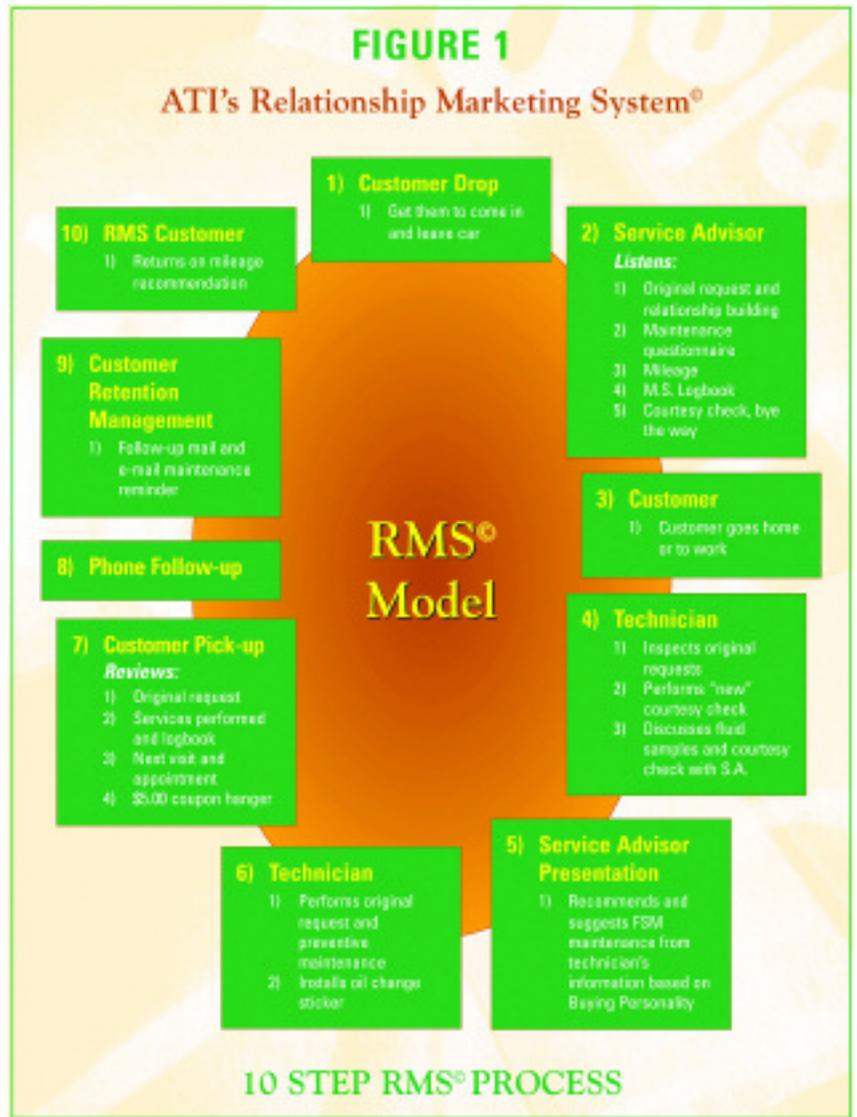
In Figure 1, you will see my 10-step, relationship-based sales process. I have written a great deal on the subject, so don't expect to learn this in a quick article. Focus on the process. I will give you a few things to try tomorrow at the counter — if you are not doing them already.

Spend time building and maintaining relationships with your clients, because only trust and integrity will overcome their confusion on maintenance. If you believe your manager will never do this, then it is time for a change before it changes you.

Because maintenance is based on mileage, you must ask for it when they call for an appointment or when they drop the keys in your hand. This is the moment of truth. Sell it up front, because selling on the pickup is a lousy exit strategy. The folks who host the SEMA show surveyed 5,000 women in Los Angeles and Pittsburgh to determine why they buy maintenance. (By the way, 78 percent of the maintenance sold in the United States is to women, so you better get rid of those calendars with scantily clad swimsuit models and clean up the dirty rest rooms, or you will soon go broke.) The survey indicated that the No. 2 reason women invest in maintenance is because someone explained the maintenance schedule to them.

Ask for the approximate mileage and teach customers how to protect their investment. Forget the sales pitch. Create a customized maintenance logbook for your clients to take home and check off the services you perform for them.

Get out of the oil change business; it stinks. It only leads to another lousy oil change. Change the name to “3,000-mile service,” for the same fee as your oil change, but on the next visit, we are involving them in 6Ks, 15Ks, 30Ks and the ultimate, 60K.



**FIGURE 1** ATI's Relationship Marketing System

The toughest sales skill I teach is listening. It is tough in the heat of battle at the counter, but you can't sell maintenance if you don't understand the needs and wants of your guests.

Following up with your guests is the most important part of the process. Follow-up mail, follow-up calls and setting up the next appointment on the exit all are wonderful strategies. Don't ask your customers if they want to set up an appointment. Simply do it for them, give them an appointment card and call to remind them. Dentists have been doing this for years, because flouride has created more reliable teeth. Similarly, automakers have created more reliable cars.

If your people won't follow you in this process, get someone else to teach them. It worked with your kids, didn't it?

You may not be a professional teacher or a great leader your people want to follow. Unfortunately, you can't buy leadership skills; you have to learn them and then try to be your best every day. *TM*

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