



# PROFIT MATTERS

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

## 19 ways to stabilize your car count

I want to share with you 19 ways to stabilize your car count. Look at this as a quick review without taking the time to dig very deep into each strategy. My objective is to help you take an inventory of what you are doing in your shop and focus on the strategies you are not currently using in your business that can help you stabilize your daily car count. This is accomplished by doing everything you can to retain customers and get them to come back even in a recession and in a time of reliable cars.

### 01 Learn your daily count 'sweet spot'

Many owners spend too much time focusing on increasing car count and not getting the people who love you and spend money. We all have a sweet spot in our daily car count where gross profit is maximized, and you better learn that number.

### 02 A better ROI with retention marketing

Retention marketing in a recession has a better return on investment than acquisition marketing, because you should have a relationship with customers. The key to making money and making your people happy is stabilization.

### 03 Utilize maintenance logbooks

Our most successful clients are using a maintenance logbook with the shop's name and the customer's name on it to teach intervals and return visits on the drop. Women return to shops where the manager takes the time to teach them how to maintain their cars, according to a survey of women in Pittsburgh and Los Angeles.

### 04 Car care clubs entice customers

Car care club programs, where your customers prepay for maintenance services at a discount to generate return visits over a 12-month period, usually are offered in

three levels marketed as silver, gold and platinum. Many shop owners have stabilized car count by giving a free oil change after the customer invests in several services on their own as well with an oil change reward program.

### 05 Stick with the oil change stickers

The No. 1 reason women return to your shop for maintenance is still the oil change stickers, according to the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association (AAIA). Get one of those sticker machines and customize the oil change to K services. Many will need a rotation before an oil change, so get out of the oil change business and get into the K service business.

### 06 Nail down visits before they're over

The very best exit technique is to schedule the customer's next visit before he or she leaves. Many owners have tried this and failed, which caused misguided belief systems on the subject. Thousands of our clients are now succeeding at this very difficult process, but it takes leadership that believes it can work.

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH

### QUESTION:

**How can I stabilize car count in my slower times of the year?**

**Develop a 12-month marketing and advertising calendar that increases retention and acquisition marketing during slower times. A 12-month calendar will keep you focused on implementing the strategies before they are needed versus when it is too late. Even if you can't afford it, at least you have a plan to follow all year, and if you succeed you will have plenty of money.**

*Do you have a question for Chubby?  
E-mail him at [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net).*

## 07 Change customer beliefs first

Then their behavior will follow. Go to Staples and buy a week-at-a-glance calendar so you can inspect a separate book every day. Don't ask your customers, tell them when their next visit is going to be and give them your business card with the appointment on the back. You let your dentist do it, right? Did it hurt your relationship with him? Heck no!

## 08 Call to confirm scheduled visits

Also, keep mailing their reminders. If your people don't have time to call, then you must be swamped with car count. Most shops are having stabilization problems due to the recession and reliable cars. So if this is you, get off your bottom and go get a new appointment calendar. In 90 days, you will see a big improvement in car count.

## 09 Freebies never have been so fun

Another idea whose time has passed but is making a comeback is giveaways to the customer. Giveaways such as calendars, magnets, mugs, pens, key rings, etc. help keep your name in front of your customers. Used on the exit, this is also a great time to introduce your referral program.

## 10 Reward their loyalty – and friends

You have a lot of competition out there, and these programs reward your existing customers for bringing in their friends. More important than the new customer is the loyalty created by the recommendation from your current customer. Also, mirror hangers with rewards to return coupled with new services or surveys are effective.

## 11 After they're gone, give them a quick call

I suggest an immediate phone call follow-up to make sure they are happy, because most people don't have time to complain. Don't have time for that? You must already be stabilized or your folks don't make mistakes.

## 12 Enlist others for those calls

A third party performing this call can teach you a lot about your front line, and I would consider a quarterly bonus if your employees score over 95 percent customer satisfaction. Also, a thank-you postcard with a return reward is a nice touch for invoices over \$100. You should expect a 15 percent to 30 percent return on follow-up mailings done correctly. My experience is you won't feel it for six months, but without it, you will kill your stabilization program.

## 13 Post cards aren't just for vacations

Reminder post cards will tie into your appointment system in concert for your maintenance clients.

## 14 Recommendations are for more than jobs

Recommendation letters explaining what they didn't invest in during their last visit due to time or money still is very effective.

## 15 Who doesn't like a birthday present?

Birthday and holiday cards with a \$25 gift certificate to be used on their next visit is a nice touch to maintain your relationship. You also have a lot of customers who have not been back in a long time, so use a "Where have you been lately?" postcard with a \$25 gift certificate.

## 16 Extra, extra! Read all about it

An excellent way to touch and retain your clients are newsletters, but they need to be informative and entertaining. Events in your associates' lives, new recipes, funny stories and ways to save gas mileage all can add up to a returning client. Since it does take a big commitment to do this yourself,

I recommend contacting someplace like [www.nwzworx.com](http://www.nwzworx.com) and use their services to save time and money.

## 17 Getting your voice heard

I have a group of the best North American shop owners in my Mastermind Group, and some of them have difficulty with this strategy. The majority of them are using voice blasting as a stabilization strategy with existing clients, not new clients. The thing that drives us crazy is when we don't know the blaster. It is a different story when a nice reminder that can help us is left on our recorder.

## 18 Plan the best time for a voice blast

A successful shop owner in my group has to plan the timing of when blasts are sent, because customers calling in to schedule swamps his service advisors, so they send the voice mail after the rush is over. He uses his voice and tells them quickly why he is calling. One example is he asks them to stop by to check their tire valve stems because there was a recall. I recommend you use something you feel passionate about that would be a good idea to blast.

## 19 Stay honest with your customers

Many of your customers think they are saving money by not calling you, but you don't feel that way, do you? This voice blast strategy requires honesty and integrity to work, but it will work.

I hope you are doing all 19 of these strategies to increase profits or just to keep from losing customers to your competitors. If you need hands-on help, I am offering all of our *Motor Age* readers a 100 percent rebated seminar ticket this month to attend an event near you, so simply send an e-mail to [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net). 



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