



PROFIT MATTERS

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

Where There's Smoke, is There Fire?

We've all heard this old saying, but does it have any real meaning in the automotive world? Let's listen to Senior Coach George Zeeks share his experiences in the trenches.

After spending more than seven years talking with and helping shop owners through their problems, I can firmly say that it definitely, maybe does have meaning. One of the biggest issues is responsibility, and so many people try so hard to avoid that particularly thorny issue. They begin to embrace the smoke and pray that the fire doesn't break out.

We often know that we have problems in our shop way before they raise their ugly heads to become clearly visible. And the way they become visible in today's world is on the Internet, as a bad review.

Are you hiding in the smoke? Maybe? Well then, read on.

Whose Fault is It, Anyway?

Let's say you hired a driver to shuttle your customers, and part of his job is to clean your shuttle van. Now it's Friday and you plan to have a busy day, so you check the van, only to find it's not even close to being ready. Promises have been made and you can't deliver. How embarrassing for you!

Now you're furious with the driver, but is this the first time you ever had this issue? Or did you blindly leave an important task to someone who has proven before that sometimes things just don't get done the way you would like?

It's your fault. Claim it, feel bad about it and then let go and just fix it.

Running your shop is the same thing. You've smelled the smoke before, but just ignored it because you're too busy putting out fires. Ignore the smoke — or your gut feeling that something is wrong — at your own risk. You always have a choice, and you make it every day. Let's look at the things in a shop we ignore and shouldn't.

Internet Complaints

Everyone has had some complaints from their customers. You can't make everyone happy, and that's OK, right? I would suggest to you there is a minefield out there, and this is one of the worst ways to walk into it.

The old saying is true, that for every complaining customer, you have 10 more who are thinking it,



but not saying it to you. We work with clients on their Internet reputation, and find that they often don't even know they have online complaints — or don't know what to do about them. When we talk to them about doing the research to find out who made the complaint and contacting them to try and resolve the issue, we hear the old "Well, you can't make everyone happy" line.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

What's the best way to deal with online complaints?

Head-on! Call the source of the complaint immediately, because they just might be fake. If you'd like to know more, go to www.atonlinetraining/2012-03 to receive the 10 things you can do to protect your online reputation. Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

The problem is that some of the “old sayings” just don’t have a place in the new world.

Ignore complaints at your peril. I recently talked during a staff meeting to an owner whose manager stated that he had received 12 complaints in the last week about the shop from “his” long-time customers. When asked who had complained, so that they could be contacted and the problem resolved, he flatly refused to tell, saying that he had promised the customers he wouldn’t say anything to anyone about it.

Wow! Where does that kind of screwed-up thinking come from? Well, the manager focused on the customers, but forgot to fix the problem. The owners obviously did not form a solid bond with the staff to sponsor an environment where the staff could feel free to tell them what the problems were. The issues spread out so far, it was hard to see who was responsible — except the owners have the ultimate responsibility, because it is their checkbook that has to pay the bills. No matter what, it comes back to the owner.

Call the Customer

Let’s go back to that original complaint on the Internet. One obvious thing that has to be done is to contact the customer and try to make things right — possibly even get the review changed or retracted. In one recent conversation, the owner told me that he was afraid to make the call. I spoke to the manager, who said the same exact thing. Wow, is it

getting smoky in here?

The reason why gets even better. Both of them said that they didn’t want to get yelled at by the customer. It all goes back to an old saying, “I would love the business if it weren’t for the customers.” Keep up this behavior, and we won’t have to call anyone.

Why were they afraid? It’s the same reason that so many owners have for all of the other problems in the shop. Some owners are afraid to make the changes needed to make the shop better. It could be a fear of confrontation, some misguided loyalty or even a stubborn fixation on sticking to the old ways.

Guess what, the automotive world has changed, the customers have changed and we need to change, too. We are all going to have some problems, misunderstandings and things that just don’t go right. OK, fix it and do everything that you can to make sure it doesn’t happen again. Focus on the process that caused the fire, and stop being the firefighter.

Some owners just can’t stand to admit that they might be wrong. Let’s face it, sometimes even when you’re right, you can be wrong. If you want to keep that customer, and we all know how expensive they can be to find in the first place, then just swallow it down.

The best outcome for everyone is that you keep the customer, that they feel good about coming to your shop, and in the end, you make a couple bucks from doing the right thing for them.

It just makes the situation even

touchier when the complaint is in a public forum, like a complaint on the Internet. You have to review your public reputation every week so that you can respond to any problems before they become unresolvable.

How about Blackmail?

We have all heard stories about customers who come into a shop or other business and demand some sort of discount or they will post bad reviews on the Internet. Aren’t you glad you live in an age where everyone has access to almost anything? In the old days, one person could tell 10 or more people about the problems they have, but now they can tell thousands — and this can help or hurt you.

Personally, I feel that if you are wrong and they demand more than you originally wanted to compensate them, you better think hard about what this is really gonna cost you in the long run. A lot depends on your market — how many customers you are getting on the Internet, your Internet placement to begin with, and how many good reviews you have on the various sites. I believe it is OK to have some bad reviews, but I would like to see eight to 10 good ones for every bad one.

Many consumers are using this just to get some power over a situation where they honestly believe that they have gotten the short end of the stick. If that’s the case and you are wrong, even just a little, do the right thing and take care of them. If you are not wrong, and they are threatening just because they can, then maybe you don’t pay. However, if you don’t want to pay, you have to know how to protect and defend yourself on the Wild West of the Internet. **TZ**

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