



On Creative Marketing

with Thomas Franklin

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End Useless Marketing—Redirect Funds and Get Results!

The marketing world has changed significantly during the past few years. So much has moved on-line that most other marketing expenditures may no longer make sense in your area. If you track results from your marketing efforts, you have probably noticed the lack of business coming from print ads, print version yellow page, and other phone book ads. It may be time to pull the plug on non-productive marketing and make better use of those funds. As insurance companies establish toll-free numbers to report claims, you should probably stop marketing to most agents. Unless you have nearly unlimited funds to advertise just to keep your name in front of the public, you should probably end off radio and TV advertising. And stop paying for useless advertising schemes. These moves should free up money to pay for real marketing results.

So where should you redirect these funds? Mainly you want to double up on-line and live contact efforts. On-line yellow page, Superpage, and similar services will allow prospective customers to find you. Enhancing your website, Facebook page and other social media will be one good use for expanded expenditures, but this should only be a start. As the volume of collision repairs decline due to advances in vehicle accident avoidance technology, to survive shops will have to embrace other profit centers. This may call for a new mindset not familiar to most shop owners and managers. For example, merchandise store marketing rule number one is "Get as many people as possible into the store!" People like to go to famil-

iar places and prefer not to have to try out a new place if they are happy with the old one. The intent is always to make a prospective customer's first experience so incredible, they will always come back first before trying out any other place. How can a shop make use of this fundamental principle?

Perhaps it's time for shops to copy what dealerships have done for decades. Shop owners and managers accustomed to \$2000 repairs and up, may scoff at a couple of hundred dollars here and there in profits from vending machines, accessories, audio sales, and cosmetic automotive merchandise. But keep in mind that many "profit-centers" have a second benefit as marketing opportunities. Every new person that comes into the shop should be given a powerful propaganda piece. This should be a booklet featuring the shop's "special" features. Shop personnel often think prospective customers know what equipment shops have, and what they do, but this is rarely true. A booklet should spell out why a shop's frame machine, welding equipment, and painting capabilities are better than the competition, and why special skills in repairing hybrids, electric vehicles, exotic cars and more make this the best shop to repair a vehicle. The reality is the public is generally unaware of shop expertise, and the unspoken message of the booklet is that our competitors are unlikely to have this high quality equipment and systems (even though they may have it too).

Sharing or piggybacking businesses is increasingly popular as rents go up. Local grocery stores now often

have a Starbucks or similar concession in the store. Some hamburger chains now have a donut vendor concession or a pizza concession sharing the space. Sharing the cost of a space again frees up funds for marketing and perhaps advertising deals on line using Craig's List, eBay and other sites. Auto glass, headlights, accessories, cosmetic fixes, running boards, pet restraints, child proofing, older cars with no GPS are all profit-center prospects for sales and/or installations and add new names to an e-mail marketing list. A shop might want to partner with an automotive accessories vendor and provide an alternate display area—and not only share in the sales profits, but also profit from installations and again capture prospect names. In a shop where estimators only write estimates a few hours a week, product sales and installation fees can be an on-going supplemental commission opportunity.

Beyond front office space, a collision repair shop also has a huge amount of space compared to most businesses. Some shops open up repair space for mini-trade shows, and not only for collision repair products. Convention centers are costly places to hold trade shows, and small groups like furniture and equipment vendors could appreciate a local space to show products. This could bring in local businesses with company vehicles and provide an opportunity to solicit their vehicle repairs. Another alternative is more community-based uses of space. Sundays some shops make open space available for meetings, church groups, school groups, and boy or girl clubs or activities. Kid's activities bring parents, especially moms who can be good prospects for vehicle repair. Redirecting marketing funds like this will generate far more sales than old-style advertising and promotions.

Continued from Page 37

Documentation Series

repair, since this saves rental car time for the insurer. It also gives the impression that the insurance company must respond to you because you're in control of the repair process. Lastly, an Authorization and Release gives you the right to use photos or videos of the repaired vehicles for your own purposes (such as on your

website).

Obtaining proper repair documentation is essential to providing customers with the best possible repair. Eversman encourages all collision repair facilities to protect their businesses by contacting a local attorney to begin drafting these vital documents.

Erica Eversman is the Chief Counsel for Vehicle Information Services, Inc. and founder of the Automotive Education and Policy Institute.



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