

Look at yourself through your customer's eyes

Andy Savva It is sometimes difficult to perceive your business the way your customer does, but doing this is vital to making a good first impression



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If you want to run a garage or accessory shop that is perceived as the best in the area then you need to look at the business in a way you have never thought about it before; through the customer's eyes.

I encourage you to temporarily remove yourself as the owner in order to view your business from an alternative perspective. This is the approach I took with Brunswick Garage; I placed myself in my customer's shoes. Take a walk from outside your premises, look at your sign: Is the brand image clear, vivid and distinct? Walk through your reception: Is it welcoming, bright and tidy? Do you offer your customer a comfortable seating area with refreshments, a TV, or something to read? Are the toilets clean? It is vital to ask yourself these questions in order to view your business from a different light. This sounds like really basic stuff – and it is – but all too often I've seen businesses where the owners are both literally and figuratively on the inside looking out and don't perceive their businesses the way that customers will.

It is also important to take your new customer perspective further into the workshop. Is it dull, dirty

and messy? Are the technicians' toolboxes organised? Viewing the workshop from your new standpoint may surprise you.

Would you be happy or embarrassed to invite a customer into the workshop to show them their vehicle? An ordered appearance of the workshop is just as imperative as an inviting reception area. Remember that the first impression will be the one that sticks – and it will be reached almost immediately.

On this subject, one of the fundamentals in any business and specifically in the service industry is how you greet your customers and the impression you leave them with. Many in the garage industry seem to overlook the importance of making a good first impression; a disastrous mistake in my opinion. You might still get the work now they are here – but you'll want them to come back and to tell their friends about this great garage or spares shop they've found.

LOOK SHARP

We've all heard the old saying 'dress to impress' but it does hold truth. Although today's business environment is much more

casual than it was even 10 years ago, it is still important to dress the part. At Brunswick we supported all of staff with company uniform. The last thing you want is to give off a negative impression before you even open your mouth. If you look sloppy, people will assume that you and your business are sloppy as well.


Start by using insight. Mystery shop your own staff and consider any annoyances you encounter. When out of sight, write them all down so you can relay these to your staff later. Also use your own experiences with other businesses: good or bad.

Now you have the insight to train your team members to make a positive impression from the beginning of a call. The greeting and the speed that the phone is picked up can alter a customer's experience. In many cases, if the phone rings more than three or four times, it is too long. Frustration starts to set in for the customer. On the other hand, employers who answer the phone almost instantly may startle the caller. Try to find a middle ground such as picking up after the first ring, but before the third.

RING OF POWER

Consider the greeting, many people find a greeting such as 'ABC Garage' abrupt and annoying. A simple improvement could be to alter the greeting to the time of day whilst introducing yourself and the business, for example: "Good morning, ABC Garage, this is Andy, how may I help you?" Don't feel you are going outside your remit by encouraging your staff to speak clearly – again it sounds obvious, but I'm sure you can think of a good number of technicians who really don't. If you are unsure of what the other person is trying to communicate, as often is the case in the automotive environment, remember most customers are not as tech savvy as us. Be patient and attentive. Feel free to ask open questions: how, what, when, why, where?

Finally, do not interrupt when someone else is speaking. Interrupting someone in mid-sentence is extremely rude and will be counter-productive for your business.

Remember your manners! 

You can find out about Andy's consultancy services by contacting: savvaautomotive.com



KEEP ON THE CUSTOMER'S LEVEL

A good suggestion when meeting customers is to make an effort to literally be on their level. If they prefer to stand and talk to you, you stand. If they prefer to sit, you sit. Our preference at Brunswick Garage was to use desks rather counters, the latter are seen as barriers between you and the customer.

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