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Are you educating your customer?

Syms Corporation was a large clothing retailer in the 1980s and their slogan was, 'An informed consumer is our best customer.' Their rationale was that the more the consumer knew, the more they would see that the retailer provided the best service and value.

The concept is an important one, albeit one that is usually ignored in the automotive aftermarket industry.

To understand why educating the customer is more important than ever, we need to look at the changes that have happened over the last 20 years.

Back in the 1990s the average motorist regularly checked their vehicle's oil, water and tyre pressure and would always get the car serviced before heading away on any large family road trip. The leading automotive technology at the time was fuel injection and audio systems.

Fast forward 20 years and it is common knowledge that most motorists never perform basic maintenance checks on their late model vehicles. The leading technology is mind boggling with driverless technology now a reality.

In lay terms, vehicle technology has increased while the average customer knowledge has decreased.

This impacts greatly on the aftermarket because customers are being asked to spend money on something they know nothing about. No one likes being pressured into a sale under those circumstances.

To get the sale, more time must now be spent on educating the customer on why the recommended service or repair should be carried out. Once a customer understands why, they feel they are back in control of the situation and can make an educated buying decision.

Some simple and effective education strategies that can be built into your sales process include:

Sending repair images

The next generation believes what they can see a lot more than what they are told. Use today's technology to email or SMS photos of their vehicle that highlight damage and the need for repair.

Service Programs Australia (www.serviceprograms.com.au) have a new exciting product out that allows the sending of an email or SMS to customers containing an electronic service report with easily attached photos of those items requiring attention.

Send educational material

It's now possible to email or SMS educational material on a particular repair or maintenance prior to calling the customer. The educational material can do the selling for you. As a Capricorn member, you have access to this service via the easy to use Capricorn Vehicle Videos.

Menu board or brochure

The last thing you want is your customer telling someone that you charged them \$800 for a service. The customer perhaps doesn't understand that the service was only \$250 and the brakes and coolant flush made up the difference. A menu brochure detailing what's included in your standard service is a great tool to highlight what is and is not included.

For an expensive log book service the menu brochure is a great way to visually highlight why such a service is fully justified.

Sell the benefits and not the parts and labour

There is big difference between what is done during a brake fluid flush and the benefits to the customer. The default sale technique used by many technicians is to sell the customer the parts and labour.

Unfortunately, this is not why the customer buys. Customers will spend money on their vehicle because:

- Future cost - It will cost them more money down the track if they don't do the repair or maintenance now.
- Reliability - the vehicle's reliability will be compromised.
- Safety - the vehicle could become unsafe to drive.

Customers need to be sold on the benefits to them if certain repairs or maintenance are carried out.

Car dealerships are conditioning their new car customers with less maintenance as a benefit for buying such an advanced piece of technology, but what they are failing to mention is that brake fluid flushes, coolant flushes, air conditioning services and wheel alignments still must be done – new vehicle or not.

It's up to the aftermarket to re-educate the customer that ongoing maintenance is just as important as it always was. Review your systems to ensure that education is part of your sales process.

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/resources.

Just go for it!