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Other resources in step 4C:

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# Keeping in contact with your customers

There is a general rule of thumb that says it's six times cheaper to get an existing customer to return than to advertise and win a new one.

That being the case, you need to ask yourself "What are we doing to encourage our customers to come back?" Good service, you might say.

That's what everyone says. Apart from good service is there anything else? What is amazing is that many workshops are happy to spend thousands of dollars on winning new customers but very few are willing to spend money on getting their existing customers to keep returning to the workshop.

Most technicians believe that just providing great service is enough. That might be right for some customers with a high sense of loyalty and who would never go anywhere else.

Unfortunately, not all good customers are so loyal. Many can be persuaded to try somewhere else. Your customers are being constantly bombarded with marketing material trying to convince them to give other workshop a try.

The best way to encourage customers to come back is to keep in contact with them.

This does two things:

1. Shows your customer that you care about them and keeping their business
2. Keeps you in the back of the customer's mind so when they next have a vehicle issue or a service due they think of you and not one of your competitors.

The strategy of keeping in contact is nothing new and it's practiced by just about any industry that has a repeat business cycle. Hairdressers, restaurants, dentists, airlines and retail shops all use varying methods to keep in contact. It is a common practice for the simple reason that it works.

The most famous example of this would have to be Joe Girard who was the number one car and truck salesman in the US for 12 years straight. Between 1963 and 1978, he sold a total of 13,001 vehicles. Of his many strategies, one of them was keeping in contact with his customers by sending every one of them a personal letter every month. His methodology was that he wanted to ensure that whenever an existing customer thought about buying a new car they thought about Joe.

A great way for workshops to keep in contact with customers is through a reminder system. The customer's car servicing cycle is used as an excuse to keep in contact. This is not intrusive or a hard sell at all. It's no different from the dentist sending you a reminder that you are due for your annual check-up. This sort of contact shows the customer that you are a professional workshop and that you really care about keeping their business.

For those who think this is all too hard, and you don't have time to implement such a system, be assured that today's technology makes setting up an automated customer contact system a lot easier than you think. Reminders can be sent via email, SMS, letter or card. Email is the cheapest but least effective as it most likely won't get read. Most of the modern point of sale systems have inbuilt reminder capabilities. If you don't have such a system, Capricorn offers Clang, a purpose-built SMS reminder system.

There is no hard and fast rule about when you should keep in contact with your customers. It will vary from business to business. For example, a workshop in a small rural town of 400 people would hardly send farmers an SMS reminder that their tractor was due for service. Instead, a quarterly newsletter keeping customers up to date with the workshop capabilities and industry developments would be more appropriate.

Use this list to select the most appropriate contact system:

1. Reminder 24 hours prior to their booking. There is nothing more annoying than a customer failing to turn up on their booked day. This can have a significant financial impact on the workshop as it's often too late to try to book in extra work. On the majority of occasions, customers simply forget about their booking. Try reminding customers 24 hours ahead. Many businesses do this via SMS.
2. Thank you letter, card or SMS after each service. After every service or repair, send the customer a thank you. If it has been a complex diagnosis and repair you might like to

give them a courtesy phone call just to see how the car is running. This is the single most effective marketing you will ever do. Customers are blown away by this simple act and it is a great way to build loyalty.

3. Reminder prior to their registration due date (NSW only). About a month prior to their registration due date send a reminder to bring the car in for its pink slip. This is no different to the RTA and insurance company sending rego renewals and green slip reminders. Combine this one with the service reminder below.
4. Reminder prior to the next service – same as above. Consider including an offer with a call to action to reward customers for their loyalty.
5. Reminder after a missed service. Sometimes customers will miss a scheduled service. A courtesy reminder after the due date can often prompt them into action.
6. Christmas or birthday card. This has a great WOW factor. You could take it a step further by sending small gifts to your most loyal customers.
7. Specials through the year. Invite customers with a special offer timed around school holidays or the start of summer. It's a great way to keep in contact and build loyalty.
8. Business newsletter. If your business has something interesting to tell this may be a great way to keep in contact. This works very well for workshops with a specialist niche. Social marketing networks such as Facebook and Twitter are becoming an effective way to keep customers up to date with exciting news about your business.
9. Reminders about any component with a serviceable life. Think outside the square. Maybe you could remind customers to come in for a free tyre rotation or battery check.

As a service to Capricorn members, TaT Biz has prepared some examples of communications you could copy to keep in contact with your customers.

So keep in contact with your customers and give your workshop every chance to turn them into lifelong customers.

The place to start is [www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn](http://www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn).

*Just go for it!*