

Using the Waiting Room to Grow Business

The time customers wait for their oil change, new tires, or to check that pesky check engine light is time in which they would rather be doing something else. Innovative service providers actually turn this wait time into a fantastic opportunity to expand business, increase profitability, and actually make the wait time enjoyable for their customers.

The turnaround

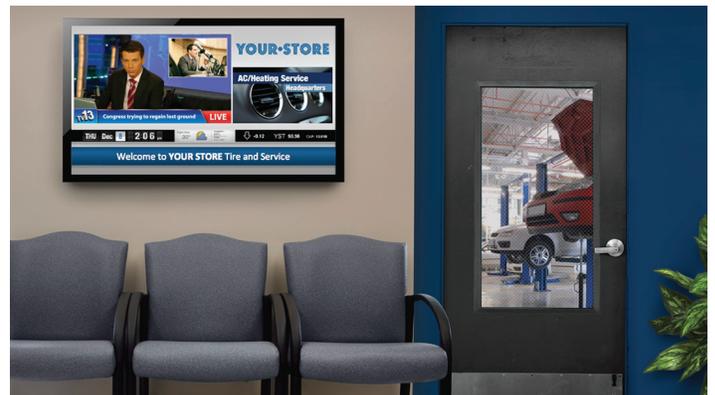
Retailers spend billions of dollars building trust and inviting people into their stores. As an automotive service provider, you are being entrusted with the care of one of their most important and expensive possessions. By virtue of the service you provide, the customer is already in your store and has a level of trust. Now is your chance to turn their waiting time into opportunity time and develop a loyal customer for life.

Too often a simple TV and VCR are installed and considered good enough. Don't waste the opportunity to communicate with customers and influence buying choices. Implement a solution with content that will strengthen your brand, build loyalty, and create customers for life.

The power of information to influence

Share information about preventive maintenance steps, proper care, warning signs, and other information that will educate the customer on how to take better care of this expensive possession. Share suggestions on how to enhance the long-term value and reliability of the vehicle by having certain services performed. Further, explain how these services are performed, what they do to improve the automobile, and why they are important. Empower the customer with knowledge, and they will be more confident and increase purchases and loyalty.

Implement a customer communication tool—infotainment—in the waiting room. If starting from scratch, consider the following options as a scalable plan. You do not need to start out with a large capital investment. Look at each location, consider the customer traffic, and consider current revenue and profitability. Some locations will be best served by a simple audio solution; others will require a video solution. Does the video solution need to include commercial television? There are a number of options that allow scaled growth while still creating a great communication method.



Influencing with audio

Don't think that the power to influence requires a television. Overhead audio with appropriate business messages can be just as effective as content on a television screen. If the budget won't allow for a television at every location, consider using an audio-only solution as a starting point.

There have been a number of studies done over the past 20–30 years looking at how music affects buying. Research has shown that there are two key items to consider when implementing an audio solution:

- **Volume:** Too loud and it will negatively impact customers; too quiet and customers are frustrated that they cannot hear the information.
- **Genre:** Studies have demonstrated a relationship between the genre of music and brand perception that influences purchase decisions. The most important factor is selecting a genre appropriate for the location.

With a simple playback device and speakers, the customer can hear contemporary music with business messages positioned in the stream. Utilizing a professional audio service will ensure proper licensing for public playback and provide a curated playlist that changes daily. Choose a service that gives flexibility in the genre of music, so that urban and suburban locations will have appropriate music. Also remember that business messages should be provided in the appropriate language or languages for the location.

That screen can do so much more...

If local television programming is important, position it on the screen to leave space for additional information. Remember that the television programming is a means to get eyes on the screen. The real value is the information provided about additional services, maintenance tips, and other knowledge shared with the customer.

The system should allow for easy scheduling of content as well as the ability to organize content based on the season and other factors.

Create a content plan – don't leave it to chance

One of the most common frustrations mentioned when a company deploys digital media for communication is the need to “feed the beast.” Once the system is installed and running, there is a need to update the content on some sort of schedule. It is important to find new and relevant material. The frequency of these updates depends on your location and the frequency and length of the customer visit. For example, a fast food restaurant might have content playing in their dining room. Their patrons will likely stay in the dining room for about 42 minutes and visit 1–3 times per week; thus, their content can have a “loop” of 45-50 minutes, and should change 2-4 times per week. Compare this to an automotive service provider whose patrons will be in the waiting room for periods ranging from 30 minutes to multiple hours, but whose visits occur generally less than once per month. There the content loop should be much longer, possibly 4 hours or more. But changes can occur monthly.

There is another important factor that should be considered when planning a content strategy: employee fatigue. If your digital media is within earshot or eyesight of your employees, the content should change for their benefit as well. If not, the employees will turn off the television, or worse, become dissatisfied with their job and leave.

A content plan should have two components: the general-interest content and the business-specific content. The general-interest content is that which gets the customer looking at the screen or listening to the audio. This content can be commercial programming or content from sources like news, weather, traffic, sports, or human-interest categories, intended to engage and make the wait time seem shorter. The business-specific content is the payoff content—the messages that inform the customer about products and services that will enhance and improve vehicle ownership and help you ultimately to sell more of what you have to offer.

Business-specific content should include more than just advertisements. Include segments that inform. “Did you know...” segments are very popular, as are informing the viewer about situations that arise in normal operation, helping to identify



the situation, and showing how to prevent or remedy it. Armed with this information, viewers will potentially ask about this add-on service and share the new knowledge with friends, colleagues, and family members, recommending you as the expert.

Increasing profitability is another advantage of the content. It is no secret in the quick service food business that soda represents a very high margin product. When the primary food item (burger, sandwich, meal plate, etc.) has a low margin, overall profitability is improved by adding a low-cost, high-margin item like a soda. The same can be accomplished in the automotive service market.

“Did you know that dim headlights contributed to more than 200 accidents last year? Reduce your likelihood of accident by having our expert staff perform a headlight cleaning while you are here today.”

Use the trusted relationship to add value to their experience and you will see upsell, cross-sell, and more benefits.

Upselling and cross-selling with style

Once the customer is in the building, there is no need to reward them with additional discounts just for being there. But with a digital communication solution, you can offer unique benefits to those customers who will engage with you. Reward the customer for being a customer. Cross-selling with discounts is a very common retail trend. In this digital age, you have the added ability to capture additional customer information, e.g., “text the word ‘Automobile’ to 555-1212 and get 10% off an additional service.” This will give access to the customer and open up new doors for communication. Plus it potentially upsells on an additional service today. Texting, QR codes, or simply “mention this ad” are all great ways to engage the customer.

Finding engaging content

Start with manufacturers and providers who have a shared interest in product sell-through. Often there is a library of content that can be accessed to provide information to customers. Also, in this age of smartphones, tablets, and customer digital tools, it is very easy to create content. Don’t discount the value of experience and familiarity. Society is filming every aspect of life and sharing it on social media. There is no reason that a virtual tour around the shop and sharing first-hand wisdom would not be interesting to customers and help build trust and influence.

Let your friends help you grow

In today's world of social media, 83% of customers say that it is important to read user-generated content about a product or service before they buy. And customer reviews are trusted 12 times more than descriptions from vendors. Don't just create a fan page or create a twitter account; create them and then use the positive comments from your customers to your advantage. Also, keep a video camera in the shop; when the customer is gushing with praise for a job well done, ask them to take a minute and tell the camera. This type of customer referral is pure gold.

Take the first step – but take it with a proven provider

Henry Ford proved that specialization would bring benefits to the worker and to the customer. Following this expert advice is important. Find a proven provider who can set up this important business tool for you and who can make sure that it is supporting you rather than distracting you. Screens, media players, and software are just the beginning. Support services, planning, installation, maintenance, content sourcing, best practices, and forward-looking ideas and suggestions are important deliverables as well. Trust the guidance of an expert and unleash the power of communication to engage your customers and grow your business.

Summary

Business is tough; growing a business is tougher, and it is important to take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. Don't waste the opportunity to communicate with customers at a time and in a place where they are focused and can be influenced the most—the waiting room. Waiting room time does not have to be a negative time. Provide information; educate and engage the customer; and reap the benefits of loyalty, increased revenues, and increased profitability.



For additional information, please call 1-888-440-7126
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