

# Sales Assassin



by Anthony Caliendo | NOLN Contributing Writer

# Profit



## Staying Customer-Driven Drives Profits

In the US, there are more than 160,000 multi- and single-unit auto service and repair establishments grossing over \$90 billion per year in revenue. Only 50 of the largest companies control 10 percent of the revenue. It's a lucrative business, but there's tons of competition. The challenge: establishments must find a way to compete with effective branding and local marketing while avoiding the danger of becoming obsolete.

Automotive service is what's referred to as a "needs-based industry," driven by business-to-consumer, household consumer activity. It can be fickle. Your customer base is the absolute most important asset you have. Your ultimate, definitive goal is to gain customer loyalty through superior and specialized customer service. Statistically, it takes two years or more to build a rock solid book of loyal, repeat customers. The leaders will be masters at analyzing customer trend data, honing in on what they want and need and employing the most effective marketing to drive traffic to their location.

In the automotive service business, the success of the business hinges on a human factor. I always say, the two most important and critical components to any successful sales or service process are you and your customer, no matter what you're selling. Remember, these customers can be highly sensitive, because of the nature of services they need. The need for automotive service is often untimely and can be expensive. Auto service technicians are sometimes the bearers of bad news. The worse the news is, the more inclined the customer is to shop around for another shop willing to soften the blow. That's why this business lives and breathes on building relationships and sustaining loyalty. Business owners, service advisors and techs must recognize the key to profits is in building up the reputation of the shop in a positive way.

In my book, *The Sales Assassin: Master Your Black Belt in Sales*, I stress the necessity of establishing Leadership and Brand Integrity. Who does it satisfy? Your customers and ultimately your business. Satisfied customers mean high profits. Don't compromise your reputation in the automotive sales and service industry. It is so easy to do, but staying customer-driven

and yielding ethical and truthful service is key. Customers can usually spot the hack garage from a mile away. What's more, your word-of-mouth marketing base is at a severe risk when you don't run a clean and honest business. Don't let it work against you, because rebounding from bad reviews is virtually impossible.

### THREE MUSTS TO BUILDING BRAND INTEGRITY

#### 1. Be Highly Skilled and Comparably Priced.

Techs and service advisors must be smart. Like I always say, be the world's leading expert. Customers expect the techs to diagnose problems correctly the first time and every time. This process involves a combination of both listening to the customer's primary concerns and immediate symptoms and using the right diagnostic tools to assess the problem. They expect accuracy and assurance that when they dole out the dollars, the problem is going to be solved. I consulted with my son, Steven Porcaro, master mechanic at Honda on this. He advised, sometimes customers seek assurances directly from technicians before they agree to repairs. Steven said it always makes his customers more comfortable with the diagnosis and more agreeable to what the service writer has advised. Now, customers will often seek second opinions and they'll shop around for a sanity check and perhaps a better deal. That's their prerogative. But make sure the services you're offering are comparably priced in relation to the market. Remember, customers will most likely go with the least costly option, so do whatever is necessary to get them into your shop and keep them there.

#### 2. Be Effectively Empathetic and Proactive.

Know how to swiftly diffuse anger and anxiety if and when customers become emotional. This is when relationship building comes into play. Be empathetic, and establish common ground. Americans are feeling the pinch and the squeeze of the economy on some level, so showing a little humility and respect goes a long way in this business. Then, focus on converting. Build a rapport and re-establish trust.

Stress the importance of regular maintenance and prevention. Create value in your services and constantly communicate the benefits. Extend some loyalty rewards so you can build repeat business. Continually take care of your customers, and they'll take care of you.

#### 3. Be Reputable and Fair.

Again, be known for your integrity, not the opposite. All aspects of the operation must work in tandem. Remember, technicians and service advisors personify the business just as much as the owner or the name on the door. The service writers should work more closely with the technicians — especially if the customer isn't feeling comfortable with the services recommended. Don't lose customers' trust. Don't misdiagnose. Don't price gouge. Don't make unnecessary repairs or perform services before getting authorization from the customer. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If additional services are required, present them the right way. It's all about your establishment's name being synonymous with good, honest and fair. Take away any of those characteristics, and you run the risk of losing customers and business.

Staying customer-driven is the key to building a reputable operation. Use every point of contact with new and repeat customers to establish mutual loyalty, thus building brand integrity. In the automotive service industry, it could go either way. Make sure your establishment is on the right side by focusing on the people who will ultimately determine your success, your customers. ♦

*ANTHONY CALIENDO has been the Ultimate Sales Assassin Master for over 25 years as a sales and marketing machine, entrepreneur, corporate visionary and sales leadership coach with exceptional sales instincts. Caliendo has discussed his sales strategies on TV and radio, and has been quoted in industry journals including Salesforce, AMA Playbook, Cheese Market News, HealthCare Business Today, In Business Magazine, and PA Realtor's Association. Anthony Caliendo has been called an outrageous salesman, a master of change and a decisive leader. Caliendo responds by saying, "I have focused my personal and professional life on finding the passion, dedication and courage in everything I do: what I call the PDCs of sales." Anthony Caliendo lives, works and plays in South Florida with his wife Lynette and their eight beautiful children. For bulk purchases of *The Sales Assassin: Master Your Black Belt in Sales* or to hire Anthony Caliendo as a motivational speaker and sales coach, visit [www.thesalesassassin.com](http://www.thesalesassassin.com) or call 561.265.1405.*