

Are you looking at your business through the customer's eyes?

BY BILL BEYERLE, AUTOMOTIVE INSTALLED SALES MANAGER, CHEVRON LUBRICANTS
ANGI SCHOOLCRAFT, LEAD MARKETING SPECIALIST, CHEVRON LUBRICANTS



Let's face it: not many people like taking their car in for an oil change any more than they look forward to going to the dentist. Most people are aware it's something they must do at least a couple of times a year if they want their car (like their teeth) to stay healthy. So, they make time in their busy schedules for an automotive checkup.

Understanding where the customer is coming from, what can you do to turn this not-so-fun chore into a positive experience, or even a memorable one that they might tell their friends about?

With the pandemic receding farther into the rear-view mirror, customers are coming back into automotive service shops, and the customer experience is more important than ever. It is the biggest factor in building a loyal customer base and repeat business. And it doesn't happen by chance. A good customer experience requires very deliberate thought and action. It requires an ability to look at your business through the customer's eyes.

So, what do customers "see" when they look at your business. It starts with your exterior façade. Does your facility have "curb appeal?" Is it clean and well kept up? Is your signage working and up to date? Is the landscaping maintained? Does the parking lot look freshly striped? Customers may not actually notice these things, but they will definitely notice a cracked window, faded or peeling paint, a broken sign, and any other flaws in the shop's appearance.

The interior ambience is just as important. The waiting room should feel like a safe space, inviting and comfortable. The refreshment area should be clean and well stocked. Check the restrooms frequently to make sure they are clean and fully supplied. Even the service area should be orderly and professional-looking. Customers may well judge the quality of your work by the appearance of your workspace.

Employees make the difference

A clean and well-maintained location is certainly important. What really differentiates the customer experience, however, is the customer's interaction with employees. Every employee should understand that nothing is more important than the customer – that is what keeps the shop in business and keeps them employed.

Customers should feel welcome when they drop off their cars. A friendly greeting and "How can we help you?" will set the tone for the visit. Service techs may not know every customer's name, but they should be able to look

up their service records on the computer. In the case of a first-time customer, the employee should offer to set them up in the system, which will speed up the check-in process in the future. The rep should also take a moment to make sure the customer's contact information is current and includes a mobile number for text messages as well as an email address.

Employees should be good listeners. Does the customer have any concerns beyond the scheduled service, anything they want checked out during the inspection? Employees should also be knowledgeable and able to make appropriate product and service recommendations. And they should let customers know when they can expect their car to be ready.

As the service progresses, customers should not be left feeling impatient. If they choose to leave their cars, offer to send them updates by text message. If the technician runs into an issue that requires immediate attention or means a delay in the job, the customer should be informed immediately.

Be sure the customer leaves with a good impression, too. The tech should be able to explain the services performed line-by-line, and the final price should match what the customer has been told. Are you equipped to send receipts by email? That is what many customers prefer these days after the pandemic experience.

When you're so close to your business every day, it isn't always easy to see it from the customer's point of view. Don't be afraid to seek an outside, unbiased opinion from a friend. Check for any comments on your business on social media. Consider sending follow-up emails to customers asking them about their experience. Now that customers are coming back, it's important to deliver the kind of experience that will keep them coming back to your shop regularly.

"Customers should feel welcome when they drop off their cars. A friendly greeting and "How can we help you?" will set the tone for the visit."

Bill Beyerle has been with Chevron Lubricants for more than 25 years and is currently the Automotive Installed Sales Manager. You can reach him at BillBeyerle@chevron.com. Eric Montanye has been with Chevron for 4 years and has over 20 years of experience in the Lubricants and Automotive Market. You can reach him at ericmontanye@chevron.com.

Angi Schoolcraft has been with Chevron Lubricants for more than 19 years and is currently the lead marketing specialist supporting Havoline®, Havoline xpress lube®, Chevron xpress lube® and Techron®. You can reach her at angi.schoolcraft@chevron.com