



Hitting “Restart” on Your Business

How to get ready for the new normal

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The coronavirus pandemic has had an undeniable impact on the quick lube business. Some owners have kept their business running with modifications, such as shorter hours, fewer employees, and limits on customer interaction. Others shut their doors for the duration, let go of their technicians and helped them file for unemployment. From all indications the “reopening of the economy” will be gradual, and when we do get back to “normal” it will look quite different from what we remember before the crisis.

If there is a silver lining, it is the opportunity to think about how you want to restart and run your business going forward. This is the time to consider fresh approaches and as always, it starts with good people. With many experienced technicians eager to get back to work, think about hiring and rebuilding your team with employees that fit into your vision and can grow with your business. Consider looking at not just their technical skills, but also their soft or people skills—are they the kind of employees you want representing your business to customers going forward? Can they rise to the opportunity to become trusted advisors on lubrication recommendations and automotive maintenance matters?

We anticipate a significant ramp-up in business as people emerge from isolation and put vehicles back into service. Consider a virtual grand re-opening by leveraging your digital presence (search campaign, social media, website, email, promotions or a combination) to engage customers. Keep customers informed of the status of your operation, your working days and hours, and when you are back at full strength; Google My Business is one notable tool you can use for this purpose.

Customer experience will be the biggest differentiator for automotive service shops in the months ahead. Therefore, your customer service needs to be better than ever. Once customers start coming back, incentivize them to tell others about your business with referral discounts or other customer perks. And because your service will be so good, when they thank you, ask them to share their experience on Yelp or Google Reviews.

Physical distancing is likely to be part of the new normal. It has already changed how people interact. Consider waiting rooms may not be as popular as they were—start giving that one some thought now. Many shops

have already adopted drive-through models and are looking into wireless payment devices. The safety of employees and customers will be of paramount concern. Establish standards and protocols for safe customer interaction and share them with your customers at every possible touch point, including: Google My Business, part of your Greeter’s script, on your website, social, etc.

Here again is where an online presence is essential. Do you have a website that allows customers to schedule appointments, choose services, and even prepay? Touchless capabilities will show you are paying attention to events around you and will help maximize the efficiency of the service visit, minimize customer time spent onsite, and reduce human contact with no money or payment cards changing hands.

Coming out of the crisis, we can expect customers to be more sensitive to the cleanliness of their surroundings than ever before. Use the time now to freshen up your shop’s appearance while also addressing distancing and touchless capabilities. Create an environment that is inviting and demonstrates your higher standards of cleanliness.

Some operators get caught in a cycle of over-focusing on expense reduction. The restart is an opportunity to shift the focus to revenue generation. With fewer cars coming in this year, each service represents an opportunity to maximize value. Be sure you have the right lubricants in stock. Train your staff to explain the benefits of premium products. Consider a service checklist to educate the customer on additional services they may need, such as: transmission services, coolant exchange, pour-in fuel additives, other filters, etc.

It’s hard to predict what business will look like when the worst of this pandemic is behind us. In the meantime, think about how you want to position your business going forward. Take a hard look into lessons learned, efficiencies gained, and customer feedback received during this trying time—use that knowledge to position your business for success in an uncharted future.

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—Julianna Fujio,
territory manager,
Chevron Lubricants

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