

**RAISING THE BOTTOM LINE** *continued from Front pg.*

needs to pay a service fee, or a packing fee and sometimes an oversize charge. If the item gets broken in shipping, he has the pleasure of fighting with Fed Up (better known as Fed Ex and UPS). Even if he proves his case, he will be waiting a while for his money. And, oh boy, if he should be sent the wrong part... well, your customer might be getting the idea by now.

No one in the mail order world can get to know and service your customer the way you can; get to know them as people, what kind of job they have, and what they do for fun.

**Making A Comeback**

Try to talk to everyone that enters your store or shop, make friends, and get to know their names. When you see them again, greet them by their name (everyone likes to be recognized). You can never tell who may wind up being one of your best customers from a bunch of shoppers and tire kickers.

Put together a mailing list; send out specials on a regular basis. Ask for names and addresses and have a box to put them in.

Your warehouse should have a flyer program; use it, it works. If you do it right, your customers will be waiting for the flyers to arrive or to pick up a new one at your store. This gives you another chance to make a connection. If the warehouse does not have a program or you can't afford it, make your own. There are so many design packages on the computer - keep it nice, but simple.



This job ends our day on a good note!

Ask your suppliers for free or low-cost point of sale (POP) displays. Put as much out as you can. People love to touch and feel the product, so let them! Of course, keep the more expensive and small items under glass or at least out of reach.

Do you have a Web site? It can be a very inexpensive tool if done correctly. Not only do we explain who we are and what we do, we run monthly specials and seasonal promotions. We also have shop specials, one for each of the four seasons.

But our most popular feature is our Car Show Calendar, Cruise Night listings and our own Car Club Section. You would be surprised how many people

look to the computer to find some events to attend, and if they have to pass an ad for your store, even better!

**Cheap! Cheap! Cheap!**

No, that is not the sound of baby chicks; it is the sound of our cheapest customers. The ones that will drive two towns over because you're 50 cents higher. Which sometimes leads me to the question, "what the hell is wrong with these people?" Don't they understand that the small business man or woman will go way out of their way to take care of and hold on to their clients?

Have you ever had to shop at a big box store? It is great, if you like impersonal, impolite help from part-time, minimum wage-earning workers who could not care less. Not all those employees are like this, but most are. They have no stake in the company; they are just marking time until something better comes along.

You can beat this type of store, with personal helpful service and a good attitude. If you can maintain a fair up-to-date inventory and have some decent parking, you can win this battle.

**Profit Picture**

Delivery service to shops is another way to sell more parts. You need only a few good accounts to support a driver and the upkeep on a delivery vehicle.

What is a good account? Well, number one would be that he pays his bill on time and number two would be that he buys regularly - not just one or two items that no one else will be bothered with.

Many years ago I, like many other auto parts professionals, subscribed to the theory that there was no such thing as too much customer service. You needed to do everything you could for that mechanic or repair shop in order to hold on to his business. But then we got a surprise: he was buying from everyone else first, except his so-called jobber. The discount stores were selling spark plugs, oil, brakes, etc., by the truckload. Shops were calling us up for a quart of trans fluid or a bushing they forgot to get - and they wanted it now!

After taking a good, hard look at the expenses, we decided it would be better and cheaper to fire a few of these customers. Of course, they were told up front; we gave them every chance.

The ones that came up to the plate, we do everything we can do for them, to help them make a decent dollar. They get the best day-to-day pricing, fastest delivery, most up-to-date catalogs, best terms, in-shop POP displays, fastest call backs, etc.

The ones who decided they didn't need us can still buy from us, but they pay cash and they pick up their parts at the store (or wait until we have time to deliver).

A good, active account is worth its weight in gold. You need to decide how much these low-volume accounts are worth to your business and then act accordingly.

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