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Monthly News for the Local Automotive Industry in Middle Tennessee, South Central Kentucky and Northern Alabama.
Body Shops • Independent Repair Shops • Dealers • Service Stations • Specialty Shops • And Many Others

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... Growing Business

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you want the link to take someone to a certain page of your Web site (say, other than the homepage) and the name of that page is long or complicated, you can just change what shows in your ad to a shorter Web site name.

Making it a powerful tool for your business

Once you've helped ensure a consumer is more apt to find your Web site, how do you use it to generate business?

Use it to tell your story and convey key "selling points." What are the one, two or three things that set your shop apart from others? When you're talking to a perspective customer, what "sells" them on bringing their car to your shop? What are the key questions or concerns you hear from them? The answers to those questions are what you should play up on your Web site. Is your business family-run? Multi-generational? Multiple-location? Specialists in certain vehicles or types of repair? Play up whatever your key features are on your homepage and, when you can, in the whole "look and feel" of the entire site.

Make it easy to contact you and schedule an appointment. Include your address and phone number on every page of your site. But also make your Web site a useful tool for the customer, not just an online ad. Can a customer, for example, e-mail you from your Web site? Can they schedule an appointment for an estimate? Can an existing customer go to your site, find the name of the estimator they are working with, and send that specific person an e-mail?

Collect their e-mail address. Just as a database of all your previous customer's mailing addresses can be a powerful marketing tool, collecting e-mail addresses of current and potential customers has value even if you choose

not to use it right now. It allows you to keep in contact with them in a way that requires far less of your time and marketing budget. So give them a reason to submit their e-mail address to you: to sign up to receive your newsletter, to enter a quarterly drawing for some prize, to get the answer to a question they have related to their vehicle, to schedule an appointment, etc.

Get them to talk about it to others. Are you running funny radio or television ads? Include them on your site to not only sell visitors but prompt them to perhaps share a link to that quick bit of entertainment with others. Videos of vehicle crash tests or photos of unusual vehicle accidents can attract attention. Kevin Cook of Cook's Auto Body, Inc., in Normal, Ill., said photos updated daily showing progress on vehicles in the shop drives traffic to his shop's Web site and front door.

"I've heard customers who have had several co-workers at their desk looking at their car when it's here," Cook said. "People say, 'Look at my car,' and other people ask, 'Where is that?'"

No longer an option

Even if your Web site doesn't include advanced features like vehicle progress reports for customers or playable versions of your television or radio commercials, it serves as a "calling card" for your business, online proof of your shop's existence and shows interest in meeting the needs of local vehicle-owners. Making sure it is clear, professional and helpful — and most importantly, that it can be found by those searching online — should be a key part of every shop's marketing plan. •

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A 2-minute guide to Twitter

By Jason Lancaster

Twitter is a free social marketing service that enables users to send and read messages known as tweets: short 140 character text messages delivered to your subscribers who are known as followers.

Tweets can be sent and received via the Twitter Web site or on your cell phone (just remember that text messaging may involve phone service provider fees).

Is your dealership or shop ready to start tweeting? Here's what you need to know:

It takes time. Success on Twitter is a process — there are no shortcuts, so don't rush it. It may take a few months before you can track any results back to your activities on Twitter.

It's called "social" marketing for a reason. Being social isn't about constant self-promotion, automated Tweeting systems, or following everyone you can.

Think of Twitter as a dinner party: Listen, engage people one at a time, and be interesting ... don't just tweet about your business.

Community works. Twitter's popularity stems from the feeling of community we get when we participate. Just like your company may sponsor

little league teams with no expectation of reward, your Twitter account should focus on helping others.

Selfless participation is the quickest path to success.

Empower an individual to Tweet on your behalf. A good Twitter account is always owned and operated by a single person, not a nameless, faceless corporate entity.

Be transparent and up-front. Don't try and hide your business or your goals — you want to sell or fix cars and that's okay. As long as you don't come across as a sleazy, self-promoting salesperson, people will respect your purpose.

Focus on re-tweets. The quickest way to build a following on Twitter is to re-tweet messages you like. When someone you're following tweets something interesting, asks for help, or makes you laugh, re-tweet their message.

The 20-19 rule. The most successful Tweeters follow a "20-19 rule." They tweet no more than 20 times per day, and 19 of those tweets are about other people. •

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To place pay-per-click ads

By John Yoswick

- Google AdWords: www.google.com/intl/en/ads
- Yahoo: www.yahoo.com (click on "Advertise with Us")
- MSN: <http://advertising.microsoft.com/home/home>
- Ask: <http://sponsoredlistings.ask.com/> •