



10 Things Your Website Can Do for You

Websites do more than give names, phone numbers and addresses. Be involved in your shop's website success.

FEATURING



We'd Love to See You

Check out our itinerary for April and May, and maybe we'll see you there!

"Snail Mail" Marketing is Still King

— John Daulton

In a recent article of *The Wall Street Journal*¹, the practice of "Snail Mail" marketing was examined through interviews with companies that had cut off their direct mail hoping to save money. The journal spoke with several large companies who spend tens of thousands of dollars on marketing every year and asked them what was working and what wasn't based on those decisions. The answers they got weren't surprising to us here at CustomerLink, but they were still very interesting and important to think about.

The article starts out looking at a company called Per Annum Inc. that sells diaries, planners and albums. This company had switched from regular mail to email only and then suffered a 25% drop in orders when compared to the same period from the prior year. *The Wall Street Journal* quotes the company president as having realized how big a mistake that was.

After doing some internal research and asking questions regarding the precipitous decline in business, Per Annum Inc. realized that they had a lot of customers who had come to expect getting the reminder in the mail. Their customers commented that they'd been waiting for one and it never came. They wanted it. Getting a reminder becomes something customers rely on to help them stay organized. It's one less thing they have to remember in their busy lives. It takes a little pressure off with everything else

they have going on. Sending direct mail reminders is actually doing your customer a favor. It is giving them good service.

But just sending them isn't the only thing. Reminders need to be personalized. Which was another interesting element discussed in *The Wall Street Journal* article. They quote a marketing professor from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management who talks about the importance of sending something with a "personal touch." The point of it being that big, mega-companies can't make personalized messages; they're just too big and removed from the customer. But small businesses, like automotive shops, can. Messages speak directly to them by name, vehicle and mileage of their actual cars. They can refer to specific events and things going on in town or even in the neighborhood. And, with our new **smrt** technology, it's actually even easier than it ever was to personalize mailers in even greater levels of detail. The message of *The Wall Street Journal* article was that, bottom line, if you make a good message and send it in the mail, people will respond.

"Yes, but how do I know the people who show up are showing up because of the cards I send?" many business owners ask. They might even add, "Customers never bring the card in. They could have been coming in anyway." And that might be true in some cases. Certainly some customers will come in on their own. Lots of people are very organized; they plan out their days, weeks and months well in advance. They use Blackberry's and Outlook and all sorts of daily planning systems to bring order to their every day. But lots don't. I'd be willing to suggest that most don't. And what's more, just because a customer may not bring a card in with them when they come for service does not mean the card was not what it took to get them to come in. It's been our experience, and the article in *The Wall Street Journal* seems to support, that it often is.

For example, some of us bring our service reminder with us when we go to the dentist, and some of us don't. I know I don't. In fact,



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I just got the reminder to take my daughter in the other day. I mentioned the card to my wife as I came in, and she said, "Oh yeah, I'll call and confirm." NOW it's on her schedule and they're going to go. It wasn't before. And there will be no card in her hands when she arrives because I never gave it to her. But I assure you, that visit would not have happened without that card, at least not right now. We probably would have thought of it eventually, but who knows when? My daughter certainly wasn't going to remember, and the visit wasn't on either my radar or my wife's. There's just too much going on at our house to think about stuff like that. I know that in a perfect world, if I were a perfect parent, it would have been on the schedule; but I'm not and it wasn't. At least we got the card.

It's exactly the same with automotive repair. It's not that we don't care about our two family vehicles; it's just that they are not our top priority day to day. We drive them every day, but we don't think about them every day. I'm willing to bet, and *The Wall Street Journal* piece certainly suggests, that large portions of customers are the same. I think it's a human thing.

So, whether with a highly personalized smrt card or with something from our traditional offerings, the bottom line is, sending out direct mail is still the best way to go. In fact, not only is it "still" the best way to go, it begins to reemerge as THE way to go. Direct mail supported by other avenues is the best approach to effective shop marketing. With all the noise in consumer level email marketing filling up email inboxes with spam, it's hardly any wonder that people are relying on direct mail more and more. As more companies go on the cheap and cut direct mail out, companies that stick to this proven method have increasingly better chances of standing out. The bottom line: "snail mail" works.

¹ Evans, Teri. "Firms Hold Fast to Snail Mail Marketing." *The Wall Street Journal*. Jan 12, 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703481004574646904234860412.html>

“He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.”

— Harold Wilson

CustomerLink Itinerary – Come and See Us



April and May are busy months for trade shows and industry events around the country. We plan on being at several of them, and we would love to see you. Below is a list of a few events we will be attending, where and when the event is being held, and the name of the person we have slated to be at each event. If you're part of one of these groups and are in the area, we'd love to see you. Come by, say "Hi" and have a look at some of the features of our new **smrt** technology.

New England Tire & Service Association

April 16th - 18th
Mohegan Sun
Stacy Verduzco

Independent Tire Dealer Group

April 23rd - April 25th
The Lowes Ventana Canyon Resort
Tucson, AZ
Eric Jacques

Virginia Automotive Association Trade Show

April 23rd - 25th
Williamsburg Marriott
Steve Baltzer

Honest 1 Convention

May 16th - 19th
Carefree Resort & Villas
Carefree, AZ
Michele Scott

“It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.”

— W. Edwards Deming

10 Things Your Website Can Do for You... IF You Get Involved

Having a website is one thing. Making it really work for you is something else. Many businesses get a website because they know they are “supposed to,” but then they let it sit there on the Internet like a droopy old sign that’s been hanging over a bay door for years. Which is okay, the information is up there, and people who want to find the shop should be able to find it if they do a Web search. So it works. And that really is a great thing about the Internet; it’s a perfect example of how the Internet has replaced the phone book in many ways. However, a good website can do much more than that. A website that is doing more than just “hanging there” presents opportunities beyond just giving the name, phone number and address for your shop:

1. It can give directions to your store
2. It can provide information about your shop (people, history, values, place in the community)
3. It can list your services (and reduce time spent answering inquires for things you don’t do)
4. It can capitalize on your co-op opportunities with vendors, trade groups and parts suppliers
5. It can let you run your own service specials (this is a great reason to encourage customers to share their email addresses with you)
6. It can be used to sell or promote specific items, for example: a set of used wheels or tires you’d like to move, a lien sale vehicle, parts promotion your supplier is having, the puppies your dog just had, etc. . .
7. It can be used in conjunction with Repair-Pal (see our newsletter from July, 2009)
8. It can be used in conjunction with your Facebook, Twitter or other social site
9. It can be used to link your business with other businesses, groups and organizations in the community
10. You can use it to get customer feedback through surveys or comments made

These are some really powerful things that a website can bring to your business to help it grow. You can build your shop’s professional image and brand identity, and you can solidify your position in the community as THE place to go for automotive service. However, YOU have to be involved to make all those things really pay off. If you want your website to come up on search engines more readily, your ranking will be improved by the number of visitors it gets. To make that happen, you have to get involved. You have to make your website a part of how you do business. That actually doesn’t require a lot of effort, but it does require some.

To begin, you have to mention it to your customers. A quick comment while billing out your customers made by you or your crew can go a long way if done consistently: “Hey, Mr. Jones, don’t forget to check our website. We’re having a sale on shocks next month.” Also, put your website address on your service reminders and coupons, and put it on your invoices and company business cards too. Get the address painted on your shop window or on a bay banner, or even an a-frame if your city ordinances allow. Put it on the mirror hangers you use, if you have them. Be PROACTIVE about your website. If you visit other websites and chat on forums and the like, put your website in your forum user “signature.” If you or someone in your family is a blogger, have them put links in their blogs sometimes. Have them put links on their Facebook pages (your employees can too). The more your website is linked and shows up in places around the Internet, the better the chances are customers will find you when they search for automotive service in your area.

It won’t take a lot of effort on your part to make a big impact on how your website can work for you. Adding your website to your cards and invoices the next time you get them printed doesn’t take much. And talking about it to your customers is free.

Switch on *smrt Technology*

The service reminds your traditional CustomerLink program mails for you use the same image for every customer. Your senior citizen customers see the same oilcan card images or the same scenes and setting images that your soccer-mom customers do. The same ones your corporate professional customers do. One image has to fit everyone.

In addition, the traditional cards are smaller. Our new **smrt** cards are an inch bigger than before. They are a unique size and shape that really stand out from the rest of the mail. And each has a customer specific name and vehicle; your shop name, logo and affiliations; and a call to action to draw them in. All done with images that are meant to appeal to each customer based on lifestyle and life-stage, this adds a lot to your chances of getting a response.

If you haven’t done it yet, call your account manager and switch on **smrt** technology.



Product News

Summer Specials:



The weather might not be steamy and hot just yet, but there's no point letting your customers wait for the heat to discover they should have planned ahead. Send out a Summer Special and give them the chance to be prepared!

A/C Specials:



Speaking of summer, the weather is unpredictable. If your neck of the woods warms up early in the year, sending out an A/C special can be an excellent way to get your customers thinking about whether they want to sit through the first heat spell of the year in a vehicle that won't cool down.

Mother's Day:



Mother's Day is a unique chance to make a service offer that speaks to your customers' hearts. Choose from a selection of unique marketing messages that present your shop's services as a gift.

Summer Newsletter:

Some good advice for your customers about taking care of their cars before and during summer time. Each article is written to help maintain and improve customer loyalty to your shop. It's entertaining, informative, and, ultimately, built to drive more business into your bays.



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