



## Auto Repair Marketing and the Power of Customer Comments

By Dave Dickson

Lately I've heard a lot of people complain about negative customer reviews. Heck, it hasn't been just complaining, it's been outright bitchin' and whinin'. It's always something along the lines of, "We're at the customer's mercy; they can put a bad comment on Yelp or Google Local or Bing and KILL us..."

My response, "Boo...hoo...hoo..." Look, I'm not heartless and unsympathetic; I had 21 shops. I understand how unreasonable some customers can be. I understand that you're not gonna please everybody, but here's the point: to succeed in today's market you better please 99% of them. That's just how it is. It's easy to do, and if you're not doing it, it's time to learn how.

I've heard of people creating elaborate methods of trying to get negative reviews removed from their business site. Well, the bad news is that long term that strategy is not going to work. The big sites like Yelp,

Google, Bing, etc. are COMMITTED to full and complete feedback loops. They will not censor or restrict comments except in the most outrageous cases.

*Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and beginning all over again* —Andre Gide

But, that's ok because nothing has really changed. We've always been

at the "customer's mercy"—it's just with the internet, if we do a bad job they can kill us faster than ever before. The key to the whole problem is to do a better job AND make sure your good customers talk about it.

The whole antidote to this negative feedback challenge is POSITIVE FEEDBACK! Get every one (or at least most) of your good, satisfied customers to leave you feedback on Yelp, Google or Bing, and the good will completely offset and drown out the bad. Make it worth their while to do it. Give them something of value (free oil change, wiper blades, tire rotation, etc.) for their trouble.

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## Earth Day – Environmental Stuff Can Be Your Friend

By John Daulton



For some shop owners, the very thought of environmental anything makes them cringe. With all the regulations and fees and procedures shops have to follow (especially in some states), sometimes the very word environment has become synonymous with a headache at least as large as planet Earth.

But there is an upside to environmental practices that you might consider using to help your shop. Since there are many things you do every day for the environment, whether it be using recycled coolant, recycling tires, following the EPA guidelines for handling hazardous waste... all of these things are environmentally friendly. So BRAG about it.

It doesn't matter if you do these things willingly or if you pay your waste-oil hauler with tears running down your cheeks as you write the check, the end result is, you are doing what is right for the environment. So, there's no reason why you can't run an Earth Day program to let customers know the great lengths you go to.

Some green decorations, maybe a few potted plants or flowers placed here and there, and all of a sudden, April is your month to explain to your customers how much you do to keep our world and water clean. Talk about it, tell people when they come in, mention it on your Facebook or Twitter page, maybe even send out a service special postcard featuring your environmental services that invites them to come in.

By doing these things, you can help make your environmentally conscious customers feel even better about doing business with you and your shop. That's what they call a "win-win" scenario. Call your Account Manager if you'd like to get an Earth Day program underway today.

As a matter of fact I've seen several savvy shop owners deploy "counterattacks" when they get an unwarranted bad review. They have a group of advocate customers who will actually go online and counter the negative comment point by point simply because they believe in the shop. That's a fantastic way to give your most loyal customers a chance to help you succeed.

The other key thing to remember is that if you get a bad review, you've failed in some way (big hint: it's usually in the communication). I know, it's easier to talk about how crazy and unreasonable the customer was, but the fact is you can't control them. It's much more profitable to focus on what you can control. You can control how you and your staff communicate with them. You can control how much you are willing to give up satisfying them (another big hint: most shop owners severely underestimate the value of a happy customer).

So, I challenge you on several points here: First, stop wasting precious time and energy trying to figure out how to "sneak out" of negative re-

views. Second, energize and motivate your loyal satisfied customers to support you with positive comments. Third, commit to doing a better job communicating (thereby eliminating virtually all your problems) with all your customers. And finally, be willing to make a serious (time and money) investment in making any unhappy customer happy again.

*(Dave Dickson is an accomplished automotive service industry pro with a proven track record of automotive shop success. A genuine "rags to riches" story, Dave started as most shop owners do, with a shop and a dream, and in the span of four years, found himself at the helm of a 21-store empire. His meteoric rise in the automotive world is the subject of the book Slingshot, and now Dave shares his experience with automotive shop owners everywhere through his consulting company, Perfect Day, Inc. You can check out Dave Dickson's auto repair marketing tips and resources at <http://autorepairmarketing.org>.)*



## Tax Time – A Sweet Spot for Consumer Cash

Spring brings lots of nice stuff: the trees turn green, flowers bloom, the weather gets nice again, we get to do our taxes...

Uh, wait, taxes?

If you're wondering why taxes are nice, it's the refund part of taxes I'm talking about. And I'm mostly talking about your customers' refunds. According to the IRS, last year they processed roughly 142 million individual tax returns. Of those, roughly 109 million got tax refunds.

Now you don't have to be a mathematician to know that is a large percentage of the people filing returns getting refunds. This is where the nice and fun part of taxes comes in for you as a shop owner. From February through early May, your community, your customer base, is being infused with cash.

However, many of these people may instinctively want to run out and buy a new electronic gadget, a new video game or an iPhone since Verizon is selling them for a couple hundred bucks. So it's up to you to make sure that BEFORE they get those IRS checks in their hands, they've already considered more practical uses for at least some of that cash: namely, catching up on neglected vehicle maintenance.

One way to do this is to merchandise your store for it. This can be as simple as putting up a sign near the counter and on the front door reminding customers that tax refunds can be put to practical use. Something simple like "Tax Refunds Are in the Mail: Make Sure to Remember Your Vehicle This Year" will do the job, or you can come up with something more creative to suit your personality and the culture of your shop.

Another great way to help get access to this influx of money in your neighborhood is to paint your windows if you have some that point towards a reasonably traveled street. If not, you can make an A-frame sign (assuming your city ordinances and landlords permit), or if you have a kid at home for spring break, you can even get him or her to go out at lunchtime and wave a sign for you.

A third strategy, and one that doesn't require as much effort on your part, is to remind them directly. You can send a tax refund service special through the mail and email to your existing customers reminding them to come in. You can even use it as an opportunity to go for new customers with a smart "New Customer Finder" campaign. Or you can do both!

The bottom line is, remind people that there is something useful they can do with their tax refunds at your shop. Get the word out, and bring those customers with their refunds IN! You'll be doing them, and yourself, a favor.

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## A Short Summary

By John Daulton

In the article above, Dave Dickson mentions Yelp among his list of review sites. It has come to my attention that more than a few folks out there are not familiar with what that is, so here's a short and simple explanation.

Yelp is a website that allows consumers to go make comments about businesses. This includes your shop. Whether you are paying attention to your Yelp reputation or not, you most likely have one. Hopefully it's a good reputation, but, frankly, happy customers are less motivated to post things than are angry ones. Happy customers do post reviews, but they usually have to have been totally blown away by something you did to go write a nice review on their own, which is why Dave suggests getting your best customers involved. They may not know about Yelp either, and you can point them to it. They might really enjoy what it does and appreciate you even more—it's not just about automotive shops, so

consumers like visiting Yelp to both give and find reviews on all sorts of things. It's fun.

If you've never visited the site before, go to [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com) and check it out. Type in the name of a business (your favorite restaurant, look up your shop or even some competitors). Odds are you will find it and some reviews. Have a look at them, and you'll see how it works. It's simple and effective (I actually used it yesterday to find a shoe repair shop). If you discover your shop is not there, you can set it up. If it is there, you can claim it... the registration is easy and self-explanatory. (Once you set up, don't send all your best customers on there over the next day or two to give you a good review, otherwise Yelp might think those reviews are spam. In fact, you might want to suggest to customers who have never been on the site before to review their favorite restaurants or other types of stores while they are at it—again so Yelp doesn't detect a sudden blast in review volume only on your shop and think it's a spam campaign—I have read that they do watch for that stuff.)

Yelp is in some ways similar to the RepairPal site we discussed last year, and it is very popular. Staying on top of these kinds of sites is becoming more and more critical these days. Don't be afraid of them; they are great tools. If your shop does good work and good service, these sites can be nothing but beneficial for you—if you use them right. We realize that when you start thinking about all of them (Yelp, Google Local, Yahoo! Local, Bing Local, RepairPal, etc.), it can seem impossible to keep up. But it's not. We can help. Call your Account Manager and ask about how CustomerLink can help you manage your online reputation as part of our **smrt** social media and customer review services.



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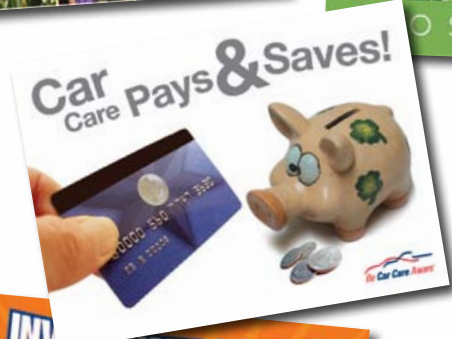
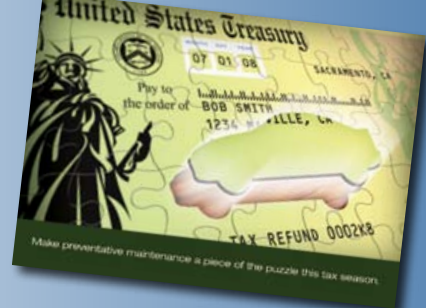
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## Product News



**Tax Rebate Cards** – Tax refunds are coming, and your customers will have the cash to catch up on needed vehicle repairs. Mail your clients one of our Tax Rebate Cards to prompt them to spend some of that refund at your shop.

**Spring Specials** – There may still be snow on the ground, but not for long. Changing seasons mean changing driving conditions. Send your customers a Spring Special Card and remind them to prepare for rain, snowmelt, and even summer on the way.

**St. Patrick's Day** – This fun holiday provides a unique opportunity to tie into the color green. Tap the marketing appeal of springtime green, environmental green, cash green, or four-leafed clover green with a St. Patrick's Day Card.

**Spring National Car Care Month** – It's coming soon. April to be exact! CustomerLink has NCCM specific cards, letters, and text

options ready for you to choose. Let us help promote your National Car Care Month activities and service specials.

**Earth Day** – Earth Day is April 22. Many people are very interested in the environment. You can tap into this interest and their need to maintain their vehicles by highlighting the environmental side of your business. Recycled products you use and the extra effort you go to when complying with good, Earth-friendly waste handling are easily turned into selling points for your shop. We can help you do it with an Earth Day special.

**Website Design and Hosting** – Does your shop have a presence on the Internet? If not, log on to your WebLink account and see how easy and affordable a custom website can be. A professional website will not only increase your shop's credibility in your customers' eyes, it will make it easier for them to do business with you. Help your existing customers keep in touch with you, and help new customers find you too. Call today.

