



FEATURING

The Winner Announced:

Meet the winner of the “Smrt-est Shop on the Planet” contest



We'd Love to See You:

A quick look at tradeshow events in the first ten weeks of 2010

Purple Cow Automotive – Finding the wow factor through Edgecrafting

— Jim Bonfield, Vice President, Business Development

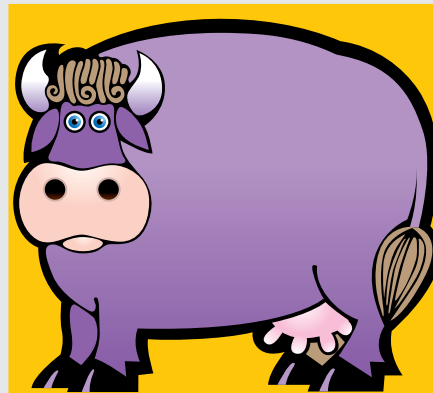
People love to be experts. We all have opinions, and we love to share them. The old axiom of “please one customer and they’ll tell ten” may still hold true, but with the explosion of social networking sites, we have seen a much greater willingness to share the good than anyone could have imagined.

This is NOT an article about Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn social networking – I am tired of the rah-rah there too. This is an article that I hope will remind you to think about your company and services through the eyes of your consumers as a way to influence what their mouths say and what their fingers may type about you, your business and services.

My favorite business author of all time is Seth Godin. He has written a number of basic, tell-it-like-it-is works that I love: *Purple Cow*, *Permission Marketing*, and my favorite, *Free Prize Inside*. In his book, *Purple Cow* (hence my title), he uses the idea of seeing a purple cow as something that would be so unique it would literally become remarkable – as in people seeing it would feel compelled to remark on it to their friends. In *Free Prize Inside*, Seth talks about something he calls “Edgecraft.” According to Godin, Edgecraft is “... a methodical, measurable process that allows individuals and

teams to inexorably identify the soft innovations that live on the edges of what already exists.”

My overly simplified summation of the Edgecraft concept is this: you don’t have to make a massive operational overhaul or come up with major innovations to really move the needle with your business. Less drastic changes, at the “edge,”



can mean a lot. You may do better to look at what you do and how you do it, then work on tweaking those offers and processes enough to add value and improve perception in a way that moves your customer to think of you as something more than a place to get his or her car fixed.

Tweaking the “edges” of a service or product can be fun. It can provide surprising impact

to your bottom line and company culture, and most importantly, it can get your customers talking about you to their friends and family.

Personal experience: I use a shop that is a client of CustomerLink. Even before coming to CustomerLink, I ALWAYS tried to use small business and independently owned companies. I’m wired that way because my dad was one of these “little” guys too, and I get how hard it is to compete.

I recently went to this shop to take care of a bunch of maintenance and repair issues that had been nagging my vehicle for a while now. Every time I picked my car up from them, it had been washed and vacuumed. Even if no work was done. Wow. It’s not that I couldn’t simply pay ten bucks somewhere for the same service. What really moved the needle for me as a consumer is how I **felt** better about my car every time I drove away from that facility.

My car is getting up in years and mileage, and I’m kind of rough on it in general. BUT – when I have driven away from the garage, at least four times now over these past months, I LIKE my car again. I have never felt that before. It’s a small thing, I know, but the emotional bond that shop has created with me feels like... wait for it... LOYALTY. Not because they fixed my car

(they actually couldn't fix one of the issues), but because they figured out how to make me feel good about having my car fixed. HUGE difference.

Of course, I have recommended this shop to family and friends. I never say it's because they wash my car. I do it because I feel good about that shop. Edgecrafting is a way of describing similar pursuits. Some examples of Edgecraft concepts (more can be found here www.freeprizeinside.com):

1. Build-A-Bear Workshop sells Teddy Bears and stuffed animals. So do 10,000 other stores. However, Build-A-Bear charges people to make the bears themselves – and get them to pay more for the privilege! (Wow, I wonder if you could offer a fix-it-yourself series of classes for simple tasks... oil change, wipers, etc.? I bet if you did, you'd earn customers for the more expensive repairs that are not DIY operations.)
2. Hershey has created an experiential bou-

tique in Times Square. There's a machine there where people wait twenty minutes to press a button and watch machine gravity feed various Hershey candies into a bag – for twice the price of the same candy on “regular” store shelves.

3. One of my best friends, Jason Marrone, is the online marketing hotshot for Jelly Belly. One of his most successful innovations has been to simply allow customers to upload pictures or photos of their choosing which are then imprinted on the container that is used to hold the jellybeans sent to loved ones as gifts.

“Yeah, but this is just car repair”

Really? Is that all you really do? I don't think that's how we consumers feel about it. We don't care that you replaced our cap, rotor, wires and plugs so much as we care that you made it possible to get our kids to school on time.

You make it possible for me to take my wife on

date night (not often enough by the way – can you find us a good sitter too?)

You get me to work every day.

How can you reinforce these facts in a way that make me/us feel better about your product and service? Maybe it's not so much total car care as total life freedom.

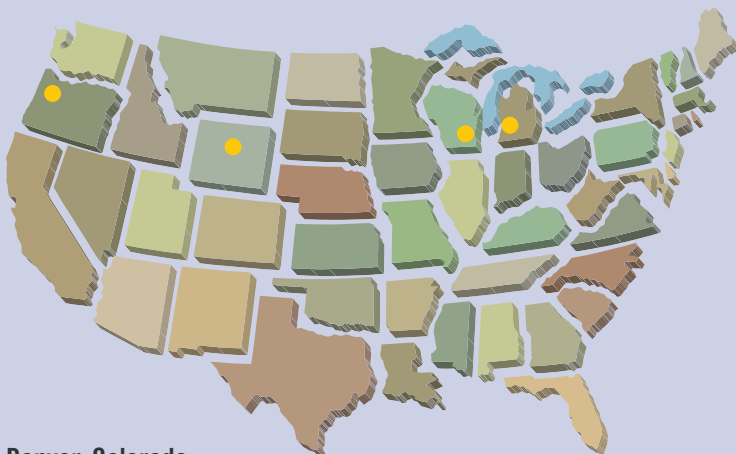
Take a clue from Southwest... “You are now free to roam about the country...” Are they selling airline travel with long delays, security checks, swine flu sneezes, and large people flowing into your seat? Nope. They are selling the feeling of escape, adventure and wanderlust.

How can you redefine what you do to a point that influences how we feel about you as a company? Write me and let me know.



If you have comments please call me at (916) 774-1381, or email me at jbonfield@customerlink.com

We'd Love to See You in...



Denver, Colorado

For ASA members planning to attend, we'll be at the ASA, Colorado trade show taking place on January 30, 2010 at the PPA Event Center in Denver. They have a really interesting format this year, what they call “speed dating,” for those of us who are presenting topics. Come by and meet sales rep Brett Murchie and check out our new **smrt** programs and processes. Brett will be glad to see you.

Portland, Oregon

We hope that members of the Northwest Tire Dealers Association (NWTDA) intending to be at the trade show in Portland on February 5th will swing by our booth and say, “Hello,” to our rep Michel Scott-Pontius. We'll have lots of information on **smrt**, and likely a fun giveaway! We're looking forward to meeting many of you folks in the beautiful north west.

Grand Rapids, Michigan

For Alliance members planning to attend the Tech Expo and Parts Store Expo on February 12 and 13th, we'll be there too and hope to see you. Our man-in-the-field, Steve Baltzer, will be in our booth eager to see you, so we hope you'll stop by.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Another great Alliance members event, this time in Milwaukee. Steve Baltzer, ever on the move, will be in Wisconsin on March 5th and 6th. If you didn't get a chance to get some in-person information on our **smrt** technology in Grand Rapids, this is your chance to let Steve show you how this cutting-edge marketing works.

*How can you squander even one more day not taking advantage of the greatest shifts of our generation?
How dare you settle for less when the world has made it so easy for you to be remarkable?*

—Seth Godin

Meet the Winner of the **smrt**-est Shop on the Planet Contest

The wait is over, and the winner has finally been announced for the “Smrt-est Shop on the Planet” contest. With a whole year of marketing services being provided for free – a year powered by our new **smrt** technology – there were a lot of shops hoping to have their names pulled for the prize. The lucky winner is the Tuffy Auto Service Centers location in Clinton Township, Michigan, north-east of Detroit.

The owner, Mark Cooper, was delighted to hear his shop had won. “I’m very, very interested to see how it works,” he told us over the phone. “It’s great that I won this.” We think it’s great his Tuffy Auto Service Center won too, and we’re looking forward to tracking his success.

Cooper is a realist, and after initial congratulations and civilities were exchanged, we asked him what he expected and hoped for from his upcoming year of **smrt**. “I’m hoping it will increase sales,” he said. “I want to see it increasing retention and bringing people back more frequently.” We’re confident it will, so we asked what he thought he’d do at the end of the year. He replied, “It is great that I won it and that it’s free. The bottom line is, if it works, I’ll pay for it.” Who could argue with that kind of reasoning?

Cooper’s Tuffy Auto Service Center is no stranger to shop marketing; they’ve been doing some on their own for years. “We send out mail to new customers,” he told us. “We mail to customers based on certain spend amounts, and we mail to people who have declined work.” He went on to admit, “We have a somewhat sporadic capturing of oil change reminders.” The shop has a variety of letters and templates they use for doing these different reminder types. “We do lots of mailing, but nothing as automated or organized as this,” he said regarding the **smrt** program.

And we understand. It’s just not possible for a shop on their own to do what **smrt** does; shop owners and staff have too much on their plates every day, answering phones and taking care of customers in house, dealing with parts suppliers, employee concerns, managing the busi-



ness... there’s just no way to do DIY marketing as “automated” and “organized” as **smrt**. We hear stories all the time, tales of hit-and-miss mailing where it can be hard to keep up, or there just isn’t time to mail to everyone that should get mail. Cooper’s interest in the automation and thorough nature of our program is well placed. No business wants to miss critical “touch” opportunities with its good customers; the mailers that don’t go out could be the key to unlocking the most profitable jobs. It’s our intention, and Cooper’s expectation, to get all those critical touches for his shop throughout this year.

We look forward with confidence to displaying the results, both incrementally and at year end, but for now, we’ll repeat our congratulations to Mark Cooper and the crew at Tuffy Auto Service Center as we begin setting up their **smrt** marketing account. Keep an eye out for periodic updates in our monthly newsletters, and for more regular updates and interesting details, you can follow along on our blog at www.customerlink.com, click on About Us, then Blogs.

1.888.942.5448

Product News

Time to Order:

Valentine's Day Cards

We know you love having full bays during February, so what better way than the holiday of love as a reason to bring more business in. There's still time to get a Valentine's Day Special mailed to your customers, but you have to act fast.



St. Patrick's Day Cards

Looking for a way to differentiate your business and stay in the forefront of your customers' minds? Consider sending a St. Patrick's Day Card. Your customers will be pleasantly surprised to receive this special card from you!



Spring Special Mailers

Yes, it's still cold and wet in many parts of the country, but spring will be here before you know it! Make sure you get your customers in for post-winter service.



Customer Loyalty and Referral Cards

Identify, reward, and retain your best customers. Earn quality referrals too! Offer a Customer Loyalty Card or a Customer Referral Card. Your account manager can help you select the program and offer that best suits your business goals.



Spring Special
Loyalty Card!

Contact your account manager today to discuss these unique offerings.

CustomerLink

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