



How Customer Reviews Help Your Shop Show Up on Search Engines and Online Directories —By John Daulton

For anyone not familiar with Search Engine Optimization (SEO), I'll begin there, but will keep it brief. SEO refers to numerous strategies that Internet marketers use to get a particular website to the front page of a search engine request. Here's a simple example: Let's say you have a shop in Roseville, California. You want your shop's website to show up on the first page that comes up when someone types a phrase like "auto repair in Roseville" into a search engine like Google, Yahoo!, or Bing. If you come up on the front page, you have a better chance of that prospective customer calling you instead of the shops that are on the third or fifth or twentieth page. There's a real advantage to being on the front page, hopefully for a number of search terms consumers use when looking for service—not just your shop name.

The problem is, everyone knows that there is a real advantage to being on the front page, so everyone who knows anything about Internet marketing is doing everything they can to make sure their websites, or their clients' websites, are showing up too. So, it's kind of like a never ending race. Welcome to the world of SEO.

This gets us back to the main point suggested by the title of this article, which has to do with how customer reviews are important to your goal of getting to the first page or two. Here's how that works:

Evidence suggests search engines are placing more value on consumer-generated content than company-created content. In a sense, the search engines have become cynical. All the Internet marketers out there over the last few years have manipulated and exploited every possible angle they could to get their websites or their clients' websites to the top. There are lots of tricks involved, things like "key word stuffing" and "link farms" and all kinds of things that I won't go into specifically but that you should avoid at all costs. Suffice to say, some of these techniques made some websites look like they were "better" than others when it came to what someone might be searching for—even though that wasn't always the case.

So, the search engines are always looking for ways to change their search algorithms (the fancy processes by which they figure out what websites show up and what websites get buried several pages deep) in order to deliver the BEST information to a searcher rather

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We're donating \$1.00 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation™ of Northern California for every "Like" we get from automotive professionals like you. With as little effort as logging on to Facebook.com/customerlink and clicking a "Like" button, you can help us help a really great organization that does wonderful things for kids.

We're doing this because, well, because helping kids is cool. But we're also doing this as an example of the kinds of things you can do with a Facebook page too. Social media can really be a force for good as much as it can be a great way to keep in touch with the people you do business with. Plus, while you are on the Facebook page that best suits your shop type, you'll have an option of entering to win an iPad. How awesome is that?

So, when you get a chance, hop on to Facebook, find our page, pick the type of shop that suits yours best, and click "Like." That's it. A dollar goes to Make-A-Wish. Enter the iPad drawing if you want as well. Oh, and feel free to say, "Hi," while you are there. We'd love to hear from you.



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than the most cleverly created website. The purpose of a search engine is to make sure search customers can find the most qualified sources of information based on the search phrases they use. Remember, when it comes to search engine companies, their customers are the folks looking for information.

The point is, when a consumer uses a search engine to find something, they are patronizing a particular search company. That consumer wants to find the best information possible. If they want information about, say, the best way to bake a cake, they want a selection of site recommendations that has lots of cake-baking information. If they want information about auto service in their hometown, it's the same kind of thing.

Here is what consumers want to know when searching for a local service business: *Which ones are near by; what do they specialize in or offer; and what do other consumers think about the quality of the service they provide?* Sites that provide that kind of information have perfect content for search engines to consider when making recommendations and assigning top-of-page placement.

This is where having customer reviews and publishing them on a number of sites fits in. Search engines have figured out that customer reviews are a great source of "genuine information" and highly valued content for the consumer doing a search. Reviews are considered customer-generated content.

So, in an ever-changing landscape of SEO pitfalls and promises, the sands are shifting to favor consumer-generated content. Gathering reviews for your shop is a great way to do that. With our new smrt 2.0, we automate review requests from your current customers and then publish their comments, ratings and reviews out to major sites like Facebook and Twitter while making those same reviews available to major search sites like Google, Yahoo! and Bing. By publishing this consumer-generated review content to multiple sites around the Internet, we create the opportunity for the auto-repair-seeking consumer in your town to find your shop in several ways. They can find you on the company-branded reviews page we create for you, a FaceBook site (that we can also create for you), a Twitter site (same thing, we'll make it for you if you don't have one), and through potentially hundreds of search engines and local online directories. No longer do you need to depend on just

your own, lone website to appear on the top pages of a search engine. Now we can promote you across multiple sites, all of which have freshly generated, keyword-rich content about your company published in a way that search engines prefer.

The best part: it's all on autopilot.

But we know some shop owners are still reluctant. They are hesitant to engage with these evolving technologies. Because we talk to shop owners all the time, we know some shops worry about getting more visible online and letting people talk about them "publicly."

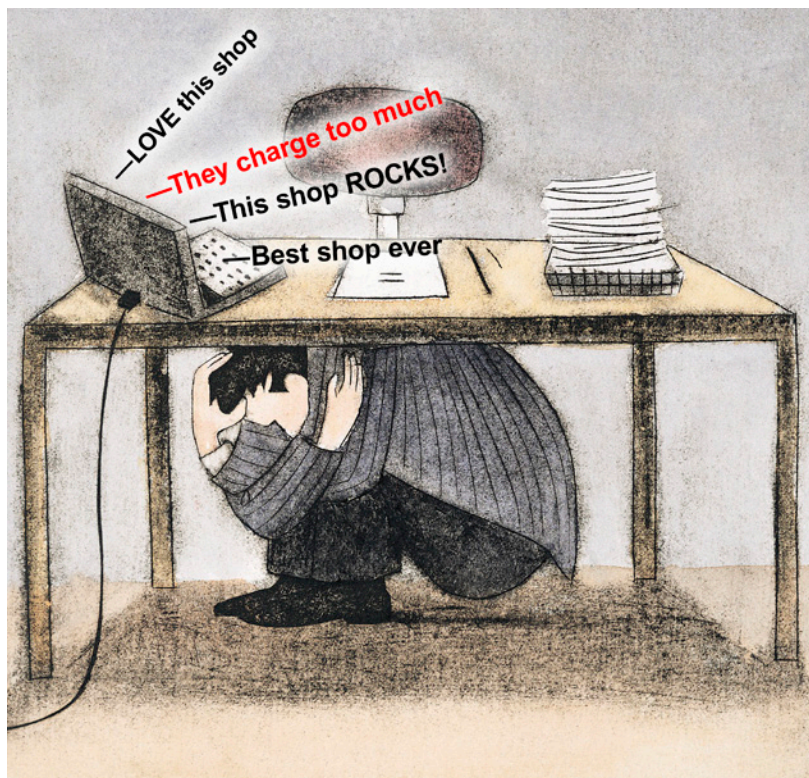
It's scary. It's like that old game where you have to fall backwards and hope the person behind you will catch you. Except now you're playing with strangers and not all of them will play nice.

Here's the deal: bad reviews happen. Period. But a bad review is *not* as bad as many fear. It's just not. For one thing, it gives you a chance to fix the problem and make the customer happy and *retain* them. For another, a bad review mixed in here and there gives *all* your good reviews credibility. Consumers reading reviews on a website are not stupid. They know that some people are unreasonable, that some

customers will never be satisfied, and that sometimes things go wrong at automotive repair shops. *They get it.* What they want to see is that the owners are responsive when things go wrong. That is what they are looking for, not a list of perfect reviews. In fact, if they see a list of perfect reviews on your site, they won't believe any of them. They'll assume you are clearing out the bad ones. Which is why the big search engine companies may actually begin penalizing review sites that don't follow a certain set of rules when publishing reviews (and which is why we want to help you do it right with smrt 2.0).

The bottom line is, customer reviews are here to stay. We all live in a "review economy" now. Reviews are not something to be afraid of, and, quite the opposite, if you embrace them and use them properly, they can help your shop get found by people searching for auto service on the Internet. Let us help.

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If you have any questions about customer reviews or about smrt 2.0, don't hesitate to call me at 888-942-5448 ext. 119 or email me at jdaulton@customerlink.com.



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Three Easy Steps to Outrageously Satisfied Customers —By Dave Dickson



If you're around me for any length of time you'll hear me ask the question, "What's the most profitable thing you could be doing right now?" If the answer is anything other than what you are doing, it's time to stop and do the most profitable thing.

Usually, the most profitable thing you can do involves talking to a customer. Ideally you'll be selling a repair. However, if you're not selling a repair right at the moment there is still another very profitable, often overlooked way to talk to a customer. Follow up calls... resist the urge to stop reading... stay with me!

Follow-up calls are one of those things that everybody talks about and few people do. There are usually three reasons why shop owners and service writers don't do follow-up calls. The first reason is fear. They are afraid the customer is going to be unhappy and angry at them. The second reason is lack of organization. There are no systems in place to make sure it happens. And the third reason is poor goal setting. I'm going to give you the solution for each one of these obstacles.

Fear! The easiest way to overcome fear is practice. If you're doing good work and verifying each repair then the odds that the customer is going to be unhappy are very low. And, if they are unhappy, it's much better for you to call them and correct it rather than have them tell twelve people (the national average) about how unhappy they are.

Another antidote for fear is a good script. Here's a short easy script to use on follow-up calls to customers who have recently been in your shop:

"Hi, (customer name) this is Dave at Dave's Auto Repair, and I was just calling to make sure everything was good with the service you just had done. Is there anything I could have done better? Great! There is something you can do for me. For each friend or co-worker you send to me, I'll give you a free oil change as my way of saying thank you. Would you be willing to do that for me? Great!"

Notice how we give them a chance to give us feedback. Whether they do or not, the answer is "great" and "thank you". Then, we ask them to help us out AND we make it worth their while. Again, whether they say yes or no, the answer is still "great." This is a very low stress, low pressure script. It takes very little time to deliver and opens up some fantastically profitable conversation.

The next challenge is lack of organization. There are two ways to overcome this, technologically or "old school." If you are going to use technology then simply set up reminders in your point of sale system to trigger a call three to five days after the customer cashes out. If

you want to go old school then go to the office supply store and get one of those file folios that are numbered 1-31. Make a copy of the work order after you cash the customer out and put it in the number for the date of the month that is three to five days away. Each day you simply grab the work orders in the file for that day and those are the people you call.

The final challenge is poor goal setting. Many owners or service writers set a goal to "call some customers" or "do some follow-up calls." Those goals are too vague and weak. Call three satisfied customers every day. Not two, not four... exactly three. It doesn't matter how many work orders you have, start by just calling three. Do it starting tomorrow. Make this simple commitment and you've solved the goal setting problem.

Use the tools I've given you here to overcome the obstacles to doing this "most profitable thing" and watch your business grow.

A note about the author: 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>.

Don't Be Afraid of Progress

He who fears being conquered is sure of defeat. — Napoleon

Never let the fear of striking out get in your way. — Babe Ruth

Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most. — Dostoyevsky

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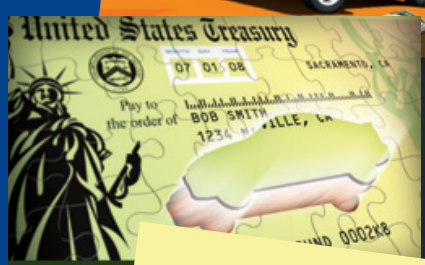
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Product News

Tax Rebate Cards: Tax season is here again, and NOW is the time to lay your claim to a portion of the tax refunds being sent to your customer base. Remind your customers that this cash infusion is a great way to catch up on vehicle maintenance and repair.

Spring Special Mailers: There may still be snow on the ground, but the spring thaw is coming fast. Now is the time to invite your customers in for post-winter services.

April is National Car Care Month: Tap into the momentum of this great automotive event by inviting your customers to your shop for a vehicle inspection. Help them improve safety, reliability, and their vehicle knowledge—and make some service sales as well!

Spring Newsletter: Some good advice for your customers about their cars, written on topics carefully chosen to help maintain and improve customer loyalty to your shop. This newsletter will give you and your shop even more credibility than ever, ultimately driving more business into your bays.

