

# Marketing in the New Millenium

By George Witt

It's official—all those “time-saving” devices that we use have now created a to-do list we can't get finished. In an effort to save time, we've used it all up. Ironic.

Internet, cell phones, voice mail, electronic day planners, email, Wifi, Bluetooth--so why can't we ever reach our customers for authorization on car repairs?

All these new things bring with them tasks to perform and a whole new, time-intensive “to-do” list.

Think about Grandma and Grandpa. Their daily planner was a wall calendar with only a thing or two on it each day. If you called them and they weren't home, no one knew it, there was simply no answer. To correspond with them, you'd write a letter and mail it. A few days later, they'd get it and if they wrote back within a week, that was considered fairly prompt. If Grandpa took off Saturday and you needed to reach him, you had to wait until he got home.

Those days are over. The meticulous leather bound day planner doesn't even get it anymore either. It has to be electronic and connect to the Internet! Every day, hour and minute is planned in advance and there's little room for error. Seconds are crucial in today's world. How many times do you go to a sit-down place for lunch and all you do is eat and go back to work? Most lunches are spent running errands and performing other tasks. No wonder they're advertising blood pressure medication so heavily.

When someone sends you an email, they expect an answer immediately and we all get lots of emails daily, each one a new task to perform by answering it.

It's been said that the car service business is off because cars are built better, that “everyone's leasing a car” and other such nonsense.

I believe the real reason is, getting the car serviced is a task that keeps getting shuffled to tomorrow and finally drops off the to-do list in frustration. You can only carry unperformed tasks forward so many times before you drop them.

For our service operations to survive, we need to understand that today's society is out of time. We have to value our customer's time and let them know we can make it easy for them.

We have to set up our operations to take as little of our customer's time as possible and make it as easy as we can to get those cars to us.

Here's how this works. This is your “New Millenium” marketing list:

1. We have to write all the information on the repair order at the time of our customer's choosing. They'll call for an appointment when *they have time* to do so. We need to write everything up when they call, for that's when they have time—time to answer our questions, time to discuss what needs to be done, time to get estimates.

2. We need to give them a specific time to arrive, one that allows us to greet them immediately and finalize the day's car plan quickly and efficiently. Since everything's already written and agreed upon, a quick review and verification of how they can be reached today is all we need. In just a few minutes we've got our highly detailed plan in place.

3. Rides need to be instant. This should also be planned in advance by asking who needs a ride and scheduling the rides to correspond with your ability to give them.

4. Our production planning needs to help us get the car done promptly and on time. Our daily plan needs to allow time to address additional needed work that will be found. In other words, don't book the day so tight you don't have time to install front brake pads after a brake inspection. Return trips for little things will lose a customer for you.

You need to tell them what they need to do this time and what's coming up in the future. Maintenance is best sold for the *next visit*, not this visit. Since they're into planning, let them plan the time and expense of upcoming events. It's a lot easier to sell a \$650 timing belt job 6 to 12 months out than it is to spring it on them when they arrive.

Tell them what they need to do now and what can be put off until next time.

5. Send them a followup letter 30 days after their visit reminding them of things their car needs that they didn't buy. A few paychecks can change their perspective and help get that car back in your shop. Always put prices on the things you list and try not to list more than 3 things. This can put you right back on the "to-do" list.

6. We need to stay in touch with our customers. A Newsletter is more important than ever. It allows us to keep our customers informed of things they need to know to operate their car more easily and avoid trouble. You should be telling them about which brands of gasoline are best for their car ([www.toptiergas.com](http://www.toptiergas.com)), why premium service is so important to the longevity of their car's AC system and what to do when the "check engine" light comes on.

Information of this type demonstrates your expertise in the business, highlights your concern for their well-being and reminds them to call you for the service they've been putting off. Again, you're back on the "to-do" list.

7. Send them service reminders for every oil change and other needed maintenance. Get back on the "to-do" list and make it easy for them to use the card as a reminder. We give away free fridge magnets and I have no doubt they are used to keep our reminder cards prominently displayed to highlight the job to be done—Call George.

8. Have a program for fast service while-they-wait. Every shop can do a 30-minute oil change if it's planned in advance. Put a system in place where your customers can make an appointment in advance and wait while you do an oil change. Then YOU can sell them air filters, wiper blades and future service work instead of the fast lubes.

In the old days, hanging out a sign and waiting for things to break was good enough. Everyone had plenty of time, life was easy. Today, if your shop's out of money, it's because your customers are out of time. Make it easy for them to give you their money.

Understanding this concept will cause you to realize why fewer customers are responding to the discount offers—they don't need the savings as much as they need the time. Save them time. Send them things that make it easy for them to call you. Use less of their time and they'll gladly pay you for it. If you don't believe me, look at Starbucks Coffee. Don't tell me people are short of money when they're spending 4 bucks for a 60-cent cup of coffee.

Now, if Starbucks could get me in and out of there in 60 seconds, they'd outsell everybody.