

Is it the Medium or the Message?

Yellow pages, direct mail, newspaper, coupon book or Newsletter? Many shop owners agonize over the best way to bring business to their shops. Heaven knows, a ton of money can be mowed through in a short period of time seeking the answer.

At best, we may get some good short-term business. At worst, we may draw in a whole bunch of undesirables and make us wish we could just take a job selling shoes.

Perhaps we focus too much on which medium we are going to use, when in reality, we should concentrate on the message itself.

Case in point—ASA of Nebraska. I spent 2 years mailing to shop owners in Lincoln to get them to come to our monthly shop association meetings without much success. The MESSAGE was: “We’d like you to come to our meetings and maybe join our organization”.

I was working an owner on the phone one day and he had a time conflict with the meetings. I asked him if he’d join if we just sent him a written summary of the activities. “Sure!”, he replied.

It hit me then that I was asking for people’s most precious commodity—time. I took a lunch hour and hit 5 random shops with one question—would you join us if we just mailed to you? 3 of 5 quickly replied in the affirmative. I slapped my forehead in amazement.

I then changed the MESSAGE. It now read, “You don’t have to fill out any forms, you don’t have to attend any stupid meetings, **we just want your damn money**”.

This is really exactly what it said.

We’ve gone from 12 members last January to over 50 members statewide in less than 8 months.

It’s very important to note that the mailers themselves have nearly an identical look. It’s still the same direct mail piece I used for 2 years with limited success. The MESSAGE has changed only slightly. We still want them to join. Where we’d been asking for significant time, now we’re just asking for 3 minutes to write a small check.

I believe, too many times, improperly aimed shop marketing attracts customers we don’t really want, anyway. The lowball oil change offer attracts a lowball customer. Duh. We’ve spent money to make ourselves nuts. I believe we can do that for free.

Ask 100 of your best customers a simple question. “What do you like best about coming to our shop?” Listen to what they say, write it down yourself and stick it in a mayonnaise jar.

My customers said, “You treat me like a friend, I can trust you and the service is great”. That’s the message I now use. That doesn’t seem to draw too many wackos.

Do your surveys, Grasshopper. Forget the medium and focus on the message.

Use your marketing money to make yourself happy. Aim at a specific customer profile and offer what they seek in auto service. It isn’t that hard.

George Witt