



Lead with Caution Whenever Contracting ANY Marketing Firm

Many body shops will use a piece of equipment, paint or other products in their shops on a trial basis before they decide to purchase them. They will use a computer management program to see if it truly works and if their staff is comfortable before integrating it into their day-to-day operations. But, why do some of these same body shops sign up and spend significant amounts of money with marketing companies before checking their references or even doing their basic due diligence?

Body shops know what they know and what they're good at — and that's fixing cars, but what do they really know about marketing? Through training and classes, some shop owners and managers are savvy about press relations, direct mail marketing, online marketing, branding, collateral and even things like graphic design and blog creation. But in the end there is too much to know and most of this stuff is out of the average body shop owner's area of expertise.

Unfortunately, some marketing companies realized long ago that body shops don't know much about marketing and for that reason unscrupulous people will take advantage of collision repairers and overcharge them for services and products, all the while under performing. We've seen it in one form or another more than a few times all over the country. For a long time, shops were getting phone calls from companies that said they could get their name at the #1 position on Google within just a few weeks. Body shop owners in competitive markets jumped on these offers. Without checking out the companies first, they simply took their word. In the end, some shops lost as much as \$5,000-\$8,000, especially the ones with multiple locations.

Organic Search Engine Optimization (SEO) takes time and effort, and by just doing a minimum amount of research, the victimized shops would

have known that these fly-by-night virtual companies were giving shops an offer that was too good to be true. At first, the deal appeared to be solid. The shop owner looked at his web site and indeed saw that his shop was now #1 on Google. Obviously, they didn't know what Black Hat SEO was or about the repercussions involved. Black Hat SEO is a practice that increases a page's ranking in search engines through means that violate the company's (Google in this case) terms of service. Implementing Black Hat SEO tactics and strategies can get your site banned from search engines, excluding you from the number one traffic referral source on the Internet, which is exactly what happened to these poor body shops.

After paying the marketing company, they found out that Google was shutting their web site down without explanation (and good luck trying to get someone from Google on the phone). In this article, I've decided not to mention any company names, because hopefully if they read this, they will see the light and gravitate away from the dark side. All of the body shop owners and managers that I interviewed for this piece also did not want to talk on the record, primarily because they're currently in court with some of these so-called marketing companies. Also, please note that most of the automotive marketing companies out there are 100 percent honest and do great work, but from what I've been hearing recently, a few bad apples have negatively impacted the others.

It all comes down to what every company wants and expects from any vendor—authenticity, complete transparency and the absence of “hidden fees” and “blatant up-selling.” Here are some tips for not getting ripped off by an unscrupulous marketing or advertising company:

- Check ALL their references.

The references that most companies provide are normally the ones they've cleared, so do some research and dig a little deeper. Call the local Chamber of Commerce and ask around. Also check out Yelp and Google them for possible consumer complaints. There's also a great site called Rip-Off Report that can help you as you sort through the shady operators in the hopes of finding a good company. Another great way to sort out the fraudsters is to check the Secretary of State's website to make certain that they are registered and even legal to do business in your state. Just like with body shops, any consumer should only work with a licensed marketing company for obvious reasons.

■ Let them prove themselves. One distributor of collision repair products told one marketing company that he wanted to work with them, but for at least the first project, full payment would come but only after the job was completed. You should let all your ven-

dors prove themselves first and especially with marketing companies. Once they get your money, they hold the reins, so don't give it up until they've shown what they can do. One shop in northern California contracted with a marketing company and then suddenly the bills started coming in with ridiculous charges, including “invoicing charges.” That's right—the company was charging them for sending them their bill! Then, when they tried to cancel the company's services, they hit the shop with a bill close to \$10,000 for “cancellation fees.” Now the shop's owners have to travel to the Midwest to defend themselves in a small claims court, all because they didn't carefully check out the company first.

■ Read all contracts carefully. One body shop owner foolishly signed multiple contracts with one marketing company thinking they were all copies, which turned out to be a major mistake, because each one was different. If any



Genuine Parts

The right part makes the difference.




Riverside KIA

Call Us First For All Your Parts Needs

- Genuine Kia OEM Parts
- Same Day Delivery

- Efficient Service on All Orders
- Fully Stocked Inventory

888.201.1888 951.509.1000

Fax: 951.688.7999

Hours: Mon-Fri 7:30m-6pm; Sat 8am-4pm

8100 Auto Drive • Riverside, CA 92504

Register Your Email for Our

Free 4xMonthly e-Newsletter

www.autobodynews.com

company shows you more than one contract—beware.

■ Stay local. One body shop hired a company to do a new logo, unaware of the fact that they were located in India. They never got the logo after transferring the money through PayPal. When the deal fell apart, there was no one in this country to sue. Retain control by working with companies that are close enough geographically that if something goes sideways, you can go there and deal with it. And if a company does not have a physical location (listing only a PO Box, for example) that too is a red flag.

■ If it looks too good to be true, it probably is. If a marketing company claims that they will bring you a certain number of cars by using their services, be wary...very wary. One poor body shop manager was told by a shady company that they can double his business by signing up with them for a year. One year later, his business was down 30% due to the fact that three MSOs moved into his territory, despite all of their marketing efforts. If any marketing firm guarantees anything—stay away, because not even the most talented marketing minds in the world can assure you things like more

cars or more revenue.

■ Tell the world. If you've had a bad experience with any company, let your community know by Yelping them or at least telling your friends, associates and colleagues. Unscrupulous marketing companies use the old "turn and burn" technique, because they know there are a ton of businesses out there that they can scam. Don't make it easy for them by keeping it your little secret because once they've wronged you, they're likely just out there looking to do it to the next guy. Like I mentioned earlier, most marketing companies and ad agencies are honest, accountable and do amazing work, but there will always be that handful that are focused more on a quick buck than on quality. So beware and follow your instincts—but also do your research and check them out carefully before signing on the line that is dotted.

Follow us on Twitter:

 @autobodynews

Accept no Substitutes!

New Nitrocell Nitrogen Plastic Welder by Urethane Supply

Urethane Supply Company revealed its new 6066-CG Nitrocell Nitrogen Plastic Welder at the NACE/CARS Show. Urethane Supply introduced the first commercialized nitrogen plastic welder to the collision repair industry in 2006, and the new 6066-CG Nitrocell is the most advanced generation of nitrogen welder yet.

It designed to generate its own nitrogen gas from shop air and requires no onboard air compressor.

"Repair shops want to minimize repair times and maximize profits, and we've designed the new 6066-CG Nitrocell Nitrogen Welder to help them do just that," Kurt Lammon, president of Urethane Supply Company, said. "The new unit will help collision specialists reduce cycle times and increase their opportunities to do more profitable labor-based repair of plastic components."

The 6066-CG's intuitive yet precise analog instrumentation features a control regulator combined with an output pressure gauge and a flow gauge to give the operator total control over the amount of gas used in the welding process. A low-pressure safety switch automatically cuts power to the heating element, protecting it from overheating if the flow drops too low.

Continued from Page 40

We Don't Know

road or in the development stage including active safety system technologies; radar technology such as adaptive cruise control; pedestrian detection; and driver state assessment systems that monitors eye closures, head position and distraction levels with a combination of alerts.

If uncertain about any repair procedure, Anderson said it's important to do the research. One option he mentioned that might be helpful is the new I-CAR feature on their website called Ask I-CAR. "If you're not sure, and can't find what you are looking for, we have the moral obligation to contact I-CAR, VeriFacts or the OEM directly. Don't make a decision without contacting someone qualified."

He also encouraged participants to research videos on YouTube and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's website: www.iihs.org

For more information, contact Mike Anderson at mike@collisionadvice.com or Farzam Afshar at: farzam.afshar@verifactsauto.com.

Great Service.

RIVERSIDE

Great Prices.

Riverside Volkswagen

Competitive Parts Pricing!



Direct Line:

951.509.2125

951.509.2123 Fax

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504



RIVERSIDE

FREE DELIVERY TO MOST OF THE INLAND EMPIRE

Mention this ad for a free gift!

Hours: Mon-Fri. 7-7; Sat. 8-5

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504

Riverside Nissan

Direct Line:

951.509.6550

951.509.6523 Fax

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504

Qualified Staff!



GENUINE SERVICE & PARTS

Riverside Honda

We Use Collision Link!



Direct Line:

951.509.6574

951.509.6575 Fax

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504



Riverside Hyundai

Genuine OEM Parts!



Direct Line:

951.509.6577

951.509.6578 Fax

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504



Riverside Mazda

Huge Inventory!



Direct Line:

951.509.6577

951.509.6578 Fax

8330 Indiana Ave., Riverside, CA 92504

