



Your To-Do Marketing List for 2015

When body shop owners ask me how can we get started on marketing for our shop, I tell them to start off with baby steps and gradually build your efforts over time. Marketing for any business is like chopping down a huge tree and the average small company does not have the means or money to knock it down with one full swoop. Imagine that marketing is like a big old Redwood tree and you're sitting there with a little pen knife, but if you keep hacking away at it, eventually you'll see results.

So, I came up with this list of five deliverables—things you can start doing tomorrow. Why just five? Because it's better to do five things right, as opposed to 500 poorly. After you've successfully achieved these five things, come up with five more, but don't try to do everything—advertising, public relations, online marketing, social media, etc.—all at once, because then you're setting yourself up for failure. Make a list and work through it and delegate if you can and then re-group after say six months and assess what has worked and what hasn't.

1) Get Closer to Your DRPs

Strengthen the insurer relationships that you currently have while always looking for more, because you may be doing well currently, but what if a new shop (or an MSO) moves into your region and cuts into your workload? We're all aware that this is the age of consolidation, so it's more than likely that new players may enter your market at any time. If one or more of your DRPs is shaky for whatever reason, either shed them or figure out ways to re-energize them.

Keep continually engaged with your insurance agents, through e-mail marketing, networking events, blogs, occasional drop-in visits and social media. Facebook and Instagram might not be appropriate for your DRPs, but LinkedIn is a perfect vehicle to keep your insurance partners in the loop. Have constant and open communication with insurers, and offer insurer services at your shop, such as hosting continuing education courses, for example.

Some body shops have special sections on their web sites dedicated

to their insurance partners. Many of these require passwords and some shops ask their insurance agents to register before then can access these exclusive sections. On these pages, shops can offer valuable information for insurance agents and even maybe entertain them a little too. In some of these exclusive sections, insurance agents can keep abreast of their company's cars in your shop and message the shop's personnel, if needed.

2) Get Closer to Your Community

Improve your shop's image in the community by host local events like a summer barbecue, or sponsor organizations that are important to the people in your region. Don't be another faceless company and start reaching out to the community and supporting charitable organizations if you can. Be sure to identify local charities that community members have a connection with and reach out to them. Giving refurbished vehicles to people in need is a big way to achieve this, because the local media loves these types of stories and you're playing a positive role in your own backyard, which is huge.

Too many shop owners are like groundhogs—they stick their heads out of their shop only occasionally and people in their community don't get a chance to meet them or know them. A body shop's image should be the same as a bank's or a hospital's—leverage the good things you do in the community and make yourself visible at events and other occasions. Check into your local chamber of commerce and start attending their business mixers, because if more people see you, it can only enhance your position in your region. If you're out there and your competitors are not, there's a distinct advantage there for obvious reasons. You want people to think about you when they get in an accident and one of the best ways to achieve this is by being seen and building a reputation for being a business that just isn't into making a buck.

3) Get More Social

Utilize social media more this year. Use Facebook, Twitter, Google + or Foursquare to get your message out there especially to the younger generation of customers. Research the newest forms of social media, but just don't jump in without determining if it's right for you. There are a lot of shops out there trying to use certain types of social media that aren't ideal for them. If you start a Google + account and then never post anything, that looks bad. Find 4-6 forms of social media and post items on them (pictures and videos are best) and stay with them for the duration. Post on a regular basis and don't deviate, because hammering away at social media is the most effective way to do it. If a customer can see that you haven't posted anything on Facebook in quite some time, for example, it can actually hurt your image more than you think.

4) Update Your Web Site

I'm shocked whenever I see a big, very successful body shop with a web site that is obviously 5-7 years old. With all of the great new platforms and development tools out there, remodeling your web site can likely be much easier this time around. With so many new bells and whistles available for even a very simple site, you can quickly keep up with the shop down the street and stand out online.

We all know that the Yellow Pages are on the endangered list and more and more people are going to their laptops, smart phones, iPads and other devices to find businesses, including body shops. If a potential customer sees a dated web site with old-looking graphics and clunky navigation, they're going to keep looking. It's all about "image perceived, mission achieved" and making a good first impression.

See *Your To-Do Marketing List*, Page 53

Mark Kia

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Having a shabby web site is like having an ugly waiting room or dirty bathrooms. So, if your site is outdated, make a point to get a new one in 2015.

5) Get a Blog!

A decade ago, people didn't take blogs seriously. They thought a blog was for amateur poets or quilting clubs, but those days are long gone. Blogs are an

ideal way to enhance your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) because Google indexes blog articles and will move your company's name up the rankings by using a blog.

It's inexpensive to create a blog (using Word Press, for example) and linking it to your web site. There's a lot going on at any busy shop, so ideas for articles are plentiful. Once you start looking around for blog article leads, you'll see that there is a wealth of great things for you to write about. Did your shop recently win an award?

Are you gearing up to work on aluminum vehicles? In what ways are you a green shop? A blog will keep people coming back to your web site, because blogs provide new, relevant information and by posting at least 2-4 times every month, there is always something fresh and new for your customers to read.

Ed Attanasio
2005 Vallejo Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
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