

Recommended Sales Contact and Communication Best Practices 2016

Prepared by Car Care Professionals Network

Introduction

The Car Care Professionals Network (CCPN), a committee of repair shop owners recruited by the Auto Care Association to serve in an advisory capacity, notes that because the nature of their business means that every day is different based on customer needs, they need to keep in communication with their parts suppliers and other vendors to ensure they can provide the customers with best parts and service.

As such, CCPN committee members appreciate the opportunity to share with manufacturers, distributors, manufacturers' representatives and others how they prefer to be contacted and communicated.

Repair Shop – First Initial Contact – Repair Shops Dislike Cold Calls

For sales and manufacturers' representatives who have never contacted a particular repair shop before, it is acceptable to reach out to/contact the repair shop; however, the purpose of this initial contact is only to learn the shop's "rules of engagement." In other words, the sales person should only collect information on:

- Who the right person is with whom to set up an appointment;
- How that person likes to be contacted (email, phone);
- When would be a good time to reach out to that person to set up a future appointment; and
- Learn how receptive the shop will be to you and your product(s)/service(s).

Sales representatives could have a short questionnaire/survey available to leave with the shop that asks for this information and provides instructions on how to submit the information.

Contacting a Repair Shop if the Shop is an Existing Customer

The first line of communication should be from an established distributor sales and/or manufacturers' representative when making an appointment.

Sales representatives should be aware of/ask:

- Who currently makes the purchasing decisions (service writer/parts manager) and ask for permission to speak with them, to explain that you would like to:
 - Provide information on a new product;
 - Provide an update on products that they are already purchasing; and

- Determine whether there are other features and benefits that might help them (and the business owner) to save time, money, errors, etc.

Regarding bringing an accompanying manufacturer representative, the distributor sales representative must make a repair shop aware of the availability of an upcoming visit and be sure it fits the shop's schedule, since most likely the visit will be lengthened. During a visit, the sales representative usually knows the shop's culture/routine and would be aware as to whether the appointment turns out to be a good time to visit, or they can come back later, or just take an order and leave.

Preferred Communication Method/Meeting Preparation

Repair shops prefer that sales representatives first reach out to them by:

1. Email
2. Phone
3. Text message

Be Sure to Confirm a Scheduled Meeting

Sales representatives should call the day before or at least earlier the day of an appointment to confirm the appointment with the appropriate person(s)/decision-maker at the repair shop.

Meeting Protocol

When appointments are scheduled, a list of discussion items (agenda) could be outlined and approved by both parties.

The sales representative must be professional-looking and well-kept, since they represent their employer company. They must not bring anyone or anything that disrupts the shop's staff and most likely will not lead to a sale.

The sales representative should treat the repair shop owner and staff with respect, since they are operating a challenging business and have direct connection to vehicle owners.

The shop owner/manager must be professional and candid with the sales representative. If the product(s) or services being presented are not a good fit for the shop, the repair shop staff must communicate this to the sales representative. If the product(s) or services seem like a fit and further information is requested or needed, the repair shop should let the sales representative know how to follow up.

Meeting Follow-Up

There should be a follow-up email with a quick recap of the meeting, which gives the repair shop an easy avenue to ask follow-up questions.

Distributor representatives need to communicate with the manufacturer when questions/issues are raised by the repair shop that need to be addressed by the manufacturer, such as defective or problematic parts.

Communication is key to successful sales and relationships. A sales representative should be willing to take this information and communicate the information to both the distributor and manufacturer.

Routine Scheduling

Once a relationship is established with repair shops, ask them how they would like to stay in contact with the sales representative and have a clear method of communication as to whom to contact under which circumstance.

When requesting future meetings once the relationship has been established, make sure to bring value to the meeting.

If the sales representative is going to establish routine scheduling, check with the repair shop to specify a day and time. If the sales representative is going to be early/late or not make it at all, he should call or text the repair shop with this information.

For regular visits from distribution representatives, weekly visits at the same time may work if scheduled ahead of time with the repair shop. These visits are predictable and become something that can be planned for easily.

A sales representative could call weekly, every other week or monthly. This person could take a stock order, drop off POS materials (if requested), program information (if requested), new product updates, returns, etc.

Meeting Collateral/"Leave Behinds"

When asked by manufacturers what type of collateral or "leave behinds" are most useful to repair shops, the repair shops responded:

- Some type of remembrance/SPIFF; lunch gift cards are preferred, along with mouse pads and pocket screwdrivers.
- Food for technicians.
- Prescheduled Lunch & Learns work well to talk about product improvement and how to fix problems experienced in the field.

Repairs shops recommend that advertisements, posters and banners not be provided because in most cases shops have no room for these items or local law prohibits types of outside signage.

Rebates

Repair shop owners tend to dislike rebates that require customers to complete several steps before earning or receiving the rebate. Direct, immediate rebates through the shop are preferred.

Finally

The days of just popping in, jaw-jacking and back-slapping are no longer effective and if anything, off-putting.