

# **BUSINESS EDITORIAL - Marketing**

## **5 Marketing Ideas to Heat Up Your Business**

**Consumers should become familiar with your shop long before they get in an accident. Here are some ways to make sure they do.**

Most collision repair facility owners would admit they just don't market their shops enough. Some say they just don't have any spare time to come up with a plan. Others would admit to laziness over the years from doing DRP work which used to bring cars straight to their door with no marketing effort expended. Now that that DRP work may have dried up, shops are scratching their heads wondering how to make up for that lost traffic.

With too many shops and too few repairs to be had, coming up with ways to brand your shop onto consumers' brains is more important than ever. They need to become familiar with your shop long before they ever get in an accident. And there are several shops that have come up with creative ways to accomplish that.

### **Go with H2O**

Ron Reichen's idea came to him like a splash of water to the face – literally. His collision repair facility, Precision Body & Paint, Inc., in Beaverton, Ore., had already been supporting the local high school sports teams by advertising in the programs handed out at games, but he was looking for a way to take that effort to the next level. The answer was H2O.

He contracted with a local spring to bottle the water for him and slap on the labels, which are made by another company. Then, he donated the bottles of water to the local high school's parents club to sell at fundraisers. He also donated the water to a celebrity golf tournament that benefits a local children's hospital, where it wound up in coolers at each hole.

From there, he decided to also offer it free to all new residents at over 2,500 apartment complexes, welcoming them to the neighborhood. He had to hire a full-time person to do this, but he says it has been worth it. Each bottle costs him 80 to 85 cents to produce, but 16 to 18 percent of the jobs his shop receives are a direct result of handing out the free water.

The label is quite unique. Looking through the bottle, the inside of the label shows a mangled car. The outside of the label on the front shows the car completely fixed and the logo of Precision Body & Paint.

Water is something unique to take to insurance offices besides pens and notepads, says Reichen. "Also, it's totally neutral in that it crosses all ethnic and religious lines. You won't offend anyone with it."

"Enterprise built its business delivering doughnuts to shops," he says. "You might say we built our business delivering water."

And the free water has created a waterfall, which additional requests for it growing each year.

### **Hot and Spicy**

Dave Dunn was looking for a way to get people familiar with his shop, Dave's Auto Body in Galesburg, Ill. He read somewhere that research showed that the most powerful draw for a customer to a business is if he or she knew someone who worked there or was at least familiar with the business.

So how was he going to bring people in who didn't necessarily need collision repair services? The secret was hot sauce. He found a company called Cajun Chef in Lake Charles, La., that would bottle hot sauce for him at a net cost of about \$1 per bottle ("Would you pay someone \$1 to drive out to your facility?" Dunn said. "I think most people would.") He then started giving away the hot sauce to local restaurants and bars for free. Some restaurants said no thanks but others eagerly took the sauce in and placed the bottles on their tables. Soon, customers were asking where they could come to take home ... and the only way to get it was to visit Dave's Auto Body.

Dunn currently gives away about 30 bottles a day out of his shop. He says it's a great way to develop relationships with potential customers with no obligation. The only reason they come in is for the hot sauce, but one day when they get in a collision, they'll have Dave's Auto Body tattooed on their brains and perhaps give the shop their business.

The hot sauce, Dunn says, has become somewhat of a cult phenomenon in his town of about 30,000. "Restauranteurs will call me and say, 'Hey, I saw your hot sauce at my competitor's place, where can I get some?'" Also, many Mexican restaurants around town call regularly when they run out to get some more.

"I don't believe in most gimmicky things. I think a total marketing plan needs to be more substantive," Dunn says. "But this works."

Logo propagation, Dunn says, can get your shop top-of-mind with people long before they'll ever need your service, which is one of the goals of marketing.

### **Power of the Pen**

Joe Polowski admits he's not Shakespeare, but that doesn't stop him from writing a regular column in his local monthly newspaper. The column promotes his business, Precious Metal Autobody in Deer Park, Wash., as well as offers readers some helpful advice on what to do when they get in an accident and need collision repair services.

"People will read this versus if I took out an ad," Polowski says. "Ninety-nine percent of the time, people don't need the service, but hopefully when they do they'll remember my shop because they read my column."

Polowski was inspired to write the column by a local realtor who did the same thing. "I figured as long as I didn't say anything stupid, it would probably work," he says.

The newspaper, the Deer Park Gazette, considers the column an ad but gives Polowski a reduced rate. It takes Polowski about 45 minutes to write, and he has written about topics such as how to avoid a collision with a deer or the value of customer satisfaction. But he doesn't always write about work-related things. One time he wrote about whether it was legal for people in powered wheelchairs to drive in the street.

Now, Polowski is somewhat of a local celebrity. People around town will stop him and tell him they liked (or didn't like) his column. He promotes his shop while giving people something to read and think about, and readers see the column every month as a constant reminder of who to turn to when they need his services. What's more, a guy who owns a service shop in town said he wants to start using Polowski's column in his own newsletter, which could refer additional work to Polowski's shop.

### **Everywhere There's Signs**

What would you give to have the name of your body shop at every busy intersection in town? Well, that's what happened with Andy's Auto Body in Alton, Ill., when owner Andy Batchelor got keen to a local community phenomenon.

One day, Batchelor's wife told him she wanted to have a yard sale, so he made a few signs announcing the event and strategically placed them on poles around town. The yard sale did OK, but the signs didn't even last half a day on the poles, either getting blown away or curling up so they were unreadable. Right then, Batchelor decided he could build a better mousetrap and create better yard

sale signs.

Batchelor had a print shop make him 15-in. by 15-in. signs made of heavy poster board which would stand up to a good breeze or rain and still be on the pole straight as an arrow. The top three-fourths of the signs were designated for who, what, when and where information for the yard sales, and the bottom fourth of them advertised "Compliments of Andy's Auto Body" and the shop's phone number in big bold letters.

Batchelor now runs ads near the yard sale ads in the classified section of his local newspaper telling people to stop by his shop and pick up their free yard sale signs. These people then visit his shop and get to check it out, plus the signs work great for them. Batchelor says it's great during yard sale season to drive around town and see his shop's name on lots of poles on busy intersections.

When Batchelor has time, he'll even help these folks fill out one or two of their new signs with a big marking pen, which gives him a chance to visit with them and get to know them.

And the best part? The signs only cost 20 cents each to make, a worthwhile investment if they nab new customers.

### **Safety First**

How would you like to capture a sizeable portion of the parents of your local high school kids as loyal customers? It might not be too hard to do if you can pull off a successful safety day each year at the school.

What did your mother always say just before you drove off in the old car and headed to school? "Drive safe and fasten your seat belt." You thought, "Yeah, right," and since then, people have been telling you to buckle up all your life.

With an "I Got Caught" safety campaign, a child will be able to go home and say "See Mom, I do wear my seatbelt." And Mom will be happy with her child and even happier with the business that helped to prove and reaffirm the need to "Buckle Up."

Here's how to plan a great Safety Day:

1. Call the school's administrative office to make sure you can sponsor an event of this type, explain what you have in mind and enlist its support and help arrange publicity. Be sure to tell them you'll be giving away T-shirts with the "I Got Caught" slogan on them.
2. Involve the principal and driver education teachers. Fill them in and agree on dates to hold the safety day. Emphasize that you would like the principal and teachers out there on the curb with you. Also, getting a mayor, fire chief, police chief or some known political official adds to your chance of getting some free publicity by being on the front page of the paper.
3. Line up the student council members to help. If you don't like the student council, then get football players, cheerleaders or any popular group that you can depend on to show up early to help pass out the T-shirts. This will also increase your chance of getting some good publicity.
4. Design a shirt or get a graphic arts company to do it for you. The number of T-shirts to order will depend on the size of the school and the number of drivers.
5. When the day of your event comes, instruct all helpers to not pass out shirts just to anyone but only to those wearing their seatbelts when they pull into the school parking lot. Call the newspaper one last time to remind it to send someone out to take photos. Make sure all your helpers, including your employees, students and the mayor or congressman, are wearing one of your T-shirts over their shirts while working at the event. Let them keep theirs; most will wear them all day. Be organized; students all seem to arrive at school at the last minute, so things will need to move fast to keep traffic from backing up.

6. Some body shops that have sponsored safety days have even set off airbags at assemblies where the message was, "Remember to Buckle Up, People Love You." Another good idea is to mention some of the teachers who were caught coming into the parking lot "unbuckled" through the roadblock by name – the student body will love it.

7. The caption of a front-page newspaper photo of a person driving into the high school parking lot will probably say, "Hundreds Caught at High School." It will make people want to read the article to see what these kids were caught doing. You can't buy advertising that good.

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