

# Building Your Shop's Brand

Let's talk about building your brand. Many service center owners don't think that brand building applies to them. I think it does and I want to tell you why.

One definition of brand is "the collection of perceptions people have about your business". Using that definition, branding applies to everyone.

The reality is that most service centers have a customer draw that's in a three to five miles radius of their location. Your service center doesn't need to build a national brand presence – it's highly localized. And even if you are affiliated with a national brand that's a household name, it's up to you to shape the public's perception of your particular center – again, highly localized.

Whether you run AI's Automotive or the local affiliate of a chain with hundreds of locations, it's your customers and your prospects that need to be convinced to frequent your service center. So how do you shape their perceptions?

Let's think of it in terms of the customer experience. As I pull up, is the parking lot clean, free of weeds with no junk parts and old tires? Is the paint on the building fresh and are your signs in good repair? This is my first impression and it shouldn't be a negative one. If you don't take care of your business, why should I assume you're going to take care of my car?

Some service centers make it a point to have someone greet the customer at their car. This is very inviting and breaks the ice. At least try to open the front door for me if you can. If you're working with a customer and can't get to the door, excuse yourself from your customer and greet me with a warm welcome and tell me that you'll be right with me.

You can see how you are starting to build a positive impression about your brand. Of course the lobby and waiting area should be clean, tidy and inviting. If I'm looking for the seat that's least likely to soil my pants, you're missing the boat. Are your magazines up to date and of general interest? Old trade journals really don't cut it with the public.

If you offer refreshments, make sure the area is clean and the treats are fresh. And be sure to have plenty of supplies.

Again, something as simple and inexpensive as a fresh coat of paint will go a long way. Also pay attention to how your lobby smells. It should be pleasant – not pungent.

And nobody likes a dirty bathroom. Ask a woman to give you some suggestions on what you can do to make your bathroom more inviting.

So far so good. Positive perceptions of your brand are starting to accumulate. Now it's my turn at the counter. How do you greet me? Do you talk to me in a friendly, respectful manner? When the phone rings, do you excuse yourself and politely ask the caller to hold? I don't know about you, but I start to feel abused when every call that comes in while I'm standing there gets completed before I get any attention. After all, I've actually taken the time to come in and want to do business – why should I have to wait for a guy price shopping on the phone for a brake job? Of course, you'll have helpful on-hold messaging to encourage your caller to wait while you're helping me.

Your paperwork reflects on your professionalism. Yes, I said your paperwork. A carefully prepared job estimate fills me with confidence. And a written inspection report lends credibility to your recommendations, and I really appreciate your time in helping me understand what you want to do for my car. I'm building trust in you and in your brand.

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While I'm waiting, let me know if things are going to be delayed or update me on the progress of my job if you see me watching the clock. I'll know you haven't forgotten about me and that you're making progress.

When my car's ready, recap what you've done for me and remind me of the benefits. Discuss a plan for taking care of any items we weren't able to do today and set a return appointment. Thank me for my business and see me to the door or to my car, if you're able.

Of course, when I get in my car, I want it to be as clean as when I brought it in. A dirty steering wheel, seat or shift knob will not leave a great last impression. I appreciate that you use that paper floor mat to protect my car, but it would be nice if you threw it out so I don't have to.

If there should be a question or problem that results in a comeback, bend over backwards to make me feel like you are sorry for the problem, want to help, are eager to make me feel good about the situation.

Now my experience has been positive. You've been building your brand at the same time you've been building a strong relationship with me. I'll share my positive experience with others.

Speaking of sharing my experience, do you know that I might be one of the tens of millions of internet bloggers that post my thoughts on my business interactions? If you search blog posts for automotive service, you'll find raving fans as well as ranting detractors. These posts are pretty much a permanent part of the internet, so you'll want what I say to be positive.

Another extension of your brand is your internet presence. Your website should go beyond the basics and actually provide helpful information. Educational content should be updated regularly so keep it fresh so your customers and prospects will visit your site whenever they have automotive questions. You want to be known as the automotive go-to source, even for services you don't provide in your service center.

Brand building isn't mass marketing. It takes place with every interaction your customers and prospects have with your service center and its staff. Brand excellence takes a little thought, planning and execution. It's certainly within reach.

Lance Boldt, a co-founder of AutoNetTV, wonders if there's a better way to reinforce your professionalism and commitment to your customer better than playing AutoNetTV.  
[www.AutoNetTV.com](http://www.AutoNetTV.com)