



Welcome to TIRE REVIEW's Top Shop Tips. We know running a tire dealership isn't easy, so we've compiled some business operations tips and best practices, inspired by Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire Top Shops of year's past that have made their businesses thrive.

Appearance

Customers have too many choices today for everything they want to buy. So, your dealership needs to stand out in consumers' minds — to be memorable.

■ One way to stand out is with a great first impression. First impressions are crucial for not only attracting customers, but they lay the foundation for building customer trust and confidence.

■ Here are some ideas to help you create an ideal service "experience" that will pay dividends in repeat customers and ongoing referrals:

Website

■ Your website is the "window" to your business because, oftentimes, it's a prospect's first interaction with your business. They need a new set of tires and they start Googling away. If they find your business online, you want them to stay on your website and start looking around.

■ Include photos of your team so potential customers can make a connection (remember, this is still a people business) and showcase your attractive and clean shop.

■ Provide a list of services offered and details about your techs' expertise and certifications — this instills confidence and trust.

■ Showcase how you're engaged in the community — which shows customers and prospects that you care and are "giving back" to those who have helped build your business.

On-Site

■ Shop exterior should be neat and clean.

■ Your signage should catch the customer's eye and it should immediately resonate with the logo they saw on your website.

■ The glass door through which customers enter should be cleaned — every day.

■ Your service advisor should greet each customer with a welcoming smile.

■ Display your techs' certifications on the wall, as well as any awards your business has received — this is another way to instill confidence and trust with your customers.

Waiting Room

■ You should have a comfortable, inviting waiting area, that could include beverages, snacks, reading materials, WiFi, a television, children's play area and the like. Make sure that the chairs are in good condition and not worn out and dirty.

■ Walls could be decorated with beautifully framed artwork, possibly by local artists. Again, this is another way to show customers that you are involved in the community. And, it's amazing what a coat of fresh paint will do for the "look and feel" of your business.

■ And, don't forget about the bathrooms! They should be checked multiple times throughout the day, and cleaned and stocked, as needed.

Paying attention to these details speaks volumes about your dealership and your level of care. Customers will feel that if you take the time to take care of the waiting area and bathroom, they know that their vehicle is in good hands.



Community Involvement

Top Shops give back. It's that simple.

- It's about more than that warm, fuzzy feeling you get when you're helping others – although that's great too! But your customers will notice your charitable acts and when you give to your community and the surrounding area.
- Begin with a charity or a good cause that means a lot to you, personally. Maybe it changes throughout the years. That's OK, too.
- It also helps to find something unique – something that customers will remember.
- With the holidays just behind us, it might be a good time to think of possibilities for giving during certain times of the year in 2021.
- Look around your town and you'll no doubt be surprised by the endless opportunities to get your name out there through charitable causes in your community.
- For those bold enough to offer it, there's something else you can give that, believe it or not, is often seen as more valuable than cash money: Your time.

Culture

Managers set the tone for their business and its culture helps attract the right people, but it can also be the reason why people leave. So, how do you create and keep a culture that breeds success?

Welcoming Culture = Happy Employees

- It all begins with the leadership of an organization creating a positive workplace environment. Managers who have good leadership skills, provide solid direction and express a positive attitude can directly impact a company culture.
- A great company culture promotes a healthy work environment, which can keep employees happy and productive, lower operating costs and enhance customer satisfaction — all of which can positively impact your bottom line.
- The ideal boss is like a role model — exemplifying the qualities that everyone in the company should possess. That way, everyone can work together as a team.
- **Here are some traits of an ideal leader.**
 - Approachable
 - Honest
 - Trustworthy
 - Positive. It spreads easily, but so does a negative attitude.
 - Works with a passion toward their job
 - Has good energy which is infectious and spreads through the organization
 - Personable
 - Understanding, calm/patient
 - Organized
 - Supportive
- Empowerment is also a key contributor to employee satisfaction, so it's important to give employees authority to make decisions and responsibility for their role.
- A company mission statement is also a great starting point to set the tone for your culture. They're essential in keeping a company's employees focused and productive, and a can have a great effect on making the customers' experience worthwhile and exceptional.



Customer Service

A seamless customer experience means providing friendly and quality service and being easy to do business with. Your customers rely on your shop's expertise and knowledge to get the job done. And, nowadays, customers expect you to meet them on the platforms in which they want to interact with your dealership.

- Many shops have implemented online scheduling and chat bots on their websites to start the conversation with customers digitally, with some shops providing vehicle pickup and drop-off services as an added convenience factor in the customer experience.
- The way your staff interacts with your customers plays a huge role. A quality customer experience means greeting them when they come into the shop with a smile, saying hello and hearing them out about their vehicle issues.

■ It continues with your service advisor asking questions to really understand the problems the customer is having with their vehicle, so that technicians can properly diagnose and repair it. It also means keeping in contact with them every step of the repair process.

■ Don't forget the fine-tuned details of a quality customer experience, like writing a thank you note to each new customer to show your appreciation.

Providing quality customer service means taking responsibility for your customers' concerns and caring for their vehicle as if it were your own. And, now more than ever, it means leveraging technology to be sure your customer is having a seamless, transparent experience with your shop.

Expertise

There are plenty of ways that you can set yourself apart from the other guys in marketing, appearance, community engagement, but how do you set yourself apart when it comes down to brass tacks, the reason you probably got started in this business in the first place – your expertise.

- Provide a complete "car care solution" to the customers you serve.
- Invest in your employees. Pay technicians an above-average wage plus commission, and regularly investing in the latest, state-of-the-art equipment and paid training opportunities.

■ Take advantage of any training opportunities offered through suppliers or industry associations whenever they arise.

■ Team up more experienced technicians with newer employees for instruction, and have a dedicated trainer and teacher in shop, who might also be the shop manager.

■ Take advantage of partners like K&M. Attend meetings like this one to share best practices and learn firsthand the many ways to take your dealership to the next level.



Marketing

Attracting and retaining customers starts with quality customer service but really hinges on the marketing you deploy in your local area.

- One of the most powerful pieces of marketing in our digital world nowadays is online reviews. And, the good news is they're free – you don't have to pay to get them published. However, you should monitor them and respond to both good and bad reviews.
- Getting involved in your local Chamber of Commerce or sponsoring local events or sports teams helps get your shop's name be top of mind.
- In your marketing budget, earmark a portion of it for sponsorship opportunities and another portion for charitable giving. Remember, what you give back comes back to you.

- Other traditional forms of marketing that pay dividends depending on your market include TV, radio and print ads.
- An ever-increasing important part of your marketing should be your digital presence. This includes your website, your Google or Yelp review pages, Internet ads, and, of course, your social media efforts.
- Shops that stay connected with their digital-savvy customers via social media add another layer of engagement with their customer base.

Your shop's marketing strategy could encompass a myriad of platforms and channels. Knowing the ones to put your dollars toward takes some experimentation and a solid knowledge of your market. But whatever you do to get the word out about your shop, make it creative, engaging, fun and something that's unique so customers can spot and remember your brand.