

**Tire Inflation Maintenance:
A Simple Service. Simply Amazing Results.**

By

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Do you remember the good old days when keeping your service bays full was as simple as opening your doors? It wasn't long ago when your customers needed you as badly as you now need them. Remember when customers would routinely return to your shop at least once a quarter, minimally every three months or 3,000 miles for an oil change? Remember how profitable those regular visits were? Tire sales and rotations, wheel balances, wheel alignments, brake jobs, wiper blades, air filters, fluid exchanges, etc., etc. ... every vehicle needed something.

Filling your bays was easy; because customers had a "need." If nothing else, they certainly needed their oil changed. It said so in their Owner's Manual and on every Jiffy Lube commercial.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we currently face in the automotive service industry is "car count." It's not that we lack maintenance services and other needs to sell customers when they show up in our service drives; the problem is they simply don't show up. And the reasons for the disappearing act probably are not what you may think at first glance.

While our failing economy may have been the catalyst for the service slowdown, it is no longer a key factor ... the economy is rebounding and new vehicle sales are booming. The reduction in customer visit frequency is largely the result of things going *right*, not *wrong*. Advances in build quality and component technology have resulted in better vehicles and an ever-expanding duration between scheduled maintenance services. In other words, cars just don't break down like they used to nor need to be serviced as often...all great news for manufacturers and consumers, but not those of us who earn our livings by servicing automobiles.

Many of the services that most of us grew up selling and performing are all but extinct today. Regular tune-ups, annual coolant flushes and rusted out exhaust systems are all lucrative services of the past. Most late-model vehicles don't require new spark plugs until 100,000 miles. Engine coolant is designed to last up to 150,000 miles and some transmissions are designed to never need service. Even the formally reliable quarterly oil change has devolved into an almost annual service for most vehicles. And herein lies the problem. Customers simply don't have a "need" to visit you.

Make no mistake, your business IS need driven. It doesn't matter how pleasant your staff is, how great a waiting room you have or what kind of coffee and donuts you provide your customers, they will only visit your service facility when they NEED to. To consumers, getting their car serviced or repaired is about the same as going to

the dentist ... they only go when they have to. This “reactive” customer behavior is not only bad for your business, but also your customers and their vehicles.

While the aforementioned advances in manufacturing technology and quality have reduced the need for many services, there are plenty of regular maintenance needs that still exist and are growingly ignored as customer visits decrease. Tires still need to be rotated and balanced regularly, front ends still need to be aligned, worn out wiper blades still don't clean windshields, etc. All valid needs, and many of which can be dangerous if left unattended. However, you can't help a customer, or make a sale, if they don't visit your business.

So, how do you compel your customers to return to your shop regularly when most of the customary needs don't exist? Simple. Leverage the most popular and important need there is: Tire Inflation Maintenance.

Every owner's manual of every vehicle sold in this country encourages customers to check their tire pressure every month... a stance also taken by every tire manufacturer, the federal government and further promoted in every media whenever vehicle safety or fuel economy are discussed. Everyone knows that proper tire pressure increases tire life, fuel economy and safety. By and large, most consumers will take the time to check their tire pressure, if they are reminded.

If your customers have regular air in their tires they can accomplish this necessary maintenance anywhere, including the local service station or even at home. However, if their tires are filled with nitrogen, they are compelled to visit a service facility equipped with nitrogen for each tire calibration. Embrace a program that combines nitrogen inflation with high value benefits such as tire repair and replacement coverage and roadside assistance and state of the art customer contact tools such as text messaging, Facebook and e-mailing features to remind each customer of this monthly maintenance need and you can almost count on that customer returning to you.

A comprehensive Nitrogen Tire Inflation Maintenance program can have a significant impact on your service drive traffic by leveraging the only service that every vehicle *needs* every month.

According to NitroFill, the industry leader in nitrogen inflation and the first company to offer a coordinated Tire Inflation Maintenance program, the advantages can be staggering. NitroFill claims that the typical consumer in America visits their car care professional about 1.2 times per year while customers who enroll in their Tire Inflation Maintenance programs visit their dealers over 4.5 times annually.

Jay Lighter, president of the Pompano Beach, Florida-based NitroFill says “as a stand-alone product, nitrogen is unlikely to have much of an impact on a dealer's bottom line. Frankly, after the novelty wears off, it usually becomes just one more service item to further crowd a dealer's service menu. However, as part of a comprehensive tire inflation maintenance program it can be a game changer. Not only do customers return much more often, but they return with the expectation that the technician is going to check their tires. And that is the holy grail of any business that wants to sell tires. Our research indicates that over 75 percent of all tires sold are

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sold by the first professional that informs the customer of the need. Who doesn't want to be that guy?"

A typical nitrogen Tire Inflation Maintenance program is sold via what is known as a "Cap Kit." Each Cap Kit contains a set of special valve caps that indicate the vehicle's tires are filled with nitrogen as well as a customer "registration card," and a specific group of customer benefits that range from roadside assistance to tire and wheel repair and replacement protection. Once a vehicle's tires are converted to nitrogen, and the "nitrogen" valve caps are installed, the dealer or consumer uses the registration card to register the vehicle online, wherein the customer's membership is validated.

Once a customer has registered, they have access to the benefits included in the program while their contact and vehicle information is entered into an automated system that sends them monthly "inflation reminders," usually via text or e-mail.

Some companies have expanded the customer contact features to enable dealers to add service coupons, announcements, interactive customer surveys and questionnaires and other features. NitroFill says their Cap Kit portfolio includes over one dozen options that include a wide variety of customer contact and management features as well as various Tire, Wheel and Auto Club benefits.

While most dealers are already in constant contact with their customers via various phone, text messaging and e-mail marketing and service reminder campaigns, utilizing a Tire Inflation Maintenance program can provide another method of keeping your business top-of-mind and customer coming back without "over-contacting" the customer. "Our inflation reminders provide a very unique opportunity. Not only are we able to touch each customer more often, as tire inflation maintenance is the only service every vehicle requires every month, but our communications are not strictly "come on in and buy something" messages. They are reminders of a service the customer actually needs and an expression of the dealers' concern for their safety" say Lighter.

With vehicle manufacturers striving to build the maintenance-free automobile, soaring fuel prices and greater need than ever to keep your service drive busy, a Tire Inflation Maintenance program may be worth a look.