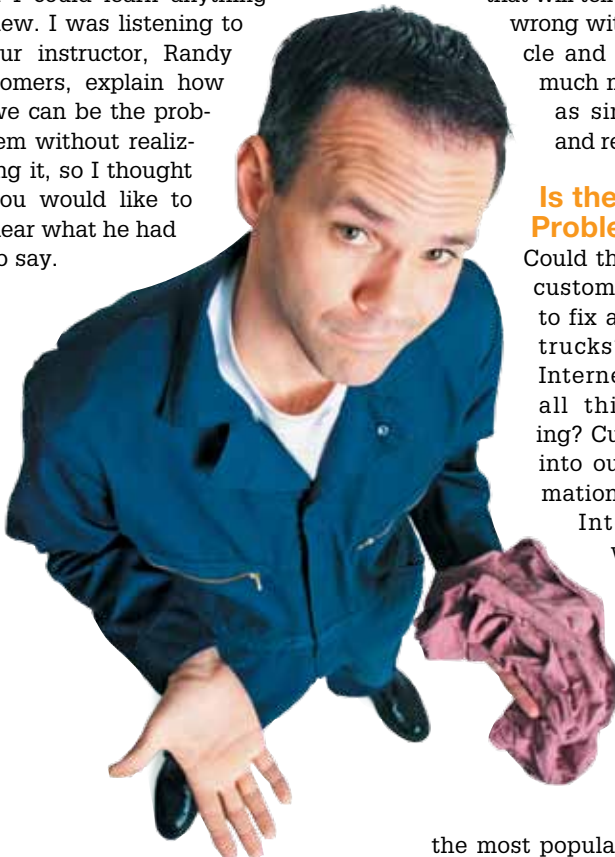


# ARE WE THE PROBLEM?

WE CAN BE OUR OWN WORST ENEMY WHEN TALKING TO CUSTOMERS. REPHRASING OUR APPROACHES CAN TURN OPPORTUNITIES INTO CLOSED SALES.

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

**ONE OF** the most important people in a shop is the one who communicates with the customer. He or she has a direct effect on customer retention and visit frequency for your shop. Last year we trained more than 1,000 service managers on relationship-based service advisor skills, and I sat in on one of those classes to see if I could learn anything new. I was listening to our instructor, Randy Somers, explain how we can be the problem without realizing it, so I thought you would like to hear what he had to say.



For as many years as I can remember, the automotive world has battled a public perception that is anything but positive. We want our customers to see us as professionals, treat us as professionals and pay us as professionals. But the general perception from some consumers is that we are just mechanics — greasy, knuckle-dragging guys who fix cars. We have a magic crystal ball that will tell us everything that is wrong with a customer's vehicle and we charge way too much money for something as simple as car service and repair.

## Is the Internet the Problem?

Could there be a reason our customers think it is easy to fix and service cars and trucks? Could it be the Internet is the source of all this misunderstanding? Customers are coming into our shops with information they found on the Internet (oftentimes wrong information, by the way) about needed repairs and maintenance on their vehicle. According to a new poll in the United States reported by Reuters, the Internet is by far the most popular source of informa-

tion and the preferred choice for news ahead of TV, newspapers and radio.

In speaking with shop owners, I constantly hear how much bad or mistaken information is out there about our industry. All of us in the automotive world, whether in service and repair, collision, parts or sales, would like to have that negative perception corrected. We, again, would like customers to see us as professionals, treat us as professionals and pay us as professionals. If only the customers stopped looking at bad information on the Internet it would make our jobs oh so much easier.

In our daily struggles of running a business it is sometimes easy to think, "It sure would be nice if our customers understood how hard our job really is, how complicated today's modern automobiles are, how expensive high-quality state-of-the-art equipment really can be, how hard it is to attract and retain employees nowadays." Right?

One thing we should remember is that we are consumers also, and we are more like our customers than we might realize. For example, if you want to buy a big-screen TV, a laptop computer or a cell phone, you probably do

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## “IF REPAIR ORDER SIZE HAS BEEN DROPPING WHAT CAN I DO? MYSTERY SHOP YOUR BUSINESS BY PHONE THEN TUNE UP YOUR COUNTER SKILLS. SELLING IS NOT LIKE RIDING A BIKE.”

CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK [ATI CEO]

some research on the Internet. Armed with that information, you walk into a consumer electronics store and say, based on the research you did, this is the laptop you want to buy. You are “an educated consumer.” When our customers do that, we almost always think things like, “Boy, this business sure was easier before the Internet came along.”

We should not blame our customers for looking up car information on the Internet when we do the same thing for products and services outside our industry. We need to realize that if customers are looking up information on the Internet, then they are information hungry. If they are information hungry, then we need to give them more information than they get off the Internet.

### Look and Talk Like a Pro

We need to be aware that if we want people to see us as professionals, treat us as professionals and pay us as professionals, we should look, talk and act as professionals. Have you ever given an estimate to a customer that sounded something like this? “The water pump is leaking. We need to throw on a new one, and it will be \$600.” What usually happens next is that the customer wants to question our prices.

Perhaps our problems aren't the result of a bad economy, but rather a poor use of terminology? We will “throw” on a water pump. To us that is a technical term meaning to remove and replace a leaking pump. To the



average consumer hearing this, they probably think: Can't the customer just throw on their own water pump? How hard do you throw when you throw on a water pump? Why do they charge so much to throw one on? It sounds easy.

### Bad Economy or Presentation?

If we want people to treat us as professionals, then shouldn't we at least talk that way? Shouldn't we say in a professional manner, “We have determined that the coolant leak is coming from a defective water pump. In order to stop the leak, we need to replace the pump. In order to replace the pump, we need to remove the fender to access the timing belt cover, which the water pump sits under.”

Or this one. Instead of saying, “We need to hook up our test equipment to the computer in the vehicle and access the onboard monitoring system to determine which stored trouble codes are the cause of the drivability concern,” we say things like “I need to pull the codes.”

If it isn't our job to educate consumers, then what other choice do they have but to look on the Internet? If we want to be treated like professionals we should talk that way. Not “plug

a tire,” but, “We need to remove the tire from the rim to inspect the integrity of the interior sidewall to verify its safety, and then perform an inside plug patch repair. Then the second step is to perform a water test on it to verify the integrity of the seal.”

We sometimes speak in terminology that we in the automotive industry understand. To assume the general public understands what we mean when we say we will “pull the codes” is to assume that the general public knows as much about the automotive profession as we do. After all, even the dentist performs a “tooth extraction.” He or she doesn't just yank that sucker out of there.

Maybe the economy and the Internet aren't our worst enemies. Maybe, my friends, we ourselves are the problem. Remember, selling service is not like riding a bike. It is very easy to develop bad habits that will decrease your average repair order and return visits from your customers.

If you want to increase revenue and maintain your status as the best shop in your market, go to [www.ationlinetraining.com/2014-03](http://www.ationlinetraining.com/2014-03) and download our list of the top 13 things you should never say to your customers. Our list of replacement phrases will make you sound like the professional you are. **ZZ**



Chris “Chubby” Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 108 associates train and coach more than 1,150 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers, and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month's article was written with the help of Randy Somers, ATI's head instructor, who has had decades of experience at the front counter.

✉ E-mail Chubby at [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net)