

# How to Leverage Inspections to Drive More Business

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There is a lot of evidence that suggests that when customers pay to have their vehicles inspected, they are much more likely to have them repaired or serviced.

How well does the average consumer know the needs of his or her vehicle? Years ago, before many readers here can remember, when you brought your car into a gas station for a fill-up, someone came out to not only pump your gas, but also check your oil and your tires' pressure levels. And you were kept informed on your vehicle's condition.

Today, we pump our own gas and most consumers know that their cars' need periodic oil changes, but that's about it. A lot of basic maintenance goes undone and often simple wear issues are not caught until they become more expensive problems.

By making inspections part of your business, you are helping your customers better maintain their vehicles. And you are giving yourself more of an opportunity to perform those services. While many understand this concept, too many are not maximizing this opportunity to its fullest.

When it comes to inspections, whether you do free courtesy inspections, more thorough paid inspections, or a combination of both, the problems generally stem from two areas: quality or quantity.

There are plenty of excuses as to why these issues sometimes happen, but I challenge that they are only that: excuses. The real reason is lack of commitment, whether that is from the business itself or members of your staff.

What typically drives this is the lack of an inspection culture at the location. Inspections will not help drive more business until offering this service becomes part of your dealership's overall culture.

Let's start with quality. One of the most common excuses I hear is there "just isn't enough time" to perform inspections or that service techs "are too busy." In either case, you will find that inspections are "pencil-whipped" or not done at all.

The "pencil-whipped" inspection, whether done on paper or digitally, is where the technician simply checks things off quickly without regard to actual conditions, just to get it done. This type of inspection is usually easy to spot.

For example, it is extremely unlikely that every car in your shop with 90,000 miles or more on the odometer is rolling on tires all inflated to 35 psi and has all of its fluids in perfect condition.

These poorly performed inspections can be more dangerous to your business than not doing them at all. Your customers leave thinking that everything is fine, when in reality, there may be an issue that was overlooked and not brought to their attention. This could create a simple inconvenience for them, at best, and a hazard, at worst.

Think of the quality message that you are giving consumers when this happens. Let me give you an analogy. Would it be ok just to install three spark plugs on a six- cylinder engine, just because your shop was busy? Would it be ok to only balance two out of the four new tires because there was "a lot of business" at your location that day? Absolutely not! That would not be tolerated. So, why do we tolerate subpar inspections?

When things were slow earlier in the year, many dealers kept busy because they slowed down long enough to perform quality inspections. The results of these inspections were presented to customers and additional work was performed as a result.

Trust me, if you perform quality inspections when you are busy, you will find just as much opportunity for additional business. Even if these are some simple maintenance services that you may not be able to get done today, it is an invitation to get the customer back in soon or at least perform these services the next time they come in.

Doing quality inspections today is a great way to insure business for tomorrow. Have your techs take the time to perform a quality inspection, every time!

While this might take a bit longer at first, speed comes with repetition. In no time, your staff will be performing quality inspections in the same time it took to "pencil-whip" them.

As far as quantity goes, excuses range from "the customer does not want an inspection" to "we just forget to mention them." Again, these are excuses. In situations like this, it is evident that the staff simply does not understand the value of inspections to your business and are not held accountable for it. Quite frankly, this has the same root cause as poor quality.

Let's start out with the excuse that customers do not want inspections. Sure, there are times when customers are in a hurry, or perhaps are in for a tire repair and do not want their hood opened. Too often, we assume that they fall into these categories. Other times, even if we do ask the customer about an inspection, we word the question in such a way to make it easy for that person to say no. "You wouldn't want us to do an inspection while it's in, would you?" Well, since you put it that way, "no" is typically the answer. If you want customers to agree to vehicle inspections, you have to help them understand the service's value.

Now, with that being said, if you are offering a free inspection, why are you even asking if the customer wants it? Just tell the customer you are doing it as part of their overall service package and that it is free.

We all love free stuff. I often share a true story about coming home one day and finding dog ice cream treats in our freezer. When I asked my wife why she bought them, she said she had a free coupon. That would have been great, except at the time, we did not have a dog! She justified it by saying it would be nice to have them available for other people's dogs, but the point is that these things were in my freezer because they were free!

If you approached no-charge inspections as part of your normal operating procedure, explained the value to your customer, and told them it was free, your inspections would jump substantially. "While we have your car in for this service, we also provide a free visual check of tires, fluids, belts, hoses, and your air filter and we will let you know if we see anything that should be brought to your attention."

If customers aren't interested, will tell you so. In most cases, they will simply reply, "Ok." Now, not only have you gained the opportunity to perform an inspection, but you have also set the stage that you might be speaking with the customer about what you found.

Paid inspections are typically more detailed and thorough, requiring more than just visual checks. These may include additional items and measurements, like brake lining thickness, front end part movement, rotor/drum measurements and

more. Qualifying a customer for this type of inspection is a little more difficult. Oil change customers, for example, are really not potential customers for this service because they are typically waiting for their vehicle.

However, if someone is buying a set of tires, they most likely plan on keeping the vehicle for a while. And they may be willing to pay a few extra dollars to get a thorough inspection to help protect the investment they are making in tires and to help ensure that the vehicle is performing properly.

You could say, "While you are here for tires, I would suggest our vehicle inspection, as well. We will inspect the following items. This could help ensure you get the most out of the tires you are buying today. And the inspection only costs \$xx."

If someone comes in wanting you to check something that is in your inspection, explain and sell the entire thing. Example: "Since you want us to look at that brake noise, I would suggest that we perform our vehicle inspection. We will check your brakes and also will look at other components. And it will only cost \$xx."

You might be surprised at how many people would be happy to let you do this. Additionally, that noise that the customer thinks is coming from the brakes might actually be coming from the car's suspension. Now you have found the actual problem. And you have potentially saved the customer the additional headache of coming back again.

The secret to selling paid inspections is to present them in a way that explains their value to the customer, whether they are there for tires or mechanical issues.

Let's also not forget that since you are collecting for this inspection, you are positively impacting your sales and gross profit, so it is in your dealership's best interest to present the service properly to increase the likelihood of a customer purchasing the service.

On top of that, there is a lot of evidence that suggests that when customers pay to have their vehicles inspected, they are much more likely to have them repaired or serviced. As such, you should have a minimum goal of 10% paid inspections to car count.

As I mentioned before, if you want to take advantage of the opportunity to drive more business that inspections offer, you must first embrace an inspection culture.

Make it clear to your staff that inspections are important - for the customer, as much as it is for your business. Focus the entire team on understanding and explaining the value of this service and encouraging customers to take advantage of it. And you will rid yourself of those pesky excuses, too.

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