



Getting involved with car clubs is a great way to showcase who you are. After interacting with your people at events, club members might be inclined to bring their other vehicles to you.

## How to Leverage Events to Attract New Customers

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*This MTD exclusive is provided by tire industry veteran Jeff Morgan, the executive director of Dealer Strategic Planning, the DSP Group.*

All of us are looking for ways to generate new business. There are two basic ways to accomplish this: do more with the customers that you have or increase the number of customers you serve.

While both are effective, one is much more limiting. The greatest gain comes in finding ways to bring in more customers.

There are a number of things that can impact this, such as staffing, productivity and hours of operation. While I can drone on and on about any of those, I want to spend some time on grabbing the attention of - and drawing in - new customers.

Like most tire dealers, you probably advertise in multiple forms. Do you remember the old adage, "Doing the same thing and expecting different results is the definition of insanity?"

I am not suggesting that your current methods are ineffective. What I am suggesting is that if you really want to maximize opportunities to draw in new business, you need to consider and try some different approaches. Think outside the proverbial box.

I want to share some ideas that have worked well that you might consider, if you are not already actively practicing them.

The first is event partnerships. I am referring to more than being the sponsor of a hole during a golf tournament or paying to have a banner put up at a local high school athletic field. I mean being a true partner in an event of some type.

Getting involved with various car groups is a great example. Perhaps you can leverage your location to host a car show on a Sunday afternoon. You can provide prizes for the winners, offer special discounts to all contestants and offer door prizes for attendees. You can put products on display and have people there to answer questions or create sales quotes, if needed.

Events like this can produce a lot of new customer leads. The first leads come from car club members. These people are typically a loyal bunch. When they see you investing in them, they like to reciprocate.

You already know that they are passionate about their show cars, but they likely have other vehicles at home that need tires and service work, as well.

You may even become the provider of choice for all of the club members' vehicles. I know a dealer who got involved with a Toyota Land Cruiser club and now his location is seeing several of these vehicles each week.

Keep in mind that the people who come to these events may not even know who you are or where your dealership is located. They could be coming from outside your normal attraction area or they could live around the corner.

Often we just assume that everyone around us knows we are there and what we do. You might be surprised at how often this is not the case.

Getting involved with car clubs is a great way to showcase who you are. After interacting with your people at events, club members just might be inclined to bring their vehicles to your store.

Events do not need to be automotive in nature. In fact, you might even find more success with community events.

I know another tire dealer who partners with his local community to sponsor a used car seat recycling program.

People bring used car seats to his location, where they are dismantled by employees and materials are sent out for recycling. This brings people into his location who may not have visited before. And it provides an opportunity to impress customers when they come in.

Perhaps you can do the same and even offer a discount for a basic service as a reward for donations. This can get that car in your bay and give you a chance to “wow” a new customer with exceptional service.

Participating in other community events can help garner attention. Consider park clean-up campaigns. You and your employees can go to a local park to pick up trash, fix some playground equipment, etc.

In addition to creating good will, this can provide you with some great photos to post on social media.

Many people admire environmentally conscious businesses and appreciate those who help keep their parks clean and safe.

Keep an open mind when participating in community events and causes. I know a tire dealer who participated in a house clean-up campaign in an underprivileged neighborhood. He donated his time to paint houses and help improve landscaping. Again, this type of community involvement draws people to you whom you may not have attracted before through normal means.

I mentioned social media earlier. This can be leveraged for more than just posting coupons and sales. Many dealers use social media to share human interest stories, as well.

You can leverage your social media channels to discuss interesting tidbits about your employees - with their consent, of course - as well as share positive outcomes to challenging problems or just provide some fun information that will get people engaged.

The goal is to get people to see your business as more than just a place to buy tires and service. They will begin to see you as members of the community who are just like them.

We all know that many people are fearful of getting their cars worked on. However, if they form an opinion of you that is positive, they will be much more likely to give you a chance. Social media can help.

Another great way to get new customers is for you to go to them. I am talking business- to-business here. There are so many businesses around you that have vehicles that you can generate a lot of business by just doing this.

These potential customers do not need to have big fleets. They might just have a few vehicles. However, treat them right and their employees will start coming to you, too.

A simple way to prospect is to simply sit at a major intersection near your location. Spend 30 minutes with a pen and paper. When you see a vehicle with a logo, name and/or phone number on it, write it down.

Plumbers, florists, construction companies - these are businesses that are already active in your area. Go back and check to see if they are currently doing business with you. If not, they are a prospect.

Take part of your day to physically visit some of these businesses, if they are nearby. Go in and ask for whoever is in charge of maintaining their vehicles. Introduce yourself and your business and ask who they are working with now. Do not bad-mouth whoever that company is. Simply say that you would like a chance to earn this potential customer's business.

Encourage them to call you if their current provider cannot take care of a need they have in the time they need it. Perhaps even offer a free oil change to entice them to come in and experience your business for themselves.

The key here is to stay in contact. After the first visit, the person with whom you talked may not remember you. Make detailed notes about who you talked with, who they are doing business with and maybe even the vehicles they use.

Stop back in from time to time and say hello. Ask how things are going with the tire and service supplier they are using. Maybe ask a little bit more about what types of services they use this company for. Is it just tires? Preventive vehicle maintenance? All vehicle repairs? Reiterate that you really want a chance to earn their business and remind them to reach out if you can ever be of service.

Sooner or later, an issue will arise. They will remember you and give you a chance. When that happens, move heaven and earth to take care of their needs. Impress them with your service and invite them back. While this business-to-business method takes time to build, it will help keep your bays busy.

The bottom line is to be willing to try a different approach. Get yourself and your business in front of potential new customers, instead of hoping that they will find you. Consumers have plenty of choices. Unless they are looking for something only you have or need a new place in general, they will not necessarily come hunting for you.

However, if you present your business to these people in a positive way, they may turn to you in a time of need - even when they had not originally planned to do so.

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