

# Trade Secrets



**Bob Cerullo**

[bcerullo@motor.com](mailto:bcerullo@motor.com)

You probably believe you're pretty good at what you do. You may even believe you're *the best*. But there are areas where the best can get even better, and direct marketing is probably one of them.

**I**n past columns I have extolled the benefits of direct mail advertising mainly because I've had great success using it in my own shop. I found that for some of my regular customers, receiving a direct mail piece was almost a command for them to come into the shop. In fact, I vividly recall a few customers coming in to the shop with our Spring Air Conditioner Tune-Up mailer and asking to have it done on their car, not realizing that their car did not even *have* air conditioning!

While our mailings worked very well with customers who had already been to the shop, I never put a lot of effort into finding an effective way to reach new customers in a personal way. I was too busy running the shop to work at perfecting a more aggressive, effective direct mail campaign.

Recently, though, while thumbing through the pages of MOTOR Magazine, I was smacked in the face with an advertisement headlined "Here's What to Do When Business Stinks." That message, from a direct mail company called Moving Targets, got my attention.

Moving Targets CEO Jay Siff, a car guy from way back, has some innovative direct mail marketing techniques that, frankly, were

totally new to me. I spoke at length with Siff, who shared with me some of the secrets of his marketing program that have won him contracts with such automotive giants as NAPA, AAA, Goodyear, Michelin and Firestone, to name a few.

Siff asks, "What if you could direct a message to your customers at the exact moment they are most likely to act?" Siff calls this approach *trigger marketing*, and says it can improve response by as much as 400%. His technique is to figure out ways a shop's mailing will reach customers at precisely the right time in their lives when they might be most receptive to taking a shop up on an offer.

According to Siff, contacting vehicle owners who recently moved to the area provides a great trigger marketing opportunity. That makes sense to me. In my own recent experience in moving to a different state, I found that I had a lot to learn about which bank I might use, what restaurants were good and where I could get my cars inspected. With the exception of the EVB bank, no one made any effort to entice me into their business. The small town in Virginia I moved to does not have a welcome wagon. The manager of the EVB bank in town knocked on my front door with a smiling face, bank calendars, mugs, pens and a potted plant. Not surprisingly, we've used that bank exclusively since we moved here.

Just a few weeks after we arrived here, my cars had to have state inspections done. Had I received any mailings promoting shops where I could get my cars inspected, I would have welcomed the information. Unfortunately, I had to search around to find a good place.

I like the idea of an auto repair shop being able to send out mailing pieces to people who have just moved into the area. I would include in the mailing an invitation to get a free lube and oil change on their first visit to the shop.

Jay Siff and I hit it off pretty well, partly, I guess, because we're a couple of car guys on the same wavelength when it comes to cus-



Photo: Thinkstock

tomers visiting a shop for the first time. Siff emphasized the need for making the customer's first visit a pleasant one. He said the first visit is the time to make a *customer*, not a profit. Siff has figured out how a shop can reach new customers as soon as they move into a neighborhood.

Siff has thought of birthday reminders, too, and has a program that allows a shop to get a message out to new and old customers on their birthday. Frankly, I think I would be very touched to get a card from local business on my birthday, and if it was a card from a local repair shop that included the gift of a free lube and oil change, I would take the shop up on the offer.

Siff can set triggers to include cou-

ples who have just been married or just had a child. Suppose, for example, you sent a mailing out to newly married folks offering them a special deal on a service at your shop if they brought both their cars in within a specified time period. Even more exciting for people with new babies would be an offer to properly fit an infant or child seat into their vehicle. You might want to target people who are having anniversaries, retirements, graduations or other important events.

Trigger marketing ideas are virtually endless. The trick is to decide with what event your mailing should coincide. Siff encourages mailers to take advantage of their own knowledge of their customers. For example, a shop could make an offer that supports the

local high school team. One he suggests is, "Wear school colors to the shop and get a free gift."

Moving Targets has the technical ability to find the potential targets for your mailings. Siff believes that 85% of a shop's market is within an eight-minute drive of the business. There's nothing personal about a newspaper, TV or radio advertisement. But a card or letter arriving at the house on a special day can "reach" a customer in more ways than one.

The Trade Secret is that no matter how long you've been in business or how successful you've been with your advertising, there are always new techniques to explore. Getting professional help exploring them makes good business sense. M



## Announcing Sea Foam Spray -

- 👑 The original Sea Foam Motor Treatment formula packaged in easy to use aerosol format.
- 👑 Each spray can comes with a U.S. Patent Pending application device that will allow Sea Foam Motor Treatment to be induced into an engine's combustion chamber.
- 👑 The application device allows access to the combustion chamber via air intake, which feeds all cylinders evenly in all engines.
- 👑 100% pure petroleum product.
- 👑 Meets all EPA and carb VOC regulations.
- 👑 Ask for it at your local auto parts store.

Circle #8

For more information on Sea Foam's products, visit our website at [www.seafoamsales.com](http://www.seafoamsales.com)