



Marketing Your Collision Center

SEPT 2020 by John Halstead



“Marketing” includes all of the actions intended to *bring customers to your business.*

Over the years, it has been shown that 85% or more of a typical collision center’s business comes from referrals—not advertising, not the yellow pages, not exterior signage, but person-to-person or organization-to-organization referrals. This includes DRP referrals, fleet referrals, dealer referrals, and of course referrals from prior customers and repeat business. Therefore, the majority of your marketing efforts need to be geared to generating referrals and leveraging your existing customer base for more.

Likely the largest source of referrals you have is from DRP’s and “completely satisfied” customers. Making sure that you mutually set and meet expectations in terms of Cycle Time, CSI, and cost containment will assure that the pipeline remains turned on. Track your own insurer metrics for Cycle Time, CSI, and Severity. Don’t rely solely on their numbers. Proactively manage your CSI programs to generate “5 Star” ratings on all repairs.

One major change in the collision repair landscape is the advent of **OE certification programs**. These are beginning to play a more important role in referrals. Due to necessary investments in equipment and training, shops may tend to specialize in specific OE brands.

Groups and organizations with vehicle fleets are other valuable sources of referrals: Dealerships, rental fleets, insurance agents, taxis, a local plumbing contractor with a dozen trucks, and even community organizations can help bring a steady flow of business to the door. Reach out to large local employers and offer concierge service to their employees.

Now, in the days of expanding social media, referrals from those sources are more important than ever. Trusted online referral sites (such as Yelp) may carry similar “weight” as a personal referral from a friend. In addition, your online presence is open 24/7 which more closely matches the times when potential customers need to reach out to a collision center. Affording these customers the ability to request an estimate, and even summon a tow truck, outside of normal business hours is a great marketing tool.

Mike Anderson of **Collision Advice** recently updated our customers on the changes occurring in the collision repair industry (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENtNVFjDd2A>) including the impacts of Covid-19. He explained that though severity is increasing, accident frequencies are going down and will continue to do so due to ADAS. Therefore, attracting and capturing repairs is more important than ever. Among other important topics, Mike explained the importance of digital marketing channels as well as the ability to compete for OE referrals.

Market Channels

Partners

Insurance
Dealerships
Towing
Agents
OE Certification

Digital

Organic Search
Paid Search
Referral
Direct
Social Media

Traditional

Location
Word of mouth
Advertising

As always, the best referral is from a **Completely Satisfied Customer**. Not the one who is merely “satisfied”, but the one that is “Wow’d”. The one who goes to their friends and neighbors and says: “*You won’t believe what they did for me at ABC Body Shop*”. Certainly “completely satisfied” customers will magnify the impact of all of your referral sources when they continually refer you to others, or post positive reviews on social media.

88% of shops reportedly use “word of mouth” as a marketing tactic. However, this is too nebulous and passive as it does not imply any overt action. Actively marketing to a database of past customers and specifically identified referral sources will help put you in control of your own destiny. Based on 100 repairs per month, in five years you could have 6000 prior customers in your database.

Dealerships with body shops can actively promote their collision center to new car, used car, and service customers. A simple flier attached to service invoices is a good reminder to regular customers that you can serve their collision repair needs.



Tip to Consider:

When delivering a repaired vehicle to a customer, be sure to “resell” your repair and prepare the customer for a CSI call or other follow-up. A closing statement such as “*Please refer us to your friends should they ever need collision repair and be sure to post a positive review on (i.e. Yelp).*” Be proud of the work you do. If you want more work, ask for it! And, constantly monitor all relevant social media and referral sites to assure a flow of positive referrals.

This TIPS flyer was written by John Halstead & edited by Georgia Thorson of RDA

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