



How often do you hear, 'What's new?'

Keep your inventory, and product knowledge, fresh

by Phil Sasso

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Probably one of the most common questions you get from customers every day is: "What's new?"

People love to know what's *new*.

Of course, that doesn't always mean everyone is clamoring to *buy* the newest innovations. But everyone wants to know what's on the cutting edge, even if they aren't always comfortable being the first technician on the block to own the tool.

Statistically speaking

In the 1960s, researcher Everett Rogers studied hundreds of technological advances and wrote "Diffusion of Innovation," an analysis of the new product adoption process. Rogers plotted a timeline of new technology purchases and saw a bell curve pattern of five unique groups: Innovators and Early Adopters (16 percent total), Early and Late Majority (34 percent each) and Laggards (16 percent).

Now before your eyes glaze over and you turn the page thinking I'm going to waste your time with academics, I promise I'll come back to the real world in a minute ... stay with me.



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Holding a tool dramatically increases the chances a customer will buy the tool.

Innovators and Early Adopters tend to be opinion leaders. They are the people that influence what others buy. That means if you get your newest tools and equipment in the hands of Innovators and Early Adopters you'll put your business at an advantage. That's because these respected technicians will be talking to everyone about this great new tool they got from you.

But don't assume because a customer is an Innovator in one area that they're Innovators in all areas — and vice versa. Rogers' study is category specific not customer specific. For instance, if I told you I'm one of the rare 23 percent of Americans without cable or satellite TV you might assume I'm a Laggard. But if I told you I've owned a computer since 1981, I've had HDTV since 2001, I have satellite radio and an iPod, you might see me differently. You'll find many of your customers will be the same. Some will love new diagnostic tools. Others will love new mechanical tools. The more you know them, the better you can peg them.

Right about now you're probably thinking, "So what's the practical application of all *that*?"

Here's one way to apply Rogers' research: Next time your customer asks, "What's new?" have a flyer. Or better yet, have the actual product. Holding a tool dramatically increases the chances a customer will buy the tool.

Keep up with AAPEX

Statistically, about one in seven of your customers aren't just interested in knowing what's new; they want to own it. So, if you expect to serve these customers, you need to keep up with the latest aftermarket technology. A great place to do that is at the Automotive Aftermarket Product Expo in Las Vegas the first week in November each year.

(I love AAPEX. This will be my 11th consecutive year in attendance at the show. In fact, my first time at Industry Week, I took Beth — on our honeymoon. Really. And she didn't even hesitate when I suggested it. Happy 10th anniversary, Beth!)

But all the romance aside, attending the show is simply good business. If you haven't been to AAPEX lately, you really should consider attending. I realize you're probably too busy to even think about getting away to some far-flung trade show. But this isn't just some trade show. This is *the* trade show. In fact it's Industry Week. So, it's actually four trade shows/conferences: AAPEX, SEMA, NACE and CARS. If you miss it this year, try to schedule just a few days at the show next year. The new products are always interesting and the environment is invigorating. It might just be the shot in the arm you need for motivation and to re-energize your sales.

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a Vegas hotel room with your sore feet up after a long day walking the aisles and seeing dozens of new product demos. Great! If not, you should keep your eyes peeled for all the new products unveiled at AAPEX. (The next few issues of this magazine and *PTEN* will be filled with the latest and greatest products from this year's show.)

Be first


Long-term sales success comes from knowing what's new. For instance, years ago, a young insurance agent introduced Beth and me to the Medical Savings Account. Getting an MSA slashed our premiums and gave us tax-free savings. We became innovators. Less than 100,000 people in the U.S. had an MSA when we opened ours in 1998. That agent won our business by being the first to talk about MSAs. He positioned himself as an MSA expert. He may or may not have been, but he

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earned our respect and trust by being first. Later, that same agent rose to the executive suite at a major financial services company.

In the same way, becoming the jobber that's the most knowledgeable about the newest tools and equipment will give you another competitive advantage over other jobbers. When your customers hear about new products from you first, they'll assume you are more knowledgeable about trends and technology than other jobbers. Although most of your customers won't buy a new product the first time you introduce it, you're planting a seed in their mind. And, in time, they'll remember who told them about it first when they're ready to buy — be it in a week, a month or a year.

So, how will you answer your customers the next time they ask you, "What's new?" Will you have some-

thing really new to show them, or just something they haven't seen for a while that you'll pull out of inventory and dust off? 

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing, an aftermarket advertising, PR and Internet services agency. Sasso is also a speaker, trainer and consultant. And just thinking about Industry Week makes his feet hurt. Sign up for his free weekly marketing tip email at philsasso.com/blog.

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