



Think outside the toolbox

Add more \$\$\$ to your bottom line with consumables

BY PHIL SASSO

As a tool guy (or gal), your job is to fill your customer's toolbox with useful hand tools. Right? Kind of. By focusing on only what's traditionally in their toolbox you could be losing a lot of sales. A good tool lasts a good long time. Usually a customer buys it once and that's it — unless they leave it under a hood and it drives away. Tool sales are the backbone of the mobile business and always will be. But more and more, a mobile cannot live by tools alone. Especially in the new economy.

By thinking outside the toolbox, you can branch out and provide your customer with a lot more than just hand tools. After all, what you're really selling are products that make a technician's job easier. That includes a lot of things that don't necessarily fit in a toolbox (literally or figuratively).

Consider how you can profit by expanding the types of consumables you offer. I'm talking about items like disposable gloves or shop towels, various chemicals — or anything that gets used up and replaced. They're a great way to boost incremental income. And, quite bluntly, they're low-hanging fruit. They're mostly quick-and-easy sales.

Consumables tend to be small-ticket items that turn quickly and have low inventory costs. So it's something you can do without a big investment of time or money. Much like a pack of gum or a candy bar at the convenience store, most consumables are so inexpensive that techs almost buy them on impulse.

Try it, you'll like it

Samples sell.

Not every product lends itself to sampling, but with a little creativity, you can find ways to get customers to try a product they don't currently use. For example, open a box of disposable gloves and give them away a pair at a time. When a tech or shop owner is making a purchase, ask if they use disposable gloves. If not, give them a sample set.

When a customer is buying an \$80 driver set, throwing in a box of disposable gloves is close to painless. Do that a couple times a day, and it starts

adding up and affects your bottom line.

The other benefit of consumables is obvious. They get consumed. That's the big benefit to you as a dealer: you get the reorders. So although it may only be a \$7 purchase, it's \$7 over and over.

In other cases, you can't afford to give away product samples, but you can do a demo to show how it works. Maybe one week, instead of your toting and promoting being an actual hand tool, it is a can of hand cleaner or penetrating oil. Let customers see it at work with some kind of demonstration.

"Most of the customers ... trust and respect their tool distributor," said Dave Babics, Senior Product Manager for Plews/Edelmann that is introducing a new line of LubriMatic Green biobased lubricants. "[Distributors] have worked hard to earn that respect and have the opportunity to use it to sell additional products based on their recommendation."

Ring up reorders

Reorders will come in several ways. Sometimes the customer comes to you for a reorder and it's a chance to sell more tools. Say a customer jumps on your truck because they've run out of butane for their mini-torch. While you're pulling stock and writing

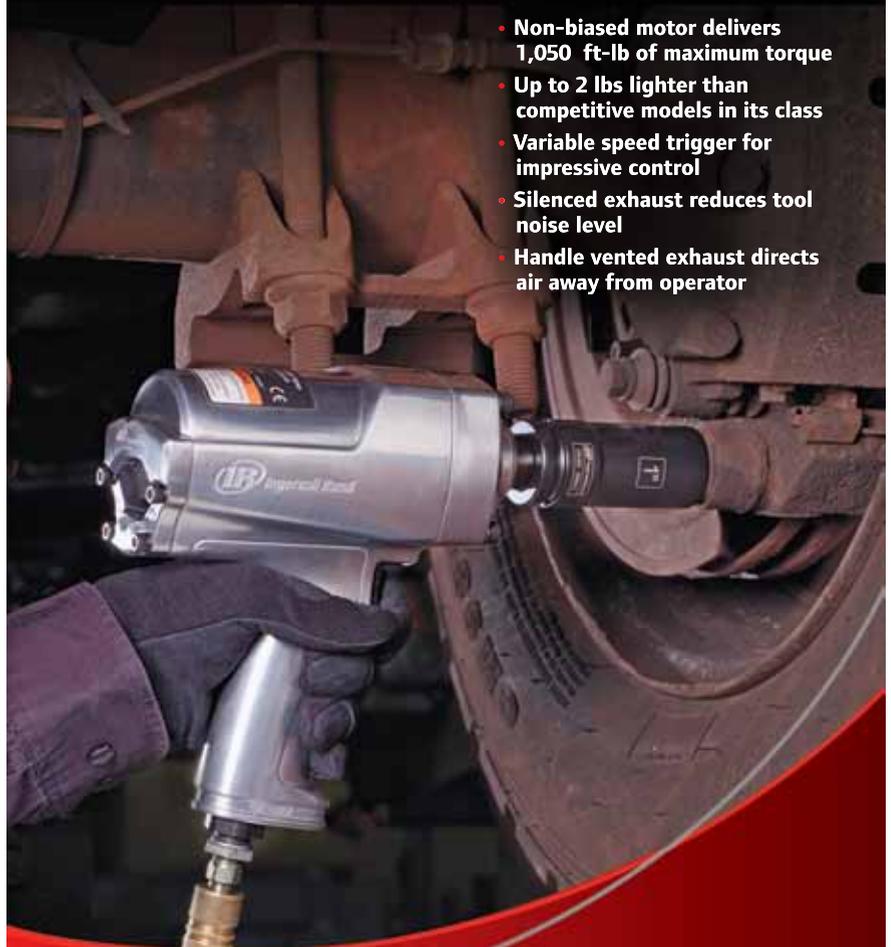
up the order, it's a good time to ask if they've seen your sales or promos for the week. In this case, the small consumable sale can lead to a much bigger tool sale.

But you can't always count on a customer to remember. Sometimes it

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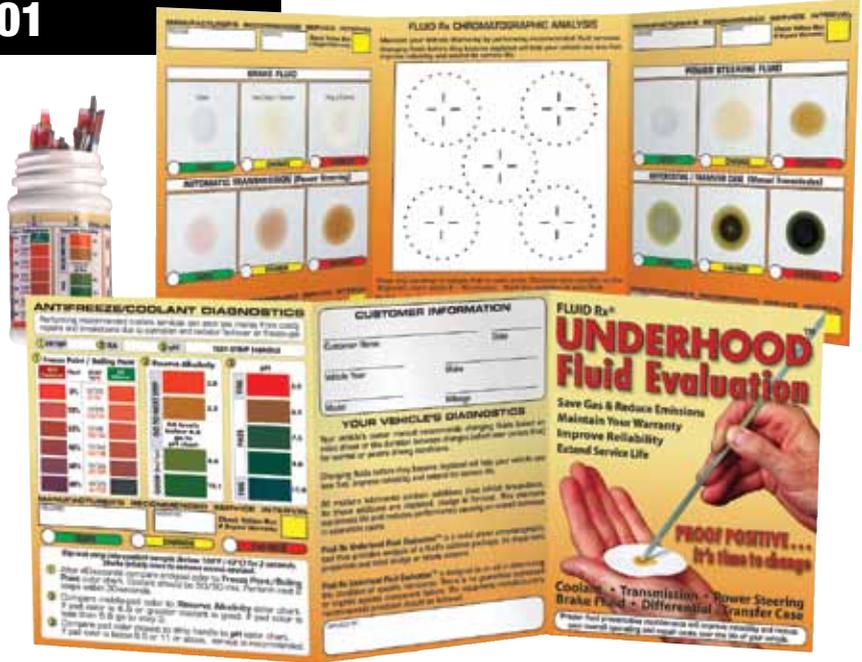
might take a simple reminder nudge to keep your customer stocked up. When you're writing up a tool sale, simply asking, "How are you fixed for penetrating oil?" can add \$5 or \$10 to the ticket with little effort.

You can also use a consumable reorder as a chance to upsell. For example, "Usually you get an 8 oz. can, the 16 oz. is a better deal if you're interested," or, "I know you like that brand, but I just started carrying another brand. It costs a little more, but other techs tell me they really like it. Would you like to try it?"

Also remember your customers are busy. Sometimes it's hard for them to remember where they picked up that can of lubricant. So, make it easy for them. Consider cinching the reorder by slapping a computer-printed label: "Time to reorder? Call Bob at ..."

Adding in additives

Penetrants and lubricants seem like natural extensions of what you do.



But what about chemicals like sealants or additives. You're probably thinking that's the kind of stuff a DIY'er picks up at the local auto parts retailer and that a professional wouldn't touch it.

Think again.

Although some retail formulations are just time-buying patches, many professional-level chemicals for the transmission, radiator, A/C or other systems are great tools to prevent comebacks. Some are even used by automakers in the production process.

"We have OEM customers that put our radiator product in on the assembly line as leak preventive," said Clayton Parks, VP Marketing & Development from Bar's Leaks.

The rationale: If it's good enough for the OEM, isn't it good

enough for a shop?

Even further outside the box

Some consumables aren't just repair or diagnostic tools, they're great selling tools, too.

"You just put a drop of each fluid on each spot of this card," said Ron McElroy of Fluid Rx. "It shows the tech if any of the fluids need to be changed. It also let's the tech show a customer tangible evidence that he or she needs a transmission fluid change or a radiator flush ... or whatever."

Don't get consumed with selling consumables. Even with healthy margins and endless repeat business, you are first and foremost a tool and equipment expert. If your business were a steak dinner, tools would be the ribeye and consumables would be the sour cream and chives on the baked potato. They add a lot, but they're not a meal. ■

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