



PREMIUM LUBRICANTS

# Know Your Competition— So You Can Compete More Effectively

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**Consumers have a lot of choices** when it comes to their oil changes. They can go to a car dealer, or even a tire or muffler chain store. So why do they choose a quick lube shop? And more importantly, why should they choose your shop?

People who go to a fast oil change specialist are looking for convenience and speed. They know they don't need to make an appointment or have other work performed. The oil change is their main objective. They appreciate that you have a variety of oils and quality grades available, and that your techs are focused on doing the job right. Tire or muffler businesses make their money from selling tires or mufflers. They may perform oil changes as a secondary service, but it is not their specialty.

It's important to understand this because, as a quick lube operator, you are not in competition with dealerships, tire or muffler stores. Your competition is other oil service specialists with a similar offering and business model to yours. That's who you should be watching and benchmarking your business against.

"Know your competition" doesn't just mean knowing who they are, but also having a good sense of how they operate. How are they pricing their services compared to you? Are they visible in the local media or at community events? What do their websites say about them? Are they associated with any particular oil brands? Can you get any insight into their promotional practices? What do their facilities look like? Is their signage clean and modern? What are their customers saying about them?

Gathering a little competitive intelligence will help you figure out how to better differentiate your offering from the competition. When two businesses offer fairly similar products and services and are not too far apart in terms of price, the biggest differentiator may well be your brand – meaning the experience customers have and the impressions they form when doing business with you.

Your brand is the sum of all the factors that influence the customer's impression of you. It starts before they even come to your store. If they are searching online, your web presence should be reflective of the professional image you want to project. Your website should be well-functioning, informative and easy to navigate. Keep up with reviews of your business and be sure to address any issues that are less than "five stars." Reviews

by customers, both positive and negative, should be responded to quickly. This can allow you to manage the optics of the review. If you use social media, make sure your postings are fresh.

When customers arrive at your shop, first impressions are everything. The exterior and signage should be clean and well-kept. The reception and waiting areas should be welcoming. Employees who are friendly, courteous and knowledgeable will go a long way toward instilling trust and confidence on the customer's part. Make sure your staff is trained in the

importance of customer service, so customers feel they are treated well and in good hands. Make sure to greet all customers as they arrive so they know they will be taken care of.

As a specialist in oil products and services, be sure you are showcasing your expertise. Talk with customers about their oil choices. Most of them probably don't give much thought to their oil, so they will appreciate your expert guidance as to what is best for their car. Follow up with customers after their visit as well. Don't hesitate to ask for their feedback on your service. Not only can it help you identify areas for improvement, but it will also make the customer feel valued.

Identify your strengths and weaknesses compared to others in your market and capitalize on your strengths. On the surface, your business might not appear very different from your competitors, but there are many levers you can pull to distinguish yourself. A high-quality customer experience can be a big differentiator, and it can protect you from having to compete on price.

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