

# HOW TO START YOUR OWN AUTO TUNE-UP SHOP

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## **HOW TO START YOUR OWN AUTO TUNE-UP SHOP**

This business idea is one of those recession-proof opportunities that can put you on "easy street." When the economy heats up and inflation increases the cost of living, people become "do-it-yourself" conscious, looking for ways to save money. Whenever the economy falters, people again are searching for methods of saving money and making what they already own last longer.

The marketing principles outlined within this report emphasize the money-making potential of an independent auto tune-up shop in any part of the country. One of the secrets of success in this business is the specialization. No longer do auto owners expect their neighborhood service station to keep their cars tuned-up and running smoothly.

There are several reasons for the demise of the local "do-it-all" auto mechanic: First, there are very few auto mechanics running service stations anymore. A good journey man auto mechanic can earn much more, without the responsibility, by hiring out to big-time auto dealerships. Most service stations today are simply gas and tire selling outlets operated by the major oil companies who advise you to take your mechanical problems elsewhere for repair. When you do find one with a mechanic on duty, the prices are such that only the very rich can afford them.

There's also the problem of unethical operators. Although many state legislatures have enacted licensing and consumer protection safety measures, the rip-offs continue. The crux of the problem is that most auto owners do not realize they've been taken until after the fact, and then it's too late. After being taken once or twice, many consumers turn to "do-it-yourself" auto repair until they run into the technology and advanced electronics of the ignition system on today's cars. That's when they'll be needing your help.

It really doesn't take any special education or training to set up an independent auto tune-up shop. Any automotive repair experience you may have will help, but a simple knowledge of basic tune-up procedures is all that's really necessary. In fact, the important prerequisites will be a strong business sense and an old fashioned "down-home" ability to get along with people.

Remember this fact: In starting and operating this business, it's not mandatory that you be a qualified auto mechanic; but your success will depend upon your ability to "serve others," and upon having a genuine desire and ability to do a good job.

This means remembering faces and names; addressing customers by first names as you get to know them; and listening to them; interacting with their problems achievements. The best way to explain the kind of "people empathy" you need for success in any kind of service business is to think of all your customers as close friends.

You can start this business in your garage - and even on a part-time basis. Run an ad in your local paper:

**QUICK IN & OUT AUTO TUNE-UPS... Low cost, guaranteed...**

We pick up and deliver... Call Jim at 123-4567

Place a similar ad or notice on all the bulletin boards in your area. To drum up business and get the ball rolling, you could even elicit customers via telephone. Simply start calling people out of the phone book. Tell them that your shop is offering a change-of-season special on auto tune-ups - in and out in less than an hour for \$5, plus parts, which usually run less than \$10, and then ask them if they'd like for you to pick up and deliver their car this afternoon or evening.

Another way of managing, building, and promoting your business is via the service stations and auto parts stores in your area. Have posters or signs painted, advertising your "quick in-and-out" tune-up service. Take them around to all the service stations that don't handle auto repairs, and to the auto parts stores, and ask them to put your signs in their windows.

The next thing would be to hand out your business cards wherever you go and to everybody you meet. Give a handful to your friends, and ask them to write their name on the back of the cards and hand them out for you. You could promise them a dollar or two for every customer who brings in a card with their name on it. You'll be quite pleasantly surprised at how fast your business will grow when you take advantage of these promotional methods.

Still another idea is to have advertising circulars made up. Pay some junior high school students to hand them out at busy shopping centers on weekends, especially after the first cold snap or hot spell of the year. If you live in a large metropolitan area, leave off stacks at your downtown parking lots and get the lot attendants to hand them out as the people pay their parking fees.

You should be able to trade tune-up work for free radio advertising, especially after or during any change in the weather. This kind of advertising should work very well for you, so plan on it and use it at those times when people are most likely to be thinking about a tune-up.

You can set this business up very simply and operate it according to the sophisticated time-saving methods of the highly capitalized franchised operations.

This means an electronic check of the ignition system and scientific diagnosis of the engine. Check with the auto parts and tools distributors in your area. They should be able to steer you the national manufacturers or suppliers of the equipment you need.

Here's how to buy the equipment: Decide upon a supplier explain your business plan to him. Tell him you want to finance the cost of the equipment through your local bank with him as your co-signer. Get the bank to draw up the papers, make a layout of your shop and equipment with the help of your supplier, and that's all there is to it.

After you've electronically checked the ignition, the next step in your quick tune-up procedure is to replace all parts that aren't operating properly. This usually means points, condenser and plugs. In some cases, this may include a new rotor, distributor cap, fuel filter, air cleaner and maybe spark plug wires. Be hesitant to suggest extras beyond the basics until your business is established. Spray some chemical cleaning fluid into and on the carburetor, start the engine, set the timing, make any necessary adjustments - and the job is complete. You charge the customer about \$10 for parts, (or according to your cost) plus \$5 for labor, and you should be on your way to a good income.

As you become established, and as your customers gain confidence in your work, you'll be able to suggest and sell them such things as new batteries, battery cables, starters, voltage regulators, alternators and sometimes even generators - when these parts are not working properly and need replacement. It's important that you don't sell, or even allow your customers to buy parts from you that are not really needed for continued trouble-free operation of their vehicles. Another thing: when you do replace a major piece of equipment on a customer's auto, always schedule the replacement work for a time when you're not handling regular in-and-out tune-up customers. In other words, you might schedule the replacement of a generator for Monday, after advising the customer of the need on Friday. Suggest that he leave the car with you all day, and pick it up on his way home from work. Or he could stop by on his way to work, and you take him to work, replacing the generator during the day, and pick him up after work.

The charge for replacing major engine components such as suggested should be \$10 plus the cost of the replacement part. It's also very important that whenever you contract to do this kind of work, you have the work done and the car ready for your customer at the time you promise him it'll be ready. No one likes to wait around for the completion of work that was promised to be done at a specific time. By completing the work on time, and having your customer's car properly serviced as promised, you'll build more long-term loyalty than any fancy advertising, "come-on" gimmicks or rock-bottom prices ever offered.

So the thing to do as you organize your business is to establish accounts - sources of wholesale priced parts - with the major auto parts distributors in your area. You'll want to maintain a general supply of new parts on hand, and not have to worry about paying for them for at least 30 days. In other words, you'll need a cash-flow system that works to your advantage.

Your profit will come from developing a standard routine that allows you to move at least four cars through your shop every hour. Some automotive purists may argue that you're only providing a "pep-up" instead of a tune-up, but let them beat their gums. Give each car the same procedure: an electronic check, new points and condenser, then an engine diagnosis, and collect your fee.

Talk with your customers. Get to know them and allow them to get to know you. Then when your engine diagnosis indicates a valve job or a new carburetor you can recommend it to them and they'll trust your judgment.

You, as the operator of a quick tune-up shop, should not volunteer any major mechanical work. Suggest someone whose work you trust. Your customer will appreciate your suggestion and concern. And he'll remain loyal to you for not taking his money and attempting to give him a repair job in an area where you don't specialize.

After all, you're a tune-up specialist - the guy who knows all there is to know about a car's ignition system - the guy who keeps cars running smoothly. By specializing in a particular area of auto repair, and recommending other specialists as needed, you'll be able to quickly dispel the skepticism many car owners have for independent auto repair shops in general.

An assembly line in-and-out operation will reduce the necessary investment for tools, enable you to hire lower-cost workers, and greatly increase your profit potential by eliminating wasted motion. Keep it simple, routine and according to a definite procedure on every car.

Once you have your business established and a regular following of people who bring their cars to you for regular tune-ups - usually every six months - you can begin thinking about expansion. It's best to hire college students, or "car-crazy" high school students, to work alongside you. Give your customers a chance to recognize and know your help. When you find one who seems to be especially mechanically inclined, take him aside and offer him the title of assistant manager of your shop.

Teach this young man how you want the business to operate; explain where the profit comes from; and assign more of the actual responsibilities to him. Leave him on his own to run the shop for longer periods of time. Be patient; compliment him on his work; and if you want him to stay with you, give him a raise now and then, and eventually, a percentage of the profits.

Offering him a percentage arrangement will result in even greater profits for you, plus a very strong local image for your business. Because you're "giving him" a part of the business, he'll promote your business to his friends, and through him and his friends, a long line of new customers and a chain of loyalty that could become more valuable to your business than any amount of advertising you could buy.

When you're ready to expand your operation from your garage to a regular commercial location, look for a vacant service station. One of the larger facilities built by a major oil company, located on a strategic corner, will be your best bet.

So long as you operate out of your garage and on a small scale, you probably won't have to worry too much about licenses. That is, providing you get along well with your neighbors, don't clutter up the street with 5 or 10 cars at a time, and don't erect any kind of sign indicating you're doing business in a residentially zoned neighborhood.

However, once you move into a commercial location, you'll need to register the name of your business with the appropriate local government authority. In most states, this is the office of the county clerk.

If your state has a sales tax, you'll have to check with the state tax commissioner's office to learn the rules on how the collection system operates.

All these licensing offices are in reality offices for tax collecting. Basically, they know nothing about your business, and usually could care less. Their main reason for existence is simply the collection of money for the administration of government in your area. If they should ask you questions relative to the worth of your business, or how much money you will be taking in, always estimate a much lower figure than either the true worth or those you anticipate. Most license fees are based upon the investment of the entrepreneur and his anticipated income from the new business, and you certainly don't want to start off paying excess taxes.

A good eye-catching sign is vital to the success of any business in a commercial location.

The most important requirement for you is visibility. Your sign should be big enough and tall enough for people to see it from several different directions at a distance of at least a half block away. Check with your city ordinances for the sign limitations in the location you select.

Secondly, your sign should immediately state the service you're offering. Hence, a sign that clearly and simply announces "Auto Tune-ups" fits this requirement. However, in order to attract customers into your shop, your sign should "promise" a benefit. It should describe an added benefit to the reader. So, your sign should read: "Rapid Auto Tune-Up!"

Basically, that's all you'll need for a sign, but to "fill it out" you might come up with a special logo or business motto. You can probably get an art student at your local college to design something for little more than the privilege of including it in his or her portfolio. For a business slogan or motto, something along the lines of "Better performance from your car, at a price you can afford," is the kind of thing you want to come up with, and that will do you the most good.

Remember, fast, efficient service and low prices, coupled with a personality that makes the customer feel you're his friend, are the keys to your success. Organize yourself; start slowly and build your customer loyalty; instill these principles in your employees, and you'll be on your way. Study this report again, then act on the recommendations given here.