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## Things You Need to Know to Succeed in the **Auto Appearance Business**

### Introduction

An automotive appearance service can quickly become a highly successful and profitable business. Thousands of professionals have made reconditioning services or auto detailing a highly successful and gratifying career, but starting an auto service business isn't so simple as buying some equipment and finding some customers, at least not if you want your business to find lasting growth and success.

There are several things business owners need to know before considering a career in the auto appearance industry. To help any professional considering a new business, Rightlook.com offers these ten tips that will separate your business from the competition and help your venture reach a superior level of success.



Automotive Appearance Equipment & Training

**TIP  
1**

# Make Professional Training Your 1st Investment

Nothing is more important than expert training for the new auto appearance professional. Training sets the stage for your entire business and will ultimately determine the quality of your service, the satisfaction of your customers, and the possibilities for growth. In addition, expert training will not only show you how to deliver exceptional results, but how to deliver these results in the most efficient way, saving you time and money.

## Be Someone Customers Trust

If you were getting your haircut, would you want it to be done by the graduate of a prestigious styling school, or some guy who bought a pair of scissors? No one wants to buy services from someone inexperienced, which is why it's just as important that auto appearance professionals show customers that they have gone through the right training.

## Get the Confidence you Need

The right training will prepare you for every aspect of your automotive service. Classes are lead by an expert instructor who has learned all the tips, tricks, and most effective time-tested industry techniques. Courses also include standard operating procedures to maximize efficiency, and plenty of hands-on instruction so you can make a smooth transition to working on your own. After comprehensive training, you'll have the experience to approach any job with the confidence of a true professional.

## Learn the Latest Techniques

If you're starting a new business, it's very important that you get trained in the latest and most effective industry techniques for a solid foundation for your service. A current example is environmentally friendly techniques that are favored by customers and required by law in many areas. With expert training, you won't have to play catch up, and you'll be better prepared to adapt when new trends and technologies arise.

### THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERT TRAINING

Some detailers think they can get trained by a friend or by watching videos they find online. These resources may seem like a cheaper alternative, but they only cover a fraction of a complete training course, and there is no way to know if the information offered is correct or up-to-date. Not to mention the lack of SOPs and business advice. If you're serious about making money, then you should be willing to invest in a course, because there is no substitute for expert training.

**TIP  
2**

# Be A Student of Business

The right training will prepare you to produce expert results on the job, but education in general business training is never over for the most successful auto appearance professionals. In the automotive industry, as well as any other business, there are countless resources for improved business practices and tips for success.

To make your business the best, you should constantly be on the lookout for knowledge that might make you more efficient, attract more customers, and improve the day to day functions of your business.

## Stay Curious

The best businesses are run by people who are constantly looking for ways to improve. Be willing to educate yourself in every aspect of good business practice and don't be afraid to delve into areas you haven't explored before. Staying curious about core business values like leadership, bookkeeping, and marketing will naturally improve your business and give you new ways to grow.

## Always Have a Nightstand Book

Thousands of books have been published on the topic of running a better business. Just walk into your local bookstore and you can find years of business knowledge packed into a \$20 paperback. Keep a business-related book by your bed or other preferred place of reading. With modern E-Readers like the iPad or Kindle, you can take your reading anywhere you go, and you'd be amazed at how much you can learn by reading whenever you have a few minutes of down time.

## Attend Seminars

Many business experts who write books also host business improvement seminars. Try a Google search for "local business seminars" to find plenty of opportunities for business improvement presentations. These seminars are also a good opportunity to do some networking and learn from other professionals in your field.

## Get Online

The internet is an incredible resource for business related advice, tips, tricks, tutorials – and a lot of it is 100% free. A published book or hosted seminar may guarantee a higher level of quality, but sometimes a Google search is all you need to answer basic business questions. Start a search with "how to..." and odds are that others have already asked the same question.

**TIP  
3**

# Master Your Marketing

In addition to general business knowledge, learning how to properly market your business is vital if you want to grow and expand. Though many auto appearance professionals overlook this skill, there are countless resources in the bookstore and online that will teach you cheap and effective ways to spread awareness, and build a strong customer base.

## Traditional Marketing

Print advertisements, banners, vehicle wraps, postcards, and other printed marketing collateral can be effective and affordable means of promoting your business. Though internet marketing has greatly risen in popularity and effectiveness, there are still plenty of times a professionally designed brochure or business card can have a powerful effect.

## Online Marketing

New internet technologies have made it easier and more affordable for small businesses to advertise to large audiences online. Using all of these marketing techniques effectively would be nearly impossible for a single business owner, but having an understanding of each will open a world of possibilities and let you determine which strategies will be most effective for your business.

## Online Marketing Opportunities

### Your Website

Step one of any online marketing is your website. The internet is the new yellow pages, so if you do nothing else, pay to have a professional looking website with clearly displayed contact info and a design that matches your brand. \*see tip 4 for more on brands

### Email Marketing

Email has quickly becoming the most universal form of communication around the world. Get your business in front of more customers by collecting emails and message your list no more than once to twice per month.

### Facebook and Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools let you communicate instantly with customers that also use social media online. Once you build a following, you can pitch promotions, discounts, and appointment openings.

### Youtube and Online Video Marketing

Video content is one of the most powerful forms of marketing today. Customers are far more likely to buy from you if they can see a short promotional video with personality and professionalism. Video testimonials from previous customers are also a hit.

### Google Paid Advertising

You may have noticed on a Google search that there are "Ads" surrounding the normal search results. Everything in a tan box is actually a paid advertisement, and you can sign up to post your own. It's known as Pay Per Click advertising since you only pay when someone clicks your Ad.

### Google Places and Local Listings

Local listings are the best online tool for local businesses, and also how you get reviews online. Search for your business on sites like Yelp.com, maps.google.com, Bing, and Yahoo Local. If aren't already listed, get a listing right away – it's free!

### Flickr and Photo Sharing

Showing pictures of your work is a great way to win over customers. Flickr and other photo sharing sites let you upload pictures to an online profile. You can then link your profile from your website as an online portfolio.

## Stay Up To Date

Online marketing is constantly changing, and constantly giving you more and more ways to reach new customers online. Subscribe to an online marketing website and make it a habit to check on web marketing news regularly.

**TIP  
4**

# Get the Franchise Look

To a customer, your commitment to your image reflects your commitment to your work. When customers see an attractive logo, clean uniforms, and a branded vehicle, it tells them that you are proud of your business and that you offer professional service.

## Branding

You don't have to be a giant corporation to have a brand. A brand is simply a consistent look, feel, and message that make your business more memorable and relatable to the customer. Main aspects of branding include a custom logo and business name, unique color scheme, and company tagline. The most important part of branding is consistency so that customers can immediately recognize your business wherever it is represented.

## 5 Steps to a Professional Brand:

### Business Name

Your company name is the customer's very first impression of your business. To make sure it's a good impression, choose a business name that is relevant to the products or services you provide while still being original, catchy, and memorable.

### Logo

Customers love logos, and the right image will make them remember your business instead of a competitor. You can hire a graphic designer who will work with you to develop a custom graphic that creatively incorporates your name and tastefully represents your business.

### Voice / Message

A brand is also how you talk to your customers. Text on print materials or online should read the same way, with tone and style that reads as though spoken by the same person.

### Visuals

The general look and feel of your business and your marketing materials should also be aligned with a familiar design. Unique color schemes, layouts, and fonts all contribute to a memorable and unified brand.

### Consistency

Once you've established the look and feel of your brand, it's time to spread it throughout all of your marketing. The real key to branding is when your emails, print materials, website, uniforms, and even company vehicles have the same design and message. That way, a customer can see your brand anywhere and associate it with the same professional, memorable business.

**TIP  
5**

# Use Technology To Grow Your Business

In addition to enhancing your marketing efforts, modern technology can improve customer satisfaction, simplify billing, and showcase your previous work.

## Smartphones

A Smartphone is like a computer in your pocket and can provide a solution for just about every aspect of your business. Use an Android or iPhone to send emails on the go, monitor your online marketing efforts, and create powerful content like before and after photos or customer testimonial videos. If your business is mobile, a Smartphone is a must-have business tool.

## Show Off Your Work

Sometimes you complete a job that makes you say "wow, that's great work." When that happens, snap a photo and upload it to your website or social media to show new customers that you're the real deal.

## Get Social

Social media can be great for marketing, and smartphone apps make it even easier to stay connected. All major social media platforms have a free smartphone app, so get that free download and start posting deals, coupons, and service openings on the go.

## Simplify Billing

A Smartphone can be used to track job times, read credit cards, and create invoices online. A quick search for "business apps" should give you a vast array of smartphone tools that will make your finances worlds easier.

## Create Content

All Smartphones have cameras these days, and you should be using them to take pictures of your work and your customers (with their permission). Take before and after photos and shoot customer testimonial videos and post them online. Seeing your work alongside happy customers gives your business personality, builds trust, and gives new customers a reason to give you a call.

## iPads and Tablets

They may seem like big toys, but tablet computers can be effective business and marketing tools for the mobile automotive professional. With just one device you can have a complete portfolio of your work, show testimonials, and display a complete service menu, not to mention the attention you'll get in the local community for letting customers play with your iPad.

**TIP  
6**

# Pay Attention to the Details

The difference between a one-time job and repeat business is often in the details. When you go the extra mile to make sure the customer is happy, you eliminate their need to go anywhere else. Perform every job with customer service in mind and you will find your business getting more return customers, more referrals, and more profits.

## **Treat Every Vehicle like It's Your Own**

Approach every vehicle like it's your own personal project. People care about their vehicles and will pay good money for a professional who reflects that same passion. If it looks like you only offer the bare minimum, the customer will probably move on to someone who looks like they care. Alternately, if a customer is blown away with your work, you are far more likely to get repeat business and more referrals.

## **Have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**

An SOP is used to make sure you are producing consistent results, and also makes your service more efficient. Organize each part of your service into a checklist so you can quickly and easily perform each part of your service without having to worry that you've missed something. Incorporate customer service aspects into your checklist as well, such as a pre-service vehicle assessment, and a post-service thank you note.

## **Don't Let Customers Leave Unhappy**

Letting a customer leave unhappy is a lot like throwing away business. Do a vehicle walk-around after every job to show customers the work that was done and make sure they are satisfied. If more applicable, you can also make a post-service phone call to make sure that customer would happily return. If not, offer to fix whatever is unsatisfactory along with a discount at the next visit. Generosity here is well worth the repeat business later.

## **Online Reviews**

With the emergence of online reviews, it's more important than ever to keep customers happy. Since people can now voice their opinions to thousands with a single post, negative reviews are especially damaging and positive reviews have incredible potential for new business. Strive for 100% positivity, and address negative reviews courteously if you come across them.

**TIP  
7**

# Keep Great Books

Having accurate finances is extremely important to running a good business. Having the right numbers will keep you out of legal trouble, give you more ways to improve, and make for a painless tax season.

## Hire an Awesome Bookkeeper

Having awesome books is a direct result of having an awesome bookkeeper. Hire someone in-house, or you can outsource someone to help out when you need them. Small businesses can hire an outsourced bookkeeper for around \$100 per month. Once you've grown enough, you can then hire a full-time bookkeeper. Whatever your situation, make sure you have a seasoned professional handling your books.

## Track Growth and Improve

They say things that are measured usually tend to improve. Having a clear understanding of your business numbers will give you a clear road map for where you are succeeding, and where you need to improve. Having an accurate record of your profits month to month can help you measure and improve in the following areas.

### Employee ROI

A bookkeeper can help you determine the profit/ hour generation of you and your employees. This is a valuable number for determining the return you are getting from your current employees, and when it is a good idea to hire more.

### Service Popularity

Having good books will show you a clear picture of which of your services are most popular, and which draw the most revenue. Once you know your most valued areas of service, you can put more effort into your biggest money makers, or attempt to improve services that are lagging behind.

### Business Value

If you ever intend to sell your business, solid bookkeeping will ensure that you can sell it for top dollar by showing monthly and annual reports of how profitable your business is. It becomes far more difficult to demand a high price when all you have to show is a box of receipts.

## Get Valued Business Advice

A good bookkeeper can read your figures and translate them into valuable business insights. Though you may just see a bunch of numbers, a bookkeeper can use them to inform you of areas that are problematic, ways to improve efficiency, and opportunities for growth. With a seasoned bookkeeper you can be smarter with your money and smarter with your business.



**TIP  
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# Delegate for Business Growth

If your goal is to grow your one-man business into something bigger, you simply can't expect to do everything yourself. If you're ready and willing, there are plenty of ways you can lighten your load, letting you concentrate on growing your business.

## **Get Help from People You Trust**

When you're ready, start finding some trusted employees to take care of the day-to-day tasks that are keeping you from more important parts of your business. Once you've established your SOP, you just have to find the right people who can deliver the results.

## **Work On Your Business Not In Your Business**

As a business owner, your concerns should be in the growth of your service, not the hands-on, day to day stuff. Doing the actual work will keep you from concentrating on more valuable efforts in marketing, management, and new areas for expansion.

## **Outsource**

Like your bookkeeping, there are other important parts of your business that can be taken care of by reputable third party sources. For example, if you simply don't have the time or expertise to market your business, hire someone to take care of this. Services like marketing are vital to business growth, and should be handled even if you aren't doing it yourself.

**TIP  
9**

# Quality Equipment

Auto reconditioning professionals are artists, and their tools are the paints and brushes. Similar to training, the quality of your equipment will affect the quality of your service and, ultimately, your business success.

## **Quality is Worth the Investment**

When it comes to equipment, quality is always worth the investment. A better quality product will produce better results, make you more efficient, and last longer than low quality equipment that lowers result quality and requires frequent replacement.

## **Do Your Homework**

There are a lot of choices when it comes to auto appearance equipment. Make sure you're getting a high quality product by researching each product online, checking for customer reviews, and asking other professionals for their recommendations.

## **Professional Equipment = Professional Look**

Customers feel in better hands when they see you have the right tools for the job. Having quality tools and keeping them organized and in good shape is another way to communicate your professionalism and get more return business.

**TIP  
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# Be a Premium Service

If you've put in the work to offer a superior service, you should feel comfortable charging customers a high premium for your added effort. One of the biggest challenges of an auto appearance professional is determining the worth of service. Many shoot too low, and end up leaving a lot of money on the table.

## Don't Sacrifice Price for Customers

It may be tempting to collect customers by being the lowest price in town, but that's actually a harmful technique for your business in the long run. Starting your prices low will make it difficult to make more later, and may even suggest to customers that your service is subpar. Though you may be able to grab some quick business by lowering your price tag, these aren't usually the ideal customer for business growth, and you will find you have to keep prices low to keep the customers you have.

## Establish Yourself as a High Quality Service

When paying for a service, customers are willing to pay a bit more (and sometimes a lot more) for quality. After all, what are you paying for if the result is mediocre work? When you charge a premium for your service, the following things will happen.

### Higher Quality Customers

When you market yourself as a premium service, you'll attract customers that have more to spend. These are the customers that value a quality service and will pay more for your extra effort.

### Newer, Nicer Vehicles

Customers who have more to spend typically have the vehicles to spend it on. If you like working on high-end cars, then premium service is the way to go.

### Less Picky Customers

Believe it or not, customers that pay for premium service are less picky about the end result. You should strive for excellence, of course, but these customers will be more forgiving, especially when you offer to correct any mistakes for free.

### More Referrals

Customers don't usually brag about how cheap their auto appearance service is. When you do exceptional work for a higher price, your customers are more likely to tell their friends about who did the work.

### More Return Customers

Customers with more to spend are committed to service more than price. When a high-end client finds a quality service, they tend to stick with the service they like. Customers that are more price sensitive will always be on the prowl for a cheaper source.

### More Profits / Less Work

When your customers pay more for your service, you don't have to do as many jobs to hit your profit goals. Instead of doing a lot of jobs at a low price, you can have more free time and make just as much money.

## Turn to Rightlook.com for Help

Hopefully this list provides some helpful ideas for your auto appearance business. Rightlook.com has been helping auto appearance professionals with their businesses since 1998, offering expert training, quality supplies, and professional marketing for the automotive industry.

To learn how you can get started in this exciting and profitable industry, give us a call at 800.883.3446

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### Resources

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#### Social Media:

[www.facebook.com/business](http://www.facebook.com/business)

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

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#### Local Business Listings:

[www.google.com/placesforbusiness](http://www.google.com/placesforbusiness)

[www.bing.com/businessportal](http://www.bing.com/businessportal)

[listings.local.yahoo.com](http://listings.local.yahoo.com)

[www.merchantcircle.com/corporate/landing/signup.html](http://www.merchantcircle.com/corporate/landing/signup.html)

[www.biz.yelp.com/claiming](http://www.biz.yelp.com/claiming)

[www.hotfrog.com/addyourbusiness.aspx](http://www.hotfrog.com/addyourbusiness.aspx)

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#### Business and Marketing Blogs:

[www.openforum.com](http://www.openforum.com)

[www.small-business.alltop.com](http://www.small-business.alltop.com)

[www.inc.com](http://www.inc.com)

[www.socialmediaexaminer.com](http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com)



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