

BULLETIN

Industry Divisions



Reference No: COVID-19/3-20

Date issued: 19/03/2020

Tips for automotive business centres to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on their business

As the COVID-19 virus continues to wreak havoc on our health, families, communities, businesses and economy, it will begin affecting the automotive industry also, if it hasn't already. In saying this it only makes sense that we should consider the ways it could affect the automotive industry and begin taking steps to offset them now. Below is a list I hope you find helpful in preparing for what we all hope is a short-lived situation that does not affect our businesses and our people.

1. Designate one company representative to keep an eye on and stay up to date with all updates and adjust your company's policies accordingly.

Assigning one person to pay attention to all the changes and updates around the COVID-19 situation does several things. It gives your employees a single point of contact for any issues that could arise in their personal lives, such as school closures, day care closures, family members affected by the virus and them self. It also gives your company peace of mind knowing someone is always paying attention to every situation so the rest of the team can focus on business as usual with minimal disruption. This temporary position could be anyone from an organised Customer Service Representative (CSR) to a non-working family member of your organisation who is known to the employees and staff.

2. Meet with all your employees to implement new sanitary and cleanliness protocols.

By now your employees have seen emails pop up in their inbox from airlines to school systems letting them know a plan is in place so it only makes sense for you to do the same. Take the time to create some temporary daily protocols and post them. Strategies around new housekeeping rules in shared areas, bathrooms and customer areas cleaned 3-4 times a day are smart. Employees should also be reminded of the importance of using common sense on hand washing and other sanitary practices to help prevent the spread of any disease. Even though this virus may not hurt them they could prevent someone else from being affected that otherwise would not have.

3. Put up temporary signage for outside visitors to understand any potential changes your company has put in place.

Another set of important changes in the workplace is how you interact with outside people. Customers, vendors and others will be coming to your shop and will be looking to stay sanitary. By having tissues, hand sanitizer and trash receptacles in plain view for them to see will help ease any concerns. Additionally, signs that mention you have a continuously clean and sanitized facility will help them feel comfortable. Signs around any temporary practices you would like vendors to adhere to are a great idea also.

4. Create a contactless process for all vendor interactions.

On the vendor side, a few simple in and out baskets for invoices coming in and paperwork or checks going out, would be great additions. The less physical contact the better. Having hand sanitizer near those baskets is a bonus. In the parts area you can implement the same ideals. Parts can be set in an area designated as "touch free" or "contactless delivery" and a basket for in and out paperwork. Anyone who opens parts for mirror matching or assembly should consider doing so with plastic gloves. Any other situations that occur daily in your business which requires contact should be looked at and adjusted to minimize contact.

5. Create contactless estimating, sales and valet systems for your customers.

This is a big one. Customers and their hesitation to have their vehicle repaired now will cause a big hit to current sales. While non drive-able claims should not be affected much, we should fully expect non-structural and drive-able claims customers to put off repairs until this situation calms down, and we can't really blame them. Some effective ways to offset this is to promote contactless estimating via mobile apps such as body shop booster, valet pick up and drop off services and to promote sanitary detailing before delivery. Outside of the health scare, decreasing sales will be the biggest impact your business faces. These options along with social media posts of the COVID-19 measures your company has implemented can help tremendously.

6. Repair vs. replace decisions become more important than ever.

Repair vs. replace. This conversation happens every day in collision centres. While the number one factor in determining this must always be guidelines from the OEM, there are many times a shop will replace an item that could have otherwise been repaired while still following said guidelines. Paying closer attention to this now can be a big differentiator for your shop in the event parts and products in the supply chain become difficult to get during the travel restrictions. On the flip side every shop should also pay close attention to not make decisions to disregard OEM recommendations and write repair over replace just to get a job out. This is a scenario that puts people in danger and is not worth the liability on your business.

7. Utilise a touch free or contactless system for field claims or catastrophe drive in locations.

For those that do have catastrophe hail or drive in locations for customers, a contactless system is a good strategy to put in place. Something as simple as asking the customer to legibly write down their name, insurance company, email address, policy number, and mileage on a piece of paper before they arrive to the claims drive. This would create a contactless claims scenario which allows the customer to pull up, stay in the car and expect their estimate in their email without leaving their vehicle. Sales opportunities via one on one communication will lessen but your customer will appreciate that you put their health and safety first, and you can still request them to make an appointment via the emailed estimate.

8. Create a simple and effective company statement and send it to all Employees, Industry partners, vendors, clients, customers, general public and local community.

As mentioned above in #2 you should have a plan in place for your employees. Once it's in place take the time to email it to your employees so everyone has time to read it before you discuss it at the shop level. Additionally, crafting an email to all your industry partners, vendors, clients, scheduled customers and posting the same your precautions on social media pages will give peace of mind to them all and make them feel better about doing business as usual with you.

9. Have executive level discussions within your organization to prepare for staffing changes and adjustments.

There is a likelihood that some of you will have staff that will be out for extended periods of time due to the virus or because they don't have adequate childcare due to school closings. Having an action plan in place now to have backup employees for every position is ideal if you have the contacts and resources to do so. If you don't have those resources, then creating a plan around what you would do during missed employee time, by employee, could pay off huge dividends if the situation arises. Considering night shifts to offset children at home while the other parent works during the day is a smart option.

10. Be a leader. Your organisation will be looking to you for leadership and advice more than ever before.

This doesn't need much explanation. While you may designate one person to be the point of contact for all COVID-19 issues, this does not mean you shouldn't pay attention and stay in contact as well. The more they see you being proactive in caring about your business, your employees and everyone's families, the more they will support you and the business. You are more than a boss or a business owner to them. You are a lifeline; their families and their wellbeing, it is so important we always remember that. Of course this goes for all of us 365 days a year, but this is a great time for a reminder to us all.

By paying attention to your people and the day to day changes that occur while implementing these or other temporary processes, you will minimize the effects of the COVID-19 virus on your business. Feel free to reach out to me anytime if you have any questions or need any assistance in planning for this potential situation.

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