

Emotions Drive Purchasing Decisions

by Paul Rupp

I have learned over the last ten years that who I decide to buy parts from simply boils down to an emotional decision. That has not always been the case.



I buy all kinds of auto parts including starters and alternators. About half come from aftermarket companies like Factory Motor Parts, O'Reilly Auto Parts, and Car Quest, and the other half from local car dealerships.

When I first started in business for myself in 1994 I looked for the lowest price, best quality, and quickest service. Other things I considered were warranty, the ordering process, and payment terms. How I make the decision now is not that cut and dried.

Price. I order most all my parts online now. It is very easy to open the aftermarket Web sites on your PC, look up the part and see who has availability and price. This Internet stuff was a great idea. The accuracy of selecting the correct part is as good as the computerized catalog you have to pick from and my ability to use a mouse. The errors are nearly nonexistent nowadays. The dealerships without Web sites for ordering are the only ones lacking here. However, I have learned to look up the OE part numbers and manufacturer list price online with technical information database companies like Alldata and Mitchell 1. I know the percent of list I get from my dealer vendors so now I have my OE price.

Price is not the answer. I think many people talk about price just because they don't know what else to talk about. For example, a new potential customer will call me and ask how much it costs to get something done to their car, when in reality they want to find out something else.

I have learned to ask questions and talk about our qualifications instead of price. After awhile, the potential customer will finally tell me the real reason

they called. They are not satisfied with what they presently have and would like to be treated better. More respect, honesty and so forth.

Price is like a funny piece of art in the middle of your coffee table. Guests look at it and ask about because it's there, then the conversation goes elsewhere.

Service. I am lucky to be located no more than five miles from almost any aftermarket parts house or dealership. I can easily get anything I need anytime from 15 minutes to three hours on average provided it is in stock. I have nearly zero inventory or need for it.

Most delivery drivers are friendly and patient. I think companies should invest more in their delivery drivers. The driver is an extended salesperson and representative of the company. They are who their customers see.

There have been a few drivers over the years that always come in with a smile, ask how I'm doing. There are days when I actually decide to order from a certain place just because I know the driver will cheer me up if I need it. There is one guy who now has worked for three different companies selling Chrysler parts. Wherever Bob goes, is where I go. I can't explain why, but I think it had to do with the fact he made me feel important when I first got into business starting in my garage. He gave me a charge account and told me someday I would grow out of my garage and own a real shop. I don't ask how much something cost anymore, I just tell him to charge me whatever is fair. He has always been fair.

Quality. Well, what can I say here. Times have really changed. When I was young, I was working at Performance Automotive Machine and Supply in WaKeeney, Kan. The owner Kenny Hacker has a fully operationally machine shop and would rebuild alternators and starters mostly for local folks and farmers. I remember the detail and care that went into each unit and how everything was cleaned and resurfaced and tested on a bench.

The diagrams and parts catalogs were fascinating to me. He would make pieces that were not available. I just knew the units would work flawlessly. Kenny would always explain why the

existing one failed. Sometimes another problem, like a poor ground or excessive load found on the vehicle or implement, had caused the failure. This was the standard of quality I learned initially—that feeling of security knowing the care that went into the work.

Things are so different nowadays. I order an alternator from a parts house and they all look beautiful on the outside, but looks can be deceiving. I remember the first time I ordered a less expensive "new brand" alternator to find it was actually a brand new unit inside the box at a lower cost than the reman units I was buying. Very impressive until it quit working the following day. The big parts house supplier had no idea who actually made the part, only it was from overseas. I stick with the name brand reman units which work better for me. I have developed a gut feeling about some parts over the years.

Warranty. The term lifetime warranty means nothing to me. In fact, I have found lifetime warranty parts to be of lesser quality than one year warranty parts. I do not understand this completely, but the brake industry helps.

A lifetime brake pad sold at any local chain brake store is usually the lowest cost and quality material. The fine print usually says the brake pad itself is covered for life, but the rotors, caliper and hardware are not. We get lots of new customers with squeaky brakes and found the low quality brake pads contain a high metal content. There is such high metal, you can see small copper and brass-looking metal shavings embedded in the pad material. These are big enough to pick out with a screw driver. The high metal content creates a lot of heat and noise. Heat warps rotors and cooks calipers. Do the math.

Labor warranty claims are a thing of the past. I always felt a company who has a warranty claim process could do so because they actually have confidence their products will not fail. What a great feeling that gives me. I usually look for the warranty claim companies, but I've never had to process a claim with one yet.

There exist some common phrases I have heard over time including; "We offer low price, great service and high

quality, which two would you like?"

"You get what you pay for" is so true. It costs money to research and test and source quality materials. One time I purchased an unusually low priced power steering pump for a Lexus. The part was a third the cost of what I thought it should be. It sure looked good in the box. I replace the part two more times under a parts-only warranty (no labor) until *finally* spending the extra for the OE pump.

I understand the phrase "If you have a problem with anything, we'll take care of you." This phrase can only come from a source with lots of integrity and honesty. I have a dealership parts man named Bill who uses this phrase. Bill came to my shop over his lunch hour once with his old-style fiche parts display machine to help find a special heater hose for a problem car we had. I have never stopped buying parts from this guy no matter what, because he always goes to any length to take care of me.

Sales pitches presented from the various vendors are very interesting, especially when you first get into business. I was dazzled by them all and signed up for every program they offered. After a few years I took a Dale Carnegie Sales Course to learn better sales skills for myself. Once I knew the secrets of a good sales pitch, I enjoyed the process much more.

Today, I don't sign up for every program offered. But I have a weakness—I love a really good sales pitch. First, I realize the guy is good and he is using all the professional skills, like asking me all the questions and complimenting me and making me feel smart and important. My mind realizes this, but for some reason, I just love to be treated this way. Next I find myself thinking, "Maybe I do need this product." The next thing I know, I'm walking out of the store with a \$350 flat screen monitor wondering what happened. The next day I wake up a little remorseful and laugh at myself. I guess the final step in the process is me looking at the monitor this very minute justifying the whole deal. My point is again, it's an emotional thing.

I will be attending the ERA Show in Atlantic City this year for the first time. I love this kind of stuff. My experience

with alternators and starters is limited to on-car system diagnosis and replacement, no rebuilding. At my shop we specialize in finding reasons why the same car keeps going through alternators once a year. I am very interested in finding a new supplier for my business. I hope to find that emotional connection I have tried to describe above.

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