



The Road to Inclusive Workshops

How more inclusive workshops
can help customers whilst
driving business growth.





Foreword

Let's face it: visiting a workshop usually means something has gone wrong with your vehicle and you need help, or it needs servicing.

At Castrol, we're on a mission to make sure visiting a workshop – specifically an independent workshop – is an enjoyable experience for everyone. As a longstanding partner of the community of thousands of independent workshops globally, we recognize the important role workshops play for continued freedom to move from place to place.

As part of our continuous efforts to help workshops thrive, we have commissioned research to better understand perceptions of them. This should enable us to make them more inclusive for everyone. This study – which we hope will be the first of several – focuses on the experiences of women, and identifying the

barriers or hesitations in their customer journey at a workshop. Through this lens, *The Road to Inclusive Workshops* reveals learnings for how workshops might become more inclusive spaces and attract a wider customer base overall.

The research was conducted in seven markets – China, Germany, India, Malaysia, Poland, Thailand and the United States – and throughout the report, you can read key market insights that could help or inspire independent workshops in other geographies. At their core, the findings reveal five critical stops workshop owners could consider on the road to improving the inclusivity of their business.

Inclusive workshops benefit everyone

We at Castrol believe that inclusive and more welcoming workshops can benefit everyone. They benefit customers, who will have better experiences when getting their vehicle fixed, but they also benefit the workshops, who will be better able to serve more drivers.

By exploring the experiences and expectations of female customers today, this study hopes to show how workshops might be able to adapt their current offering and reveal a road to more inclusive workshops.

Nicola Buck
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About this research

The Road to Inclusive Workshops presents the findings of global research to uncover women's perceptions and experiences of independent workshops. The research was conducted in 2021, in seven markets: China, Germany, India, Malaysia, Poland, Thailand and the United States.

Research in each market comprised five focus group discussions with 5-6 female customers, and five separate in-depth interviews with owners or managers of independent workshops.

Focus group discussions were 2 hours and 15 minutes each, and participants spanned

different ages, life stages and relationship statuses. All participants had to own a car and be jointly or solely responsible for its maintenance, and all were asked to carry out a visit to an independent workshop and questionnaire ahead of their discussion.

Five stops on the road to more inclusive workshops

Every workshop is unique, and ways of working vary between geographies. Still, our research reveals five key stops in every customer journey; from their first impression of a workshop through to post-service engagement.

Stop 1.

Arriving at the workshop

The first conversation between a customer and a workshop sets the tone of the relationship. However, many customers have already started to form an opinion about a workshop before even speaking to a member of staff.



Parking access

Customers feel more comfortable when they can see there is somewhere safe and easy to park their vehicle when they arrive at a workshop. For inner-city workshops or those in industrial areas, indicating where drivers should leave their car (even if it is a short-term 'drop-off' space) helps to prevent worries about parking in tight spaces or leaving their car somewhere unsafe.



Signage

Clear signage – using large letters, well-lit branding, and visible signage from the road – gives customers confidence that they're in the right place. New customers may also need directions for parking and where to go next, whether that's a separate reception space or a service counter at the front of the shop.



Clear communication

Describing mechanical symptoms can be difficult, especially for customers that lack confidence in vehicle maintenance. Diagnosing a problem and managing expectations is easier with clear communication and, in this research, both customers and workshop owners emphasised the value of patience and respect in these initial conversations.

Under the hood in India

In India, some workshops offer a virtual diagnosis before customers make an in-person appointment. This gives mechanics and customers an opportunity to gauge what the problem might be, estimate the potential cost, and manage expectations ahead of the initial in-person visit.



A customer in Germany describes a typical challenge that could be eased with clear signage:

"I come directly into the bay where all the staff are standing, but I have no idea who I should talk to about the problem I have. I don't want to go in, so I knock, but nobody hears it because the radio is on loud."

Customer in Germany, aged 25-37

Stop 2.

Entering the workshop

Are customers welcomed into a tidy, well-lit space? Or do they meet their mechanic among the tools and grease of the workshop floor?



A designated reception area

It's easier to communicate away from the noise and activity of the main workshop. And, having a separate space that's focused on delivering service has the added benefit of keeping customers at a safe distance from hazardous equipment. Customers also feel confident when they see a designated person managing phone calls, appointments, and customer communication.



Clean and bright spaces

Customers believe that clean, tidy spaces indicate a well-run business. They describe an ideal workshop reception or office space as having natural light, being well organised and having neutral décor.



Female representation

Several women in the research shared positive perceptions of workshops with female staff, associating them with inclusivity.

A customer shares their view of seeing female employees:

"It would be ideal if a woman is working there. It's not important, but it's cool. Where there is a woman there, it's different, somehow. It's about inclusivity."

Customer in Germany, 25 - 37

Under the hood in Thailand

In Thailand, where it is respectful to remove your shoes before entering a home or shop, mechanics observed that women are unsure about whether to remove their shoes in the workshop. A clear distinction between the workshop area (where footwear should be worn for safety), and the reception area may clear up confusion and make both parties more comfortable.



Stop 3. Vehicle repairs

Handing your car keys over to someone else can be daunting, so long-term relationships – that are built on trust, respect and transparency – can help customers feel at ease. Considerate communications and explicit pricing are some ways to encourage this.



Trust over time

Many customers choose independent workshops because they want a more personal level of service – for example, mechanics remembering what services have been carried out previously, or remembering small details about the customer or vehicle. If workshops can consistently deliver this positive experience, they may be rewarded with repeat business from satisfied customers.



Respectful communication

Bridging differences in technical knowledge can be a challenge for both sides of the conversation. But customers trust mechanics who are prepared to explain repairs and maintenance work and offer helpful answers to their questions, which may develop into future business.



Transparent pricing

One of the biggest customer concerns when using an independent workshop is uncertainty about pricing: how much will a service cost, what's a normal price for labour, how much are components? A price list for routine jobs and common parts – combined with itemised receipts – sets expectations and helps customers understand what they are paying for, building trust in their chosen workshop.

Under the hood in India

Customers in India tend to feel that their car is symbolic of their independence and success, which is impacted if their vehicle isn't returned clean. Workshops could help maintain customer pride in their vehicles – and develop that relationship of trust and respect – by cleaning away dirt or spills that occur during a service.

Alleviating customer concerns about costs can build trust:

"I feel like sometimes when you go to these mom-and-pop places, you don't know the set price, but you can go to dealerships, and you can see a tire alignment is going to be exactly this much. So, knowing beforehand how much I'm going to drop would be wonderful."

Customer in the United States, aged 25-37

"I use a smaller workshop because I trust the person there. I have known him for quite a few years now, and I feel in much better hands with him than with an anonymous workshop."

Customer in Germany, aged 25-37

Stop 4.

Waiting for the vehicle

Mechanics don't want to feel watched while they work, and customers don't want to be in the way. Workshops offering a dedicated waiting area with amenities – or that can work with a local café – can help customers relax and create a more comfortable environment for everyone.



Space away from the shop floor

While their car is being serviced, customers describe their preferred waiting area as being separate from the activity of the workshop, but with a window (or camera) to help them understand the repair work being carried out. In smaller workshops, customers don't mind leaving the workshop if they can receive a phone call or text message when their car is ready.



Cover essential needs

Workshops can become a more comfortable space for customers and employees by offering a small selection of refreshments – water, tea, coffee – and providing access to well-maintained restroom facilities. Customers express that, ideally, toilets should be separated by gender and be different from those used by workshop staff, but preferences vary between regions.



Additional amenities

If they're waiting on-site, customers suggest having a TV, magazines or a table where they could quietly work to pass the time. Having a selection of car accessories to browse and buy could turn into an opportunity for mechanics to upsell. In smaller workshops, staff could direct customers to nearby cafés, shops or amenities, so that customers can complete other errands in their day.

Under the hood in China and Malaysia

How customers prefer to spend their time varies. In China, customers generally prioritised relaxation, and saw the time waiting for their vehicle as an opportunity to visit a salon.

For others, facilitating religious practices or worship was important, and the focus group based in Malaysia suggested the inclusion of a prayer room.

Keeping workshops clean should be front-of-mind for workshops:

"I notice female consumers don't use the toilet and ask how long [the repair] will take. So, I try to clean it daily. Sometimes they don't want to take off their shoes to enter the lobby because they think the floor is not clean enough."

Independent workshop owner, Thailand

"There should be a proper seating area, reception and a clean washroom – that's a must – or even a café where I can go and be nearby. Or, the seating area can have a glass wall, which will allow me to look at the car. There can be leaflets to educate us on car maintenance there as well."

Customer in the US, aged 25-37

Step 5.

Post-Service and after-sales

Customers like to understand the changes to their car and what they're being charged for. A great post-service experience also increases the likelihood of customers returning.



Communication through the transaction

Many workshop customers are looking for a better understanding of their vehicle. Mechanics can build rapport by offering to walk customers through the work that's been carried out and explaining the lifecycle of particular components. Then, when it comes to payment, an itemised receipt is much easier for customers to follow. This communication could potentially encourage customers to bring their car in more frequently.



Additional services

The different aspects of car maintenance can feel overwhelming for some customers, and many like the idea of being able to tackle multiple needs at once. If workshops can offer additional services like professional car cleaning – or partner with a nearby business that can – it gives customers more reasons to bring their car in for routine work, and associates the workshop with being an all-round solution provider.



Securing future business

In other service industries, appointments often end with booking the next one, and customers who are opted-in can choose to receive reminder notifications by text or email. Not only is this a quick way to secure future business, it helps customers learn how often certain maintenance is required. It also sends the clear message: that the customer's business is valued.

"I have known the mechanic for a long time, and now I feel ok about asking questions – initially I felt uncomfortable because of his attitude. He also knows my car and the issues by now."

Customer in India

Under the hood in Poland

Customers in Poland suggested that training programmes could help mechanics learn new communication approaches and provide a better customer service.



Inclusive workshops: Driving better business

Like their customers, no two independent workshops are the same. Their unique location, size, facilities and specialisms are what attract their customers in the first place – and means there is no ‘best’ route when it comes to the road to more inclusive workshops.

However, the research highlights the commonalities that do exist: customers and workshop teams around the world are seeking a positive and easy experience, based on principles of respect and politeness. When something’s gone wrong with their car, customers’ want to take it somewhere they feel listened to, regardless of their level of vehicle expertise, background or gender.

When workshops get this core part of the service right, customers feel more positively about taking their car in for repairs and are more likely to return to the same workshop or recommend it to others. By focusing on creating more inclusive workshops, owners can drive better outcomes for both their business and their customers.



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Our passion for performance, combined with a philosophy of working in partnership, has enabled Castrol to develop lubricants and greases that have been at the heart of numerous technological feats on land, air, sea and space for over 100 years.

We’re here to accelerate our customers progress through innovative technologies, premium products and superior service experiences. We do this by not only providing them with quality products but also quality advice on managing their consumer journeys. The Castrol brands and products are crucial to achieving this.

Today, Castrol is helping drive sustainability with our strategy that sets out aims for 2030 to help save waste, reduce carbon and improve lives.

Castrol is part of the bp group and serves customers and consumers in the automotive, marine, industrial and energy sectors. Our branded products are recognized globally for innovation and high performance through our commitment to premium quality and cutting-edge technology.

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