

Branded Successful

Brand image is high on Tony Ruddick's agenda. He's a mechanic with a flair for marketing his automotive repair business, AJR Automotive. When *Auto* visited the Croydon workshop, we found Tony had put many great marketing ideas into practice, a move reflected in a healthy and happy customer base.



Tony tends to the garden, top, and the AJR team show off their certificates, bottom

Photo: Matthew

AJR Automotive – for major and minor repairs, service and tune – stands out as a smart business, sporting an eye-catching British racing-green logo with matching letterhead, business brochures and business cards. The same green reinforces the brand message on the paintwork and trim around the workshop and reception, from carpets to doors to vertical blinds – even certificate boards and picture frames. Staff, of course – in this case mechanics Bruce Feben and Paul Tate – wear overalls and jumpers bearing the AJR logo.

Tony Ruddick established AJR in 1989 and has since expanded his marketing initiatives to include a colourful and informative newsletter for customers. The current newsletter aptly carries a lead story on 'Why your car is like an Olympic athlete' and also features an article about LPG pricing and tips on travelling with young children. The regular newsletter is a mix of topical news, motoring tips, such as winter driving or towing trailers, and reminders about pre-Easter servicing, for example. One edition included a complimentary CD-ROM on the Maroonadah Automotive Employment project. Tony also uses the VACC logo in his publications.

AJR also sponsors the local football team and Tony, who has an Associate Diploma of Business in Marketing, provides gift vouchers to

save customers money on work performed by the business, encouraging them to return. He also invites customers to share improvement ideas, through a customer survey, and if customers have forgotten about AJR after all that, Tony also hands out fridge magnets.

If there is ever a quiet time, Tony organises leaflet drops or tends to the garden to keep up the company image.

So what is the result of this focus on marketing? What every business is searching for: a steady and increasing customer base.

"The feedback is really positive," Tony said. "According to our customers, we are doing all the right things. They like the look of the place and say they are confident in AJR's ability to keep their vehicles running smoothly. At the end of the day, that is what it's all about – providing assurances and backing-up our professional image with professional services."

Clearly Tony, who is a qualified mechanic, VicRoads licensed vehicle tester, certified LPG installer and EPA authorised air conditioner servicer, has an eye for detail.

This is reflected in the company business plan, which sets out short- and long-term objectives, action plans, budgets, and ways to increase the company profile and customer base, much of which is achieved through community networking. The plan also contains important statistical data, including client profiles and target markets.

But Tony hasn't done it all alone. He credits his partner Vicki and father Jack for their unfailing support, and old school friend Grant Clark has provided ideas and enthusiasm.

Little has escaped Tony's notice: now that the reception has been developed into a child-friendly zone, with toys and books for toddlers, he's onto the next project: developing a company web site.

And if you are wondering if any brand image opportunities had been overlooked, Tony also sends Christmas cards to customers. In AJR's racing green, of course. **ATA**