

# Counter Sales

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At Specialty Products Company we understand that wheel alignment is more than just installing parts. The sale at the counter is the single most important part of the process. Without the sale at the counter there are no parts for the Tech to install. The purpose of this packet is to help the counter person in the sale of alignment and after-market alignment parts. This packet has selling tips to help you explain the basic wheel alignment angles to your customer. It will also tell you what to look for when you inspect your customer's car. Finally, it will help you qualify customers, to assure that the customer gets the type of alignment that is correct for them.

Your goal, along with ours, is to produce maximum sales and service profits.

There are two questions that the customer will usually ask when approached with an alignment sale. You need to have the correct answer for them before you start the sale.

## A. Why are we doing the alignments?

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### Tire Wear

One of the most important reasons a customer needs an alignment is that of tire wear. It is one of the things that a customer can see and it can be corrected through a proper alignment. However, once a tire starts to wear in a set pattern it will continue to wear in that same pattern. A proper alignment will only somewhat reduce that wear.

### Handling/Safety

Proper alignment will give the vehicle a more stable ride and better control in inclement weather and severe road conditions. An out of aligned vehicle will tend to pull or drift out of the traffic lanes or overreact to small changes in the steering wheel presenting a traffic hazard.

### Comfort

An out of aligned vehicle will constantly require steering effort by the driver. Correcting for a pull or having to compensate for an oversteer or understeer condition caused by misalignment will fatigue drivers on long trips.

### Parts Wear

A vehicle with loose or worn parts cannot be properly aligned. Each of these parts is a pivot point of the vehicle's suspension and any movement will allow the vehicle to shift out of alignment. An improper alignment puts undue load stress on all suspension parts as the vehicle travels down the road. Loose parts will also allow the suspension joints to bump and cause premature parts failure.

## B. How do vehicles go out of alignment?

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### Parts Wear

As a vehicle ages the parts wear thus allowing the suspension to move changing the alignment angles as the car is driven down the road.

### Accidents

Accidents from major accidents to little fender benders can create a change in the vehicle geometry. More vehicles are designed and manufactured with a unibody construction. These vehicles are more susceptible to alignment changes with minor damage to the vehicle.

### Not set at the factory

Most of the vehicles manufactured today have little or no provision for adjustment. They are not adjusted at the factory but built in jig welds. Also the manufacturers have increased the specification tolerance for alignment in the last few years, allowing more misaligned vehicles to leave the factory.

### Someone set it with equipment (or Tech) out of calibration

Alignment calibration equipment is a sensitive measuring device, many are electronic with computers calculating the readings. If the equipment is damaged or out of calibration it can lead to a misaligned vehicle. Technicians play an important role in the alignment of the vehicle. With the many changes that have occurred in the alignment industry in the last few years, some technicians have not kept pace with these changes. A technician using specifications or equipment that is outdated or out of calibration may not be able to correctly align a vehicle. And a technician who is not up to date on all the advances and changes in alignment technology may not be qualified to align today's vehicles.



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## Consider this question. What is the most important part of selling?

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### Is it...

- Product knowledge?*
- Selling yourself first?*
- Having confidence?*
- Price?*
- Proper inventory?*

These are important factors of selling, and all of them take place during the selling process. The first thing you have to do is get the customer's attention. Talking to someone who isn't listening is a frustrating, demoralizing and unrewarding experience. You can't sell anything if you don't have the person's attention.

Most service sales are lost in the first two minutes of conversation. Your first comments and the following statements decide whether you win, attract and hold the customer's attention.

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## There are 5 basic steps to follow when you contact any customer.

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- 1. Get the customer's attention and confidence.*
- 2. Assume the sale, use a positive approach.*
- 3. Establish a legitimate concern to justify spending the money.*
- 4. Volunteer credit terms. Make it easy to do business with you.*
- 5. Ask for the order. Ask them to buy from you.*

By following these next five steps you can be consistent in your sales. Here are the five steps detailed and explained.

### Step 1. Get the customer's attention.

You will get their attention and confidence with a single statement.

Such as...

*I have your car in for alignment and have uncovered a problem, can I show you?*

This gets their attention immediately by telling them there is a problem. It establishes your professionalism because you uncovered the problem, and you gain their

confidence by asking them to personally view the problem.

### Step 2. Assume the sale, use a positive approach.

Use the next statement. "I know you want to take good care of your car. After your service is finished, ask for me and I'll show you or give you the worn parts." Assume the customer will purchase the alignment, and offer to return the worn parts. This does two things: one, it increases the customer's confidence in you and secondly, it establishes that the need is real.

Don't predetermine what the customer will or will not purchase. This is a common mistake that you will always need to guard against.

Give yourself and your customer credit for having enough intelligence to understand their needs and that something has to be done about it. When you predetermine what a customer will buy you are robbing that customer of the chance to have their car repaired correctly the first time. No one wants to be guilty of that.

Think of it like this. If you said to a customer, "You don't want you car fixed right do you?"

Do you think they would reply, "Thanks, that's just what I was looking for, someone to half fix it and for that repair to be wrong.?"

By predetermining what they will or will not buy you are doing the same thing. How you react to the first "NO" is very important. The first "NO" only means that they don't understand what you are telling them.

### Step 3. Establish a legitimate concern necessary to justify spending the money.

Continue your positive selling by using words in your conversation such as: "must", "have to", "necessary". Never use "should", "maybe", or "I think". Positive words convince the customer you believe there is a need for this service. When the customer realizes that there is no doubt in your mind, there will no doubt in theirs.

### Step 4. Volunteer credit terms. Make it easy to do business with you.

Price is always a concern. Suggesting credit overcomes this objection before it is mentioned and will overcome the embarrassment of having to ask for it.



## Counter Sales - Continued

### Step 5. Ask for the order. Ask them to buy from you.

1. Closing the sale is done by asking for the order.
2. Ask them to buy from you.
3. Tell them when it will be ready.
4. Describe any warranty.
5. Discuss the price, offer credit terms.
6. Thank them for their business.

### There are two things that prevent you from getting the sale. They are:

#### 1. Failure to check the car.

The car comes in, and the requested service is done, the car goes out. If no one inspects the car, your sale stops right there.

#### 2. Not performing a complete inspection.

The car comes in, the requested work is done, the car is checked for the related need, the need is corrected and out it goes. To achieve maximum profits, a complete inspection must be performed.

You prepare the customer for complete inspection when they come in. A statement like, "While your service is being completed, I will have my tech inspect your car at no charge to you. If he finds anything, I'll give you a call and let you know about it. If that's all right with you, would you please sign this work order on this line?"

The technician can then complete the inspection knowing it is O.K. with the customer.

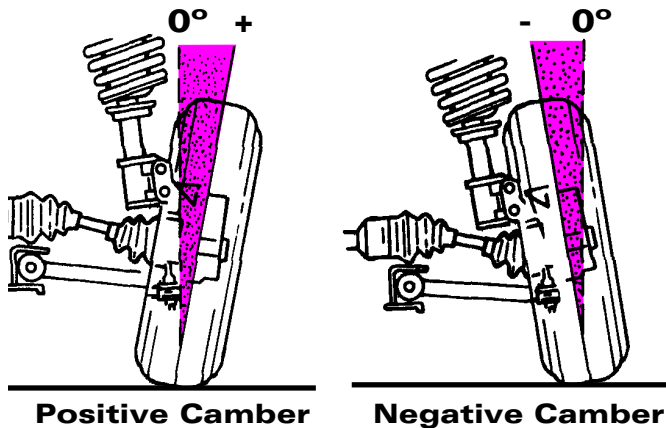
## Alignment Angles

In order for you to sell wheel alignment you will first have to educate the customer. The average customer does not understand the idea of wheel alignment, therefore you should explain it so it is easily understood.

### Camber

Camber is the easiest alignment angle to understand because it is visible to the customer. Look at the tire from the front of the vehicle, if the top of the tire leans out the tire has positive camber. If the top of the tire leans in, the tire has negative camber. One of the simplest ways to

illustrate this is to use a tire from your showroom floor. As you tilt the tire the customer can see how running on



the edge will increase tire wear and not allow the tire to have its true footprint on the road.

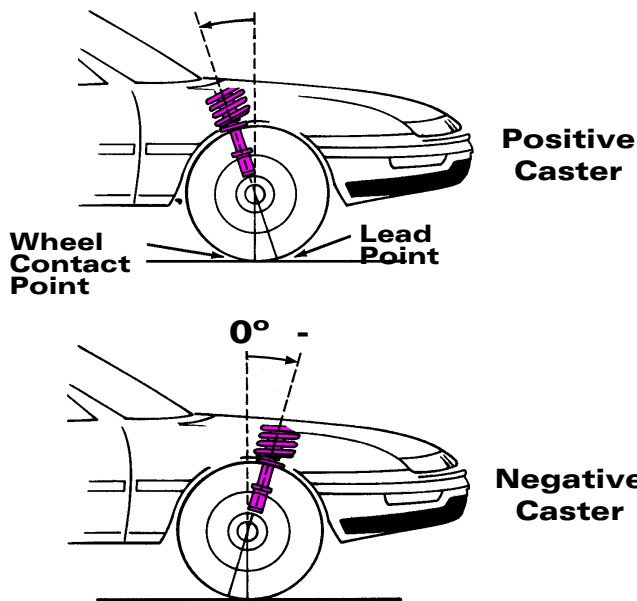
By using this method we can explain rapid tire wear, and show how the tire should properly contact the road. This one demonstration will explain how correct camber will increase the life of the tire and improve the handling and control of the vehicle at the same time. Remember that camber is the same tilt of the tire at the top, regardless if it is front or rear camber. Few vehicles manufactured today come with camber adjusters. To correct camber on a misaligned vehicle you may need to add an aftermarket kit.

### Caster

Caster is harder to explain, because caster measures through the upper and lower pivot points, which are either the upper and lower ball joints or the upper strut mount and the lower ball joint, not visible to the customer. Caster is also measured as positive or negative. When the upper pivot point is behind the lower one, the caster is positive. To illustrate positive caster, thinking of a bicycle will help. When you look at the front wheel, you notice that the front fork tilts toward the rear of the bicycle. This extends the weight in a line at the front of the wheel. Positive caster helps to control the stability of the bicycle. Unfortunately this also has a couple of drawbacks, in that the same line that adds stability, adds to the road shock.

When a vehicle with positive caster hits a pothole or curb, the impact transmits up this line to the body, resulting in a large noise. This is more prevalent in McPherson Strut systems than in the older Short/Long Arm suspensions. To illustrate negative caster lets look at a shopping cart. With a shopping cart the caster wheel is always

trailing, this negative caster allows the cart to be easily steered. However, stability is at a minimum with nega-

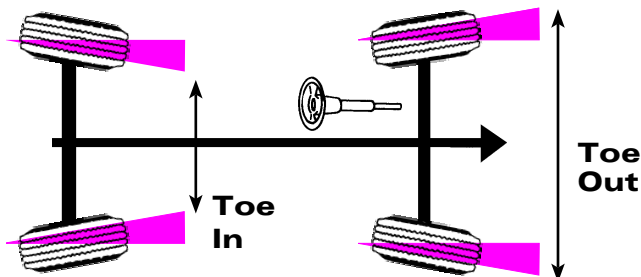


tive caster.

Negative caster tends to hang in the cracks of the road and allows the vehicle to wander as it seeks its center. Positive caster is the normal setting on the cars of today. Positive caster gives the vehicle stability and gives the steering wheel returnability, both qualities are desired by the customer. Many manufacturers have increased the caster angles in the positive direction in recent years as they have reduced the weight of the vehicle. They have done this to help maintain stability on these shorter, lighter and smaller vehicles.

### Toe

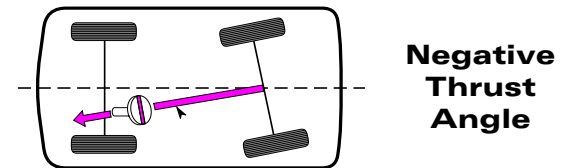
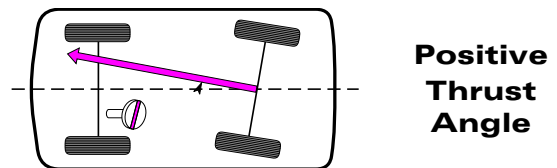
Toe is the most important of all the alignment angles. The reason for this is nothing wears tires more quickly than incorrect toe. Toe is the measurement of the distance between the front of the tires and the rear of the tires. If the distance between the front of the tires is



smaller than the distance between the rear, the tires are toe-in. That is positive toe. If the distance between the rear of the tires is smaller than the distance between the front, the tires are toe-out. That is negative toe. Toe can be demonstrated to the customer by using his feet. If they move their toes closer together than their heels then they have toe-in, and if their toes are set wider than their heels they have toe out. Being out of specification on toe even a small amount in either direction will cause excessive tire wear and handling problems as you increase driving speed. Having either too much or too little toe will cause the tires to wear in a saw tooth pattern on the front and a diagonal wear pattern on the rear. Toe settings that are only 1/8th of an inch off specification is equal to dragging the tire sideways 16.5 feet for every mile you drive.

### Thrust Angle

Thrust angle is the last angle you need to explain to the customer. The thrust angle is the direction that the



rear wheels are pointing. With a positive thrust angle the rear wheels point to the right but the car will try to pull to the left. With a negative thrust angle, the thrust angle points to the left and the car will try to steer to the right. To explain thrust angle to a customer ask if they have ever backed a car down the street. When you back a car down the street you are steering with the thrust angle, and a small movement at the steering wheel can cause a large movement in the car.

### Why does this customer need an alignment?

There are several reasons why a customer will need an alignment. One of these is maintenance. Alignment must be checked at the very least as noted in the



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Owner's Manual. On vehicles prone to tire wear, or performance vehicles designed to handle well, the alignment should be checked at least twice a year to catch problems before they become expensive.

Once of the most important reasons why a customer would need an alignment is tire wear. Because tire wear is a visible sign of misalignment, it is possible for the customer to see it and have it corrected. However, frequently you will need to point out tire wear when you see it. When customers bring in their car for oil changes or other normal maintenance, inspect the tires for odd wear patterns. There is always a reason for abnormal tire wear, and often it will be because of incorrect tire pressure or loose or worn parts. Bringing tire wear problems to the attention of the customer gives you an opportunity to check for the loose or worn parts that are causing the abnormal wear.

It is impossible to properly align a vehicle with worn parts because the parts directly interconnect with the alignment angles. One example is a worn upper ball joint or strut mount. Each of these parts is a pivot point of the vehicle suspension. When either of these parts move because of wear, it will change the camber, caster and toe as the car drives down the road. Strut or parts replacement is also an excellent opportunity to correct alignment problems. Since replacement of parts requires that the alignment be checked, even strut replacement gives you the opportunity to save customer's money, assure the future alignment is adjustable and correct alignment problems all at the same time.

If you have eaten "Fast Food", you know whether you drive through or walk up to the counter, if you ask for a cheeseburger and a coke the next thing you hear is "Would you like French fries with that?" This is suggestive selling. You have the opportunity to use this style also. When new struts are installed it is a great opportunity to sell alignment cams if they haven't been installed earlier. By selling the cams at the time of strut replacement you do several things.

One, you will save you customer money. Because the strut is already out, the labor time is saved. Secondly, you have made this non-adjustable car adjustable for future alignments and you will make your Technician happy because he doesn't have to remove the strut again.

## Before you can sell alignment you must ask the correct questions.

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*Questions like... Does it pull?*

*How does it handle?*

*Does it steer hard?*

*How does it ride?*

*Why do you think you need an alignment?*

*What type of driving do you do?*

*All city, highway or a combination?*

*You need to look at the car.*

*How is its condition? Can you see new parts?*

After you ask these questions you are closer to identifying what type of alignment your customer needs.

You have to understand that no one buys wheel alignment. What they buy is what alignment does for them. There are basic reasons why someone would come to your shop for alignment. These are the same reasons why they install new tires. They are for safety or for peace of mind; comfort or to maintain the vehicle's value; performance and to lower operating costs.

When the customer comes in with a Taurus SHO you will be talking performance. Chances are good this person didn't buy this car just to go shopping. So as you talk about V rated tires, you will also be talking about making this car handle as it is designed to.

When the customer comes in with a Lincoln, you will be talking about tires that return the car to its ride and handling as if it just came off the showroom floor. At the same time you will talk about an alignment that will also extend the life of the tire while it returns the ride to that same showroom quality.

When a Volvo comes in, it is time to talk about safety. This person didn't buy this car because of its sporty looks, they bought it for safety. As you talk about having safe tires on this car you will also be talking about unstable steering, and minimizing tire and part wear.

The final reason for alignment would be to minimize operating cost. As this person is looking at you value priced tires, you will be talking about alignment to get the best possible fuel mileage and the maximum amount of driving mileage from these tires.

## Types of Alignment

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There are three types of alignment and in this section we will go over each type and their benefits to your customer.





## Counter Sales - Continued

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If you go to the page shown in the application chart you can find a picture of the part, an installation illustration and an estimated installation time.

### Explaining Basic Alignment Adjusters.

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To make sure the customer understands what is being done to his vehicle you will need to explain the adjusters that are being installed in his vehicle. One good way is to get a sample of the adjuster and then show it to the customer while using the Sourcebook to illustrate how it will be installed in the vehicle.

Some of the basic adjusters are shims, cams and sleeves as well as factory adjustments which may be made on the vehicle.

#### Shims

Shims are devices that allow the camber and/or toe to be adjusted with one application. A shim is an apparatus that has different thicknesses, depending on how the shim is set on the rear spindle of the vehicle. Specialty Products' EZ Shim allows several changes to be made while using only one shim. Shims can help correct tire wear, correct crooked steering wheels, and correct pulling problems.



Specialty Products' EZ Shim™

#### Cams

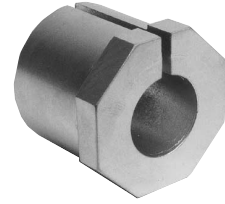
Cams are offset devices that allow the vehicle's spindle to be moved in or out, while making a camber adjustment. There are cams that work on both the front and rear of today's FWD vehicles. A cam rotates to make alignments easy to perform. With this type of adjuster there is no longer a need to grind, or elongate the vehicles strut holes. By using cams you can be assured of a quick, easy, safe and professional job.



Specialty Products' EZ Cam™ XR

#### Sleeves

Truck sleeves are rotating devices that are manufactured with different offsets to allow the Camber and Caster to be fine tuned to manufacturer's specifications. By using sleeves the alignment technician can simply rotate the sleeve, and by watching the alignment equipment adjust the alignment of the trucks. The sleeves take care of tire wear problems and pulling problems that can occur in trucks.



Specialty Products' 23130 Sleeve

### Let's review.

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- Camber is the tilt of the top of a tire. When it leans away from the vehicle it is positive, when it leans towards the vehicle it is negative.
- Caster adds stability to steering. It also helps the wheels to return to center.
- Toe is the main tire wearing angle. Toe-in wears the outside of the tire, toe-out wears the inside of the tire.
- Thrust angle is the direction that the rear wheels are pointing the vehicle. A positive thrust angle pushes the vehicle to the left, while a negative thrust angle pushes the vehicle to the right.
- Determine adjustability and parts needed to correct the problem.
- Preventive maintenance, tire wear and worn parts are the main reasons for alignment.
- Suggestive selling works as well at your front counter as at the fast food counter.
- Ask the right questions. Qualify your customer for the alignment that correctly fills their needs and don't forget to ask your customer for the sale.
- Don't cheat your customer by assuming that you know what they will or will not buy.