

Volume

1

HOW TO...

Developed By The National Autobody Council (NABC)

HOST AN OPEN HOUSE

National Auto Body Council



On Behalf Of NABC

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The NABC's Of An Open House (Customer)

Everything you wanted to know about hosting an amazing Open House in the collision industry, but were afraid to ask.

This guide was created for YOU, the automotive professional. Its specific purpose: education. An education that we felt was not currently available. We want to help you reach your community. Make your customers your neighbors. We want to help you host an open house.

Did you every wonder what an open house was or why you should host one? We at the National Autobody Council (NABC) did. We also knew that your competitor did, as well as Bob and Jane down the street at Generic Bodyshop USA., and thousands of other body shops around the country as well.

For this reason, we at the National Autobody Council (NABC), wanted to help you join the growing ranks of businesses who are being welcomed into their new communities by hosting open houses. This booklet, the first in our series of HOW TO Guides will provide you and your business with the direction necessary to host not only a wonderful open house, but become an integral part of your community.

We at NABC feel it is important to not only expand NABC community outreach, but to welcome it with open arms. Strong and ethical businesses help create strong and ethical neighborhoods. We want our customers to not only see our businesses, but our behaviors as well. And through strong ethical business practices, we can help make that happen. We can make the industry better. We can help reach and strengthen our ever growing neighborhoods and communities, and show them a side of the collision industry more of them should see. A side we at NABC like to believe is our true side, our real side, our ethical side. A side dedicated to the values of fair play, honest hard work, and dependable repairs. A side that charges a fair price for a fair job and at the end of the day is an asset to their community.

Thus, we want to show you how to host an open house for the consumer. In the following sections, we will give you a brief overview of the 9 major steps required when hosting or planning an open house. Good Luck...

Event Planning

There are 9 basic steps in creating or hosting an open house. The first step is to create an event plan. But just what is an event plan?

Inviting Your Audience

- Target audience should be a custom fit if possible.
- The target audience you define determines the type of event you have.
- If you have different types of customers you can assign a different day to each:
 - Families of your employees
 - Insurers
 - People in your neighborhood or town
 - Existing or potential fleet managers
 - The local police, fire department & city officials
 - Your suppliers

What Do We Want To Accomplish?

- Impress potential customers with our professionalism
- Impress them with our equipment
- Provide literature about dealing with a collision repair situation
- Show that we are good people, citizens, and neighbors
- Provide a means (token gifts, etc.-) of remembering us

Selecting Events

- Identify your objectives and do not try to achieve too many things, especially in your first event; keep it simple.
- Feeding is absolutely recommended.
- Try to have as many demos as practical.
- Do not underestimate the appeal of time-tested favorites as seminars, participation contests, trinket giveaways and prize drawings.
- Keeping guests entertained is essential:
 - Demonstrate equipment or processes
 - Provide scheduled tours of the shop and the repair process
 - Special session for technical students
 - Offer free safety checks
 - Display special vehicles, projects, or hobbies
 - Show videos
 - Visits by public officials
 - Discussion sessions related to repair issue
- Insurance representative discussing the insurer's view
- Paint supplier discussing modern paints and the matching process

Budgeting

- How much will the event cost and can you afford it.
- Remember that it does not have to be outrageously expensive.
- Include:
 - Refreshments
 - Extra employee hours
 - Promotional materials
 - Advertising costs

- Start with what seems reasonable.
- Estimate actual costs and do the numbers.
- Adjust the budget to the kind of event you want and what it might return in the long run. Keep good records for next year.

What Help Will We Need?

- Do we need help?
- Will employees volunteer?
- How about your insurance representatives?
- Who else can provide informative literature and freebie trinkets?
- Will anyone else help subsidizing bigger giveaways?
- Should a caterer take the food responsibility?

Facility Appearance

- Do we need help?
- Will employees volunteer?
- Do a walk through
- Organize all items before the open house

Getting The Message Out

Publicity should be a significant chunk of the event budget, but there may be clever avenues for free advertisement:

- Alert local media with a press release
- Alert drive by traffic and the neighborhood with banners and flyers
- Bill it as a public service and seek free radio ads
- Invite a DJ to broadcast from your facility

Do not forget Murphy's Law; make contingency plans for natural or unfortunate interruptions.

Organize, Organize, Organize

- *Pull the team together*
 - Get the employees involved
 - Favor the employees' ideas
 - Share the responsibilities
 - Request planning checklists
 - Use effective meetings to make sure everything has been covered

- *Coordinate all activities*
 - Assign a leader to each event
 - Have them demonstrate for the team
 - Check the timing of each event
 - Rehearse as necessary
 - Evaluate the order of events

- *Prepare the facility*
 - Do a walk through, starting outside
 - Where will guests park and how do they know?
 - How will guests be greeted?
 - How will they know what is being offered?
 - Where will the food be set up?
 - Make adequate refuse containers available and convenient
 - How will we keep the place looking fresh?
 - Provide clear, explanatory signs wherever needed
 - Mark the tour route as needed
 - Check out the bathroom facilities for all supplies and cleanliness
 - Address safety concerns, prepare signs, handouts or scripts and advise guests of potential problems.

Event In Review

After the event be sure to tell the NABC of your success or what you learned that can be shared with others for their benefit.

Business to Business Open House

One of the most beneficial ways to promote your business, whether you are new in town, or whether you have been at your location for a while, is to hold an open house. An open house provides you with a unique opportunity to “show off” your facility to your community and to your customers. For the purpose of this event plan, we will be looking at how to host an open house for industry affiliates and community businesses, or a “business to business” open house. The planning is similar for the general public, but the target audience, in that case, is much larger and must be handled in different manner. Working hand in hand with your Chamber of Commerce is important here in that it represents those businesses that are most concerned with sharing referrals and representing the best of the business community.

An open house forces the business owner to take a good look at the condition of the business, building and grounds. Clean up and maintenance that may have been overlooked will now become a priority. Employees will take an active part in planning and implementing the open house, and their enthusiasm at being included as part of the team for this important event, will surprise you.

The most successful open house takes organization and planning over a few months. We have provided a timeline that is a step by step guide for a successful event.

120 Days Prior To Event

- Start a file with all the information you will be gathering (guest list, vendor list, budget, proposals, catering).
- Select a date and time. Check with the local Chambers of Commerce to ensure no conflict with their events. Evening events during the week work best. 4:30 – 7:30 is good, though this is 1 hour longer than most Chamber Of Commerce after hour mixers.
- Choose a theme. (Luau, Oktoberfest, Western, Classic Car, Holiday)
- Establish a budget. This should include items such as printing, mailing, food and drink, entertainment.
- Start a checklist. Note the action you took and date of the action.
- Develop a guest list. If possible schedule a Chamber of Commerce mixer with your open house. Our Chamber mailed 700 invitations to its membership and we mailed another 300 to local government, press, insurance partners and

vendors. (Note: 1000 invitations produced an attendance of 300, so depending on the number of attendees you anticipate at least double the number of invitations.)

- Invite a keynote speaker, celebrity, or a local politician for a ribbon cutting. Celebrities draw attendees.

Contact vendors for prizes and equipment demonstrations at the event.

Remember, you want to showcase your operations, so active demonstrations can be helpful.

90 Days Prior To Event

- Choose a caterer. Work on catering choices. Often a caterer will meet with you to assist in determining how much and what type of food to provide.
- If supplying entertainment, contact a DJ or other entertainer for proposals.
- Select and order giveaways with your company name imprinted on the items.
- Plan for inclement weather if the event is to be held outside (alternate location indoors, tent with flaps, outdoor heaters).

60 Days Prior To Event

- Hold a company meeting to let staff listen to what you have done so far and provide input.
- Design and order invitations. If you are not good at design, your printer should be able to do it for you.
- Order brochures and printed marketing materials.
- Confirm vendor participation.

30 Days Prior To Event

- Mail invitations with phone RSVP and enclose a map and clear directions to your location.
- Train staff on how to accept RSVPs. (How many will be coming, do guests know how to get to your facility, how to give directions).
- Contact the Chamber of Commerce to confirm their participation. Hosting an open house as a Chamber mixer brings many more people to the event and involves the local business community. This is extremely important, as local businesses account for a high percentage of referrals.
- Write a press release and send it to local media contacts. If you are having a ribbon cutting, state the time it will take place.
- Meet with the caterer and finalize menu choices and quantities.
- Compile your day of the open house checklist.

Two Weeks Prior To Event

- Fax a reminder to your invited guests. The more times they see it, the more likely they are to attend.
- Follow up RSVP with insurance and key contacts personally, either by phone or in person.
- Meet with staff to assign duties before (clean up and event layout), during (greeters, parking, shop tour guide, demo area) and after the event (clean up). Plan to photograph the event. These photos can be given to guests if a photographer is taking instant photos, and other photos may be used later for an after event press release.

One Week Prior To Event

- AGAIN, fax a reminder to your invited guests.
- Confirm arrangements with caterer finalize the numbers and go over the menu. A good caterer should also be able to provide tables and chairs for rent as well as a tent if the event is to be held outdoors.
- Contact the DJ to discuss music preferences.
- Receive prizes and inventory them.
- Prepare a sponsor board, listing participating vendors.
- Make follow up calls to the media to confirm they received your press release and invitation.
- Clean up the facility and perform needed maintenance. Do not forget to replace burned out light bulbs. Make sure the bathrooms are clean and stocked.
- Check landscaping and the exterior of the building.
- Write an agenda for the big day from beginning to end, including a script for any speakers (owners, staff, VIPs)
- Plan store tour routes and rehearse staff on how to conduct the tour.
- Get a fishbowl or decorate a basket to collect business cards as people arrive. These will be used for the prize drawing and after event thank you, unless a raffle for charity is being held.
- Buy two part tickets if a charity raffle is being held.
- Order name tags and black felt pens for the greeter's table.
- Order a balloon arch for your entrance and cut flowers to give away. Carnations do well, are inexpensive and come in many colors.
- Prepare media packets and promotional materials.
- Make sure you have ribbon and scissors for a ribbon cutting ceremony. Your Chamber of Commerce may be able to supply both ceremonial shears and the ribbon.
- Plan a "Guess the "Estimate" contest. Prepare an estimate on a medium to heavy hit. Cover up all of the labor units and parts costs, and duplicate for

distribution to your guests who want to participate. This is a great way to show how professional your business is, and how the repair process begins.

- Prepare signage giving an adequate description of key areas in the shop. Remember, the nicer it looks, the more professional an appearance you present. Signs should be poster size and laminated. They can be used afterward for shop tours.

Day Prior To Event

EVENT DAY!!!

- Final cleaning of the facility and walk through inspection. Check the bathrooms again for supplies and cleanliness.
- Pick up any litter outside.
- Set up demos and equipment you would like displayed.
- Set up the greeters' table with name tags, pens, business card basket, brochures, and media packets.
- Make name tags for all employees.
- End work in the shop one hour before the event. Have employees clean up their work stations and change into clean uniforms.
- Rope off potentially hazardous areas.
- Start on time and be organized.
- Stick to your agenda/checklist.
- Circulate and meet as many people as possible.
- Make sure your guests enjoy themselves.

Event Follow-up (Within 30 Days)

- Send a follow up mailing and thank you to all attendees.
- Send a post event press release to the media.
- Follow up personally with marketing contacts to be sure they enjoyed the event.
- Write thank you notes to vendors.

Publicity

How Will We Get The Message Out?

Organize

Event In Review

How Well Did We Do?

Did We Accomplish Our Goals?

Suggested Changes For Next Time?

When Is The Next One?

Appendix

Sample Press Release

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

[Location & date] - [Name and title of owner or Manager] is pleased to announce that a public open house will be held at [name of business] on [scheduled date(s)] to celebrate National Collision Repair Industry Pride Month. [Name of business] is located at [address] and the phone number is [number].

This free, interesting, and fun event will occur from [hours of event]. Refreshments will be served and tours, demonstrations, and discussion of auto body repair technology will be shared. Even people who may have had a car repaired recently will be amazed at the technology and skill required. This is their chance to see for themselves and meet the professionals with these skills. "We hope they bring the whole family", said [name and title of person].

National Collision Repair Industry Pride Month is a celebration of pride and professionalism by the people that repair our cars after mishaps. It is coordinated by the National Auto Body Council that is the focal point for recognition of all the good things about the industry.

[Name of business] is a leading auto body repair facility in the area, and is very proud of the capabilities of its people and equipment and of its role in the community. This event is meant to share that pride with the community and to help everyone understand what a top of the line collision repair facility needs to be.

Suggested Letter To The State Governor

SUGGESTED LETTER TO STATE GOVERNOR REQUESTING A PROCLAMATION OF PRIDE MONTH (on your letterhead)

Date

Honorable "Name"
"State" Governor
Address
City, State and Zip

Dear Governor

The National Auto Body Council is an organization dedicated to enhancing the image of the auto collision repair industry, a proud, high tech, and vital industry. We all know how we Americans love our cars. I am very proud to be a member of that industry and of being a citizen of (name of state).

One of the NABC's programs is to use the Month of October to celebrate our industry and our theme of industry professionalism. We use this event to communicate with our customers and the general public, and to do educational activities. Examples are tours of repair facilities for young people searching for a career, and child safety seat checks where technicians ensure that parents know how to properly adjust and secure them. With open houses at their facilities, our members have stressed safe driving by inviting representatives from police departments, MADD, SADD, etc.

You can assist us in making this year's Pride Month a great success by issuing a proclamation that October is so designated. I have enclosed some suggested language for the proclamation for your convenience. We will publicize your proclamation within the state and nationally. If, by chance, you have received this request from some of my fellow members and state citizens as well, we hope that copies of one proclamation can be sent to us all so we can maximize our efforts throughout the state.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Title

Sample Proclamation

PROCLAMATION

By the Governor

Whereas the Board of Directors of the National Auto Body Council has declared the month of October as "Collision Repair Industry Pride Month", and

Whereas, the goal of "Collision Repair Industry Pride Month" is to generate interaction between the different segments of the collision repair industry and to help establish the positive image of an essential and professional industry; and

Whereas, through "Collision Repair Industry Pride Month", members of the National Auto Body Council and the (local associations if applicable) want to educate the public about collision repair shops, repair safety issues and what to look for when selecting a collision repair shop: and

Whereas, the State of (State name) would like to offer its support to the members of the National Auto Body Council and (local associations if applicable) for their efforts to educate our citizens about the collision industry and foster improved relations between the industry and consumers;

Now, Therefore, I (Governor of the State of XXX), do hereby proclaim October 2004 as COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY PRIDE MONTH.