



Driving Force

Speedy Auto and Minute Muffler CEO and President David Lush is ready to accelerate growth

By Roma Ihmatowycz

As a young high school grad, David Lush was undecided about a future career. His no-nonsense father, a carpenter, told him if he couldn't make up his mind then he should at least get an honourable trade.

That's exactly what Lush did. Having already worked part-time at a local garage to earn some extra pocket money, he became a licensed mechanic.

Little did Lush realize that this would be the starting point of an illustrious and lifelong career in the country's automotive service industry. In fact, what started on the shop floor of a small family-owned garage in Toronto's west end has today culminated in a position as CEO and president of Prime CarCare Group Inc., franchisor of the well-known Speedy Auto Service and Minute Muffler brands.

"I started right down on the shop floor in a small independent garage," says Lush, not without a well-earned hint of pride. "I'm one of the rare executives in the auto service

industry in that I am actually a Class A mechanic."

In actual fact, there's a lot more to Lush than his impeccable skill at fixing a car and running two of the best-known car repair brands in the country. Over the course of his more than 30 years in the automotive industry, Lush has worn just about every hat there is and he's done it at an equally diverse group of companies.

Early on, he worked as a trainer for a manufacturer of car test equipment, and from there he moved to Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company as their automotive trainer. During his seven years with Goodyear he held six different positions, eventually running all the mechanical services for the company's more than 200 stores and franchises.

From there, Lush moved to Canadian Tire as director of auto service for all the Canadian Tire stores – about 420 at the time. Next in line was a stint as vice president of marketing and franchise operations for Midas Canada, and then he

Speedy

auto service

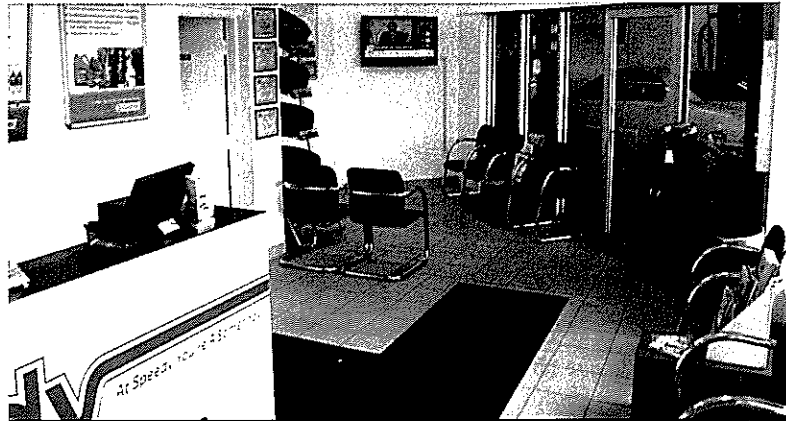
took on the role of senior vice president of marketing for Midas worldwide, working out of Chicago. All this, and he was only in his mid-thirties at the time.

Lush has also worked for Ford Motor Company's Quick Lane and Fast Lane programs and, most recently, for CARSTAR Automotive Canada, one of the country's largest collision chains. Somewhere along the way he found time to take a break from the trade to work, among other things, for the Toronto Argonauts (as vice president, no less!) and to study business at Queens University in Kingston, where he subsequently lectured.

"Apparently this guy can't keep a job," laughs Lush. Self-deprecation aside, Lush, now 51, has continuously been an in-demand automotive professional whose steady climb to ever-higher executive positions reflects an astute mind, hard-earned skills, and a tough work ethic. Today, he's putting his aptitude to the test at the Prime CareCare Group and its chain of Speedy Auto Service and Minute Muffler franchises.

Taking the reins

After joining the company in 2009, it was under Lush's management that Speedy underwent a major name change – from Speedy Corporation to Prime CarCare Company – in



Both Speedy Auto Service and Minute Muffler provide convenient vehicle servicing while customers relax in the reception area.

order to better leverage its two complementary franchise networks. "I decided that having two brands under one umbrella is a good idea, and that we could potentially have many more brands under that one umbrella," explains Lush.

The decision was made not long after purchasing the Minute Muffler chain, which has a strong presence in the western part of the country, particularly Alberta. Speedy Auto Service is better represented in the Central and Eastern provinces, especially Ontario. Although operating on slightly different models, both chains specialize in while-you-wait service for all makes and models of cars, light trucks and SUVs.

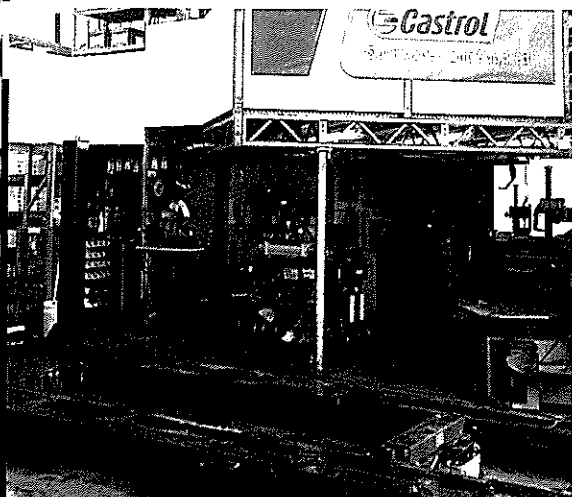
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Converting existing independent car repair shops to a Speedy or Minute Muffler location is something Lush sees as a great opportunity.

Both also have an iconic status in their respective strongholds, and Lush wants to build on this legacy moving forward. "Speedy is a 50-year-old brand, with brand recognition that survived all sorts of issues," Lush says, referring to Speedy having gone into receivership before being bought by its current ownership, a privately held and fully

capitalized company, "At Speedy, you're a somebody' – Canadians can recite that slogan off the top of their heads. It remains a well-known brand."

Lush spearheaded substantial growth in 2009, followed by consolidation in 2010 and renewed growth is in the works for 2011. There are currently about 140 franchises in total, divided equally between the two brands, and Lush is eyeing growth opportunities in regions across the country, particularly in British Columbia and some parts of Ontario.

Prime CarCare is especially looking at conversion franchising, reaching out strategically to independent car repair operators who might be interested in the Speedy or Minute Muffler franchise concept. "We are now looking at different ways of franchising; there is a lot of opportunity in conversion franchising." That said, they are also interested in pairing up potential franchisees with existing or future opportunities.

Strong drive

After so many years in the industry, one might expect Lush to have a slightly weary attitude to the daily grind of yet another position in all-too familiar industry. On the

contrary, Lush exhibits a contagious enthusiasm, and one can somehow imagine him just as happy under the hood of car as he is in a corner office negotiating expansion plans for a large, national chain.

What drives him, says Lush, is a strong sense of obligation to both franchisor and franchisee to build a successful company that benefits all involved. "At the end of the day, I have one goal: to make this company better and to help these guys, the franchisees, make money and be thankful that they did it," he notes.

"What works long-term in Canada in the franchise sector," adds Lush, "is when there is a balance between the franchisor and the franchisee: a balance of wealth and a balance of income. It can't be all about one or the other. If you mess with the balance too much, the system will fail."

Lush continues to have as much contact with his franchisees as possible, actively playing a role in franchise councils and regularly traveling across the country to visit as many stores as he can. "Corporate responsibility is not going to keep me from being hands-on," says the industry veteran.

Currently, about 80 percent of Prime CarCare's franchisees are professionals with an auto-service background, while the remaining 20 percent come from varied backgrounds. What all have in common and what is necessary for success, notes Lush, is the customer service

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factor: greeting each customer as they walk through the door and giving them the attention they expect from a small business owner. Customers need to feel the franchisee's sincerity and trust them with the service they are supplying. "That is 30 seconds of magic that takes place," says Lush. "You either feel really good about the guy, or you don't."

Franchisees need to anticipate putting in some hard work for the first three years of operating their new business, the same as with any new business venture. Those who work the hardest and put in the most hours are the ones that have the most profitable franchises, observes Lush.

"If you work really, really hard, you tend to be rewarded," says Lush. ❀

Ten Car Care Tips from Speedy/Minute Muffler

1. You can cool an overheated vehicle by turning on the heat and rolling down your windows.
2. If your car won't start because you left the lights on overnight, turn them off and try the engine again in ten minutes. If you're able to start your car, drive for at least 20 minutes to recharge the battery.
3. When putting air in your tires, press the pin in the air hose to blow out any water that might be in the system.
4. For every kilometre you drive over 90 kilometres, your vehicle increases fuel consumption by 1%.
5. Horn, radio or turn signals not working? You may have blown a fuse. Check your owner's manual for directions on what to do.
6. If your car vibrates or pulls to one side at highway speeds, you might need a wheel re-alignment.
7. To check your car's suspension, press on each corner of the vehicle. If it bounces more than once, your shocks or struts need replacing.
8. Has your car been giving off a musty odor lately? If your vehicle is a model year 2000 or newer, your cabin filter might need changing. Refer to your owner's manual for directions.
9. If your vehicle sounds louder than usual or you hear a ticking sound when you accelerate, you may have an exhaust leak due to corrosion.
10. If your car makes a groaning or clicking sound when you turn at a slow speed, your ball joints, wheel bearings or CV joints might be worn out. You should have your car inspected by a trained technician.

Sources: www.speedy.com / www.minutemuffler.com

SPEEDY AUTO SERVICE STATS

Franchise Units in

Canada: 71

Corporate Units in

Canada: 5

In Business Since: 1956

Franchising Since: 2004

Franchise Fee: \$25K

Investment Required:

\$150K - \$600K

Start-up Capital

Required: \$50K

Training: 3-6 weeks

Website: www.speedy.com

Available Territories:

All of Canada

CFA Member Since: 2008



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