

## Opinion: Missed Connections and Driving Ambitions

By [Jim Fisher](#), Founder and CEO, IMST Corp.

What do you say when someone jumps into the back seat of your vehicle, tells you “Good morning” and then reminds you that you are taking this stranger to the airport? Yep, it happened to me.

On the morning in question, I had left my hotel room, took the elevator down to the first floor and got into my car. My decision was to then drive around to the hotel entrance, go inside, check out and get my morning USA Today for my flight back to Houston. Upon arriving at the front in my Hertz black Hyundai Sonata dressed in my very official IMST shirt and beginning to get out of the car, this mid-30s female jumped into the back seat and waited for me to start driving to the airport. I then asked if she assumed I was her Uber driver for her return to the airport. Her reply was a resounding affirmative.

Hey, dress shirt and slacks, black four-door sedan and about 6:45 a.m. on a Friday—what else would she think? I graciously offered to take her. However, I needed to check out, get my USA Today and return the car to Hertz, at which time she could then ride with me on the Hertz shuttle to the airport. And I would not even charge her for the trip. Or she could wait for her intended Uber driver. Guess what she elected to do?  
Communication Breakdown

I tell that story for two reasons. First, it was a really funny moment, and goodness knows we need funny moments amid our many monotonous days of travel. And second, it merely shows how we assume and then jump right into what we are expecting to happen. Then reality smacks us in the face and we see how totally wrong we were in making such an august assumption. Hopefully, the result of such a misguided conclusion is merely a laugh and lighthearted occurrence, such as my one failed stint as an Uber driver, and not something of significance such as missed opportunity or deep disappointment.

### **Often we fall short in communicating to our customers how we can enhance their lives.**

The story also reminds me of an experience once shared with us by one of our clients. As a five-store owner/retailer, one of his customers was his family dentist. He had been going to the dentist for more than two decades, and the dentist had probably been buying gasoline at one of his facilities for nearly the same amount of time. One normal day, as the dentist stopped to buy his fuel, the retailer just happened to be walking out of the store to go to the bank. They met in the forecourt, had a brief conversation and then departed for their respective destinations.

It just so happened that their individual destinations took them on similar paths at

the beginning of their trips, which put our client behind the dentist's vehicle. In about three blocks, the dentist pulled into a 7-Eleven. He parked, went inside and exited with a fresh cup of coffee.

Well, needless to say, our client was totally confused and had to ask why his dentist stopped at his location, purchased fuel and then drove to the 7-Eleven to buy his "morning" coffee. It was a simple question that elicited a simple answer: His dentist simply did not know he offered coffee. You see, his dentist had never been inside our client's store over all his years of purchasing fuel and did not know he even offered great, fresh coffee. Our client's store was his fuel stop and the 7-Eleven was his convenience port-of-call.

## Spread the Word

The latter is a story that absolutely reflects the nature of one of the biggest dilemmas facing this industry daily: How do we get the vast majority of our fuel customers into our stores? Volumes have been written about all the things to do to offer a wonderful in-store customer experience, but not a chapter has been penned about the absolute solution for getting all of those additional potential customers into our stores. Just like my one moment of being a very respectful Uber driver fell short of accomplishing a task the potential female passenger had expected, so often we fall short in communicating to our routine, everyday customers how we can truly enhance their lives and make them better via a meaningful experience. Bottom line: If they ain't comin' inside, then take the outside to them until they understand what is on the inside. A threshold of opportunity awaits.

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