There are no other resources in step 7ff:

The workshop of tomorrow

by Jeff Smit

The rate of change in the aftermarket auto repair industry has been so fast and so dramatic over the past decade, that it has become almost impossible to make accurate forecasts of the industry's future.

It's encouraging that the main market indicators show that most in the industry are quite optimistic about the growth outlook, but will optimism be enough?

If the technology growth of the past decade has taught us anything, it would be that businesses must learn to evolve and be prepared to change the way they operate if profitability and survival are the goals.

One of the significant issues that will dominate the future for all businesses will be the serious shortage of skilled technicians, covering a wide range of vehicle repair. The best we can all do is address the most obvious things that will impact on our lives in the foreseeable future and be prepared to make the investment to keep our workshops on the front foot, prepared for anything.

The most obvious are of course training and diagnostic equipment. These are not new by any means. It is probably safe to assume that those businesses that have survived thus far, and are consistently profitable, are those which long ago embraced the need for training and keeping equipment up to date.

Future workshops are going to be a lot bigger than today's average, and they will be cleaner, air conditioned and heated. Software used in office management and in diagnostics will be constantly upgraded.

One certain growth area will be in the calibration of the many different systems that control and monitor the modern motor vehicle. Those independent workshops that ignore this trend will find it difficult to survive in the longer term.

From a layman’s point of view, humans don’t drive cars any more; computers drive cars. Fully autonomous vehicles are around the corner, and the technologies they contain will change the very foundations of workshop skills and operating systems.

The fundamental role of a technician will change, and so too will the tools and equipment they will use.

Over the end of year break, I would recommend that every workshop owner and manager answer a simple question – where do you want to be in five years time? Do you want to be the one-stop shop that does everything? Perhaps you would be better off sub-letting some jobs or calling in experts when you need them?

Being a one-stop shop is going to be difficult, and increasingly expensive. I believe specialisation will be commonplace in the aftermarket industry.

Most workshops can list their specialities, whether it be with a make of vehicle, or in diagnostics of things like automatic transmission, suspension, or programming.

So having identified your specialities, your approach to handling the huge variety of car problems that your customer brings to your door will change slightly. You never have to refuse a job simply because it doesn't fall within your area of expertise, but you assure the customer that you can look after the vehicle, and if it's a problem that needs expertise outside the skills of the workshop, you have a network of specialists at your finger tips.

Whatever direction you choose, make sure you can deliver on your goals by investing in the tools and workforce skills that your speciality requires. Workshops will need to be very clear and honest about what they do (and what they can't do) in-house, and what expertise they can tap into if needed.

It will be hard for some to shake off the now old-fashioned notion that your workshop can do everything. This will not be possible in the near future.

Many workshops will close during the next decade as their owners reach retirement age, simply because they do not see the benefit of keeping up to date with technologies.

This is a short-sighted strategy. Justifying your decision not to keep up by thinking you are too old for all this technology is not doing the right thing by the business you have worked hard to grow.

If you don't keep up, there will be precious little to sell when you retire in a few years time and instead of cashing in on your life's work, you will be just closing the doors and walking away. With the help of employees, it should be possible to accommodate the waves of new technologies and retain worthwhile skills that will add to the value of your business.

The best way to future proof your business is to constantly monitor where you sit in the market, and make the changes and the investments needed to protect your assets and your future.

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn

Just go for it!