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Too many cars? Become a specialist

by Jeff Smit

If the modern motor vehicle has become so high tech and reliable, with servicing intervals extended to unrealistic lengths, what is keeping the independent workshops busy?

Putting aside those models with a history of unreliability, it's the diagnostic work that many in the vehicle repair industry have acknowledged is the fastest growing sector.

But it doesn't always follow that those workshops busy with diagnostic work are always profitable. In fact, many workshops shy away from certain types of diagnostic work because it can consume so much time and energy, not to mention the stress. It's just not worth the effort for some people.

So what does the future hold for workshops, their owners and staff?

It's time to seriously think about the future of your business – where do you want it to be in three to five years? What type of work do you want to be doing, and on what type of cars?

The days of the one-stop shop that fixes everything and anything are numbered. It is becoming very difficult, if not impossible, to fix everything efficiently and effectively. No technician and no workshop can know everything about every make and model of motor vehicle.

The range of vehicles on Australian roads is huge. With more than 50 different manufacturers selling vehicles in Australia, multiplied by the different models available

from each manufacturer, plus the average motor car age of 10.4 years, you can begin to see the challenges facing the repair shops.

There are two options – farm out the challenging jobs, or become a specialist in one or more areas.

Sub-letting some of the highly technical or challenging jobs is fine, assuming you can find an appropriate technician for the task. But if you adopt the second option of becoming your own specialist, you will need to think about what type or make of vehicle do you want to work on and what type of work – transmissions, suspension, 4WD, diesels, hybrid or electrical. Once this decision is made, you will need to figure out what diagnostic equipment you're going to need.

Going down the specialisation road opens up a whole new potential market. The general workshops will send their challenging jobs to you and your specialisation will have its appeal to many in the retail market.

Selecting the tools and equipment for your specialisation requires homework or research. With specialisation you may be able to justify an OE scan tool, or other specialised tools, like timing belt tool kits, suspension or engine tools.

Specialisation means you can now focus more precisely on the tools required. Imagine trying to tool up for every make and model, let alone learning the quirks and performance characteristics for all of them.

A common complaint in the repair industry is lack of access to technical information. This is a little unfair because there are some great data providers in the market, but of course their information comes at a price. But if you specialise, it is worth considering buying access to manufacturer or OE information. Such a move can be fully justified if it results in a more efficient workshop, higher level of staff skills, and a marketable reputation in a particular area of diagnostics.

There are many side benefits to specialisation, one being that skills with even the most universal of tools such as an oscilloscope will be greatly enhanced when the user becomes more familiar with a limited range of vehicles or areas of repair.

There's little doubt that specialisation in a more focused area of repair, will, over time, result in working days that will be less stressful and more profitable. The pressure of the 'all makes and models' business model is really starting to show.

So call the team together, polish up the crystal ball, and see where you want your business to be in five years.

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

Just go for it!