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the Art *of* Purchasing

Software Solutions

Benjamin Franklin once advised tradesmen that "time is money." While much has changed over the past two and a half centuries, this idea still holds true for small businesses.

Most tire dealers are efficient with their time, but there is always room for improvement. If a tire dealership uses an antiquated computer program, or even handwrites job tickets, estimates and invoices, the shop is missing out on opportunities for growth. One way tire dealers can save time and money at their stores is by utilizing the latest software management solutions.

The right software can increase a tire dealer's bottom line by helping them to work smarter, not harder. These products can optimize workflow, track inventory, process national accounts as well as estimate parts and labor.

"The biggest problem dealers experience if they're not using software that's designed for them or if they're hand-writing things down is the loss of profits and loss of revenues," shares Partick Braswell, director of strategic initiatives at TCS Technologies. "If the owner of the shop is running around, trying to manage here, manage there, and there is nothing doing the management for him, he's missing out on opportunities and the chance to expand his business."

One important way software can assist dealers is by managing workflow. The more cars that go through a dealer's bays, the more profits made.

Chris Cloutier, shop owner and founder of Autotext.me, notes that cars can get lost in the shuffle of a busy day, but software can help tire dealers manage where cars are at in the repair process.

"With just a point and click you can very quickly move something along in the workflow, and anyone in the shop can see where a car's at," he shares.

Workflow management software can also help shops keep its bays from backing up. Andreoli & Associates HITS BPOS software, designed to mimic the workflow of a typical tire shop, is one example of how software can help tire dealers identify shortfalls in their workflow system.

"The Bay Management screen is particularly helpful in identifying open bay opportunities. The Appointment List View complements Bay Management by helping to identify workflow bottlenecks and potentially missed promised times," says to Mike Andreoli, president of Andreoli & Associates.

In addition to tracking vehicles, part of a shop's workflow is customer management. Software solutions can help tire dealers know what parts have been order for customers, if a vehicle is waiting on approval and if a time promise has been made to customers, the software providers say. Additionally, software products can help maintain customer's sale and service histories.

"Say a customer comes in and asks 'What's my history?' 'What did I buy?' 'You've given me other recommendations, can you get those?' If you don't have something you can instantly look up a specific history – what you've done and the data related to that – you'd be going to a filing cabinet and flipping through files and that could really be a time waster," says Dave Vogel, vice president of sales at ASA Automotive Systems.

Another way software can help with customer management is by keeping customers informed of repair progress through text messaging. "If you keep that customer updated, that will prevent unnecessary phone calls to your shop," shares Autotext.me's Cloutier. "There are certain types of phone calls you want, that's new customers. Other than that you don't want people to be calling you all day. 'Have you looked at my car?'"

On top of workflow, one time saving benefit of using software is the ability to integrate point-of-sales systems with vendors, the software providers note.

"Things like looking up and ordering parts from warehouses, checking availability, without software solutions you could be bouncing around to a lot of different websites. A lot of that can be consolidated," ASA's Vogel shares.

Another time-saving benefit of software is the ability to process national accounts from a point-of-sale system. Software can streamline this two-step process into one step.

"Assuming you don't already process national accounts in your point of sale, you complete the national account invoice in your own point of sale software and then you go over to a second system, whether its Bridgestone or Goodyear or whatever brand and fill it out there to process your credit. When you get information back, you return to your POS system and put in the credits so your accounting is correct," says Jay Adams, president of Madden Co.

"With software, the requirements for

each national account customer are built into the ticket so the technician can fill all that information out right then and there and have it ready to be processed over night," he continues. "Stop faxing paperwork that may take three or four days to process, and send it digitally so you get credits sooner."

Software can also assist a shop's accounting department with accounts payable.

"One great example of that is[the software ties vendor orders immediately to accounts payable. As soon as you receive an order in, it sets up an accounts payable file and lets you know at the end of the month what you owe to each one of your vendors," TCS's Braswell says.

Other time and money saving benefits of management software include inventory tracking, parts and labor estimating and integrating tire registration filing.

Tales of Success

Stewart Gogel, co-owner of Gogel Tire Exchange in East Hanover, N.J., has been using TCS' TirePower software in his store since May 2014. He says that the software has helped him operate more efficiently.

"Time management has become much better because it much less effort and work to track estimates and find invoices – whether it's a sale we've made or a purchase we've made," Gogel says.

Additionally, the software has helped Gogel Tire Exchange better track inventory, produce estimates for customers, and find those estimates later, Gogel shares.

"We give a customer an estimate and they come back a week later saying they've lost the quote. The software makes it much easier to find the quote you've given them," he says.

Burt Brother Tire & Service with eight stores in Utah has been using TireMaster from ASA Automotive Systems since 2012. Brandon Burt, general manager, says the software has allowed the dealership to better understand its business.

 "We know more about our business on a day-to-day basis," he shares. "It's very good at pinpointing where we're making money, where we're not making money, and where we need to improve. It's also great at managing our inventory because we have reports that can show how long we've had tires. When we run those reports we can figure out if we need to change our stocking levels."
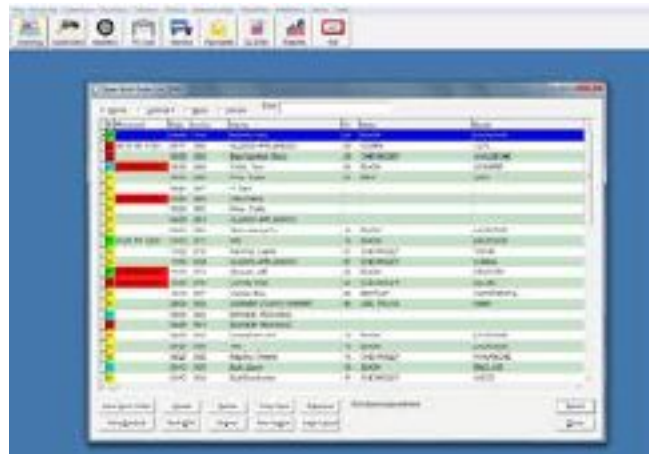
The software has also helped the shop save time when working on jobs, too.

"When we're selling service we don't have to catalog the car inside one of our suppliers websites, it's all cataloged right there. And we don't have to look up labor in a different area," he says.

Burt notes that switching processes and software can come with growing pains.

"I feel like in our industry it's tough to change. You may have older guys that have been doing it forever and ever and are used to something else. If they don't think anything is broken, there can be a major push back."

He advises discussing the change with staff, and talk about why the change is needed and how it'll make the job easier in the end.

Mark Morrison, co-owner of Tires First in Columbus, Ga., has been keeping his customers informed using Autotext.me for two years, after noticing more people respond to texts than telephone calls. The software has saved the shop time, Morrison shares.

Tires First uses Autotext.me to notify customers when special tires are in, of their vehicle repair status and when a vehicle is ready for pick up.

"It is much faster for our team members to use the Autotext.me, than having to text from their cellphones or call from the store landline," he says. "It also saves time from tying up a rack, waiting for the customer to call back with approval for the repairs."

In addition to keeping a customer informed, the dealership uses the software to thank customers for their business.

Product Offerings

With a variety of software options, it's important for tire dealers to consider it's individual shop needs when selecting a software tool. There is no one size fits all solution. Below is a sampling of shop management software products available in the automotive/tire sector:

Andreoli & Associates

Andreoli & Associates' core shop management software is its HITS BPOS. The cloud-based software solution includes point of sale, repair order/invoice writing, appointment scheduling, bay management, inventory control, and inspection form

printing, the company says. Additionally, the product offers customer and vehicle sales/service history, sales reporting, integrated parts, tire registration and online appointment scheduling.

A labor estimating, electronic ordering module – HITS ServiceCAT – can be added to the HITS BPOS software as well. This add-on provides access to job, part and labor data for accurate estimating and part ordering, according to the company.

The HITS TireLink is another add-on to the HITS BPOS software. HITS TireLink enables wholesale dealers to provide their retail clients with Web-based inquiry and ordering capability, the company says. *hitstiresoftware.com.*

ASA Automotive Systems

ASA Automotive Systems offers two software solutions for tire dealerships: TireMaster and TireMaster Enterprise. The systems are very similar, but the products are designed for dealerships of different sizes – TireMaster is designed for up to a 25-store chain and TireMaster Enterprise is for larger dealerships with a bigger network, the ASA says.

TireMaster includes point-of-sale, inventory management, and accounts receivable. Within the software dealers also have access to customer's sales and service histories, workflow management, and integrated vendors parts ordering/look up.

TireMaster and TireMaster Enterprise can be set up on ASA's server, on the tire dealer's server or in the cloud. *asatire.com.*

Autotext.me

Autotext.me is a browser–based workflow management system for automotive repair shops.

The software allows shops to set up a customized workflow for their business, with buttons for checking in, waiting on a customer approval, estimation, parts orders and more. Any step or button a shop might want can be added to their custom workflow, according to Autotext.me.

In addition to workflow management, Autotext.me allows shops to send out customized text messages to customers to update them on vehicle status. Text messages can be sent directly from the workflow management system with the click of the mouse, the company shares. Follow-up messages can also be sent after services are completed. *softwarestatussolutions.com.*

MaddenCo

MaddenCo's Tire Dealer System offers several software modules for all tire industry segments, the company said.

Software modules include point-of-sale, warehouse order entry, accounts receivable, invoice history, customer history, sales analysis, accounts payable, retreading, and vender interfacing. Features within modules include inventory tracking, text messaging, ticket packaging, as well as national account processing and integrated accounting, MaddenCo said.

In addition to running on computers, MaddenCo's software can be run on a smart device, assisting with dealer mobility, the company said. *maddenco.com.*

TCS Technology

TCS Technology offers three different software solutions for tire dealers – TirePower, ePower, and TreadTracks.

TirePower is a whole business management suite, that allows tire dealers to work on their business rather than in it, the company said. Features include point of sale, customer history, inventory tracking and real time analytics, among others.

ePower is a wholesale website that allows independent tire dealers, wholesales, distributors, regional distributors to sell their tires to other tire dealers as well as car dealers on the internet, the TCS said.

TreadTracks is a retreading shop management software designed to assisting the floor managing at a retread shop, according to TCS. *tcstire.com.*