

Dealerships Urged to Fix All Makes, Models

By Jim Leman

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Dealership service departments must be all things to all vehicle owners to speak, to stay profitable these days, say fixed-operations gurus such as Ed Kovalchick.

That means having the facility and staff that can repair all makes and models, including brands the dealership doesn't sell in its new-car department.

In other words, whatever franchise has buttered your bread over the years it will be burnt toast unless your service team embraces an "any make or model" culture and gets price-competitive with aftermarket sales.

Sometimes it's just a question of asking for the business, says Bill Hughes, general manager for the multi-site Honda Carland in Atlanta.


Kovalchick's firm, of Net Profit Inc., offers a workshop to help service staffers understand, market and capture repair and maintenance business that traditionally flows to more than 80,000 independents and chain service centers.

Hughes sent his service managers to the workshop, who returned with ideas that led to one store, alone, tallying 700 more flat-rate hours in other-make models in one month or 15% of all flat-rate hours.

That's up from "maybe a hundred" hours registered working on such vehicles before, he says.

"Customers assume we only work on Acura or Honda vehicles," Hughes says. "But when we started asking customers to bring the other-make vehicles in their families to us too, they responded by giving us that business. That was an eye-opener; why not ask for the business?"

Hughes also started offering customers two options – genuine Honda parts or aftermarket parts – and began to get the business from customers who historically would have balked at the OEM-only price structure and gone elsewhere for service.



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“By offering the choice, more work and more customers stayed with the dealership rather than defecting,” he says.

For Park Ford/Lincoln Mercury, Mahopac, NY, use of a new diagnostic tool is leading the way to greater confidence and success in servicing makes other than what the dealership sells.

Service manager Len Castelli says the use of this new tool, a drivability diagnostic system from PH2 Solutions, helps his techs, even those lacking the diagnostic “gene,” to dramatically reduce code diagnostic and repair times.



Technician checks a vehicle's service system.

Unlike diagnostic equipment that read historic events only, this system reads in real time and provides clearer information as to conditions requiring the most attention by the technician.

Castelli is now quickly able to tell customers if their vehicle will pass state emissions inspections or what it will cost to make vehicles ready for inspection. He also is able to identify other issues that might need correcting.

“We now validate repairs in just 15 minutes, not hours, reducing wasteful technician drive time and virtually eliminating comebacks,” Castelli says.

Hughes doesn't buy the argument service technicians trained to fix specific-brand vehicles are unable to work on anything else.

Technician skill is not isolated to a specific make, and technical data for most all makes and models is available through sources like Mitchell, AllData and Identifix, he notes.

Most, if not all, specialty tools an OEM requires can be acquired from stores such as CARQUEST and NAPA.

Nearly 70% of what any service department does these days is maintenance, such as tires, brakes, batteries and hoses. Every make and model still uses those components and needs them replaced now and then, Hughes says.

Kovalchick is finding dealer technicians to be far more open to learning how to use the resources that independent shops employ to repair high-mileage vehicles.

“It's all there, and anyone can capture the information needed to make effective repairs,” he says.

Once set up with the expanded repertoire, how does a dealership bring in all-brand business? Often, it is just a matter of letting the local market know the store services everything from Acuras to Volvos.