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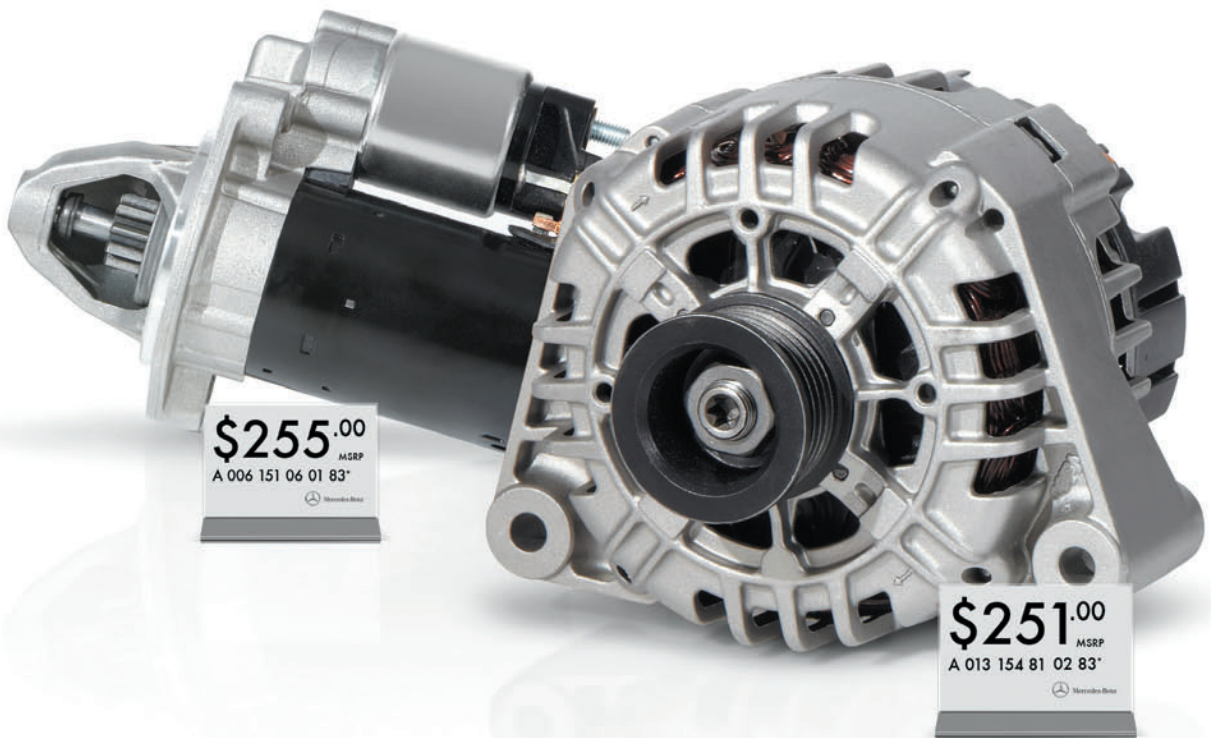
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**EDITORIAL**

**MICHAEL WILLINS**  
GROUP CONTENT DIRECTOR  
mwillins@advanstar.com  
(440) 891-2604

**KRISTA MCNAMARA**  
MANAGING EDITOR  
krcnamara@advanstar.com  
(440) 891-2746

**JAKE RODENROTH**  
CONTRIBUTING

**STEPH JOHNSON-BENTZ**  
ART DIRECTOR

**CONTRIBUTORS**

**BRIAN ALBRIGHT**  
b.albright@abcglobal.net  
(614) 237-6707

**MIKE ANDERSON**  
mike@collisionadvice.com  
(301) 535-3333

**MIKE LEVASSEUR**  
mike@keenanautobody.com  
(484) 237-8410

**JAMES E. GUYETTE**  
jmguyette2004@yahoo.com  
(440) 564-9180

**GREG HORN**  
greg.horn@mitchell.com  
(888) 368-7796

**KEVIN MEHOK**  
k.mehok@comcast.net  
(708) 516-2936

**TONY PASSWATER**  
tony.passwater@aaii.net  
(317) 290-0611

**TOM MCGEE**  
tmcgee@autotraining.net  
(888) 471-5800

**TIM SRAMCIK**  
tsramcik@yahoo.com  
(330) 475-5969

**ALFRED THOMAS**  
alfthomas@pcl.edu  
(570) 329-2712

**JOHN YOSWICK**  
info@crashnetwork.com  
(503) 335-0393

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**TRAINING**

## AUTOMECHANIKA CHICAGO SET TO KICK OFF IN 2015

The new trade show, produced by Messe Frankfurt in partnership with the Advanstar Automotive Group, will focus on tech training and product discovery.

**MARKETING**

## PPG MEETING TEACHES CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

8 PPG's MVP Business Solutions Spring Conference taught attendees that engagement is essential for shops to build brand awareness and customer referrals.

**TRAINING**

## I-CAR, FORD CREATE F-150 TRAINING

8 I-CAR and Ford have partnered to create two collision repair training courses for the 2015 F-150, the Ford F-150 Structural Repair course and I-CAR Aluminum Welding Training & Certification.

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**FEATURE**

## THINK LIKE A ROCK STAR TO HELP DIFFERENTIATE YOUR BUSINESS

BY KUKUI | ABRN BLOGGER

There is a lot to be learned from the world of rock and roll — get the stage, have a designated frontman, give backstage passes and more that can be applied to body shops.

[COMMUNITY PULSE]

BEST OF THE BLOGS | AUDIO WEBCASTS | TOP HOW-TO VIDEOS | READER PHOTOS | INDUSTRY CALENDAR | MESSAGE BOARDS | INDUSTRY GROUPS | VIDEO WEBCASTS



**WHAT IS ABRN COMMUNITY?** The ABRN community is an online NETWORK for your business. It's a place to go to post articles, blogs, videos, photos and audio clips to share ideas with other collision repairers. Community content is used in ABRN's twice weekly e-newsletters. Check it out at <http://workshop.search-autoparts.com>

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BY MIKE LEVASSEUR  
A MID-MONTH MEETING

18 A regular gathering of location managers can help to foster business communication and continued improvement.

## I-CAR TRAINING

BY JASON BARTANEN  
READYING FOR ALUMINUM REPAIR

38 Repairers must adapt — again — this time to be able to tackle the extensive use of aluminum that is coming.

## THE LAST DETAIL

BY MIKE ANDERSON  
FLATTEN THE "X" IN YOUR SCHEDULE

66 Implement these tips for smarter scheduling to improve cycle time.



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**SPRAYING MONEY**

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Learn the steps to take to improve labor and materials profit in your shop's paint department.

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ABRN**

**F**ind the pay plan method that best fits your shop culture.

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**THE SHOP PROFILE**

CONNER BROTHERS BODY SHOPS; MIDLOTHIAN, VA  
JAMES E. GUYETTE / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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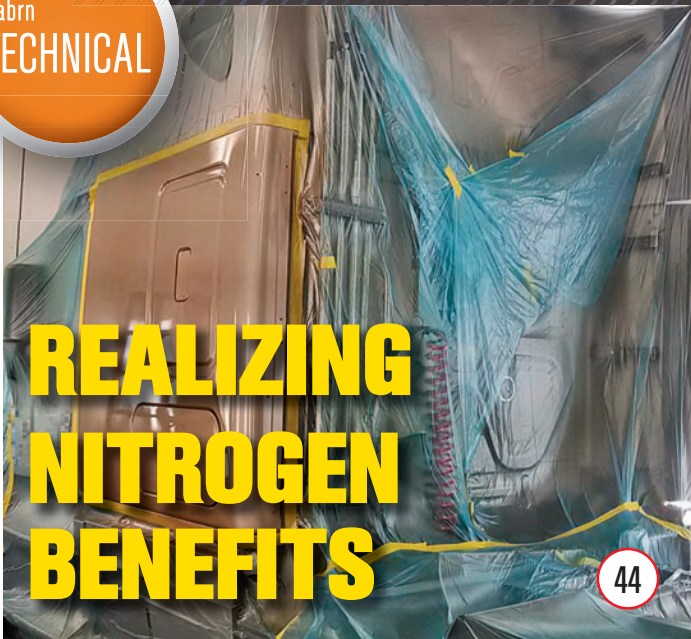
**THE PROFIT MOTIVE**

TAKING CUES FROM FAST FOOD

TOM MCGEE/ CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**24** National fast food chains show the power of phenomenal systems in producing a consistent, reliable and efficient product every time.

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BY CHRIS STERWERF | FAIRFIELD AUTO & TRUCK SERVICE

Using nitrogen in heavy-duty shops takes training and adjustment, but can increase product quality and cost savings.

**TRAINING FOCUS**

**PAINT CHANGES**

BY ALFRED THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**30** Learn the latest on water-borne paint technology and how to adapt in your shop.



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LATEST PRODUCTS & EQUIPMENT TO GET THE JOB DONE

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**PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT**

Axalta Coating Systems launched Cromax Mosaic, a new fully featured solvent basecoat to help provide outstanding coverage, color match and blendability.

**PRODUCT FOCUS**



**60** BASF Onyx HD Low VOC Productive System is a solventborne basecoat alternative that dries quickly and complies with all regulation requirements.

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- Air Filters

**BONUS ONLINE CONTENT**

ABRN HOW2 VIDEO GALLERY

automechanika CHICAGO



JUNE'S FEATURED VIDEO  
**AUTOMECHANIKA CHICAGO TRAINING EVENT IN 2015**

[URL [ABRN.COM/CHICAGO2015](http://ABRN.COM/CHICAGO2015)]

**VIDEO SPOTLIGHT**

**1968 PLYMOUTH GTX wins first place**

This 1968 Plymouth GTX, sprayed with PPG ENVIROBASE High Performance DB152 clear, took first place for Conservative Hardtop 1968 at the Detroit Autorama.

[URL [ABRN.COM/1968GTX](http://ABRN.COM/1968GTX)]



**BLOG SPOTLIGHT**

**MOST FAVORED** Nation contract clauses are having negative impacts on our industry, said Stephen Regan with Regan Strategies and CIC Governmental Chair at CIC Portland earlier this year.

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ONLINE COVERAGE

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**MEGUIAR'S SWEEPSTAKES TO AWARD SEMA TRIP**

Meguiar's kicked off the Ultimate Sweepstakes, giving entrants the opportunity to win a trip to the 2014 SEMA Show.

»» [ABRN.COM/MEGUIARSTRIP](http://ABRN.COM/MEGUIARSTRIP)

**NABC, ABRN COLLABORATE ON AWARDS PROGRAMS**

Groups joined forces in recruiting applications and nominations for the NABC Award of Distinction and Body Shop Image Award and ABRN's Top Shops Contest.

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**PPG, PENN COLLEGE EXTEND PARTNERSHIP**

PPG and the Pennsylvania College of Technology's Collision Repair Program will continue its decades-long partnership.

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**I-CAR, FORD CREATE F-150 TRAINING**

I-CAR and Ford have partnered to create collision repair training for the 2015 F-150.

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**NISSAN PROGRAM OFFERS OEM REPLACEMENT PARTS**

Nissan North America has validated and is releasing Nissan Value Advantage OEM replacement parts.

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**NATIONAL TRAINING EVENT**

## Automechanika Chicago set for 2015

CHICAGO — The mayor of Chicago and executives from Advanstar Communications and Messe Frankfurt introduced Automechanika Chicago, a new trade show that will focus on shop-level training for technicians and product discovery. The biannual show will debut at McCormick Place April 24-26, 2015, the parties said in a May 1 press conference in the Windy City.

The show will be the 14th Automechanika event around the globe, but the first in the U.S. Chicago was chosen because it is centrally located and easily accessible for drive-in attendees and air travel.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel said, "By choosing Chicago for Automechanika next year, a great international convention comes to a great international city. Three years ago we started the hard effort of repairing the relationship and the image of McCormick Place. We used to have conflicts between labor and management. We resolved all those issues. We now work together as a team and go out and secure business for Chicago. This is a classic example of a win/win situation you can have when labor and management work together on behalf of the city of Chicago."

Chris DeMoulin, executive vice president of Advanstar automotive group, said this is the second show Advanstar has scheduled at McCormick Place.

»» CONTINUES ON PAGE 10

**BREAKING NEWS**
**MARKETING**

### PPG MEETING TEACHES CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Engaging customers is essential for shops to build brand awareness and customer referrals. Engagement has a new meaning in our social-media-driven world, using Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools can be the difference between a favorable reputation and being destroyed by negative viewpoints.

"Brand is not what you define it as; a brand is what the customer says you are," says Scott Stratten, author of the book *Unmarketing: Stop Marketing, Start Engaging*. Stratten served as keynote speaker at this year's PPG MVP Business Solutions Spring Conference in Scottsdale, Ariz. The conference was attended by 455 of PPG's top shops and customers.

Stratten kicked off the

»» CONTINUES ON PAGE 10

Photos: Adam Alexander





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&gt;&gt; CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

## AUTOMECHANIKA CHICAGO SET FOR 2015

"The Chicago team won our business seven months ago when we announced we would move our Powersports Dealer Expo from Indianapolis to Chicago. When our research showed that one out of every four repair and collision shops in America are within 500 miles of Chicago, that made this an easy choice." He also praised Chicago's union leaders for making McCormick Place "an easier, more user-friendly place to have a show."

Michael Johannes, vice president of Messe Frankfurt and brand manager of Automechanika, said, "I am delighted to welcome Automechanika Chicago in our portfolio and I am sure that we have found the right partner in Advanstar and the right location in Chicago. Our global network, which is active in more than 150 countries, will be working very hard to make the first Automechanika Chicago a huge success next year."

"We are in constant dialogue with our customers from manufacturing, distribution, retail and the entire automotive supply chain to ensure that we meet their requirements and organize shows in markets that they want. That's how we know that our customers are waiting for an Automechanika in the U.S. The brand Automechanika serves over 16,000 exhibitors worldwide and over 500,000 trade visitors – that is our asset and that is what we take care of every day."

Automechanika Chicago will showcase the newest tools, equipment and products in the market and will be the largest U.S. trade show dedicated to

high-end technical training and management classes for automotive technicians and shop owners. The event will leverage the world's most-trusted show brand – Automechanika – with Advanstar's leading automotive publications for the service repair and collision repair segments, *Motor Age* and *ABRN*.

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DeMoulin said, "Automechanika Chicago will be designed specifically for shop owners and technicians as we seek to make it the largest training event ever produced in the U.S. marketplace. Attendees will find a show floor packed with the latest products and innovations for independent shop owners and technicians and get top-notch classroom and hands-on training."

Johannes said the show's shop-friendly environment "will allow visitors, from technicians to shop owners, to really get a feel for the new product offerings through the various demonstrations, management seminars and technical training sessions."

With the number of diverse product categories exhibiting at this one event, attendees can experience the latest advancements in a very efficient manner."

The U.S. automotive aftermarket has maintained steady growth of more than 3.4 percent annually, fueled by an aging vehicle population where the average vehicle age is 11.4 years. These trends along with an explosion of new technology means technicians must keep pace. Automechanika Chicago will be the venue for shop-level training and new product discovery in North America.

To learn more about Automechanika Chicago, visit [www.AutomechanikaChicago.com](http://www.AutomechanikaChicago.com).

Headquartered in California with offices across the United States and abroad, Advanstar Communications has a portfolio of more than 50 trade shows, 30 publications, and 200 electronic products and websites, including auto industry brands *Aftermarket Business World*, *ABRN*, *Motor Age* and *SearchAutoParts.com*.

The Automechanika brand continues to experience record exhibitor and visitor numbers. This year's Automechanika Frankfurt show Sept. 16-20 had 90 percent of its floor space booked at press time. In 2012, more than 4,500 exhibitors attended the show in Frankfurt as well as 148,000 visitors from 176 countries.

Messe Frankfurt is one of the world's leading trade show organizers. In 2013, Messe Frankfurt organized 114 trade fairs, of which more than half took place outside Germany.

&gt;&gt; CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

## PPG MEETING TEACHES CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

event with a breakdown on the effectiveness of social media. One point Stratten conveyed is that shops must realize the potential reach of a consumer's voice.

"We are the media now. We have the power," he said. "We need to behave as if everyone has a million followers."

The conference hosted eight breakout sessions featuring speakers from segments of the collision market. Mitchell International's Greg Horn spoke about trends that will have short- and long-term implications for their business. One example is the increased usage of airbags among carmakers and the trend toward "micro-cars," which use airbags to keep passengers safe. Horn said statistically 25 percent of all accidents occur on the sides of vehicles, but as side airbags are added to newer vehicle models severity and vehicle totals continue to climb.

Toyota's Rick Leos led a breakout session on Current

Estimating vs. Next Gen Made Simple. Toyota has teamed with Mitchell to feed standardized repair data into an estimate when it's written. During the estimating process, if a user picks a particular part for a Toyota vehicle, the associated labor times, parts and some auto-included operations will appear. Users will then have the option to auto-include the Toyota data on the estimate.

The carmaker hopes that by exposing OEM-recommended repair procedures in easy-to-access templates, the industry will see improved information flow and shorter cycle times.



Scott Stratten



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# COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

The **National Auto Body Council** is aiming to donate **300 vehicles** through its **Recycled Rides** program in 2014.



## Think like a rock star to help differentiate your business

People are willing and happy to spend money when they get a good value.

BY KUKUH | ABRN BLOGGER

**L**ike many of you, I am always searching for ways to differentiate my business from the competition. I recently found some interesting ideas in Mack Collier's book: *Think Like a Rock Star*. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much overlap between the collision repair business and the world of rock and roll. But there's actually a lot to be learned from successful long-running bands. For example, the primary goal of most musical acts is to build a loyal fan base. As a business owner, that should be your goal too, because those "fans" will support your shop for years to come.

Here are some other "rock band" strategies that will help you establish a stronger brand and stand out from the crowd:

- Set the stage. We all know that show business, to a certain degree, is about style. I'm not saying your shop needs to look like the backdrop

of an Iron Maiden concert, but keep in mind that the appearance of your storefront and lobby area will give customers a preview of what to expect. Keep your shop clean and uncluttered and don't be afraid to display your certifications and awards where customers can clearly see them. Don't plaster your front desk with coupons and promotions. Nobody wants to walk into a concert and be bombarded by vendors selling t-shirts and souvenir cups.

- Have a designated frontman. The Rolling Stones have Mick Jagger. U2 has Bono. The lead singer is essentially the face of any successful band – setting the tone, working the crowd and turning on the charm to cultivate new fans. Your shop needs someone to play a similar role. Whether it's the shop owner or a general manager, whoever takes on that task should be front and center daily, thanking customers for their business.

Continues on page 14

### abrn.com BEST OF THE BLOGS

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#### BEST OF THE BLOGS are articles written by bloggers on ABRN's community pages

##### The right social network for you

KRISTEN FELDER

We spend quite a bit of time explaining what to do and not do when it comes to your social media strategy. From what times to post, to how to use certain networks and how to maximize your page's engagement, we like to cover our bases. We haven't, however, talked about choosing the social networks that best fit your business. We strongly advise against joining every social network with your business because you will end up spreading yourself too thin. Instead, focus on the networks that are most active for your industry and will best suit your business. Here we break down each of the most popular networks:

**Facebook:** The most popular social network across the board,

Facebook offers the ability to post photos and videos with ease. Facebook has its own metrics built in for easy monitoring, and you can schedule your posts in advance. Having an active presence on Facebook is essential for small and large businesses alike.

**Twitter:** Boasting a large population as well, Twitter is more for updates and news. If you are interested in branching out, Twitter can help you reach a less targeted audience than Facebook. This is also the birthplace of the hashtag, so utilize them if you are going to tweet.

**Instagram:** Very popular with millennials due to heavy visuals, Instagram recently introduced 15 second video capability to much success. This site is great

for businesses that have tangible products or services.

**LinkedIn:** A professional networking site, LinkedIn user profiles are based around careers and exchanging information. Establish yourself as an expert in your industry here by getting involved in groups.

**Google+:** Although it has fewer active users than most other social media networks, Google+ is great for the technical crowd. There are many SEO benefits, as Google indexes any content posted. The interface is similar to Facebook for multi-media postings, so be sure to link your website with lots of images.

**Pinterest:** Like Instagram, Pinterest is good for brands who are looking to boost with visual elements. Followers can repin your

pins, so it is great for putting on contests and can be used to drive traffic to your website.

**YouTube:** The second largest search engine after Google, YouTube is a powerful social networking tool using video. Showing off your work, doing a product demo, or highlighting customer testimonials all make for great video and are a worthwhile investment for your brand.

We've just scratched the surface of what social networks can do for you, so be sure to look for more in-depth breakdowns of social media marketing on our YouTube channel or here on our blog. Good luck and happy networking!

# WD-40® Specialist® Impresses in the Shop

HISTORIC HAYWARD, WIS., HOME OF ERNIE'S AUTO BODY, attracts year-round tourists who take advantage of the region's spectacular scenic beauty and its opportunities for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, golfing and bicycling.

Serving the vehicle repair needs of both the guests and neighboring residents as efficiently and expertly as possible is the prime goal of John R. Magowan, the shop's owner. Quality repairs, high CSI scores and low cycle times are key elements of his success.

"At Ernie's Auto Body, we are continually searching for the best product to help us deal with removing rusty bolts," John says. "After trying several products, we were given the opportunity to try WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray and have found it to be a far superior product, helping to increase our level of efficient and quality repairs."

"Living in northern Wisconsin subjects vehicles to the most brutal of winters," John reports. "The salt on the roads can cause vehicles to deteriorate and rust even in their early years."

These factors, of course, can lead to the toughest of challenges when it comes to facilitating the repair disassembly process. "So using WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray is a must," Macgowan says.

**Ernie's Auto Body** 15995 Nursery Rd | Hayward, WI 54843



Technician Josh Coddington



JOHN AND KAREN HOOVER, THE OWNERS OF JAKE'S AUTO BODY & TOWING, have fully embraced industry-leading "lean" production strategies while maintaining a stellar 9.9 Customer Service Index (CSI) rating at their "small but mighty" repair facility in High Falls, N.Y. "I've been using WD-40 [Multi-Use Product] for over 35 years and it never lets me down. Our shop runs lean — one choice product on every tech cart for the task at hand," John says.

"From the farm to the body shop, rusty bolts don't stand a chance," John points out, expressing high praise for the WD-40® Specialist® Rust Release Penetrant Spray.

John goes on to point out that "lean production is simple as long as you stay with it." He suggests that you monitor the operational measurements associated with production and look at all your numbers to "understand your expenses and what it costs to open the door." Ongoing education is present throughout the entire operation, which includes utilizing the most efficient materials — including WD-40® Specialist® Rust Release Penetrant Spray.

"Cycle time is mission-critical in our business. The WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray works instantly. We can't afford to wait for results, and with this product we don't have to," he says.

**Jake's Auto Body & Towing** 2302 Lucas Turnpike | High Falls, NY 12440



"WORK SMART, NOT HARD," DESCRIBES THE SHOP-FLOOR PHILOSOPHY at Quality Auto Paint & Body, a high-volume collision repair facility in Roanoke, Va. that consistently pursues continuous operational improvements.

"With a name like Quality, our customers expect their vehicles to be repaired right and fast," says General Manager Richard W. Henegar Jr., who is universally known as "Junior." "WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray helps our business meet those expectations. It makes the toughest bolts and fasteners easy to remove, and the repairs are completed smoothly where other products have failed."

"In an industry that is constantly changing in technology and procedures, it is great to have something that evolves with us to make the job easier," Henegar says. "Our shop always uses WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray," he adds.

"Let's be honest, working on cars can be seemingly impossible at times when nuts, bolts and parts can't be removed to complete the repairs," he explains. "WD-40 Specialist Rust Release Penetrant Spray helps to make the impossible jobs seem possible. With so many uses, it is one of the most versatile tools a tech can have."

**Quality Auto Paint & Body** 1529 Seibel Drive | Roanoke, VA 24012



See more reviews at [WD40Specialist.com](http://WD40Specialist.com)

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June 25, 2014  
@ 12 p.m. EST

## Aluminum repair update

PRODUCED IN COOPERATION WITH I-CAR.  
Register at [ABRN.com/AluminumPrep](http://ABRN.com/AluminumPrep)



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## THE SHOP OWNER

MIKE LEVASSEUR

A mid-month meeting

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## THE PROFIT MOTIVE

TOM MCGEE

Following cues from fast food

PAGE  
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MIKE ANDERSON

Flatten the "X" in your schedule

Think like a rock star - Continued from page 11

- Give everyone a backstage pass. Educate customers about what happens behind the scenes. Introduce them to the technicians who work on their cars so they feel like they're part of the process.
- Hand out autographs. Have everyone — from the front desk personnel to the technicians — sign the back of the repair order. This small gesture shows customers that everyone

- at your shop takes ownership of their work.
- Build your brand identity. Who says rock stars are the only ones who can have posters? Make a "poster" of your team and post it for all your "fans" to see.
- Make your customers fans. Get to know everyone who comes in your shop, and reward your fans with special offers for their loyalty. 📧

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[ABRN.COM/CHICAGO2015](http://ABRN.COM/CHICAGO2015)

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Imagine out of dust in 10 minutes and sanding in 30 with De Beer's low VOC Air Dry Clearcoat. [[ABRN.COM/AIRDRY](http://ABRN.COM/AIRDRY)]
- **XPEL paint protection**  
XPEL ULTIMATE Paint Protection Film provides years of protection from stone chips, scratches and abrasions. [[ABRN.COM/XPEL](http://ABRN.COM/XPEL)]
- **Estimating Front-End Damage**  
Larry Montanez with P&L Consultants takes us through general considerations when estimating. [[ABRN.COM/MONTANEZ](http://ABRN.COM/MONTANEZ)]

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*Noteworthy* **READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE ARTICLES**

On LinkedIn, Eddie Martin with The Dent Devil's Paintless Ding and Dent Repair asked: "Do you write estimates for customers who email pictures?"

**James Moy, senior consultant, Precision Auto Group:** I do entertain all prospective clients with any form of communication. Without communication, there is no way of landing any repair in the shop.

**Truman Fancher, manager, Truman Fancher Auto Collision Repair, Inc.:** Absolutely not. At best, I will give them an idea of the scope of repairs, but as far as cost, I have to see the damage in person.

**Donald Miller, body shop marketing and software company:** It is a vital communication and selling opportunity, but you can't put a cost on it until you see it. But we also offer to go wherever we are needed. It is about the customer, not that one repair.

**Shey Knight, The Only One, Inc:** Insurance company apps are all about first contact. It's not really about the estimate; it is about getting the car to your door and selling the job. We will gladly do estimates via electronic medium. That being said, we only write what we see, so it is always a starting point.

On LinkedIn, Noe Flores, manager at Avenue Body Shop asked: "What's your opinion on joining a local auto body association?"

**Joe Fisher, owner, J. Lee Automotive Industry Equipment USA:** It is nice to meet with other people in the industry, but you can't solve much meeting once a month.

**John Shoemaker, director at Bowditch Collision Centers:** I have been involved with several body shop associations locally and nationally, with different levels of participation. With any organization, you reap what you sow. If you participate, you will benefit from it.

**Barrett Smith, CEO of Auto Damage Experts:** Don't just join, join in and affect positive change. If you don't, others will. If one is not part of the solution, they are likely part of the problem!

**Janet Chaney, Cave Creek Business Development:** If you're not contributing, you're not helping. There are true industry leaders working in associations today who are looking out for your future — get involved and help us to make a difference.

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2014 WEBCAST SCHEDULE

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WEBCAST ARCHIVES

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2014 INDUSTRY CALENDAR

- **A/C Servicing Best Practices**  
Presented from MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., we discuss A/C servicing best practices and the latest news impacting the A/C service field. **Visit:** [www.MotorAge.com/MacDill](http://www.MotorAge.com/MacDill)
- **Why General Sectioning Guidelines No Longer Apply**  
I-CAR's Jeff Poole explains the criticality of understanding repair techniques and their impact on structural integrity and passenger safety. **Visit:** [www.ABRN.com/ICARSteel](http://www.ABRN.com/ICARSteel)
- **Overcoming Common Estimating Errors**  
Mike Anderson offers tips to help improve the estimating skills of your technicians and best practice ways to avoid missing bottom line dollars. **Visit:** [www.ABRN.com/EstimatingWebinar](http://www.ABRN.com/EstimatingWebinar)

**JULY 29**

- **Collision Industry Conference Detroit, Mich.**

**JULY 31-AUGUST 2**

- **NACE/CARS 2014 Detroit, Mich.**

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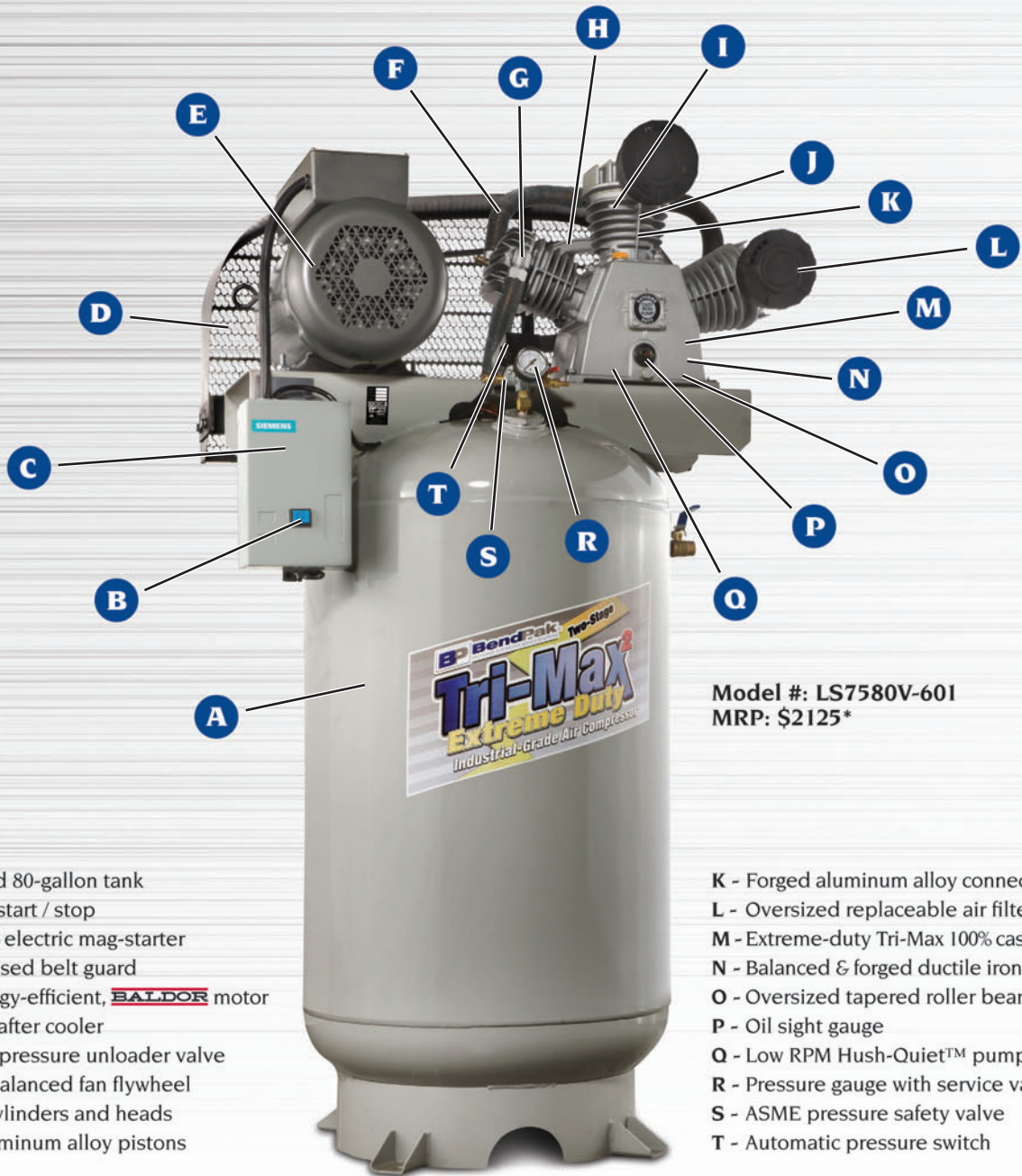
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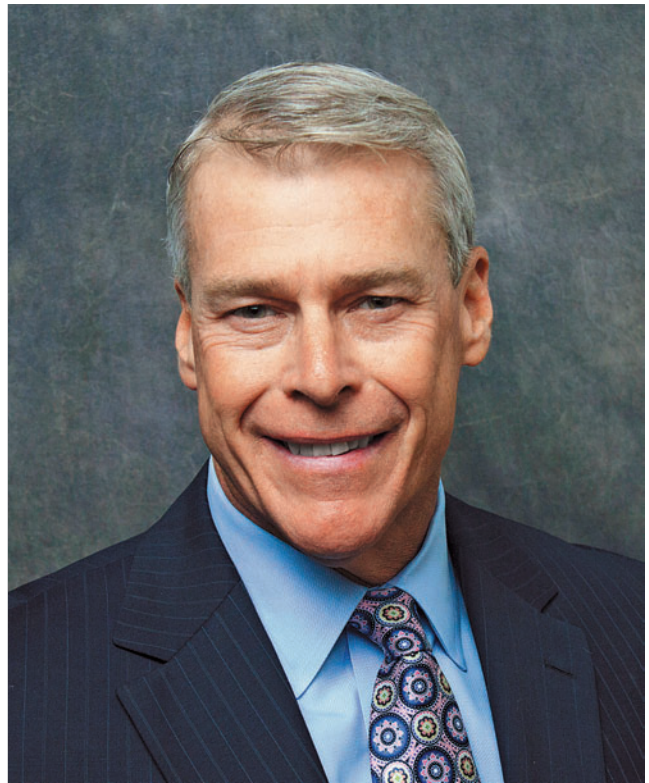


# Q+A WITH ROB LYNCH

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,  
SHERWIN-WILLIAMS AUTOMOTIVE  
FINISHES

## SWAF'S UNIQUE DISTRIBUTION MODEL OFFERS BENEFITS TO BOTH MSO AND INDEPENDENT BODY SHOP CUSTOMERS

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR



**ABRN:** Tell us about SWAF's approach to distribution.

**RL:** We bring a unique nature as a solution provider to our customers because of the controlled distribution platform. Our company-owned branches now have grown to a little more than 190 in North America, and we really control the ideation, commercialization and manufacturing of our products, right down to the distribution service for our customers.

Every person that touches our customers' business works for Sherwin-Williams. As a result, we are all part of same culture, and we all adopt the same value system and mission. There are great advantages to be able to replicate a consistent experience to all our customers.

**ABRN:** How is this distribution method different for the customer?

**RL:** Expertise. We're a one-stop PBE shop for our customers; we have service and technical employees, unmatched customer service and a just-in-time delivery method, which helps our customers manage their inventory and cash flow. Company-owned branches are able to act quickly to serve our customers by community so that their product

needs can be met from one location and delivered with unquestioned service.

**ABRN:** Does direct distribution also provide benefits to MSOs?

**RL:** In the industry today, as the MSOs continue to grow relative to consolidation, we are all trying to achieve a consistent, repeatable and reliable experience. With a controlled distribution model, we are able to replicate that service experience from state to state and market to market. We are able to match our Sherwin-Williams SOPs with the MSOs' SOPs and deliver a repeatable experience every single time.

**ABRN:** How does this form of one-stop shopping encourage lean processes for SWAF customers?

**RL:** We are able to use our consultative services to help them establish the appropriate SOPs to eliminate waste and drive leaner processes through their entire organization.


**ABRN:** How does this distribution model help customers with inventory management?

**RL:** We deliver our customers the right products when they need them. Our

infrastructure allows complete PBE replenishment and delivery processes that interface with our customers. With our branch network, we allow customers to standardize their delivery process so they have a consistent and trainable approach for all of their people. We can also offer centralized billing so that MSOs have a simple, single vendor experience.

**ABRN:** In a nutshell, what does this direct distribution system mean to the collision repairer?

**RL:** The model represents a one-company approach. We project one voice; one mission. When our customers pick up the phone, they are going to get a Sherwin-Williams employee on the other end that is going to meet their needs, resolve their issue or help them with their opportunity.

What is most important to us is our company. We are proud of the innovations that we continue to bring to the industry. We are proud of this controlled distribution model. We feel we bring some best-in-class capabilities. But in the end, it really is about our people and the passion they have for serving our customers and growing our business. 



# A mid-month meeting

A regular gathering of location managers helps foster communication, improvement

**T**oo many or poorly executed meetings are a waste of time. Your organization and participants will gain little. But a well planned meeting offers the advantages of multiple brainpower and produces many valuable results.

In a previous column, I mentioned that we hold a monthly meeting to bring together the managers from all 11 of our locations. Those meetings have proven to be an effective (and at times fun) means of improving our business.

We hold the half-day meetings mid-month, after each manager has reviewed and accepted their location's financial numbers for the previous month. We rotate the meetings among our locations. Those attending also include our comptroller, marketing and operations managers and me.

Throughout the month, I gather news, information and ideas (from conversations I have or things I read) that I want to share at the meeting. I then build a Power Point presentation. I start with a quick summary of the previous meeting as reinforcement and a way to re-engage everyone.

Here are some of the other key elements of each meeting:

- Safety committee meeting. Though we hold safety committee meetings at each location, we also hold a corporate safety committee meeting during the managers' meeting, using a conference call with our safety consulting firm.
- Guest speaker. These half-hour presentations can be vendor updates about new products or service; information from our medical or business insurance providers or brokers, or tips from a human resources specialist. The key is to provide useful information to help our managers personally or professionally.
- Internal updates. We review our overall performance numbers, any changes to insurance programs and our current and upcoming marketing and social media efforts.
- The "Quick View." We also do a run through of each location's key stats (sales,

cost of sales, gross profit, overhead and net profit) compared to last year and to the other locations.

• The "Forecast." We ask each manager where they are in terms of monthly goals, analyze data pulled from our management system and discuss projected sales for the coming two weeks. We monitor how close managers were on their projections for the previous month. We've held these meetings for years, so the managers understand the expectations for their participation. The meetings provide a forum for praise when they exceed their own projections, but the group also is good at catching when someone is "sandbagging," projecting too low just to look good when they beat the number. Everyone calls them out. It's pretty animated and interactive, but it's friendly competition.

• Facility inspection. Midway through the meeting, we do a walk-through at that location, using a checklist to score it on everything from the landscaping and availability of current magazines in the customer area, to the cleanliness and organization of the production area and consistent use of our "vehicle report card" system.

• "Lunch Wars." Our guest speakers sponsor part of the tab for lunch, and it's turned into a bit of fun competition among our locations to out-do each other. Last November, for example, the manager of the location where the meeting was held brought in a complete turkey dinner. Another location did steak and lobster, cooked right at the location. For another meeting, an employee hired a friend who had competed on "Master Chef" to do the cooking – and the food was phenomenal. You just never know what to expect.

• An upbeat conclusion. We always end each meeting with a motivational or funny video.

Because they know the date and location of the managers' meeting a month in advance, we rarely have a manager miss the meeting. And interruptions from their location are minimal; what I tell the managers is if their location cannot run for half a day without them, they're not running it properly.

The meetings are typically on a Monday, and each location holds its own meeting later that week, to convey to employees the key information discussed. Each manager sends me a copy of the agenda and notes from those meetings. It's an effective way of getting consistent information out to everybody on our team, and that consistency leads to cohesiveness throughout the company. 📶

**"THE MEETINGS PROVIDE A FORUM FOR PRAISE WHEN PROJECTIONS ARE EXCEEDED, BUT THEY ALSO ARE GOOD AT CATCHING WHEN SOMEONE IS SANDBAGGING."**

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Mike LeVasseur is president and COO of Keenan Auto Body, which has 11 shops in Pennsylvania and Delaware.



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## IN THIS SECTION

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## MINDING YOUR BUSINESS



## STEPS SHOPS CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE LABOR AND MATERIALS PROFIT IN THE PAINT DEPARTMENT

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**ASK** 10 shop, owners what their gross profit level is in their paint department, and chances are you will get 10 different answers.

What can you do if you find your paint department profits lagging behind other shops? Here are some recommendations to help improve profitability.



Steve Feltovich

**Start with your estimators**

The skill of the estimator in writing accurate estimates is essential to getting the appropriate hours on the job, which impacts profitability and productivity in the paint operation, says Jim Berkey, Director, PPG Refinish Alliance Programs. "At PPG, we help collision centers analyze paint and material profit-

ability and audit estimates if necessary to determine if the shop's estimating skills need strengthening."

"The estimate is king," said Steve Feltovich, manager of business consulting for Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes. "It's really the driver for all refinish labor and paint materials sales. You have to have 10 percent paint materials sales when measured against your total sales."

If your shop is below that 10 percent threshold, PPG, Sherwin-Williams and the other paint companies offer estimator training focused on ensuring all necessary paint labor is itemized.

"In a lot of cases, I see that it's work being performed in the paint shop but not adequately billed out," Feltovich said.

**Purify the numbers**

Steve Trapp, collision services development manager for



# Bronze Beauty



The *Envirobase High Performance* system is approved by Mercedes-Benz for refinish warranty work.

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Axalta Coating Systems, said other office-related practices can obscure paint department profits. Paint-related sales and expenses need to be coded properly to make profit-and-loss statements accurate. And rather than sticking to established inventory orders, shops may stock up one month and then buy very little for two months, skewing profit numbers in all three months. Or shops comparing paint materials profits with another shop may not account for all rebates and incentives they've received.



Steve Trapp

And rather than sticking to established inventory orders, shops may stock up one month and then buy very little for two months, skewing profit numbers in all three months. Or shops comparing paint materials profits with another shop may not account for all rebates and incentives they've received.

### Consider available technology

Once you've addressed the office, it's time to move into the shop. Infrared lighting and booth fans are among the

equipment that can improve paint profit.

Tim Ronak, senior services consultant with Akzo Nobel Coatings, said Akzo offers a "manual proportioning unit" that often reduces waste by 10 percent or more. A shop loads the unit with product – typically clearcoat and hardener – and it then dispenses the exact amount the user calls for, pre-mixed and ready to spray.

"Because it's coming out already proportioned, you can mix very, very small quantities, rather than mixing to the next level on a stick or cup," Ronak said. "We have guidelines to help you predetermine how much material you need for panel size."

Color cameras are another time-saving technology available. Berkey says correctly identifying the appropriate paint code the first time ensures accurate hours on the job and avoid delays when the vehicle is ready for the booth. PPG has a spectrophotometer that can read the vehicle color right up front and determine the correct formula. It simplifies the color-matching workflow for all refinish repairs.

### Maximize booth cycles

Shops tend to do lots of bumper jobs, which are ideally suited for getting multiple jobs sprayed in the booth at the same time, suggests Craig Seelinger, VisionPLUS program manager for BASF.

"One thing that really helps decrease cycle time and increase touch time on vehicles is for a paint shop to get a list of what's coming into their department so they can prepare for it," Seelinger said. "They can load the booth properly to paint and clear four or five bumpers all at the same time during one booth cycle, rather than four or five individual booth cycles."

Having advance notice can also eliminate a part sitting for half a day before it gets edged out.

"If it doesn't get painted until the afternoon, that car won't get reassembled until the following day," Seelinger said. "But if it gets edged out in the morning, it can get reassembled that same day."

### Standardize process, products

Having all technicians follow the same process reduces errors and often leads to fewer products to inventory.

"This applies down to sandpaper,"

Seelinger said. "One tech likes to use 220, another uses 240. You can use either one, but why duplicate inventory?"

Standards can reduce costs in other ways as well. Ronak points out that the amount of high-solids primer the paint shop has to apply can vary widely based on the quality of work coming over from the body department.

"Going from a 150-grit final finish to a 220-grit final finish on bodywork and all prepped areas prior to priming can actually cut primer liquid costs and the time associated with it by half," Ronak said. "So do you have a system that supports that level of finishing?"

Standard operating procedures help ensure all the shop's materials work in unison to reduce costs, Ronak said.

### Avoid over mixing

One profit-killing problem to look for is over mixing. Charlie Whitaker, technical advisor for Valspar Refinish, said this is especially true when a painter begins using a different paint line.

"They can be a little pre-programmed, looking at a panel and thinking they'll need, say, four ounces to cover that," Whitaker said. "If the new paint line has better coverage, that may be driving the amount of waste up."

"With waterborne, we find that very common," Axalta's Trapp agreed. "Our waterborne product basically covers in a coat and a half. But the painter may be used to needing two, three, even four coats. So he's still mixing for that, even though he only needs a coat and a half."

Those extra ounces of mixes often end up sitting on a shelf, never to be used, Seelinger said. In addition to taking steps to reduce that "waste," Seelinger said, painters can look for ways to put any such mixed product to use, such as for ground-coats.

### Mix on the scale

Over mixing raises the one standard operating procedure all the paint company representatives recommend: Make sure all sprayable products are mixed on the scale.

"Mixing on the scale can be a huge benefit to a shop because it will allow them to track their actual use of individual products," Seelinger said.

In addition to helping with inven-

#### JUSTIFYING FULL PAINT TIMES ON REPAIRED PANELS

*Tim Ronak, senior services consultant with Akzo Nobel Coatings, said he's watched over the last 12 years as the average overall number of refinish hours on estimates has fallen while labor rates have not risen nearly as quickly.*

*One cause he cites: An increased push for use of partial paint times on repaired panels. That concept makes little sense, Ronak said.*

*"The refinish times are to refinish a clean undamaged panel," Ronak points out. "Once there's damage on that panel, it justifies more refinish operations, not less."*

*Shops seeking to justify full paint time may want to download a presentation that a Collision Industry Conference (CIC) committee compiled back in 2006. It is available at [ABRN.com/CICPartialRefinish](http://ABRN.com/CICPartialRefinish). Among the information it provides are notices from all three major estimating system providers that their blend formulas were not intended for use on repaired panels.*

*For more ideas and tools, shops also may want to check out ABRN columnist Mike Anderson's take on the subject from last year. Read his column by visiting [ABRN.com/PaintTimes](http://ABRN.com/PaintTimes).*



tory control, mixing everything on the scale can help shops compare product use among painters within the same company or, using paint company data, against industry benchmarks.

Trapp said rework also can show up on the mix report, when it shows the same color was mixed twice in one day or three times over the span of a job.

Feltovich said another measurement that consistent use of the scale allows is refinish labor hours produced per gallon of clearcoat used. If the shop is hitting the benchmark of having paint materials account for 10 percent of sales, Feltovich said, the shop should be producing 75-80 refinish hours for every gallon of clearcoat consumed. This is a good way to measure for potential waste or, worse yet, potential theft; that can be tackled by limiting access to paint materials, making these items available through the shop's parts department or production manager.



Tim Ronak

Ronak agrees that production hours per gallon of clear is a good measurement, but notes that the benchmark can vary based on the product sprayed. He advises check-

ing with your paint company or just tracking it over time to look for variants. Overall, he said, use of the scale allows a shop to ensure the volume of liquid product it sprays is within 4 or 5 percent of what it buys, when measured on at least a 3-month window.

Variants or changes in consumption may not always signal theft, but it can alert a shop owner to dig a little deeper, Seelinger said. One shop saw its use of clear jump, only to learn that painters were spraying an extra coat as "insurance" against an over-zealous buffer trying to cope with dirt problems because the booth filters needed to be changed.

"If you don't track it, you just think your paint materials bill is sky-high, when in fact it's technicians being creative to come up with solutions to problems taking place within the paint shop," Seelinger said.

### Use smarter inventory controls

Whitaker said SOPs, including mixing everything on the scale, can help a shop track exactly how much of what products are being used. That's information, he said, that can save a shop time and money when it comes to ordering and inventory.

"You can dial it in to a point where

you know what you need to have a 10-day or two-week supply," Whitaker said. "Ordering based on real usage data keeps inventory to a minimum, reduces the time the shop has to spend ordering, reducing trips for the jobber, and eliminates ordering things that don't provide value and that drive up costs on materials." 📡



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PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

# Following cues from fast food

Implement the systems used in restaurant chains to ensure consistency

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

If you go to your favorite fast food restaurant in Los Angeles, Chicago, or any other city, the store appearance and food is pretty consistent. Well, operating a successful collision repair facility today is very similar to flipping burgers, dunking French fries and making milkshakes.

It's not hamburgers. It's systems. Fast food restaurants have developed phenomenal systems that result in a consistent, reliable and efficient product.

Unsuccessful fast food restaurants — whether unsuccessful from the customer's point of view (poor quality, slow service, dirty restaurant); the employees' point of view (drama, bickering, lack of teamwork); or the owner-operator's point of view (unprofitable) — can become successful by implementing and following the established systems and procedures.

Just like a fast food restaurant, to be successful in today's collision repair industry, you must focus on your processes, both in the front office and in the shop. Your goal should be to attract and retain quality employees, provide a quality and consistent repair and deliver outstanding customer service (to both the vehicle owner and the insurance company).

## Staff engagement

As a business owner, your expectations of how you want things done are your best practices. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) ensure that your expectations are consistently met or exceeded; managers must be willing to do what it takes to fol-

low procedures and implement policies to ensure that employees heed the systems. The key to SOPs is to develop them with the involvement of your staff.

## SOP benefits

There are many benefits to implementing SOPs. For example, they can:

1. Create a positive customer experience.
2. Develop a culture in your business around customer satisfaction, quality, efficiency and continuous improvement.
3. Provide consistency in the entire repair process.
4. Establish clear expectations and accountability at all levels of your organization.
5. Serve as a tool for performing internal audits. You want to be able to quickly walk through the office and shop and see if a process is not being followed properly.

## Where to start

The number of processes used during a collision repair can make developing SOPs seem overwhelming. To get started:

1. Determine the goal you want to achieve.
2. Choose a "Project Champion" who will be directly impacted by the SOP.

3. Identify and document the steps in the process.
4. Reference supporting documents, when applicable.
5. Consider developing a current state and future state process map (flow chart showing each step in the process). Keep this simple.
6. Because different people have different learning styles, once you have written the procedure, consider enhancing it with photos, videos or audio clips.
7. Determine how you are going to measure and audit the process.
8. Have some objective way of measuring the success of the SOP.
9. Determine how you will implement it. You will need to explain not just what the SOP is, but why it's important to use and follow the SOP.
10. Communicate and celebrate the results to your staff during your staff meetings. If you show improvements for the customer, business and staff, your team will support the efforts you make.

## Get started

The most important key to success with SOPs is just getting started. Set a goal for completion such as completing one per month or three per quarter. Chances are that a year from now, both your front office and your shop will run more smoothly and efficiently in the areas in which you have SOPs.

We have performed a lot of research in this area, so please keep up with our discoveries! We have created a great tool to help you get started developing the SOPs you need to have in the office and the shop! Try it free for a limited time by going to [www.atonlinetraining.com/abrn1406](http://www.atonlinetraining.com/abrn1406).

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# SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

CONNER BROTHER BODY SHOPS / MIDLOTHIAN, VA.



## Getting back by giving

Family-owned MSO values the intangible while serving the community

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Virginia's Conner family has combined strong religious beliefs, a good sense of humor and high standards for providing standout customer service to create an expanding chain of four body shops.

Giving back to the community through charities, such as their ongoing Recycled Rides project, is a key attribute of the business. Four vehicles per quarter are presented to deserving families in need.

"Last year we gave away 14 cars," reports general manager and co-owner Kevin Conner. "We've enabled the changing of two lives – the tech's and the recipient family. This is a testament to my faith and what Jesus wants us to model," says Conner.

The shop also frequently appears during the news cycle on the local television station. "NBC 12 likes our Recycled Rides

and Car Wash programs, and they help to promote them," Conner says.

In addition, accolades recognizing Conner Brothers as "Richmond's Best Body Shop"

have been bestowed by *Richmond Magazine*.

The family was instrumental in establishing the Virginia Auto Body Legislative Committee. "Through this organization, we were able to get insurance companies to pay sales tax on all materials at a retail rate," Conner recounts. "This meant that the shops in Virginia no longer paid the sales taxes when they bought the materials, saving every shop that cost. There were other good things the group did for the industry, but this one was the most significant."

Conner's membership in a Sherwin-Williams 20 Group assists in bringing about constant improvement. "They are a great group of people who are making a difference in the industry," he says. "The support the group offers is significantly better than going it alone. We all live the life every day and we know each other's pains."

Taking advantage of educational offerings from Sherwin-Williams and I-CAR, the staff is platinum certified in their respective areas of expertise.

All of the training is paid for by the



Kevin Conner

### AT A GLANCE

#### Conner Brothers Body Shops

Name of shop

Midlothian, Va.

Headquarters location

Douglas G. Conner, Jr.; Kevin

Conner; Alan Conner

Owners

4

No. of shops

38

Years in business

25

No. of employees

5, plus 5 fleet accounts

No. of DRPs

4.5 days

Average cycle time

350-500

No. of vehicles repaired monthly

60,000

Square footage of shops

Sherwin-Williams

Paint supplier

Chief, Duzmore

Frame machines used

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Estimating systems used

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company, and the technicians earn commissions; “not to be confused with flat-rate,” says Conner. “We also have a work referral program that rewards techs for bringing work to our facilities, and we give them great benefits and pay them fairly.”

The recruiting strategy strives to “hire good-hearted people with great attitudes,” he says. “We are on the cusp of a full-on customer service training program for all staff who come into contact with our customers. Currently we do phone training and some light role-playing.”

“The majority of our processes are lean-driven,” Conner says, citing stocking procedures, quick/fast lane repairs and integrated payroll, management, estimating and accounting systems.

Mechanical services are provided along with collision repairs, “and we are the only body shop in the United States to be a supplier of Countryside Organic Products, which includes seed and feeds of all types.”

Yet the company’s commitment to innovation and other efficiencies is certainly not chicken feed. “We focus on doing as much in the repair process as is profitable. Our primary objective is safety,” Conner says. “We embrace technology when I-CAR accepts it.”

The company maintains five fleet accounts and has five direct repair program (DRP) affiliations.

“We attempt a balanced relationship with the DRPs,” he says. “You cannot be an MSO without the relationships. What we do is provide the best service possible. While our cycle times are not always the lowest in the market, our CSI (Customer

Service Index) scores are tops and our quality is without question.”

### Fighting to grow

Conner points out that “making a profit when costs are accelerating faster than the labor rates are increasing” remains a challenge for the family business.

“Our biggest and toughest challenge is building our company. This is not a local concern either. At this point, I cannot get any insurance company to commit to supporting us in our newest location. We as owners have to put it all on the line and then solicit an insurance company for work,” according to Conner.

“It seems a little backwards to me. One would think that a company with a good reputation for serving the community and doing excellent quality work could expand their company with a DRP agreement in hand. I can see how the largest consolidators are making a run of the industry because their agreements are made well above the local level.”

Conner goes on to observe that “our market suffers from the customers’ ‘dealership mentality’ and a lack of unity among the shops. The dealership mentality is when the customer believes they have to take their car back to the dealership to get them repaired. Having run body shops for Toyota, Cadillac, Subaru, Saab and Chevrolet, I can tell you that our techs have more and better training than any body shop at a dealership. But the public believes the dealer is the place to go.”

The company is currently in negotiations to open a fifth full-service body shop

and a satellite estimating center. When contemplating a venture into a new location, the deciding factors include the neighborhood’s population and economic demographics, claims counts and the potential vehicle capacity that can be delivered through the bay doors.

Virginia is not known for harboring a rugged winter climate, but when the snow does fly it presents numerous opportunities for collision repairs that are highlighted by the Conner Brothers’ active use of social media posts and an attractive Internet site. Heavy thunderstorms and encroachments by hurricanes are other drivers of heightened business prospects.

“My plan is to own the customer,” he asserts. “It is a huge opportunity to capture every customer or potential customer and market to them – even if we don’t work on their car.”

### Decisive decision making

Douglas G. Conner Jr., Kevin and Alan’s father, is the family patriarch. Since retiring 12 years ago, Douglas has pared back his active involvement in daily operations although he remains a valued participant in the business.

After mustering out of the Marine Corps in the 1960s, Douglas honed his skills as a painter and ultimately established the namesake company during the mid-1970s.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Kevin Conner enlisted in the Marines in 1986, rising to join the service’s officer corps. “In 1996, I left the Marines to rejoin my family in our body shop,” Conner recalls.

“If given the opportunity to hire a vet, we do,” he reports, adding that “there are not that many veterans who are looking to make our industry their career choice.” Conner voices his strong view, though, that the prime purpose of the nation’s military is to defend the country – period – rather than serving as a training ground for civilian occupations.

“If we want to talk about basic leadership,” Conner concludes, “Marine training helped me become a better decisive decision-maker for our company. Having the luxury of looking back over the last 20 or so years since I left the Marines I can see how I’ve grown into the owner I am today. Not all the decisions I’ve made have been best ones for our company, but I’m fortunate that the big decisions have carried us through these tough times.”



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THE ONLY CONSTANT IS

CHANGE

PAINT TECHNOLOGY IS EVER CHANGING, AND TO STAY CURRENT,  
YOU MUST CHANGE WITH IT. SO WHAT MUST WE ADAPT TO NOW?

BY ALFRED THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Paint technology is ever changing, and we must change with it. So, what is the change we must adjust to now? Well, it is not really new. In the U.S., the National Rule of 2008 regulated the amount of VOCs that coatings can have. Though many painters believe this mandates waterborne coatings, it regulates only the amount of VOCs in the coating. So if a solvent meets the requirement, it can be used.

Meanwhile, many paint companies, believing that the rule may become more stringent as pollutants continue to rise, worked on developing waterborne coatings. In 2008

and 2009, parts of California were required to convert to waterborne. A year later, Canada changed as well. Other parts of the country, mostly along the east coast, also began converting. There are large areas of the U.S. that have not mandated the switch to waterborne paint, many businesses have voluntary complied.

So if a shop would like to change to waterborne paint, what must they do? First they must consider the equipment changes. One of the most often asked questions is, "Will I need new spray booths and spray guns?" Though new spray booths will not be needed, some changes in drying/curing equipment may be necessary. Most paint manufacturers recommend that a downdraft spray booth, which has the



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capacity to move large amounts of air, is the best type of booth to use.

Traditional solvent-borne basecoats dry through evaporation, and though atmospheric humidity does affect the drying time of these finishes, temperature has a stronger influence on their curing time. Baking-type spray booths can significantly increase the cost of using solvent-borne paints. When waterborne paints are used, the cost of baking is markedly reduced. To speed the cure time, a technician can choose a “faster” reducer and/or increase the temperature of the booth to reduce the coating’s cure time.

With waterborne, air movement influences dry time the most because water must evaporate from the finish. Humidity does affect evaporation speed, but air moving rapidly over the surface of the painted vehicle can also boost dry time. When water evaporates out of a finish, it increases the humidity of the air just above the painted

surface. By circulating air in the booth, the humidity over the surface is moved and lower humidity air takes its place, thus increasing drying.

Many booths do not move the needed amount of air; to increase booth air movement, venturis, or special blowers, can be added. Booths designed for waterborne finishes have venturis permanently installed (**FIG 1**). For existing booths, a movable venturi or venturis (**FIG 2**) can be placed in the booth, circulating air around the area on the vehicle that has been painted.

Another consideration is filters. One of the biggest enemies of a painter is dirt, so the air that is passed through the venturis must be scrupulously clean.

Paper booth filters are not used much anymore, but some booths still use them. With all the water used with waterborne paints, paper filters can be damaged when used in conjunction with waterborne coatings.

Concerning spray guns, most spray

guns being used today for solvent-based paints can also be used for the application of waterborne coatings. Though the technician must consider the recommended needle and nozzle sizes provided by paint manufacturers, gun clean-up may need to be altered. When traditional guns are used with waterborne paints, they should be cleaned with water first to remove any waterborne paint, and then rinsed with either solvent or alcohol to remove the water. Older guns have non-coated steel in them, which would be susceptible to corrosion when water only is used to clean them. Newer water-ready paint guns have stainless steel or coated parts that water does not affect.

Technicians now have specially-designed guns available for water application that address the corrosion problem and can atomize waterborne paint. Shops contemplating switching to waterborne finishes may want to consider this equipment.

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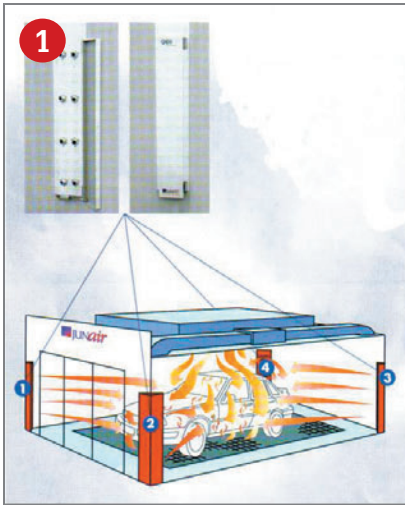
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**Training**

Many paint companies will state that the switch to waterborne paint can be made easily, but it is not without its learning curve. When the National Rule took effect, high-solids coatings became the standard. With the use of

higher viscosity paints, more texture in the finish became a common side effect. When water is the primary solvent, paint coatings are not restricted by the amount that can be added, thus letting technicians apply coating with little or no texture. Though high-solids solvent-borne clears are still needed to finish a refinish paint job, texture is much less a problem than it has been in the past.

Most paint manufacturers hold regular training classes for new painters or to introduce new products to shops **(FIG 3)**. Technician training may still be one of the best investments a shop can make, especially when changing to waterborne coatings.

**Storage**

With water as the principal solvent in waterborne coatings, freezing may become a problem. Transportation of product in the winter may require vehicles that have the ability to keep paint prod-

uct from freezing. Storage at paint stores and in body shops also must be in heated areas to avoid freezing. Even when there is no danger of freezing, the paints need to be applied at suitable temperatures to avoid atomization and flow problems. In the winter, paint may be shipped in insulated boxes to guard against freezing.



**Reduction**

A common misconception with waterborne coatings is that a paint shop can take water from the tap to reduce the coating. Actually, the water used to reduce waterborne coatings must be de-ionized, and thus most companies recommend and supply the precise type of reducing water for their finishes. Any contaminant such as iron or other min-



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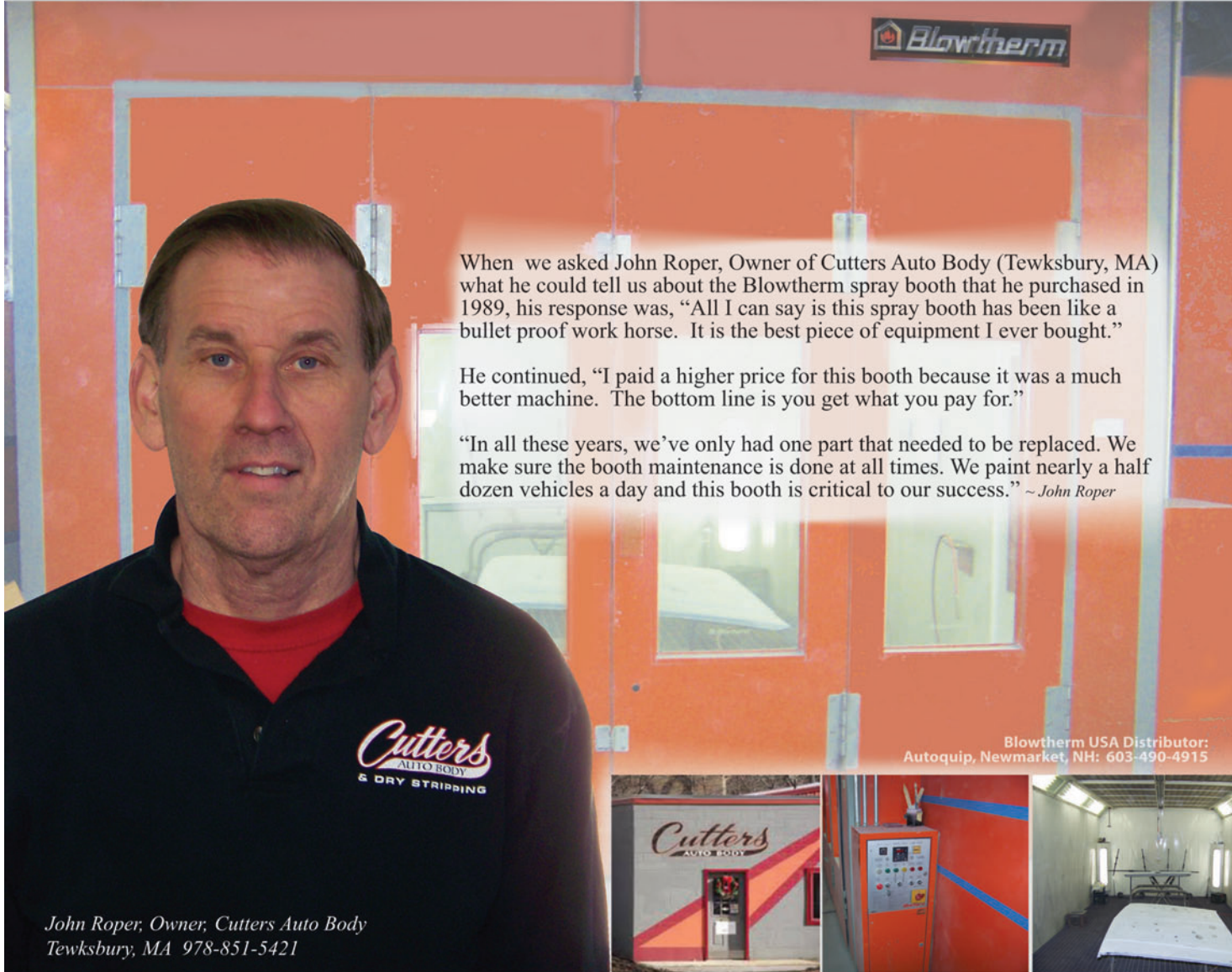
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erals in common tap water would cause undesirable side effects.

**Safety**

As mentioned earlier, waterborne coatings are much safer for the environment and the technician applying the coating. That is not to say that personal protective equipment will not be needed (**FIG 4**). Technicians must still read, understand and follow all the safety precautions listed in the product MSDS. Paint manufacturers, in their quest to help paint shops reduce throughput cycle times, work continuously on developing safer coatings. Nonetheless, with the amount of hazardous ingredients they routinely are exposed to, paint technicians must be diligent in their pursuit of personal safety.

**Latex vs. urethane**

Waterborne paint technology is already changing and will continue to change as paint companies strive to improve their products. In fact, there are at present two different waterborne formulas in use today. One type of waterborne technology is a urethane paint that uses water as its principle solvent. The other is a true latex technology. Manufacturers often recommend that these formulas be applied differently.

Tom Gardner of Pro-Spray states that their paint is a fourth generation waterborne paint. It is latex-based "shake and pour" paint, which means that it does not need to be mechanically stirred by the mixing rack before pouring. The technician can just take the paint tint off the rack, gently agi-

tate it by rocking or shaking it by hand; then the tint is ready to pour. For many, waterborne paint shelf life can be a concern, but Pro-Spray has a two year shelf life from the date of manufacture. After the paint formula is mixed, the paint must be reduced by 10 percent to 15 percent with one of two special water reducers, one for normal painting conditions and a second for hot or low humidity areas.

Application of this latex is a two-coat process with a control coat (as needed). The first coat is applied and then dried with air amplification, followed by a second coat. Many waterborne paints have an off-color until the coat is fully dry and matted, so technicians shouldn't worry about color match until it is completely dry.

One of the advantages when using this type of waterborne latex paint is that if the finish has a nib or other imperfection, it does not need to be "washed off." You need just let it completely dry, and after it is "nibbed out" another coat is applied over the worked area to become undetectable.


Urethane waterborne paint uses urethane as the paint with water as the primary reducer. Many brands of these urethane waterbornes must be adjusted mechanically, just like their solvent counterparts. Though this type as well needs large amounts of air to "dry" (**FIG 5**), the finish the application recommendation can be much different. The first coat is put on the panel, and with little or no flash time the second coat is applied. The surface is checked for complete coverage and a



judgment is made for a third coat. After all the color is applied, the panel is air dried. The recommendation for panel progression is also different than others: the panels to be painted completely are done first, and the blend areas are done after. As always, it would be wise to check the particular paint maker's recommendations and follow them.

Technicians will discover other advantages in using or switching to waterborne paint before regulations require it. First, cure time can be reduced, with the correct equipment, by using waterborne paints. Additionally, color match, metallic orientation and blending can be enhanced with the use of waterborne basecoats; and technician safety is markedly increased when waterborne coatings are used. One of the myths about waterborne paints is that technicians need to use special respirators when applying water finishes, this fact is not supported in the product MSDS literature.

There are many reasons to convert to waterborne coatings, principally because in the future, shops will be required to convert. Next, using waterborne is significantly safer for the environment, and likewise for technicians. In addition, because the more expensive chemical solvents have been significantly reduced in waterborne paints, they may even be lower in price than "the old kind" as they become more popular. With the proper process, time can also be significantly reduced when paired with fast cure time clearcoats. It is also significantly cheaper to operate venturis with compressed air than to operate paint booth bake ovens.

Requiring the use of waterborne will bring significant advantages for the industry without significant adjustments or decreased profits. 

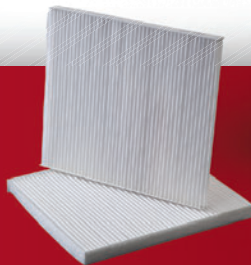


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I-CAR TRAINING  IN FOCUS

# READYING FOR ALUMINUM REPAIR

REPAIRERS MUST ADAPT — AGAIN — THIS TIME TO BE ABLE TO TACKLE THE EXTENSIVE USE OF ALUMINUM THAT IS COMING

BY **JASON BARTANEN** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Soon, a rivet gun will become a common tool in collision repair facilities.

## JASON BARTANEN

is Technical Director for I-CAR, the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair, a not-for-profit training organization focused on education, knowledge and solutions for the collision repair industry.

We've seen a lot of changes in vehicle technology over the years. With each of these changes come new challenges and new opportunities. When the unibody vehicle was introduced, repair professionals were required to change their approach to collision repair, from damage analysis through the repair process. With the introduction of GMA (MIG) welding, additional requirements for repairs included new training and equipment. And passive restraint systems presented a completely different type of challenge, involving electronics and diagnostics.

Since then, we've seen advanced braking systems, advanced-high and ultra-high-strength steels, new types of plastic and composite parts, and a plethora of advanced safety systems. With each new advancement, collision repairers have been continuously challenged to adapt; and it's time to get ready to adapt again. High production vehicles with extensive use of aluminum are coming; it's time to acknowledge the reality of this imminent change and get ready to tackle it as another opportunity.

"Aluminum isn't difficult; it's just different." We first heard this statement in the 1990s during the development of the Ford P2000 concept vehicle; a collaborative effort between the Aluminum Association and Ford Motor Company. Many collision repair professionals



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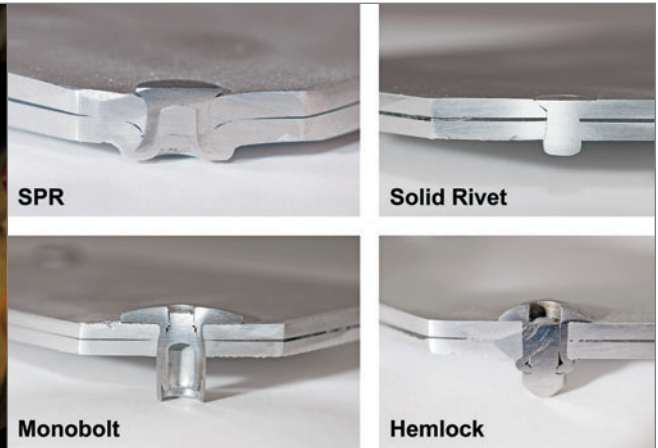
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(Left) Aluminum GMA (MIG) welding will require new equipment and training for complete, safe and quality repairs. (Right) Depending on the application, and the vehicle maker instructions, a variety of mechanical fasteners will be required for aluminum repairs.

began to look into the impending challenges we'd soon be facing, I-CAR expanded its aluminum course offerings, and started to see an expansion in the availability of automotive aluminum MIG pulse welding equipment. How-

ever, when the steel manufacturers recognized the charge that aluminum was about to make, they acted quickly and formed the UltraLight Steel Auto Body (ULSAB) consortium; that led to the creation of the ULSAB vehicle structure.

The infusion of aluminum into the automobile design and development industry had been slowed; temporarily.

An Iowa endeavor proves that aluminum is about to boom. In March 2012, Alcoa executives, along with the Gov-



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WHERE PROCESS MEETS INNOVATION


ernor of Iowa, broke ground in Davenport on a \$300 million dollar expansion at their Davenport Works facility to “meet rising demand for aluminum from the automotive market.”

While there isn't a shortage of aluminum intensive vehicles (Jaguar F-Type, XJ and XK, Land Rover Range Rover and Range Rover Sport, Audi A8 and R8 are just a few examples) and there are a lot of aluminum closure panels, the Iowa expansion is a strong indicator that we will soon see more aluminum than ever. The new Corvette Stingray is built on an all-aluminum space frame and rumors are running rampant about other potential high volume vehicles that will employ aluminum intensive body structures. At a minimum, we will see more aluminum hoods, doors and other closure panels. According to the latest Ducker Report, a survey of auto OEMs and their planned use of materials, the amount of aluminum used in cars in North America – already the No. 2 material in a car – is going to nearly double by 2025.

So what does it all mean to collision repair professionals? It's time to adapt, again. Much like shops had to “find a place” to install a three-dimensional measuring system, they'll need to develop an isolated area to repair aluminum intensive vehicles, to avoid potential galvanic corrosion issues. Similar to making investments in GMA (MIG) and squeeze type resistance spot welding (STRSW) equipment, they'll need to invest in GMA (MIG) welders capable of aluminum pulse welding and in rivet guns to properly repair tomorrow's aluminum intensive vehicles. There will also be a number of vehicles built with a combination of aluminum and steel structures (Audi TT and Porsche 911, for example) that will require repair professionals to ensure they're using the proper adhesives and techniques to minimize the potential of galvanic corrosion.

Aluminum intensive vehicles will also force professionals to adapt their approach to damage analysis – no different than as with high-strength steels. Identifying castings from stampings and extrusions, and knowing the repairability limits of each, will be essential to writing a complete and accurate damage assessment. Proper identification of parts and their repairability limits will minimize supplements and improve cycle time. I-CAR has developed the Aluminum Panels and Structures Damage Analysis (DAM05) course to better equip industry professionals in the damage analysis process.

Technicians will also have to be able to identify the types of aluminum and choose the proper attachment method, based on the vehicle maker's recommendation. Proper electrode selection is essential for performing welds that will stand the test of time, and proper rivet removal and installation are paramount to a complete and safe repair. Having the proper tools, equipment and materials, along with the knowledge gained from understanding proper training and repair techniques, are the only way to achieve complete and safe repairs.

The technologies found in today's vehicles are evolving at a record pace and collision professionals must continuously adapt to meet the opportunities. More aluminum intensive vehicles will be on the road in the next 12 months and the time to start adapting is now. Fortunately for all of us, aluminum isn't difficult; it's just different. 



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TECHNIQUES  IN FOCUS

# Realizing the benefits of nitrogen

Using nitrogen in heavy-duty shops takes training and adjustment, but can increase product quality and cost savings.



Nitrogen helps with metallic orientation. We can make blends with touch metallic colors in the middle of flat panels.

IMAGES: CHRIS STERWERF

BY **CHRIS STERWERF** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

In the heavy-duty collision repair world, technique, air pressure, temperature, spray gun settings and solvent choice are just a few of the many variables that painters have to adjust daily in order to have a successful paint job. It is entirely different from the automobile solvent coatings and waterborne technology of today. The variables involved in painting heavy-duty vehicles can make the process exponentially more difficult. Luckily, about a year ago, we began spraying with nitrogen, and it has empowered us to take control of many of these variables.

We were one of the first commercial refinishing heavy-duty shops in the country to try an ionized, heated, nitrogen system. The support we received from the manufacturer was great, but it was uncharted waters for both of us. At that time, at least two of the other leading nitrogen system manufacturers had yet to work with a shop in heavy duty.

Before you consider nitrogen, develop a solid baseline. Create consistency among your painters with spray guns,

spray tip sizes, spray gun control settings and air pressure. Ensure your painters test their film thickness with a wet mil gauge card or a digital dry film thickness gauge. Try to control as many variables as you can to build a starting point.

Once we established our baseline and started using nitrogen, we continued to spray using our old techniques, pressures and spray tips. Problems arose. We were getting solvent pop because of too much paint on the panel. Mil





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On large jobs like these, the savings from nitrogen really adds up.



Testing compressed air versus nitrogen using a low-hiding yellow color. The nitrogen proved to help the color cover more quickly.

thickness was almost twice the recommended amount. The finishes were looking “fluffy,” as there was too much material on the panel. We found the solution involved a combination of changes — adjusting the spray overlap, speeding up the spray passes, changing air pressure, using smaller tips and trying different solvent and reducer combinations. Find out what works best in your shop.

The nitrogen system allowed us to limit Mother Nature’s influence on our production. We are able to utilize the slowest solvent and reducer packages regardless of outside temperatures. Slowing the paint down allows it to flow out to control texture and mottling. The hoses are heated and keep the nitrogen fluid carrier dialed in at a specific designated temperature. By changing temperatures and solvent packs, we can match the orange peel to adjacent panels with smooth or textured finishes. With compressed air, chang-



On large jobs like these, the savings from nitrogen really adds up.

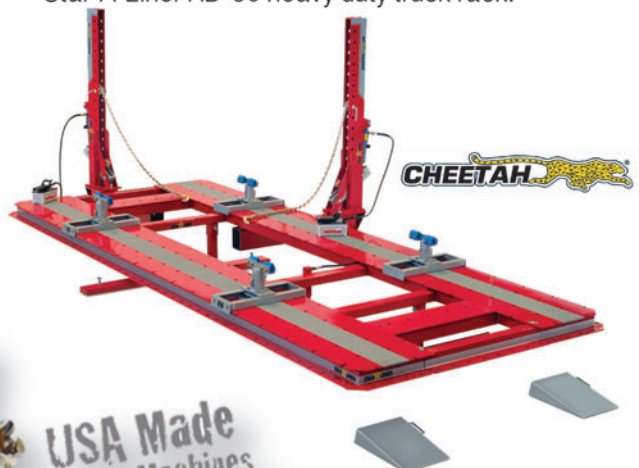
ing outside temperatures can make the air expand and contract, which requires spray gun or wall adjustments in order to achieve consistency. Because nitrogen is inert, the system basically allows the spray gun to be set at one pressure, and it never has to be changed again. Nitrogen doesn’t hold water, so moisture is kept out of the lines, which helps in reducing flash times. The combination of nitrogen and the heated lines allows the paint to get out of dust more quickly, drastically reducing our

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need to buff. We are able to move parts in and out of the booth faster and reassemble in much shorter times. The nitrogen system really speeds dry time to just over a minute between coats.

One problem we continue to have is over mixing. In the heavy-duty world, we judge by gallons instead of ounces. When painting an all over in commer-


cial paint, a job can be ruined if you have to stop and mix more because you may lose your wet edge. Painters tend to err on the side of caution, but it can get very expensive when a gallon of commercial paint could cost well over \$1,000. However, we are getting better and better every day.

A basic system runs anywhere from \$30,000-\$60,000, depending on the brand. We have had a learning curve to deal with, but I'm starting to compare refinish labor hours sold in comparison to liquid costs from prior years and the trend is moving in the right direction. Our productivity has increased, and our quality is way up. It has cut maintenance cost and time in half. In the past, it would take an entire day to wash down one spray cabin's walls and grates, scrape off overspray and sweep out our concrete pits. Now, we can get it done in half a day, and we do it less frequently.

Prior to nitrogen, when spraying a



**Nitrogen allows us to spray with smaller tips and at lower pressure, which keeps overspray down allowing our booth to stay cleaner.**

large job, our downdraft booth floor would be the same color as the vehicle we painted, and the ground would be sticky from overspray. With nitrogen, you would be hard pressed to figure out what color we just sprayed unless you looked closely at the filters. We have been extremely impressed with the results. 

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TECHNIQUES  IN FOCUS

# Super savings

Build your paint department revenues by cutting costs



IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

Most of the steps you can take to cut costs in your paint department begin well before the actual painting.

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**O**'Rielly Collision Center, in Tucson, Ariz., has been among the top 10 in the *ABRN* Top Shops contest for the past several years, and was even named the 2011 Top Shop. That success has to come with a vision for doing things right. So what sets it apart?

O'Rielly's continues to hone an ongoing effort to make its paint department more efficient. O'Rielly's, at the urging of its paint vendor, implemented a system that more accurately measures painter productivity and actual costs by tracking product inventory use instead of labor hours. By examining and comparing product use, the shop and its painters received a clearer picture of the paint department's costs and painter performance.

Manager Brian Guerrero says the system saved money, improved paint services and motivated staff to upgrade their performance.

Building efficiency in your paint department can deliver significant cost savings – enough to make this effort well worthwhile. Read on for more information about what steps you can take and where you can get help to build revenue by cutting your painting costs.

## Numbers that motivate

Shops hear plenty of suggestions about what they can do to go lean or cut costs. If you don't believe the rewards will justify the efforts, consider some numbers provided by Ted Williams, Manager of Business Consulting Services for Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes.

Williams notes that if a shop's paint material cost is five percent of total sales and paint material sales are 10 percent of total revenue, their profit is 5 percent of total sales. The average shop nets less than 10 percent net profit. This means that paint material profit in most shops is equal to half or more of the total net profit.

Without bringing in any additional work, shops can significantly boost revenue by better managing one cost area. Fortunately, plenty of help exists to create a program that is effective.





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**Build a program**

The following steps provide an outline of what your shop can do to institute its own cost program.

**Step 1: Contact your vendor.** Paint vendors are not only experts on the best ways to use their products, they also provide a myriad of other resources to help shops manage their numbers. During the past few years, they've rolled out a number of programs to help shops reduce their painting costs through better management of material inventories and elimination of waste and errors in paint processes.

Many shops already are taking advantage of these programs. Williams reports that Sherwin-Williams is extremely busy working with customers to incorporate its programs. Indeed, he and reps from other paint vendors suggest interested shops request these services as soon as possible to avoid wait times. Translation: act now, since your competitors probably have.

In case you're wondering why vendors would run programs that poten-

tially could cut into their sales, Williams says the programs provide greater benefits for a vendor because they help build better shop operations, ones that help shops thrive for the long term. Profitable shops stay busy and buy more products, leading to a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with their vendor.

**Step 2: Educate your estimators.** Paint services may not be performed until the last stages of a repair, but cost savings begin the moment estimators start damage analysis. Williams notes that estimators frequently receive little ongoing training, so they aren't always aware of the true labor hours and materials cost of paint services. When these costs aren't accurately recorded on the repair order, shops aren't properly compensated and lose money.

Williams says the best shops in the country routinely have 10 hours of paint work recorded on their repair orders, where many other shops have less than 8 hours and some write as little as five.

He recommends shops enroll estimators in continuing education to ensure an accurate estimate. He also suggests that a shop's paint department review the estimate as well before it's delivered to an insurer or the customer.

"The painter is going to know which panels need painted, which can be blended and where," he says. "Further, this information needs to be documented up front so the insurer will pay."

Inaccurate estimates also result in supplements, which result in costly delays. Williams says supplements for paint work can prove particularly costly since they may not be submitted.

"If the estimator already had written other supplements, they may not be willing to submit one more to the insurer near the end of the repair," explains Williams.

**Tip 3: Avoid inventory flux.** Maintaining a proper inventory – one that meets your needs without running low or carrying unnecessary excess – is a key part of cost reductions and a central feature of vendor programs. Pete Mahoney, National Technical Manager/Trainer for ChemSpec, says that one of the chief benefits of inventory control is



**Maintain an inventory list to ensure a consistent inventory and to track product use.**



**A neat, efficient and properly stocked paint room can significantly reduce your paint department costs.**



**Spraying technique can vary widely from one painter to another. Work with your vendor to institute the proper technique and spraying consistency.**



**Create a better materials inventory by investing in quality supplies and specific products.**

the funds it frees up for other shop investments. Stable inventories also deter overuse and misuse, along with theft.

Vendors typically provide a number of tools to help shops determine proper inventory levels. Sherwin-Williams, for example, provides its customers with "smart scales" that transmit product use to the company. Using this information, the company can help set proper inventories for a shop. (The scales also provide other services, such as determining if products are being correctly mixed at the shop to improve product efficiency and cut waste).

One rule Williams employs when calculating inventory levels is taking into consideration all the products and materials a shop uses. From there, he says shops should determine where their investment should go, with the bulk of their money being invested in "products that leave with the vehicle over those that end up as waste." That means spending more on products the customer actually sees over those that are discarded after use - sandpaper, masking tape, etc.

IMAGE: LEFLER COLLISION AND GLASS

IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

IMAGE: CENTRAL COLLISION CENTER



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Shops shouldn't necessarily invest in the cheapest versions of those products, says Williams. Low-cost products can cost shops more if they don't offer quality and force shops to perform expensive re-dos or if shops must use more of them to provide the same quality a higher-priced product could offer more economically with less use. Williams says shops should invest in those products that provide quality, while keeping an eye on cost.

He also suggests shops practice consistency when ordering products and materials. This means using a single brand of product and specific products (for example, 100 grit sandpaper) for specific tasks. This practice reduces inventory costs since shops no longer need to stock multiple varieties of products.

Mahoney says shops also can save on inventory using products that can be utilized for multiple purposes. Some paint lines feature products that can be mixed into multiple bases, clearcoats, etc., thereby reducing the number of products a shop needs to keep in stock.

**Step 4: Eliminate waste and re-dos.** Once you address issues with estimate accuracy and inventory, you'll cut down on waste and re-dos – two areas that likely are the sources of your largest unnecessary costs. You'll still need to address their other causes.

Steve Trapp, North American Strategic Accounts Manager for Axalta Coating Systems, says shops can cut significant waste by reducing over spraying and performing better prep work. Trapp says many painters fall back into old habits while using new products. They apply 4-6 coats of product where just 1½ coats is necessary. (In many cases, painters overuse waterborne products, forgetting that these finishes require fewer applications than their predecessors.)

During prep work, Trapp says shops can create significant problems, resulting in waste and re-dos, by improperly staging paint jobs. Trapp explains that when shops don't mask correctly, paint is not applied properly. This alone produces a re-do. Paint departments often complicate these mistakes by sanding and re-masking a vehicle in the booth, producing dust that contaminates the

fresh paint work.

Trapp says shops should work closely with their vendors to identify the sources of waste and re-dos and then institute systems that fix these problems.


**Step 5: Spray smart.** Improper spraying technique could fall under the previous step, but technique and other spraying issues constitute such a large part of cost management, they're broken out here as a separate step.

The vendors that *ABRN* spoke with noted that technique can vary greatly from one painter to another in a single department. Williams notes cases in which the difference in painting efficiency between painters can be as great as 80 percent. The good news here is technique can be corrected, usually without much difficulty. Williams says one shop with this issue videotaped its painters, then noted the difference in spraying efficiency between its best

painter and the one with the worst efficiency. After watching the tape, the latter employee was able to quickly close the gap (within 10 percent) between his work and the other painter.

The more challenging issue here is preventing painters from reverting to old habits. Again, your paint vendor can help with programs that maintain proper technique. Mahoney says these programs have been particularly effective with new painters and suggests shops get these employees involved with such program as early as possible.

He also recommends that shops invest in HVLP or LVP guns, which provide greater transfer efficiency.

Incorporating these steps in your shop will involve commitment from you and your staff, along with some hard work. A payoff in greater net profits, and more effective work habits, will make these effort well worthwhile. 

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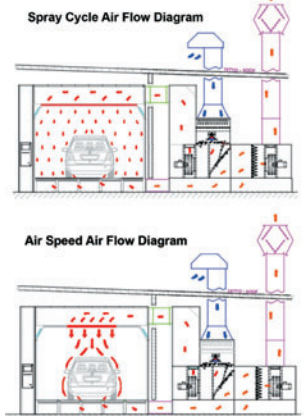
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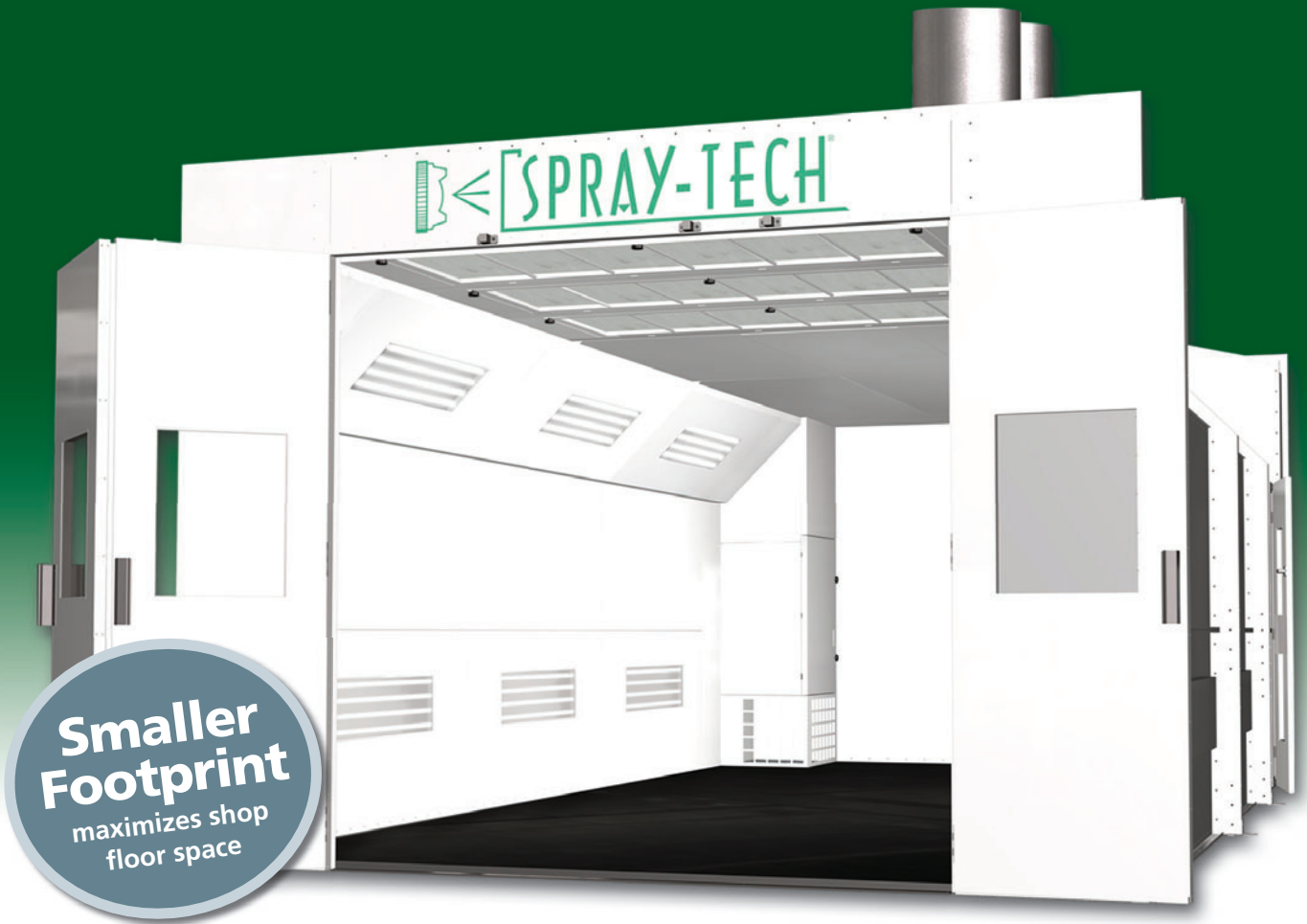
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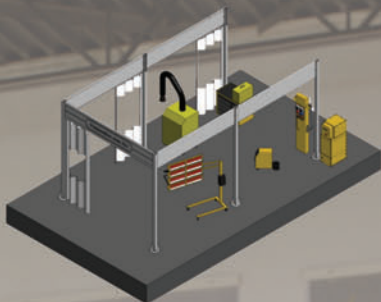


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T H E L A S T D E T A I L 

One of the most common barriers I see to a shop improving its cycle time is bad scheduling. Too many shops schedule everything in on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. So the painter who is standing around early in the week with nothing to do is then scrambling on Thursday and Friday to get it all done.

Most shop management systems will track how many cars you take in and how many you deliver each week. Make a chart of it, and for many shops that chart will look like an 'X'. The line showing the number of cars taken is high on Monday and drops to a low on Friday, and the line showing number of cars delivered starts low on Monday and rises throughout the week to a high on Friday.

The most efficient way to schedule for the best cycle time, however, is to flatten out that 'X,' making both lines flat across the week. That means the same number of cars brought in and delivered each day.

I suggest you determine your anticipated monthly sales and divide that by your average repair order. So for easy math, let's say you do \$200,000 a month in sales, and your average repair order is \$2,000. That means you need to average 100 cars a month. If there are 20 working days that month, your goal should be to bring in five jobs a day, put five cars into paint each day, and deliver five cars each day.

Shops sometimes say it's a challenge to get customers to schedule on a Thursday or Friday because they don't want to be without their car over the weekend. Here's a tip I learned from Aaron Marshall at Marshall Auto Body in Waukesha, Wisc. If you schedule the first five customers who call on a Monday, the next five on Tuesday and the next five on Wednesday, then you're hoping the next 10 will schedule on Thursday or Friday. Those aren't great odds.

But Aaron suggests instead trying to schedule Thursday and Friday first. You're then trying to find 10 out of 25 customers to schedule for Thursday or Friday. Those are much better odds.

Another thing I suggest is posting a sign on the front counter that said, "Ask us about our Thursday and Friday drop-off specials." That can help you identify customers who don't mind

“Try scheduling on Thursday and Friday first. You are then trying to find 10 out of 25 customers who are willing to schedule a drop-off on Thursday or Friday. Those are much better odds.”

## FLATTEN THE 'X' IN YOUR SCHEDULE

### Implement these tips for smarter scheduling that will improve your shop's efficiency and cycle time


bringing their car in later in the week. You can offer them a coffee shop gift card, or a discounted oil change or detailing services.

Shop management systems can also help you dial in your scheduling even further by looking at different categories of jobs. The systems can divide jobs into four or five categories based on the number of labor hours per job. A job with two or fewer labor hours might be a "category 1," while a job with 2-8 labor hours might be a "category 2," etc.

Look at this data over a year, and you can see how many of each category you do in a typical month. Again, you can then use that information to schedule more effectively. If you typically do 40 "category 3" jobs in a month, you know you should schedule two of them in per day in a 20-workday month.

Whatever systems you try, I will tell you that everyone I've challenged to do this has come back to me and said, "Scheduling drop-offs on Thursday and Friday isn't as hard as I thought it would be." They find their staff's stress level drops along with their cycle time.

But what about insurer push back? First, my message to those insurers is: Get over it. Let us fix the cars and produce for you. Give us the flexibility to schedule efficiently, and your cycle time will improve.

I also know shops who have convinced insurer supervisors to let the shop try scheduling more efficiently for a few months; the results have shown the insurers it works. Remember: "No" doesn't mean no. "No" means they don't yet have enough information to say "yes." 

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