

Licensing: It's a Tough Sell!

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Thursday, 03 September 2009
Last Updated Thursday, 03 September 2009

Discussing the pros and cons of shop and technician licensing is necessary as the industry explores this topic. What are your thoughts? There are many questions to be answered before a general agreement about the need for shop and technician licensing can be obtained.

Kudos to Mike Lambert, president of the Automotive Distribution Network (Parts Plus), for addressing the technician licensing issue in ADN's Network Magazine (Summer 2009 edition).

Lambert thoughtfully lists the potential benefits and negatives in his article, "Licensing agreement ... or disagreement?"

Lambert's quote, "I realize this subject is controversial and elicits different opinions," is a classic understatement at its best, but Parts Plus is to be applauded for encouraging its members to submit their thoughts in a "Letters to the Editor" format. If you are a Parts Plus shop customer, you should take advantage of the opportunity to weigh in.

ASA has a somewhat different stance on the subject because over time, our members have recognized that licensing should apply to the shop first and foremost, and secondarily to the employees, which includes the technicians who work there.

I agree with the statement in the article that is attributed to Gil Gunn, Parts Plus vice president of marketing: "the problem with ASE [voluntary technician certification] is that only the good shops participate, leaving countless shops unqualified to repair vehicles in some cases, which can give the entire industry a bad reputation." Amen!

There is an increasing recognition that good shops will be under more pressure to differentiate themselves from the "pack" in the minds of value-conscious consumers. How does a consumer know that a shop is capable of providing safe, reliable repairs at a fair cost? We constantly encourage ASA member shops to promote the association's Code of Ethics and invest in their ability to competently address the increasingly complex repair requirements of modern vehicles. We also vigorously promote the importance of employing ASE-certified technicians and service writers. But can we do more?

There will be opportunities for independent shops to grow their businesses in the next few years by capturing some of the displaced customers who would have traditionally been served by franchised vehicle dealerships. However, any success that independents might enjoy will be dependent on demonstrating technical competence and excellent customer service skills, in my opinion.

Will a formalized set of minimum requirements and standards be helpful? Do we need government entities to establish the criteria for us? I suspect that our industry is already on many politicians' radar as a possible source of new revenue. But would licensing create a better industry or merely a morass of red tape?

These and many more questions related to this issue will have to be answered before there is any general agreement about the need for shop and technician licensing. The good news is that credible organizations such as ASA, ASE and the Automotive Distribution Network are willing to engage in a healthy discussion of the pros and cons. Join in the mix,

and let us know what you think.