

Technology and Talent: Now Is the Time to Get Ahead of the Learning Curve

Dennis McCarron

The top two concerns for any tire and service shop owner today have nothing to do with tires, manufacturers, advertising or which part supplier to use.

Without a doubt, the top two concerns are technology and the growing talent gap. Both of these issues will be dramatically shaping how owners do business in the near future and for years to come. Let's take a look at both concerns.

Technology

Technology is becoming more and more a required part of running a shop. Gone are the days of hand writing invoices. Soon to be gone are the days of using the phone to order parts or tell a customer their new tires are installed and their car repairs are complete.

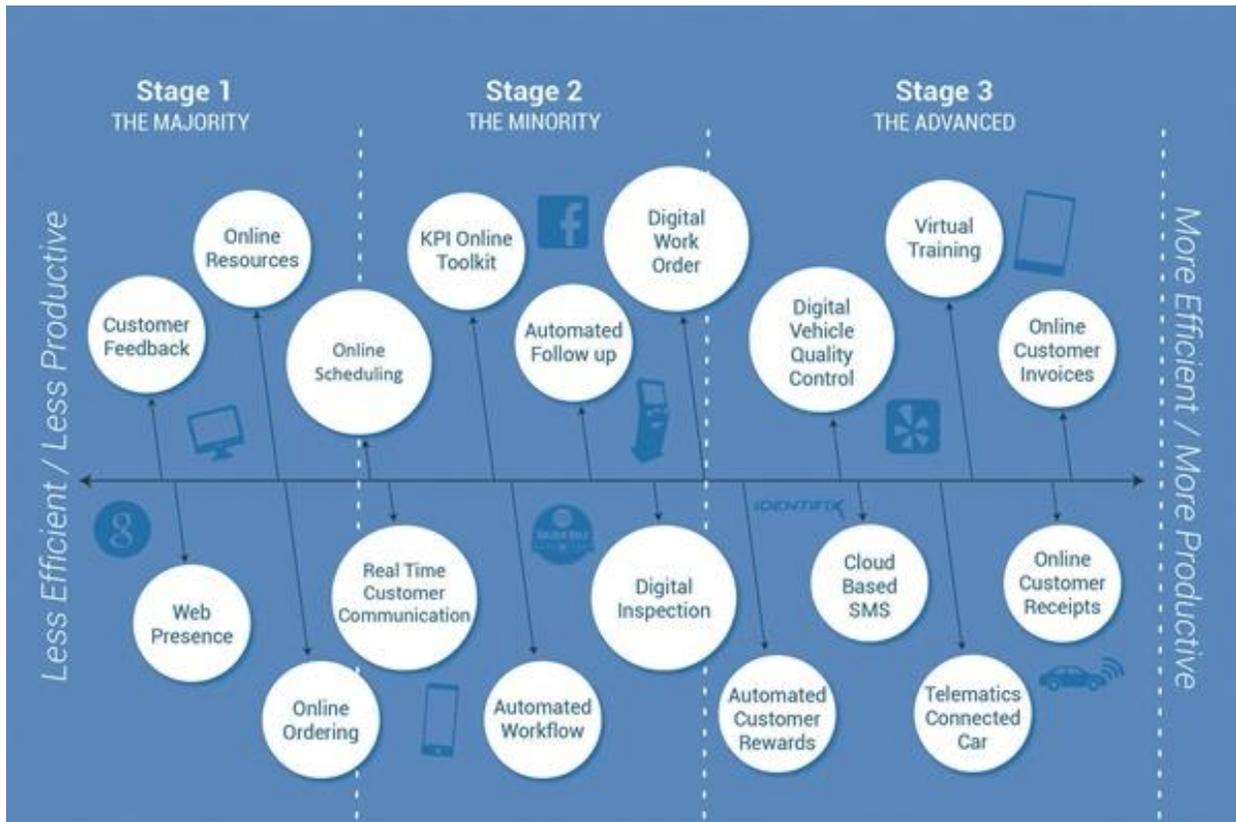
Technology should be about improving the experience in a tire and service shop for both the customer and employees alike. If you don't know where to start technology-wise, there is a great visual tool from autotext.me creator and Rowlett, Texas, shop owner Chris Cloutier called the Shop Technology Timeline <http://www.shoptechnologytimeline.com/>. It doesn't say what you need to do, as much as it will show you where you are and what the next steps in digitizing your shop will be when you eventually decide to move forward.

Talent

Early in the 1990s, the federal government made a hard sell for America's youth to go to college. Politics aside, the idea was that in order to push the U.S.A. from a manufacturing base to a service-based economy, we needed more college grads. This drive had the unintended consequence of depleting skilled trade of talent, especially of people whose gifts and abilities laid in thinking with their heads and their hands: carpenters, electricians and, yes, service technicians.

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Good technicians were already scarce. Thanks in part to the college push, which unintentionally made choosing trade school a negative, you now have a situation where the average millennial is not really even interested in a driver's license let alone working on cars. It's a fact that the average age of a master tech is now in the 50-years-old range. You don't have a talent shortage — you have a talent famine.



Where does your shop fall on Cloutier's Shop Technology Timeline?

The shop of the future is not only going to have to have the latest technology to make employees more efficient, it is going to have to educate its employees on trade skills as well as provide a basic education in the areas where our school systems are also failing: math skills, critical thinking, problem solving and social skills (face-to-face), among others.

Now is the time to start making your business attractive to ambitious workers. Make work rewarding for salespeople by focusing their time on actually selling and advising and less time on administrative tasks. Enhance a technician's job by creating laptop/tablet workstations or building out an inspection bay where information about a customer's car can be relayed quickly, reducing downtime.

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The shop of the future has tire machines that enable a tire tech to mount/demount low profile tires without bending and twisting. Systems will need to be in place where customers receive updates/photos on their vehicle's repair status.

These aren't decades away shop improvements. These are solutions being implemented today and tomorrow. And job training and education in the tire industry needs to become the norm. The regular routine exercise of applied learning through workshops, community college or in-house mentorship needs to take center stage, not be something that gets attention only in slow times.

As fast as technology moves and as loud as the siren is for the talent gap, shops that survive the next 10 years will have to be ahead of the curve on these two issues. ■

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