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A DEALER'S GUIDE TO HIRING

A SERVICE DEPARTMENT WHITE PAPER

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department's performance by
enhancing your hiring techniques

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CONTENTS

3 IT'S A SERVICE TECH'S **MARKET**
FOR EMPLOYMENT
From the editor

5 HELPING YOU FIND THE
RIGHT FIT
From the sponsor

6 **HIGH STANDARDS** BRING
DEALER BACK TO MMI

9 THE CURRENT STATE OF **JOBS**

10 J&P CYCLES RELIES ON
KNOWLEDGEABLE NEW TECHS

12 **INTERVIEW** QUESTIONS

14 MIDLAND POWERSPORTS HIRES
MMI GRADS EXCLUSIVELY

16 STARTING A **NEW LIFE** AT MMI

18 TIPS FOR GREAT **SERVICE**
WRITERS

19 SERVICE DEPARTMENT **HIRING**
MADE EASY

21 YOUNG MMI ALUM BRINGS
CONFIDENCE AND **CREDENTIALS**

23 **CHOOSING** THE RIGHT
TECHNICIAN

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IT'S A SERVICE TECH'S **MARKET** FOR EMPLOYMENT



By Dave McMahon
Senior Editor

LIKE MANY OF THE STORIES we craft for *Powersports Business* readers, the origins of this *A Dealer's Guide to Hiring, A Service Department White Paper* came from feedback from dealers themselves.

We learned from dealers in our surveys at the conclusion of both the second and third fiscal quarters that the service department was the best performing revenue source in the dealership.

With that in mind, we wanted to ensure that dealerships of all sizes were on the same continuum of revenue success in their own service departments. Key to that success is having the right service techs in place, so we turned to a variety of industry sources – dealership owners, techs themselves, aftermarket companies and others – to get insight into what drives a successful hiring practice.

We believe the market intelligence presented on these pages will bring a new level of insight into how you should approach hiring service techs. And for service technicians themselves, we offer plenty of tips for success in finding your ideal job from folks who are turning wrenches today.

As usual, we're always interested in providing our powersports industry readers with a view from 10,000 feet, as we like to say. Henry Lonski specializes in recruiting, staffing and consulting in the powersports industry. Never has he seen more demand for qualified service technicians.

"Dealers that are sleeping at the switch and not paying their people what they should be, they're vulnerable," Lonski told *Powersports Business* in a phone interview from his Lonski and Associates firm.

Lonski reports that while his business initially started as way to fill OEM positions in areas of sales, engineering and marketing, dealer principals are now turning to him to find the best and brightest service techs.

"Right now it's a technician's market," he said. "They can and will bounce around, because there's a big difference between \$15-20 an hour vs. \$25-\$30 an hour. The top dealers really take care of their staff and are sensitive to both the market and the talent, whether it's certified, non-certified or experienced. In this market for service department employees – writer, managers, techs – mobility is an option. Right now it's all of their market."

Pointing to data presented during the inaugural *Powersports Business* State of the Industry webinar, Lonski notes that as dealership inventories are rising, pre-owned sales are bringing major profit.

"They need qualified techs and service writers, and right now they're hard to come by," Lonski said.

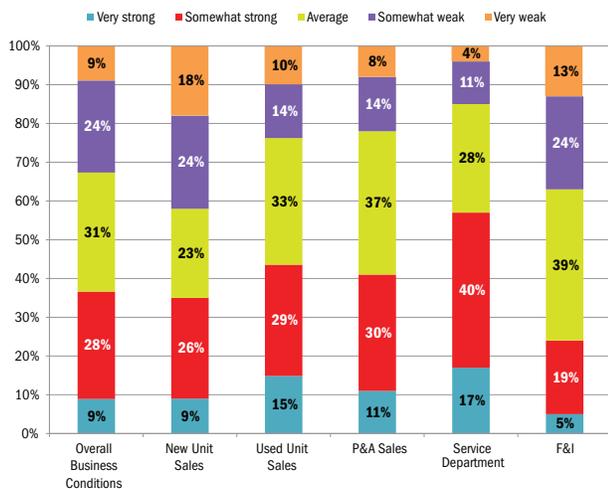
For example, Lonski's October lineup of jobs to be filled included four technicians and three service managers at separate dealerships.

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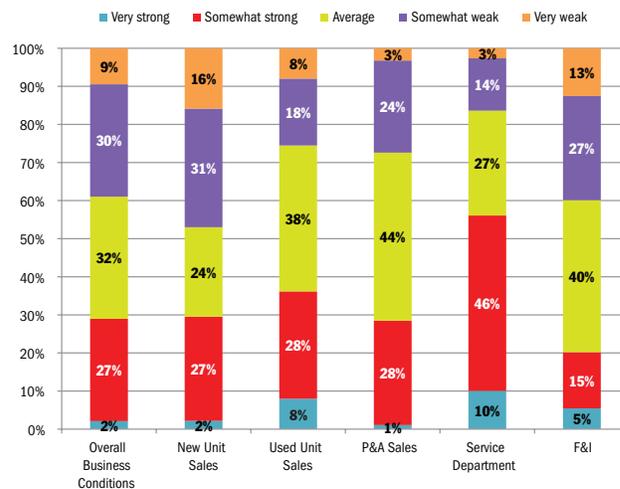
FROM THE EDITOR

► continued from page 3

POWERSPORTS BUSINESS/RBC CAPITAL MARKETS Q2 2012 DEALER SURVEY



POWERSPORTS BUSINESS/RBC CAPITAL MARKETS Q3 2012 DEALER SURVEY



Lonski, who has seen a similar technician market in the marine and RV industries, said import dealerships such as Ducati and BMW are having an especially difficult time filling service tech openings.

“There are only 140 BMW dealers across the U.S., as opposed to the 1,000 Kawi or Yamaha. It’s really, really hard to find experienced technicians, if not certified technicians,” he said.

Dealership pay rates, which Lonski estimates average in the \$12-\$20 hourly range, hinder prospects from potential moves.

“The high end would be \$25 an hour, and include some relocation benefits, in terms of paying for the last month of a rent if a guy has to break a lease. More and more dealers are understanding that they’re going to have to increase their reach and that they’re not necessarily going to find their next hire in the local county, or even the state,” he said. “The flip side to that is ‘Can the individual afford to move?’ The real estate market has hurt everyone in the market – they can’t afford to move. They’re underwater in their homes, so as good as the opportunity might be, they can’t afford to take the job – and that’s for the technician, GM, regional manager, vice president.”

Service techs who bring a degree from the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute or other motorcycle-specific trade schools set themselves apart.

“It increases their value,” he said. “You see a lot of mechanics go back to school because it increases their marketability. But each person has to do the math. It’s the question of having a BA vs. MBA – what’s the value?”

Lonski believes that dealers are turning more to his company because he has access to qualified candidates who are not necessarily scouring Craigslist or Monster looking for their next great tech job.

“Putting an ad on any of those places are only as good as the people looking at it,” Lonski said. “But I believe a dealer should use all his resources to find staff and continue to upgrade. I know who’s working and where they are.” **PSB**

HELPING YOU FIND THE **RIGHT** FIT

THE MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS INSTITUTE (MMI) proudly sponsors *A Dealer's Guide to Hiring, A Service Department White Paper*. MMI has partnered with industry experts to provide this white paper to help you in addressing the challenges that you face when recruiting technicians.

Few business activities are as time-consuming and resource-intensive as recruiting and retention. You deserve to get the most out of the valuable resources you spend. Retention is optimized when you get the right fit in hiring from the start.

To ensure alignment of employer needs and employee skill sets, collaboration between dealerships and training programs is vital. Toward that end, MMI works closely with industry. Our Program Advisory Committee, composed of OEM, dealer and independent repair shop partners, helps to make certain that curriculum, tools, equipment, technology and bikes, trikes, ORV, and watercraft are state-of-the-industry.

Your hiring qualifications are unique to your dealership. It's important to define them so that your recruiting efforts are targeted. MMI training program's employment specialist can help you delineate those criteria, including experience with customer service training, specific brands and models, and the latest technology and tools.

You will find useful information and best practices in this white paper to fine-tune or overhaul your recruiting practices – a significant step in maximizing your recruiting resources.

When you are ready to find just the right technicians for your business, consider working with MMI's dedicated Employment Services team. We work closely with employers and MMI graduates to make matches based on geographic preferences and skillsets to help ensure longer-term working partnerships. As part of Universal Technical Institute (UTI), MMI shares in a rich 46-year history as a nationwide provider of technical education for students seeking careers as professional motorcycle, marine, automotive, diesel and collision repair technicians.

We take very seriously the importance of "find the right fit" between employers and technicians. Continuing joint efforts between industry and training programs are critical, and help to bring you resources such as this white paper. We are confident that you will find it to be a valuable tool for your recruiting, hiring, mentoring and retention needs. **PSB**





HIGH STANDARDS BRING DEALER BACK TO MMI

Dealership hires former MMI students to fill many positions throughout the store

DEALERSHIP OWNER FRED

Bosshardt knows what he wants when he's hiring a new employee at Caliente Harley-Davidson in San Antonio, Texas. Bosshardt has high expectations for his staff, and he expects his new hires to adhere to his standards.

Luckily, he's found many Motorcycle Mechanics Institute grads who have made the cut. Currently all 10 of the dealership's service techs, all four of the store's service writers, and four parts staffers and one parts puller are MMI graduates.

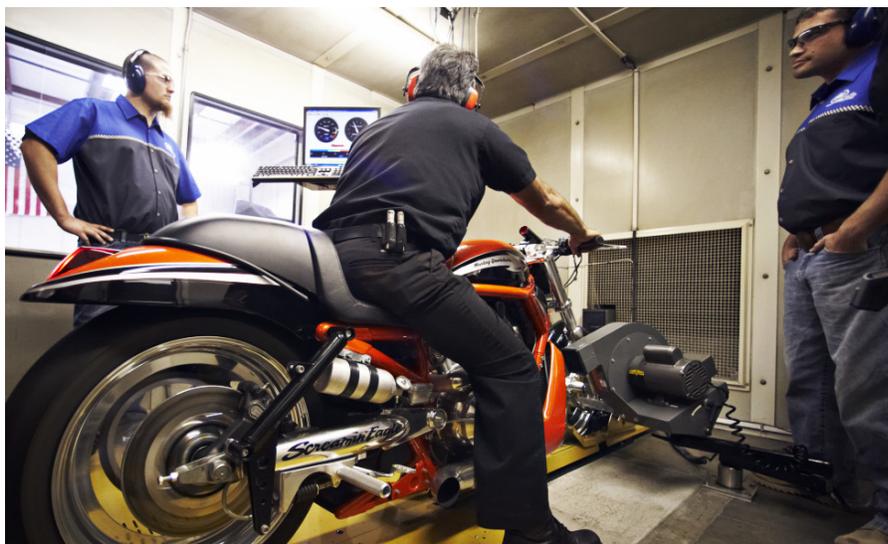
Though all MMI grads learn how to service bikes, Bosshardt, who sits on the advisory board for MMI's Orlando, Fla., campus, said their education prepares them for numerous jobs in a dealerships.

"As far as the training that they get at MMI, we feel that it's very comprehensive," he said.

When hiring, Bosshardt focuses on a graduate's skill set and future goals to decipher if he or she is a good fit for a specific role. He asks candidates where they see themselves in the future, and often they fall under one of two camps: either they want

to become master technicians or they want to become managers and possibly open their own dealerships some day. Bosshardt can usually target their hiring area by from learning about their objectives.

"Oftentimes if they're honest, they'll



reveal what their long-term goal is, and I feel that people are going to gravitate toward their goals," he said. "I'm not going to put someone in a technician position who even wants to be a manager because there's a lot of time and investment that a dealership puts into these employees."

For example, if someone interviews who has vast parts knowledge, great customer

"When I hire them as a parts person or a service writer, I tell them that they will never be wrenching for me."

— Fred Bosshardt, owner,
Caliente Harley-Davidson

service skills and intends to one day become a department manager – but has only mediocre tech skills – he or she may be better suited for a job in the parts department than as a technician. So even if the prospect is a great fit for the dealership's culture and applying for a tech job, he or she might not get the tech position, but he might get a call back for a parts opening later.

"One thing that I've found that is vitally important is when I hire them as a parts person or a service writer, I tell them that they will never be wrenching for me," Bosshardt said, explaining that if the prospect learns that he or she could later become a tech, their focus on the parts or service writing job could suffer.

Caliente Harley-Davidson has fared well with placing MMI grads in a variety of positions. The dealership's customers appreciate that the service writers and parts counter staff have experience working on bikes, so they know their way around the bike and can give sound advice.

"I've been able to leverage that training to our benefit," Bosshardt said.

In addition to learning about a student's skills and goals, Bosshardt also asks about the candidates' hometowns to discover if they



desire to return there.

"I like to find out where they're from and if they want to go back there. Because when they're in school, they'll jump at any job they can get," he said, adding that his goal is to hire long-term employees, rather than short-timers.

Keeping people on board is important to Bosshardt because his dealership not only invests time and money into training, but the store also covers some relocation expenses for new hires. He says the investment is returned easily because a good technician can contribute thousands of dollars in

profit each month.

"I don't want to lose someone who could be a good employee over \$1,000 or \$1,500 or whatever part of the moving expense is," he said.

But just because that investment is made does not mean Caliente Harley-Davidson employees can go easy once they're on the job. Bosshardt said he runs a tight ship, and being a team member means being subject to critiques of service jobs, random monthly drug tests and a zero tolerance policy on drugs, alcohol and serious safety violations.

"We need them on their 'A' game. They have



to perform on a higher level,” he explained.

When a tech starts working at the dealership, his first week features him shadowing a more experienced tech or being supervised by a veteran. New employees often focus on tasks such as PDI setup and fluid and tire changes. Though MMI graduates come out of school with a comprehensive education, Bosshardt knows a good or bad service job affects his customers, so he’s careful when choosing jobs for new employees.

“I think it’s important to match the jobs you assign to the skill set of the techs, but the jobs that we assign, they do very well, and that’s been part of my success is hiring the right students.”

— Fred Bosshardt, owner, Caliente Harley-Davidson

“I think it’s important to match the jobs you assign to the skill set of the techs, but the jobs that we assign, they do very well, and that’s been part of my success is hiring the right students,” he said.

New techs also work for hourly pay for their first several months, so they learn to first focus on completing jobs safely before worrying about their pace.

“We don’t want to compromise the safety of the customer, and we don’t want techs to

have to speed through jobs to get a better paycheck,” Bosshardt said.

In the 12 years that Caliente Harley-Davidson has worked with MMI, most hires have worked out well for the dealership, and many have stuck around. Those who have left have usually done so for personal family reasons, and not because they didn’t like working for the dealership. Bosshardt admits not all hires work out in the end, but he’s been happy with the caliber of performers he’s acquired with MMI’s help. Whenever he makes a hire, his goal is to keep that person on staff throughout his or her career.

“We position our dealership in San Antonio as the premier dealer, and there’s a high level of expectation that the customer has when they see that,” Bosshardt said. “It helps us to have a well-trained staff, not only at the technician level, but also at the service writer level and at the parts counter.” **PSB**

THE CURRENT STATE OF **JOBS**

Jobs are plentiful, but most service techs are not in the looking mode

SERVICE TECHNICIAN “help wanted” ads posted by dealerships consistently have been the most populated segment on MotorcycleIndustryJobs.com since its 2004 launch. But in 2012, the number of techs posting their resumes has taken a substantial drop, according to MIJ founder Alex Baylon.

“There’s definitely been a huge increase on postings for dealers looking to hire service techs, but there’s also been a slowdown on applications from techs,” Baylon said.

Since the onset of the Great Recession, Baylon has seen the sheer number of technicians in the market on the decline.

“Depending on the region, a lot of techs decided to become mobile techs, working out of their garage, being unsatisfied with the way dealers are paying their employees or the lack of work or the seasonality of it,” Baylon said. “I’m hearing from dealers more and more that their service managers are also leaving the industry. So it’s not just the techs. Right now there seems to be a huge shift on in the service department, where people are working, where they are going. The industry

“There’s definitely been a huge increase on postings for dealers looking to hire service techs, but there’s also been a slowdown on applications from techs.”

– Alex Baylon, president, MotorcycleIndustryJobs.com

is kind of suffering right now on the service side of the dealership.”

Baylon says qualified technicians, employed or not, can take their pick of jobs and markets.

“It’s an employee market. The world is their oyster as a technician. They can go anywhere and work. They can basically write their own ticket once they get the experience and are knowledgeable enough,” he said.

Baylon’s site connects employer with employee, so he’s seen the success it can bring. He also knows how marketable a focused service tech can be.

“One of my key pieces advice is for the

tech to focus on something that he’s really passionate about. Instead of getting certified with all the brands, pick the one you’re passionate about. Don’t worry about the others. Focus on the one you love the most and you’ll be able to go anywhere.”

All Baylon has to do is check his site’s database of dealers looking for techs, and compare that list to techs looking to get hired to know that there’s a shortage of techs looking for work.

“Technically, with unemployment and the amount of dealerships that have gone out of business in the past few years, there should be tons of applicants,” he said. **PSB**



ADVERTISING TIPS

Alex Baylon provides some suggestions for dealers who are writing a classified ad:

- ▶ Provide as much information as you can
- ▶ Describe the shop
- ▶ Post pictures
- ▶ Tell the tech why he would want to work there
- ▶ List benefits
- ▶ List pay rate

J&P CYCLES RELIES ON KNOWLEDGEABLE NEW TECHS

High volume aftermarket retailer depends on quality techs

J&P CYCLES, ONE OF the largest aftermarket retailers in the country, with locations in Anamosa, Iowa, and Ormond Beach, Fla., does a high volume of business. That level requires a knowledgeable staff to provide customers with exceptional service.

J&P's technicians are a big part of maintaining that high level of customer service. Not only must they have the technical

knowhow, they have to be able to engage with and help customers either in the shop or over the phone. That's why J&P has hired many of its techs out of the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute.

Tom Blankenheim, a recruiter for J&P, estimated more than 20 of the company's technicians spent time at MMI.

"The curriculum and the hands-on

experience they're providing those guys at that school are preparing them much better than any of the other schools we've seen out there," Blankenheim said of what makes MMI techs ideal hires. "For whatever reason, when folks graduate from MMI, their knowledge and their hands-on experience is superior to any of the other campuses or places that we've found in the nation."

Blankenheim explained that based on the regular evaluations J&P gives employees, MMI techs tend to stand out.

The breadth of their knowledge coming out of the school often allows the MMI techs to acclimate themselves rather quickly, but J&P goes the extra mile to ensure the techs are in tune with how the company operates.

"We're going to be a retailer of all the aftermarket motorcycle parts and accessories, so we're probably going to spend a good three weeks with these folks prior to cutting them loose and letting them go live," Blankenheim said.

Since a lot of the work with customers will be over the phone, most of the training is teaching the techs how to deal with customers over the phone and how to use J&P's computer system.

"I think the easy part for these guys is talking about the motorcycles themselves," Blankenheim said. "I think it's all the other little niches that you need to teach them about — how our phones work and the computers — that slows the process down a bit."

In addition to the training, J&P has a mentor program to help the techs transition into their new positions.

"We obviously have a professional training staff, and then we try to mentor our existing technicians with new techs for probably a good four or five days," Blankenheim explained. "They'll listen in on phone calls, and then we'll reverse the roles and have the mentors sit in with them on the phones. We employ probably 40 technicians, so there's more than enough support there for all these



folks as they come forward.”

It is important to J&P as a company that the new technicians become engrained in the philosophies of the business and feel as though they are part of the team.

“It doesn’t do anybody any good to just hire somebody and throw them in a position and hope they succeed. That’s not developing people. That’s not training people and that’s not setting them up for success in the company,” said Blankenheim. “We’ve already invested a lot of time in interviewing these guys and testing them and putting them through training. It’s a huge investment – you just want to continue building your people.”

Blankenheim further explained how in-depth J&P will go in its interview process.

“We do several different things,” he said. “Everybody is going to view a little bit of the work history. We’ll give them a couple of evaluations to see where their motorcycle knowledge is. We’ll put them on a computer for about 20 minutes and do a customer service scenario with them, which makes sure they’re comfortable with using the basic computer components and being able to listen to customer’s needs and answer questions. Then you have the interview itself and that’s where you’re trying to pick out behaviors and good fit for the culture.”

That investment of time has paid off as MMI techs have already made a sizable impact at J&P.

“We’re able to use a person with a lot of strong motorcycle knowledge that can go a lot of different directions in the company. Purchasing, e-commerce, supervisory – they’ve been going all over the place,” Blankenheim said of techs’ movements within the company.

Overall, Blankenheim has had nothing but good things to say about MMI, citing the school’s willingness to listen to the specific needs of companies like J&P.

However, he seemed especially impressed with how well the school treats its former students.

“These schools are really looking out for the best interests of all their students,” he said. “[MMI] works with us tremendously. I think they’re going above and beyond what most schools or colleges would do to help their people get into the market and get jobs.” **PSB**

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– Tom Blankenheim, J&P Cycles



Behavioral Interview Questions

Ambition:

Describe a time when you made a suggestion to improve the work in your shop (dealership, etc.).

Tell me about how you developed passion in this industry? What experiences brought you here?

Give an example of an important goal that you set in the past. Tell about your success in reaching it.

Give two examples of things you've done in previous jobs that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.

Building Relationships:

Give a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer. What was the problem and what was the outcome? How would you assess your role in diffusing the situation? What if anything would you do differently?

Communication:

Describe a time when you were able to effectively communicate a difficult or unpleasant idea to a superior.

Give an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you, or vice versa, to get to a decision together.

Tell me about a time you had to explain a complex technical problem to a person who does not understand technical jargon?

Alternative: Give the interviewee a specific example and ask them to explain it to you.

What approach do you take in communicating with people?

Customer Orientation:

How do you handle problems with customers? Give an example.

How do you go about establishing rapport with a customer? What have you done to gain their confidence?

Decision Making:

Give an example of a time when there was a decision to be made and procedures were not in place to help you determine which path to take.

Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. What did you do?

What was your most difficult decision in the last 6 months? What made it difficult?

Follow-up and Control:

How do you keep track of delegated assignments, action items and priorities?

Think of a time when you worked on a project with multiple steps or stages. How did you get it done on time and stay organized?

Initiative:

Give an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Tell me about a time you had a complex technical problem to diagnose. How did you go about it, what resources did you use?

Interpersonal Skills:

Tell us about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with them.

What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

Integrity:

Give examples of how you have acted with integrity in your job/work relationship.

On occasion we are confronted by dishonesty in the workplace. Tell about such an occurrence and how you handled it.

Personal Effectiveness:

Keeping others informed of your progress/actions helps them feel comfortable. Tell your methods for keeping your supervisor advised of the status on projects.

Tell us about some demanding situations in which you managed to remain calm and composed.

Self Assessment:

In what ways are you trying to improve yourself?

Give an example of a time when you made a mistake because you did not listen well to what someone had to say.

What do you consider to be your professional strengths? Give me a specific example using this attribute in the workplace.

Hire a True Professional

A call or web inquiry to a member of our dedicated Employment Services Team will make it easy for you to find the right fit for your dealership.

866-960-9156 | MMItech.edu/Employers



Interview Results

Interview Questions (see Behavioral Interview Questions)	Good	Average	Does not meet needs	Comments
Ambition				
Building Relationships				
Communication				
Customer Orientation				
Decision Making				
Follow Up and Control				
Initiative				

Hire
 Don't Hire
 Reason: _____

Hire a True Professional

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MIDLAND POWERSPORTS HIRES MMI GRADS EXCLUSIVELY

Texas dealership finds continued success with service techs

MIDLAND POWERSPORTS, based in Midland, Texas, has a problem when it comes to hiring technicians. Inevitably, at some point, the techs leave, causing a high turnover rate at the dealership, making service manager Darrell Golden's job tough at times.

According to Golden, the dealership often hires young, single men, and Midland might not be the best town in which to be a young, single man.

"The biggest reason I lose technicians? They're single when they get here. This is a transient oil town and there aren't a lot of single women here," Golden said with a bit of a chuckle. "I've lost eight in the last year."

According to Golden, the service depart-

ment drives significant revenue to Midland Powersports. And with such high turnover, it's vital to have new techs come in with a vast knowledge of what's required of them. For that reason, Golden requires each new technician to have a certificate from Motorcycle Mechanics Institute.

"If you don't have an MMI certificate, you cannot work at Midland Powersports," Golden said.

"Our dealership is strictly a menu-based operation," Golden explained. "We run a tremendous amount of income to our dealer. We do it by utilizing a lot of the kids coming out of MMI – who cannot go on the line directly to make a living – by going on our

team, which is a group of guys – usually five guys we have at the time that do all of the quick service, tires, wheels, that kind of stuff."

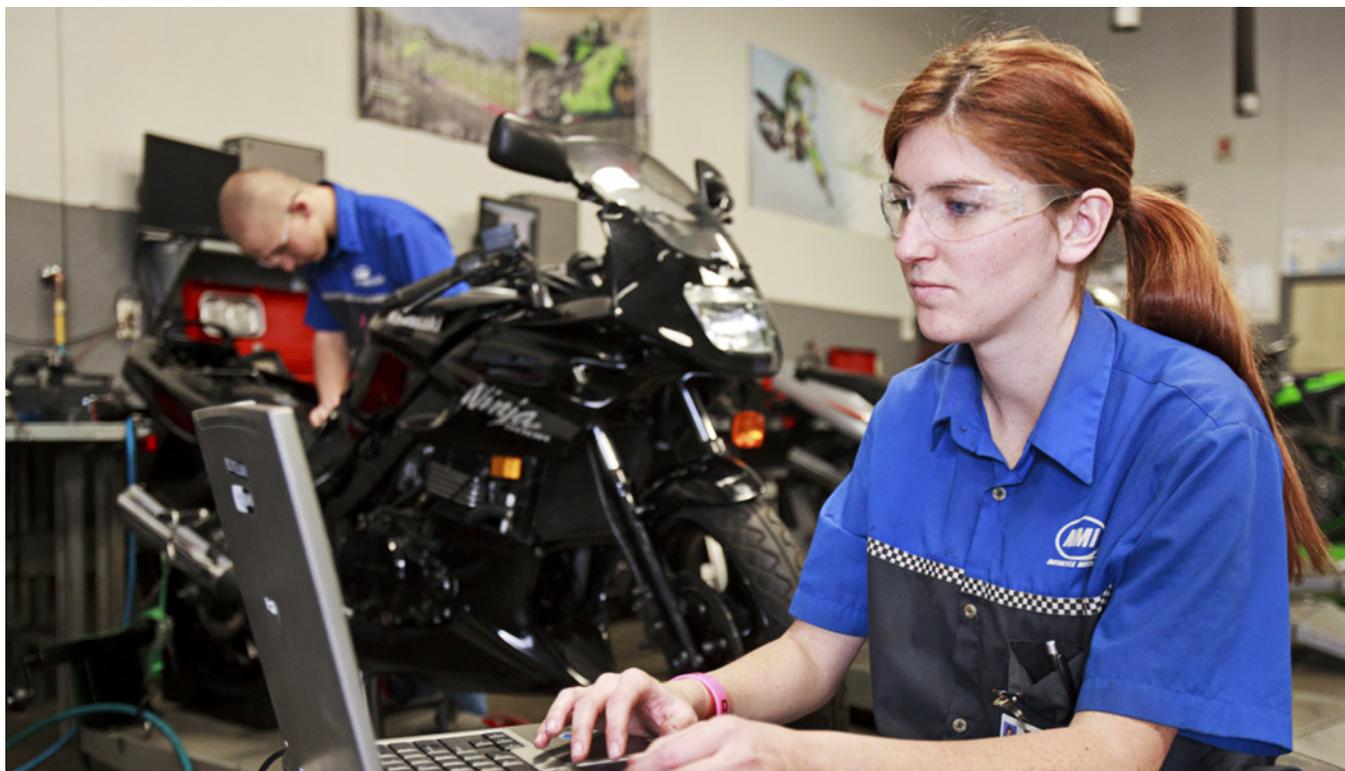
As techs show more advanced skills, they can be promoted to more involved jobs in the service department.

By using the MMI techs on the team Golden speaks of, it allows the service department to run more efficiently.

"It gives us the ability to run stuff in. An average guy comes in and wants a factory service done, if he comes in by 11 a.m., it leaves the same day. That's our policy," Golden said.

With a large oil industry in Midland, the dealership does a lot of work for those oil





companies, particularly in servicing the side-by-sides they use in the field. The service department works on at least 100 side-by-sides each month.

Because of that focus on side-by-sides, Golden has been able to speak with MMI instructors to inform them of what is required of his techs.

“I talked to an instructor in the Kawasaki class, and I asked him to make sure that our technicians know how to service and replace clutches and belts,” he said. “MMI does a heck of a job for us making sure those guys are coming in here prepared.”

Golden has seven MMI grads currently working in the shop, with another two on the way. Due to the high turnover, he interviews MMI technicians regularly.

“I’m on a board out at MMI, so I go out there the first of every year, and I’ll usually interview what I need for the six or seven months,” he explained.

Golden said it is important to put the time into the interview process, even sometimes speaking with techs through Skype, the internet video conference program, if an in-person interview is not possible.

“I find that with MMI technicians, if you go to the trouble to Skype interview them,

“Going through MMI is by far the easiest way to replace a technician. I’m probably the biggest supporter they have. They’ve made my dealer a nice profit over the years.”

—Darrell Golden, service manager, Midland Powersports

really study their resume, visit with them about where they’re from, where they want to go back to, find out if they have any legal history, you can find good technicians,” he said. “The quality of technicians out there is far better than trying to run ads in the newspaper.”

Once at the dealership, there is a sense of teamwork that comes along with working in the Midland service department.

“The technicians help each other here,” Golden said. “We have a shop supervisor, and we test their limits. You can figure out pretty quick if he’s a good line technician, so we push them.”

Golden shared a story of a tech hired out of MMI, who was given the opportunity to

do top-end work on two dirt bikes on his second day on the job.

“He did them as fast as any beat technician I’ve got,” Golden marveled.

Even with the high turnover, Golden said that the techs who have stayed have been promoted within the department. Additionally, Golden makes a point to help each tech who leaves find an appropriate job wherever he’s going. He has seen his former techs rise in other dealerships in bigger cities.

“Replacing technicians is a lot of trouble,” Golden opined. “But going through MMI is by far the easiest way to replace a technician. I’m probably the biggest supporter they have. They’ve made my dealer a nice profit over the years.” **PSB**



STARTING A **NEW LIFE** AT MMI

Custom builder Ryan Kruesi did a life U-turn with his degree in hand from MMI

“YOU GET OUT OF IT what you put into it. I put my whole life into it and I couldn't be happier with where I am today.”

That's how 34-year-old Ryan Kruesi describes his decision to attend the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute in Phoenix. After having graduated in 2010, he's been a custom bike builder at Jim Nasi Customs for the past two years, and spent about 18 months prior to that with Trask Performance.

He discussed his time at the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute, as well as his current career, with *Powersports Business*.

PSB: *You didn't have to stray too far from MMI to land your first couple of gigs out of school. Is it custom central around Phoenix or what?*

RK: Yeah, there are a handful of custom shops around here. Everybody knows everybody. Bourget's is on the same block as us; Sinister, Jesse Rooke.

PSB: *What brought to you MMI?*

RK: I had visited a buddy down here about three months before I enrolled. I had been building cars and motorcycles. My stepdad owned a hot rod shop for about 10 years. I had been doing construction in my hometown of Sweethome, Ore., and I thought it was time to change things up.

PSB: *What was your powersports background?*

RK: I've been building dirt bikes since I was 20 years old, and I've been mechanically inclined my whole life. I went from Legos to dirt bikes. I also raced import cars at the local NHRA drag strip, got into drifting a little bit. My best year I built 26 cars. I also rode sport bikes and had a few bad wrecks, so I bought a Harley. I've been riding a Harley as my only mode of transportation for years now. Right now I have a Dyna Sport.



PSB: *You just went cold turkey into a new career. How difficult was that to make the change to being an MMI student?*

RK: It was a huge change, actually. I came

“It was like hanging out in a garage working on motorcycles with your buddies. The best part about it is being able to network to build a career.”

– Ryan Kruesi, custom bike builder,
Jim Nasi Customs

from a town of 8,000, so it was pretty crazy for me to be in Phoenix. It was a culture shock, for sure. But now it seems like a small town out here. I've had the best time of my life moving out here and going to school at MMI. I was able to finish in 15 months with one leave. I go balls to wall when I do something.

PSB: *What was your course schedule like?*

RK: I went from noon to 6 p.m. I hated high school, but I could sleep in and then go to school all day at MMI. I loved it. It was something I wanted to do so it was exciting. We would do lecture for six weeks then clinic for a week. It was like hanging out in a garage working on motorcycles with your buddies. You meet so many people from all over the country. The best part about it is being able to network to build a career. I was meeting everybody I could to get my name out there.

PSB: *How did you land your gig at Trask while you went to school?*

RK: They do turbo kits for Harleys, and I had built a lot of turbo cars, so I had the experience, and I met the right people at the right time. I started working part-time cleaning the shop for the first three days, and the fourth day I was there I tore a whole motorcycle down and did an engine rebuild.

PSB: *You don't seem to be lacking drive.*



RK: I wanted to do this really bad. You can go to MMI and never work on motorcycles a day in your life after you leave there. You can make whatever you want out of the experience. I've been on TV, met so many crazy people. I was runner-up for Mr. Vegas at Vegas Bike Week last year and got fifth-row ZZ Top tickets. It's crazy what you can do in this business.

PSB: *What's the shop look like these days at Nasi?*

RK: There are two of us that build bikes, three fabricators. We're really, really busy. The bagger fad has exploded. It seems to me like everyone in the motorcycle industry is busy. If you're going to get into the motorcycle game, now is the time to do it. We've been busy for a year-and-a-half, swamped busy.

PSB: *What was your MMI experience like?*

RK: I was all Harley from the beginning.

I'm a Harley purist now. I haven't driven a car in four years now. I did well, excelled a lot. I got projects done pretty quickly, got Student of the Course. I think it all helped me get into the industry. I also worked full-time at Trask while I went to school. I worked during the day and went to school at night. I was working about 55 hours a week. I'm still good friends with a lot of my instructors at MMI. I could see myself doing what they do someday.

PSB: *You changed your whole life at age 30. Has it proven to be a wise decision?*

RK: I had a friend down here who was in the industry. I was going to work for Sucker Punch Sally's, but that was during the downturn, so I went to MMI instead. I wouldn't have been in Phoenix if I hadn't done that. I'd be setting tile somewhere, being miserable with sore knees. I had been doing multi-million dollar jobs, commercial buildings. But I let it all go and built a new career. Great decision. **PSB**

TIPS FOR GREAT SERVICE WRITERS

SO YOU'VE HIRED a new service writer, now what? Behind every good employee is an education gained from schooling and/or training and from experience, but sometimes they need added advice. Valerie Ziebron, president of VRZ Consulting, shares some of her tips for what a good service writer should be doing.



VALERIE ZIEBRON

1 Perform a careful walkaround. “Doing a walkaround with the customer is key to getting a clear understanding of exactly what issues the customer wants addressed. Take this time to give the bike a professional lookover for any additional sales opportunities. They will be easier to sell when you can show them to the customer. Take your walkarounds one step further by bringing along a roll of blue painters tape. Put a piece of the masking tape on the areas that the customer wants addressed. This lets the tech know exactly where to focus his efforts. Some advisors even write notes on the tape or put a big check mark if the tech is to check and advise prior to digging into the repair.”

2 Tap into ego. “How much of your customer’s ego is tied into their ride? If we talk to them about ways to make their bike, faster, cooler, better in any way, they are going to want it! Don’t be afraid to suggest additional sale items. People enjoy spending money on things that make them feel good.”

3 Watch hours per R.O. “Keep an eye on your hours per repair order. This is one of the best indicators of effi-



ciency. When we get busy, the tendency is to just write up the bare minimum, or to not look for additional needed upsell. This often means the customer will have to come back for another visit, and we’ll have to write up another work order. Labor hours per R.O. tend to drop during the busier months, so track it against last year’s numbers for the same month.”

4 Create a rainy day list. “As you close out the service ticket, be on the lookout for any work that may be needed in the near future or anything that we did not do because of lack of time, approval, parts or any other reason. Document these needed services and you will have easy places to look when it starts to get slow. When you go to sell these items in the future, think about how your dentist sells. The dentist doesn’t say, ‘Gosh, you have a cavity! Do you want to do something about it?’ They use assumptive close techniques and sell with confidence. ‘You have a cavity. We can get you in next Thursday or the following week. Which would you prefer?’”

5 Track open R.O.s. “Master service advisors know the status of all open tickets and keep all that info in one place. This can be a computer-generated report, a white board or a simple route sheet that is updated regularly. It is the advisor’s central command center for all decisions on dispatch, parts, quality control and communication. A solid tracking system not only

keeps you on track but allows many people at the dealership to get the info they need without actually speaking to you.”

6 Set call back times. “It is hard to get anything done if the phone is ringing off the hook and your email box is loaded. Master service advisors set call back times. ‘Okay Mr. Customer, I’m going to try to have some information for you no later than Monday afternoon. What is the best way to reach you?’ If you are good at calling them when you say you will, they will learn over time that they don’t have to call you.”

7 Be proactive. “The alternative is running around like a chicken with its head cut off. Master service advisors are always looking for ways to flip the switch from reactive to proactive. This leads to less stress, more money, happier customers and co-workers and a lot more enjoyable work environment.”

8 Give thanks. “A well-run service department requires a lot of effort. Get comfortable thanking not only the customers but also the team that makes what you do possible. Behavior that gets noticed gets repeated, so be sure to thank your techs, parts counter people, sublets, lot attendants and anyone else that plays a role in service. A thank you from a peer often means even more than an attabooy from the boss, so get good at giving thanks!” **PSB**

SERVICE DEPARTMENT HIRING MADE EASY

Industry vet Steve Lemco shares lessons on bringing in quality staff

HIRING THE RIGHT staff members isn't easy. Posting jobs, interviewing candidates and properly on-boarding hires all require dedication in order to be successful.

Steve Lemco, brother of the late Ed Lemco and author of the book "You Gotta-Wanna," has helped hundreds of dealerships with hiring, and many of the strategies he uses to hire sales staff easily transition into the service department.

The first thing a dealership should do when it has a position that needs to be filled is to assign a point person for the hiring process. Lemco says the No. 1 flaw he finds in most dealerships' hiring processes is



STEVE LEMCO

not being prepared for handling responses, especially by phone.

"If it's real important, because this guy who you're hiring really means a lot, someone should take the calls immediately, even if it's a secretary who has to take a message," he said.

Oftentimes dealers ask Lemco how he manages to receive 100 applicants for a position, and he says it's often as simple as sitting by the phone. Sometimes candidates call, and no one picks up the phone, so the candidate is lost.

"If you're looking to hire someone, someone needs to be in charge of that because that's always been what's worked for me as far as getting response," he said.

Resumes can be accepted via email or fax, but a phone conversation allows the point person to vet each candidate in advance, giving him or her extra information to decide if an interview is warranted.

Once the point person is selected, the job opening should be posted. Lemco recommends dealers use websites that are free to

"I do recommend you hire early, then if that person lets you down, you do still have time to take a second swing at it."

— Steve Lemco, author, "You Gotta-Wanna"

applicants, such as Craigslist. He also suggests posting an ad in the local newspaper with the highest circulation if the free ads don't produce enough responses. Word of mouth advertising could also lead to some high quality applicants.

"One thing I might do is have a store memo or someone go around because everyone's got friends, and you can find people through your internal network," Lemco advised. "And putting up signs in your front door certainly would be nice."

On top of the normal experience and/or



education a dealer should seek in a resume, stability at previous jobs is also important. A person who has transferred in and out of jobs every three or four months will likely lack the motivation to stay long term anywhere.

When candidates are chosen for interviews, it's important to take note of their initial impression, the vibe they present as they get more relaxed, their personal appearance and their personality.

"I think generally whoever's going to interview them, what they're looking for is what kind of impression they made on them, because they're most certainly going to be on their best behavior. You'd assume," Lemco said.

He suggests that the best candidates will come off as coherent, kind and prepared to handle customer service.

"I would look at them through the customers' eyes," he said.

In addition to questions about education, experience and others pertinent to the job, Lemco recommends dealers ask candidates how long they plan on staying at the dealership if hired. Interviewing, hiring, on-boarding and training an employee can cost time and money, and a dealer needs to know the candidate is going to stick around to make the hire worth the expense. Lemco also likes to ask applicants how far away from the store they live. Even with the best of intentions, many employees have a hard time driving an hour or more and often quit shortly after they're hired, he has found.

Once a candidate is chosen as a potential hire, Lemco recommends dealers run a background check to assure the prospect hasn't committed any serious crimes. For positions that have liability and insurance ramifications, such as that of a technician, Lemco suggests that candidates be drug tested before they're formally hired. Lemco also adds that appli-

65%

Steve Lemco says about 65% of the job applicants he receives learn about the job from free posting sites.



"If you're looking to hire someone, someone needs to be in charge of that because that's always been what's worked for me as far as getting response."

— Steve Lemco, author, "You Gotta-Wanna"

cants should be made aware of the pending drug test, so they don't apply and take up the hiring manager's time if they're going to end up failing the test.

After a new employee is hired, Lemco recommends that the newbie receive a full explanation of the expectations of the job, vacation time, break times, reasons for termination and, especially, wages.

"Dealers make their pay plans so confusing that some people don't know what their wages are," Lemco reported.

New hires should also be introduced to the dealership's entire staff and be checked up on periodically, so they don't feel left in the cold.

"After the first or second day, you set up a meeting with the new people," Lemco suggested. That meeting allows new hires to ask questions about accomplishments and challenges already experienced in the dealership and assures the employee that

the dealership cares about them.

If a dealership has the funds to hire a new tech in the off-season, Lemco suggests they do so in order to properly take the time to train the new hire.

"I'm a sports fan, and every sport has a pre-season, and that's to prepare for the season and iron out the mistakes," Lemco said.

For a tech, this period would generally be 30-60 days before the busy season begins.

"I do recommend you hire early, then if that person lets you down, you do still have time to take a second swing at it," Lemco said.

Though the hiring process may be daunting, with a little dedication, it's easier to discover a quality candidate. **PSB**

For information on Steve Lemco's hiring and in-store training services, visit www.stevelemco.com or call him at 253/826-6110.



YOUNG MMI ALUM BRINGS CONFIDENCE AND CREDENTIALS

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY to land a first job as a service technician? For Brent Hopkins, the answer was simple: Pick up the phone, call the dealership and ask if they're hiring.

It's an old-school tactic that continues to work in 2012 for those who have the credentials, not to mention confidence. The ink was barely dry on Hopkins' certificate from the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute in Phoenix when he packed his bags and headed to California. He's now a service tech at San Jose BMW.

"Our ceremony at MMI was on a Friday. I moved to California over the weekend and started on a Tuesday," Hopkins recalled of his adventures that landed him on the West Coast in July.

What inspired him to make the move so quickly?

"They were in need of a tech, and I was

in need of job," Hopkins related. "They were getting backed up with bikes at the time, and now we're moving into a new building where the service department is the size of the entire current building we're in. We're crazy busy."

The pristine new real estate, located only two blocks away from the original location, provides Hopkins with a chance to experience life at the top after only a few short months in the industry. "It's been hectic to move, but they want us in there and working by the end of the year," he said.

Hopkins, originally from Grand Rapids, Mich., opted for MMI only after a giving some other venues a shot. Mainstream college courses first in mechanical engineering and then in graphic design didn't lead him anywhere.

"I kind of bounced around, went to school a couple of times for a few different things," he said. "You can throw a few dead-

end jobs in there, too."

He had started riding as 18-year-old, and enjoyed tinkering and otherwise working on mechanical-type projects, "so I decided to try my hand at this and moved to Phoenix," Hopkins said of his decision to enroll at MMI.

Hopkins, who learned of the dealership while he was visiting a friend in San Jose, had started networking with dealerships prior to his graduating from MMI.

"I looked around at different dealerships, and these guys had a good reputation. It's a full machine shop and they work on a lot of race bikes. I called them about three months or so before I was done at MMI, and they were super booked out, so they wanted me right then. There was so more back and forth and we finally did a Skype interview. When I was done with school, I started."

Hopkins also had called a dealership in

Washington that would have provided him with porter opportunities, “but I wanted to be a tech,” he said.

His first day of real-life experience in the dealership opened a whole new world of education. “School is great to go learn how to do everything, but the real first day is when you walk into that dealership,” Hopkins said.

Hopkins entered his first day with tools in hand, thanks to a program that MMI has arranged with Snap-on that provides extensive discounts. Even so, Hopkins called his boss prior to starting to ask which tools were required.

“I asked him what the good entry-level tools are, and he gave me a list,” Hopkins said. “I would have liked to have gotten them while I was in school to get the discount, but rent and money were tight. I had actually to sell a lot of my tools to get where I was, but those are the sacrifices you make. I’m lucky enough that the guys in the shop will lend me one if I need it. But yeah, it’s good to start with a nice set. It shows you’re serious about wanting to learn and you have the tools to make it work.”

Hopkins works alongside two fellow MMI graduates at San Jose BMW. In fact, one has served as his mentor in the shop.

Hopkins started out doing PDIs, along with changing batteries and tires on BMW, Aprilia and Vespa motorcycles and scooters. His duties eventually included oil changes. But tasks weren’t the only thing he learned.

“The main thing I’ve learned since I’ve been here is to look at it not only as a bike, but consider the customer as well. The customers make the dealership. You can’t treat it like a piece of metal. You’ve got to treat it like a human being, because somebody is trusting their life with the bike that you’re servicing. Plus, it’s never a bad thing to be friendly to the customers. It’s a good way for them to say ‘I want that guy to work on my bike.’ Just make sure they know you care.”

Hopkins, who rides a scalped 1994 Suzuki Katana and has a custom 1969 Triumph Bonneville show bike that he’s trying to get up and running, works a 9 a.m.-6 p.m. shift Tuesday through Saturday. The dealership is closed on Sunday and Monday. He’s already become part of the team.

“The big thing that drew me here was the reputation of the shop,” he said. “We’re build-



“The main thing I’ve learned since I’ve been here is to look at it not only as a bike, but consider the customer as well. The customers make the dealership. You can’t treat it like a piece of metal.”

— Brent Hopkins, service tech, San Jose BMW

ing a race bike that I’ll eventually go out to the track and race. We contract with the California Highway Patrol, so that’s another real positive quality of our shop. We make sure the work goes out and doesn’t come back”

And while working as a BMW tech limits his dealer landscape to about 150 stores in the U.S., Hopkins figures he made the right choice.

“At MMI I saw the technology that BMW is putting into the bikes,” he said. “You look at an S1000 and there’s not a single inch of

unused space. After I took the BMW courses, I was really set on wanting to work on them. They’re so technologically far ahead that I find them easy to work on. You just hop on the computer and find the RSD [Repair and Service Data], and they give you step-by-step instructions with pictures.”

At 24, living in California with a friend from home and being gainfully employed as a BMW service tech, Hopkins has turned his MMI education and a phone call into a new life. **PSB**

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TECHNICIAN

Editor's note: Powersports dealers can learn a thing or two from other industries. The following article looks at how dealerships in the marine industry go about hiring in their service department.

SERVICE DEPARTMENTS ARE vital revenue centers for today's dealers, and they are using previously untapped resources and interviewing techniques to assemble their technician dream teams.

A popular source of applicants for marine dealer principals has been trade schools, like the Marine Mechanics Institute, sister to the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute, and various technical colleges.

At Russell Marine in Alexander City, Ala., its last six technician hires have come through schools. Dave Commander, general manager of the dealership, said the schools play a vital

role today, a time when experienced technicians are more difficult to find.

The programs provide a good baseline of knowledge, according to Tom Mack, owner of South Shore Marine in Huron, Ohio. But having a solid mentoring program in place is vital to turning a green technician into a valuable team member.

"We see the classroom as a real good base, but the classroom is the classroom. You cannot use a customer's boat as practice," Mack said.

The ideal applicant at South Shore Marine comes through a reference by a current employee, but another alternative is through soliciting referrals on the company's Facebook page.

Mack said he posts any job openings on his Facebook, broadcasting the position to nearly 700 people.

"Some of our best hires have come from more nontraditional methods, and Facebook is the main one," he said. "We have a lot of friends, about 40 employees, and most of them play around on it."

Mike Hoffman, owner of Marine Center of Indiana, said he has kept in touch with technicians who formerly worked at his dealership through Facebook.

"You can look around and find people that used to work in the industry or even worked with us at one time," Hoffman said.

Hoffman said he is always looking to improve his service department by upgrading his personnel. By offering a superior work environment through amenities like air conditioning in the shop, for example, he creates an attractive option for other technicians.

"Technicians come and work here and find out we are pretty good guys to work with," he

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

Russell Marine

Location: Alexander City, Ala.

Full-time Service Employees: 12

Average Technician Efficiency: 71 percent

Russell Marine has a fast-growing service department with revenue growth of 60 percent in the last five years. The dealership assigns one of four pay ranges to its staff based on skill level, training and tenure. Bonuses are issued starting at 75 percent billable efficiency; other team incentive bonuses are also handed out at the end of the year.



DEALER SPOTLIGHT

Shipyard Marine

Location: Green Bay, Wis.

Full-time Service Employees: 6

Average Technician Efficiency: 42.1 percent

Shipyard Marine hands weekly efficiency reports to its technicians, and management discusses ways for each technician to improve. Although technicians are paid an hourly rate based on their education and experience, they also receive a quarterly and annual bonus if their efficiency is more than 60 percent over the time period. The dealership also posts a scorecard where the progress of daily, monthly and annual goals are discussed.



“We want to find out if they have a natural desire to tinker with stuff, or if they just thought the job sounded cool.”

—Andy Howitt, president, Shipyard Marine

said. “Then they go out with their buddies and say, ‘I am working at this place, and it is pretty interesting.’”

Hoffman also stresses the importance of having top talent at positions outside his technicians, including parts employees or a service writer, for example.

“You cannot spend money on techs if you are not spending money on the whole system,” Hoffman said.

Interviewing technicians

Regardless of candidates’ experience levels, the interview process is crucial in determining both their technical and social skills.

Technicians directly out of school complete a mechanic competency exam to ensure their skills translate from the book to the shop at Shipyard Marine, president Andy Howitt said. If they fail the test, the applicant is no longer considered.

Beyond school training, Howitt says one positive indicator is a past inclination to fix or restore possessions.

“We want to find out if they have a natural desire to tinker with stuff, or if they just thought the job sounded cool,” Howitt said.

On South Shore Marine’s website, company values are posted, and they are taken very seriously by all employees, Mack said. Therefore, before the interview, all applicants are mandated to visit the website and determine if they are willing to abide.

“They will quickly realize we do not goof around here,” Mack said.

Finding out if an applicant is a cultural match is crucial, and Hoffman said at his dealership it involves examining the person’s out-of-work life. Hoffman says he often does not receive valuable feedback from references, so he instead examines the applicant’s financial and family situations.

“I do not want guys with situations that take away from them having a good attitude here,” he said.

At Russell Marine, interviewing applicants will speak with multiple people, most of whom they will be working with on an everyday basis. The purpose is to determine if they are outgoing enough to not only have good communication skills within their department, but also with customers, said Jeff Ellis, manager of Russell’s Ridge marina.

“I have found that the ones who are a little more outgoing are more successful,” Ellis said. “They have to have the communication skills to fit in with the techs; they have to have those skills to be confident.” **PSB**

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

Marine Center of Indiana

Location: Indianapolis

Full-time Service Employees: 7

Average Technician Efficiency: 71 percent

Marine Center of Indiana prides itself that if a boat is dropped off on Monday, it will be repaired by Friday. And when a customer’s work order is more than estimated, technicians are not paid for the work hours above the ticket estimate. In the winter, its techs are paid \$3 less per hour; however, they are guaranteed 40 hours of pay per week completing tasks like readying inventory for spring, cleaning the shop, tool repair, etc.



DEALER SPOTLIGHT

South Shore Marine

Location: Huron, Ohio

Full-time Service Employees: 20

Average Technician Efficiency: 87.73 percent

While some marine dealers service only their own customers, South Shore Marine goes to great lengths to attract new customers, even taking the service to them when necessary. The dealership measures its service department in terms of the cost of labor relative to revenue using a color-coded system. Any job where labor cost is more than 50 percent of revenue is marked red and is not acceptable.



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