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## How to Find a Service Provider

**Vehicle sophistication, the technician shortage and the cost of diagnostic tools are making outsourcing more attractive to many fleets.**

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by Denise Rondini, Aftermarket Editor



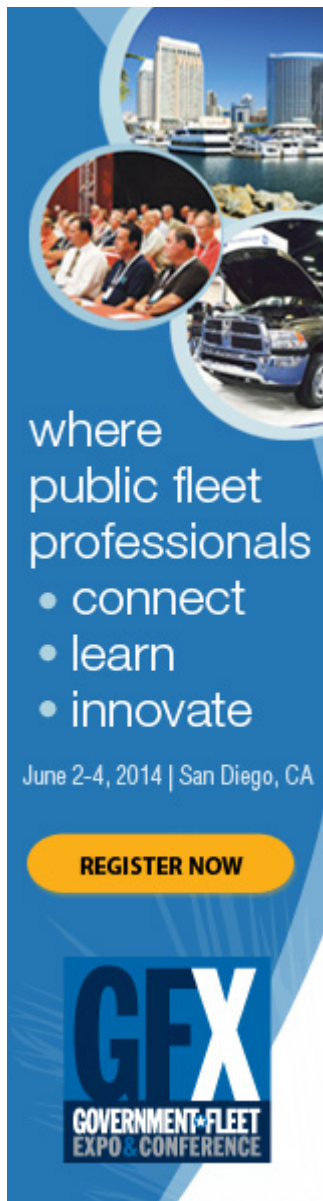
Select a service provider who has certified technicians and who has invested in the latest tools and diagnostic equipment.

Finding and training technicians, purchasing tools and equipment, maintaining a parts inventory, dealing with OSHA and the EPA. These are just a few of the headaches fleets that maintain their own trucks face, according to Kurt Jorgensen, vice president of JX Enterprises, a Peterbilt, Hino and Volvo dealer with 16 locations in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin.

“This business has become so much more complex that it makes outsourcing maintenance and repair much more attractive,” he says.

While it may make sense to leave the maintenance and repair of your vehicles to someone else, you need to choose the right service provider. Here are some key things to consider.

### Assess your options



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You'll need to do some homework to find the service provider that best fits your needs. Start with the basics. John Wensel, president of Wensel's Service Centers, an HDA Truck Pride Truck Service Expert and independent repair garage with locations in Pennsylvania, suggests going to the

company's website. "If they are a professional company, they usually have a professional-looking website."

Next, call some of the companies you are interested in to observe how they answer the phone and respond to your request for information. That will give you some insight into the overall culture of the company.

Prepare a basic list of questions to ask. According to Ken Edmonton, vice president of service operations at Power Train Co., a heavy duty parts distributor and HDA Truck Pride member with service locations in Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky, that list should include the type of services they provide, labor rate, hours of operation and technician certifications. Ask about their service backlog. Find out how soon they get to vehicles and the expected turnaround time for various repairs.

Once you've narrowed the list, Edmonton suggests you set up an in-person meeting. "Express your needs and expectations," he says. "Let them know what kind of work you want them to perform and the type of vehicles they'll be working on for you. See if they have experience with those types of vehicles."

Jim Pascale, president of Pascale Service Corp., a heavy-parts distributor and service provider, in Pawtucket, R.I., and a member of Vipar Heavy Duty, says, "They should be able to get vehicles in and out fast. If it is a good shop it has its own parts inventory so you are not waiting two days for the parts needed to complete the repair."

You'll also want to ask them about insurance coverage, Pascale says. "Do they have enough insurance so if their shop burns down with your truck in it their insurance will cover the damage to your vehicle?"

Michael Reimer, vice president products and channel marketing for Decisiv, which offers cloud-based service relationship management software, says, "Make sure they can support your specific operations and inspections with agreed on standard repair times and parts and labor rates based on your specific asset types, makes, models, etc."

Pascale also advises a site visit. "Make sure it is nice, neat, clean and organized," he says. "If you go into a shop where stuff is all over the place, that is not a good sign. It usually reflects on the quality of work they do."

Dick Sweebe, partner in the Summit Truck Group, a dealer serving 26 markets in seven states, reminds you to talk with potential service providers about how they back up their work. "What happens if you get your truck fixed in Tennessee and the clutch goes out in Ohio? The part probably has warranty, but does the labor?"

Edmonton adds, "The bottom line is, do you feel comfortable with the looks of the location and the honesty of the managers? Does the outside service provider act like they want your work?"

### **Look beyond cost**

While the cost of the repairs is important, make sure you look past the established labor rate. Wensel says, "What is the difference if I pay a guy \$50 an hour who takes all day to fix the truck compared to a guy I pay \$200 an hour to who ends up fixing it in an hour?"

Reimer says you need to look at a combination of price, quality and consistency. "Don't look at who has the lowest price, but look at who can provide the best quality of service, on time and at an agreed upon rate using standard repair times. The lowest price does not always mean the best price."

Bill Cowell, lead mechanic at Insituform Technologies' Indianapolis facility, says he expects fast turnaround on his trucks because downtime costs money. "We are a very lean, efficient fleet," he says of the 100 vehicles used in his company's underground pipe repair operation. "I look for a one-stop shop that can handle anything from minor repairs to major, and handle them quickly."

Jorgensen also advises fleets to dig deeper than the initial price of the service and look at the opportunity cost for outsourcing. "Where else could they spend their dollars and their time if they do not have to invest in things like bidding out parts purchases, paying technicians, upgrading tools and investing in shop facilities?"

### **Build long-term relationships**

Mike Delaney, president and CEO of the service network WheelTime, says fleets too often look at service providers as short-term relationships. "They should be developing a long-term relationship based on a specific set of rules." His advice is to look at the service provider as an extension of your own business.

Cowell agrees that relationships are important. "When you build that relationship, find one guy to be the ramrod on their end so you only have one person to contact. Give him the to-do list and let him help you manage it." He says he exchanges at least 10 phone calls and 100 text messages a day with the contact at his preferred service provider.

### **Tailored standardization**

Outsourcing doesn't mean you lose control over the repair process. Greg Wilson, truck product manager for GE Capital Fleet Service, a provider of truck financing and fleet management services,

says standardizing the maintenance and repair process is a way of controlling your costs and ensuring compliance.

“When you have standardization, PMs are being done on a regular basis,” Wilson says. “This means problems are being caught early, eliminating unscheduled repair events.”

But having a standardized process does not mean cookie cutter. “You can [ask the service provider] to duplicate the maintenance operations and times you are using in your own shop,” Delaney says, “so that it happens exactly the way you want it to.” Automation of the service management process can speed up repairs. “The more they can automate and standardize on the way you want to do business the more quickly the repair can be taken care of and the less room there is for errors and miscommunication.”

In addition, an automated process makes it easier to access service records. “Everybody wants to see service records when you trade in or sell a truck,” Sweebe says. Being able to show a complete maintenance history can increase the value of the truck at trade-in, he believes.

<http://www.truckinginfo.com/article/story/2014/05/how-to-find-a-service-providers.aspx>