

Trading Paper For an iPad

August 5, 2021 *Paul Hodowanic* *No Comments*



SHOP STATS: Tom's Foreign Autohouse Location: Temecula, Cali. Owners: **Tom and Kristina Mace** Staff Size: **5** Shop Size: **10,000 square feet** Number of Bays: **6** Average Monthly Car Count: **80-100** ARO: **\$1,020** Annual Revenue: **\$1-1.2 million**

For more than 27 years, Tom and Kristina Mace have owned Tom's Foreign Autohouse in Temecula, Calif. For nearly that entire time, every invoice was handwritten. That's the way they'd always done it. And that was what Tom preferred.

But late in 2019, the shop's IT consultant suggested a shop management system to help digitize and streamline all of the shop's operations.

Tom pushed back on the change, but Kristina convinced him to try a 30-day free trial. They've used the system ever since.

"It changed everything," she says.

So what are the benefits of finally ditching pen and paper for a shop management system? Kristina spoke with Ratchet+Wrench to explain how the switch has impacted her business.

Choosing Your System.

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Tom's Foreign Autohouse opted to use Shopmonkey as its shop management system, but the service is just one of many different options. Mace chose the service based on a recommendation from her IT consultant, who knew some of the company's developers. Picking the right system is important for any shop, and it will often be different based on what the shop needs. Among the things that need to be considered are price and if it is compatible with other technological systems that the shop has.

Eliminate simple mistakes.

It's black and white. You're not chasing your tail if you couldn't read a VIN (because you couldn't read my husband's handwriting). Because what could happen was, I'm sitting there and maybe I step out for a phone call and Tom is trying to add up his numbers and maybe he clicks something wrong on the calculator, or maybe the phone rang or a customer came in and he had to stop what he was doing. When you're interrupted and you're looking at a ticket that's massive, maybe you left off a part of a job. That was huge for us because we are so busy. There's no more errors as far as pricing goes, not at all.

It's nice to have something that is completely broken down, completely legible. There's no errors in the addition of parts, labor, or tax. It includes the tax, which is really nice. Everything about the customer is in the system, their name, their license plate number, everything that we've ever done on the car, it's all there.

Boost production and protect your shop in the process.

Unfortunately, we work in a very litigious society so to have that and be able to do that charting—it's invaluable. That's what you need. You need a program that works and works to protect you, so the documentation we have with this system is really a help.

You can show customers that they authorized it on this day, at this time and here is what they said. And they can do that all virtually through text and online, which has made things go so much quicker, especially during COVID.

We could send the basic estimate to look at the car and they could approve. We could send out pre-populated texts to give instructions. Every step of the way, they could approve it without needing to be in-person. It kept us able to function.

We also now scan our downloads and pictures. We can store all of that into the system, rather than on our personal cell phones like we were doing before. There are endless opportunities to back your company up and protect your company in case something goes south. We frequently say 'thank God we documented that, thank God we took a picture of that,' and it's all right there.

Find benefits for the entire team.

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Our mechanics love it. They've played around with the system to find different things we can do all across the shop with the photos and the texting. They're all very tech savvy, so introducing a system like that was an easy transition for them.

Our IT guy also helped set up the system for us and that has been instrumental in helping us integrate it into our operations. I'd recommend having someone who is great with technology there at the beginning to help make sure things go right.

But for people like my husband, who still hand writes his notes, he still enjoys the benefits. He loves the fact that if he doesn't remember a customer's name but remembers the car, he can go back and find the car and thus the customer. You can use a VIN or a license plate or a model year.