Selling heavy duty scan tools: Are you ready ... and willing?

The market seems ready for dealers who are ready to take the leap

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In business, there's an advantage to being "first to market." Being a step ahead of the competition positions you as the leader and can earn you a premium price for promoting and selling cutting-edge technology.

But market leadership often means making an investment.

Heavy duty scan tools are not new. But, the need for them is growing. So, chances are you can still be the first mobile tool distributor on your route selling HD scanners.

Q. How much does the typical HD scan tool cost?

A. If I've learned anything about HD scan tools it's that nothing is typical.

OEM tools can run $15,000 or more and are specific to one manufacturer's vehicle models. Aftermarket tool prices range from $300 to $400 for an entry-level generic code reader, to as high as $10,000 to $12,000 for a bi-directional scan tool with diagnostics data on vehicles from diesel trucks to farm tractors to construction equipment.

Q. So can a code reader fix a truck or does a tech need a scan tool?

A. A code reader just reads codes, where a scan tool reads live data. A bi-directional scan tool can do things like set idle speed, complete injector coding, or most importantly, do forced regens (burning off soot in the diesel particulate filter). But no tool can fix a vehicle without a technician knowing at least basic diagnostics, says Bill Peek, a veteran technical trainer and co-creator of Modern Diesel Diagnostics (TechDVD.com). Not all tools perform all functions.

"There isn't a fix-the-vehicle button," says Michael Flink, National Trainer for Autel (www.auteltech.com). "The scan tool isn't going to tell you how to fix the vehicle. The technician needs to know that."

Q. What questions do I ask? Doesn't every shop use the tool the same way?

A. First, you want to match the tool with the vehicles the customer services, says Victor Rivilla, marketing director with CanDo Diagnostics (candointl.com). Different scan tools offer different feature sets and every shop services different vehicles.

Not even how a fleet looks is the same. One fleet may buy 50 2016 Freightliners, says Don Jordahl, product planning manager at Cornwell Tools (cornwelltools.com).

"Oftentimes what happens in that type of a fleet is the manufacturer – Freightliner in this case, makes available, or gives them, the diagnostic package for their PCs to work on these vehicles."

Another fleet, for example, may be a local moving company with a dozen tractor trailers that are all different make and models, Jordahl continues.

"That kind of a fleet is where you need a tool that is well-rounded, such as those available in the aftermarket," he says.

Here are some typical questions to ask the technician or shop manager:

- What scan tools are you using now?
- What would you improve on the tool if you could?
- What is the age range of vehicles in your fleet?
- Do you work on both light duty vehicles and heavy duty trucks?
- Do you also work on farm or construction equipment?

Q. Isn't the real cost of a scan tool the on-going subscription?

A. You're absolutely right! It's like buying a Roku to stream video to your TV. The Roku box might only cost $40 at Walmart. It's the on-going subscription to Hulu, Netflix and other services that are the real cost in the long run.

HD scan tool subscriptions provide updates to both the software and the data. They're generally free for the first year or two.

"The renewal price range is fairly wide, from roughly $600 to $2,500 depending on the product and level of software," Jordahl

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Contributing writer Phil Sasso answers the following questions:

- Should I approach the technician or the shop owner?
- How do I handle a customer that thinks I'm tech support?

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says. "He's missing an opportunity to make money if he's not selling them when and where he can."

More important to you as a dealer is knowing which, if any, manufacturer will pay you for selling data subscriptions. For example, CanDo has this relationship with some flags.

The technology is so new and growing so fast that many scan tool makers update their data and software every week or two. They aren't just updating data on the newest vehicle, but often updating the software as well.

But, unlike OBD-II scan tools, some subscriptions will stop working after the expiration date, while others will continue to work using the old data and software. It's important to know which is which so you can inform your customer.

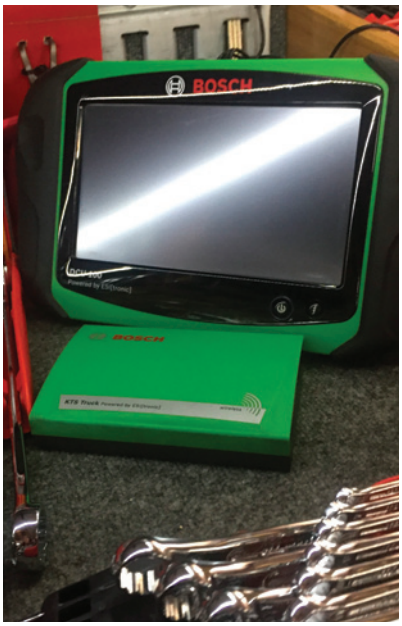
Q. Is there really a scanner port on earthmovers and agricultural equipment?

A. Government regulations say any diesel engine over 75 hp must have clean air technology, meaning some level of on-board diagnostics – and that requires a scan tool, says Modern Diesel Diagnostics' Peek. A rule of thumb is 14,000 lbs or more (or a class 4 truck), but there are many small vehicles and stationary engines with 75 hp engines.

Q. So, this is about more than just trucks?

A. It's about far more than just trucks. It's basically anything with a heavy duty diesel engine, including buses, boats – and even some really big lawn mowers!

That means your potential market now isn't just independent truck repair shops and fleet garages but any shop repairing farming or construction equipment, large forklifts, electrical generators,



Like all products, consider displaying heavy duty scan tools on the truck to garner interest with customers.

and even marine repair centers. You may call on these shops already, or this may be a great source of new customers for you.

Although new truck dealerships likely have OEM-specific scan tools for the makes and models they sell, many also have used truck lots and need aftermarket scan tools for brands outside of their OEM box, so don't rule them out, either.

Q. Why is the price range all over the board?

A. Part of it is price differences are cost of the various features. Part of it is the cost of OEM information. Some companies buy data directly from the OEM, which is costly. Others create a database of information by, in essence, reverse-engineering the data.

Unlike generic OBD-II on cars and light trucks, which has been standard on every consumer vehicle since 1996, there's not a full set of standards for heavy duty on-board diagnostics and there are no Right-to-Repair laws in place yet, says CanDo's Rivilla.

Because of this, HD scan tools have to do a lot: protocols vary, OEM diagnostic data differs, and even the physical connectors can range from OBD-II 16-pin, to 6-pin and 9-pin connectors, to brand-specific connectors on Isuzu, Mercedes and others.

Even the same two vehicles may not actually be the same.

Q. But isn't one 2013 Navistar just like another 2013 Navistar?

A. In North America, heavy duty trucks are "spec'd," that is the buyer can choose the engine they want, and often even the transmission and braking system they prefer.

A 2016 Kenworth can have a Caterpillar, Cummins or Detroit Diesel engine with a wide variation of make and models of transmissions and brakes, says Peek.

Q. I don't know enough about heavy duty scan tools to do a good demo. Any advice?

A. Don't do a demo, leave a demo.

Live demos take time. And as a salesperson your time is money. Besides, the average customer will only remember a small percentage of what you said once your demo is over.

A better approach may be to lend out your demo unit to a different shop every week.

Once a customer experiences the tool in his or her shop on a day-to-day basis, he or she will more likely see the benefits. They'll basically sell themselves. Just be sure you provide the manufacturer's support number to address any questions.

Some tools, like CanDo's and Launch's, allow remote login. This means a tech support person can even log in to a customer's scan tool and do remote diagnostics. PD