

PUT ASIDE YOUR RESERVATIONS ABOUT DMS AUTO DISPATCH FEATURES

If you enforce the system and prevent cherry picking of jobs, then your service department will operate more efficiently.

BY KEN ROCK

If at first you don't succeed, try and try again, right? However, when dealership management system vendors first announced auto dispatch features about five years ago, many service managers tried them and quickly gave them up. Their avoidance was understandable given that the first auto dispatch systems were complicated and bug-riddled.

But as programming improved and features evolved, auto dispatch features became more user-friendly. Many service managers tried them again but most yet again dropped them (perhaps slightly less quickly than before).

WHY SERVICE DEPTS. DRAG FEET

In my experience, the three main reasons why the majority of service managers still aren't using auto dispatch today include:

- 1) Service managers are afraid that, if fully utilized, auto dispatch will replace a human being – meaning they'll have to fire a dispatcher, foreman or technicians. I'll explain later why this fear is unfounded.
- 2) Some techs try to game the system and cherry pick jobs, causing problems in the system that require human intervention. So, the thinking goes, it's just easier to assign jobs manually in the first place.
- 3) Setting up the automated dispatch system takes time. It can take weeks to set up initial parameters, and months to transition from a manual system to fully automated dispatch. It takes continuous effort and commitment by the service department through this transition to ensure success.

You might ask, why bother at all with auto dispatch? My answer: Auto dispatch assigns the right tech with the right skill to the right job at the right time. Service departments that successfully transition to auto dispatch have enjoyed a 15 percent to 50 percent increase in labor hours sold, and everyone in the department makes more money.

Company	RO#	Tag/Oper	Pri	Status	Est Hrs	Tot Hrs	A/T	PT/PR	Prom/Off Hold	Skill(s)
1	999	0	1	1 / A	0.00	0.00	55	1589d		
2	A	SAF	1	Not Started	0.00	0.00	A33	I		20
3	1000	0	1	1 / H	0.00	1.27	55	1578d		
4	A	SAF	1	Cust. Hold	0.00	1.27	A22	I	03/14/13 11:33	0001
5	1005	0	1	2 / I C	0.00	3475.35	69	1345d	ASAP	
6	A	550032	1	Interrupted	0.00	3406.60	A16	C		--
7	B		1	Completed	0.00	68.75	A22	W		--
8	1013	0	ASAP	2 / W I	0.80	2282.22	24	1170d		
9	A	550032	ASAP	Work	0.00	2282.18	A22	C		--
10	B	550221	ASAP	Interrupted	0.80	0.03	A22	C		--
11	1015	0	*	4 / U I C	0.00	648.07	51	1099d		
12	A	01	0	Completed	0.00	0.00		C		--
13	B	02	0	Interrupted	0.00	648.07	A33	C		--
14	C	03	9	Unassigned	0.00	0.00		C		00
15	D	06	0	Unassigned	0.00	0.00		C		--
16	1016	0	1	2 / I C	0.50	0.00	24	1099d		
17	A	06	1	Interrupted	0.00	0.00	A17	W		--
18	B		1	Completed	0.50	0.00	A17	C		--
19	1017	0	1	2 / I	0.00	2999.27	51	1089d		
20	A	KENTEST1	1	Interrupted	0.00	0.03	A22	1 / N		0002
21	B	LOF	1	Interrupted	0.00	2999.23	A43	1 / N		12
22	1019	0	*	Complete	0.00	0.00	24	1044d		
23	A	03	9	Completed	0.00	0.00	A42	C		00
24	B	01	0	Completed	0.00	0.00	A42	C		--
25	C	09	0	Completed	0.00	0.00	A42	C		--
26	1020	0	*	Complete	0.70	0.00	24	1044d		
27	A	01	0	Completed	0.30	0.00	A22	C / N		--
28	B	02	0	Completed	0.40	0.00	A42	C		--
29	C	09	0	Completed	0.00	0.00	A42	C		--
30	1021	0	*	Complete	0.00	1.45	51	1019d	06/18/13 14:00	
31	A	01	0	Completed	0.00	0.05	A43	1 / N		00
32	B	02	0	Completed	0.00	0.08	A43	1 / N		00
33	C	03	9	Completed	0.00	0.00	A43	1 / N		00
34	D	SAF	7	Completed	0.00	1.32	A22	1 / N		00
35	1022	0	*	1 / A	0.00	0.00	51	1019d		
36	A	SAF	7	Not Started	0.00	0.00	A22	1 / N		00
37	1023	0	*	2 / I H	0.00	2898.37	51	1019d		
38	A	01	0	Cust. Hold	0.00	0.02	A22	I		--
39	B	03	9	Interrupted	0.00	2898.35	A22	C		--
40	1024	0	*	1 / U	2.50	0.00	55	1019d		
41	A	SAF	7	Unassigned	2.50	0.00				--
42	1025	0	*	1 / U	2.50	0.00	12	1019d		

How Auto Dispatch Displays Status Of Jobs, Etc.

I believe that once your service group has transitioned to auto dispatch, both service managers and their personnel will love it.

HOW A TYPICAL SYSTEM WORKS

In a DMS, the auto dispatch function is integrated with the service module. Setting up auto dispatch

requires assigning certain skills, such as "brakes" or "electrical," to techs; along with skill levels such as "beginner," "experienced" or "certified." It also requires that jobs be prioritized based on qualifiers such as "waiting," "VIP," "promised time" or "appointment."

When a repair order is created, the system



These techs should become more productive, not be replaced, under an auto dispatch system.

electronically files that RO into the dispatch route sheet. Parameters are set ahead of time, so the system knows which skills and how much time should be needed for each job. The system then prioritizes jobs and searches for a tech with the needed skills and availability.

When tech finishes one job, the auto dispatch function automatically releases another job to him based on the pre-set parameters.

You're probably thinking that parameters like prioritization of jobs cannot possibly be set in stone. After all, conditions in shops constantly change. Sometimes, a "waiter" may need to take precedence over a "VIP," or a "promised time" may need to have a lower priority assigned if the customer won't show up until three hours later than expected. Also, what about techs who try to game the system?

AUTO DISPATCH WON'T REPLACE PEOPLE

You're right: Conditions in service departments are always changing, and that's why auto dispatch will always require human intervention and will never replace a human being. Auto dispatch is not designed to replace anyone. Rather, the function is intended to increase employees' productivity.

For example, say your shop foreman currently spends 70 percent of his time manually dispatching jobs, 15 percent of his time training techs and 15 percent performing high-paying diagnostics. With auto dispatch, his time spent on dispatching jobs can be managed and reduced to 10 percent from 70 percent, with training rising to 40 percent and valuable diagnostics work to 50 percent.

HOW TO STOP CHERRY PICKING

Because auto dispatch functions in DMSes are designed to be flexible, most do allow manual overrides in certain circumstances. Most let techs place a current job on hold and view the next job assigned to them, so they can choose to start work on the second job instead.

service manager must enforce the process. One reason why many service managers don't is they have favorite techs who are accustomed to being assigned plum jobs. Or, service managers may tire of hearing techs complain about auto dispatch and back off.

Whatever the reason, it's critical to stop letting techs cherry pick the best jobs. Believe it or not, 90 percent of the time the computer does know better than the service manager, foreman, tech or advisor about who should be working on what job, and when. If given a fair chance, auto dispatch will increase every tech's productivity and pay.

Recent upgrades to many auto dispatch functions have attempted to address the challenge of cherry picking. For example, in the version from my company, Auto/Mate, service managers now have the ability to control how many active ROs a tech can have open at one time. Users also have the option to disable techs' ability to place jobs on hold and make them get a manager's approval first. If some techs prove more trustworthy than others with the system, permissions can be adjusted accordingly.

PAYOFF ON THE BACK END

Depending on the size of your shop, it can take anywhere from two days to two weeks to set up all of the parameters. It can take anywhere from several months to a year to transition from a manual system to one that is fully automated. Once the system is established, regular maintenance is required.

Whenever a tech quits or is hired, that person has to be removed from or entered into the system, with appropriate skill sets assigned and adjusted as necessary. Ideally, the service manager or dispatcher should allocate 15 to 20 minutes every day for ongoing system maintenance. The good news is, finding the time to do this should not be a problem, because auto dispatch will be creating more free time.

I am cognizant of the innate fear about handing over such an important responsibility to a computerized system. "What if a bottleneck occurs?" you worry. "What if the system screws up and creates chaos?"

Auto dispatch is no different than any technology in that the "garbage in, garbage out" saying applies. Auto dispatch is not something a service department can set up and forget. Every shop is different, so there's not one set of recommended parameters. During the transition, parameters will need to be constantly tweaked until you find what works with your individual processes.

It takes dedicated commitment to switch to auto dispatch, but once it's humming smoothly, the time you invested – plus a whole lot more – will be repaid on the back end. I think your service department will become more profitable, each employee will generate more revenue, and customer satisfaction will increase due to quicker turnaround with fewer tech errors.

And, if at first you don't succeed, then try and try again. **CBT**

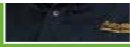


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Ken has trained dealership customers for more than years, after having worked as a fixed-ops director for a dealership group in New York and Massachusetts. He has more than 25 years of dealership experience and

This behavior causes obvious problems, including jobs not getting done on time and honest techs who don't game the system receiving less desirable work. For auto dispatch to succeed, the



hands-on training of dealership staff.

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