Kmart Tyre & Auto Service – case studies

Serge Rizzardo, Aaron Hullet and Michael Vothrontos are all Store Managers at Kmart Tyre & Auto Service (KTAS) stores across Australia. Each store is run by a dedicated team of trained technicians, who service and repair a large number of different vehicle makes and models each day. The stores are an important part of the local community, with a strong customer base and long-term relationships between technicians and customers.

As Store Managers Serge, Aaron and Michael spend their days balancing the needs of their customers with running a profitable business. One issue that is becoming more commonplace and making it increasingly more difficult to do this, is an inability to access vehicle repair data and information distributed exclusively to vehicle manufacture dealer repair networks. For customers, this means longer than necessary without their vehicles and usually an additional cost, that in most cases is absorbed by KTAS. For Serge, Aaron and Michael it increasingly translates to an inability to deliver the best possible service for their customers, despite their teams being highly trained and equipped.

CASE STUDY ONE: MR SERGE RIZZARDO, STORE MANAGER AT KTAS RESERVOIR
Serge Rizzardo has been an automotive mechanic for more than 25 years. Prior to joining KTAS he worked in both the Holden and Mitsubishi authorised dealership service departments.

Serge's customer and the issue
A single mother in her mid to late twenties who is a regular KTAS Reservoir customer. She drives a 2011 Holden Barina and brought her car in to KTAS Reservoir after noticing the engine warning light was on and that the car was not driving as well as it usually does.

What did Serge and his team do?
Using the latest specification diagnostic equipment that all KTAS stores are equipped with, along with the benefit of regular training to diagnose modern engine electronics, Serge performed a scan of the vehicles On-Board Diagnostic (OBD) system, including the Engine Control Unit (ECU) – the brain that controls and monitors the engines operating system. From this scan, Serge was able to determine the ECU had logged a fault relating to the catalytic converter, which is an important and highly expensive component of the car's exhaust and emission control system. After checking the related components were free of any physical damage, Serge carried out a live test where all sensor inputs to the ECU are recorded as the vehicle is driven. When reviewing the captured data, Serge noticed the output range from two emission control sensors appeared a little out of the ordinary. Ideally Serge's next step would've been to compare the output data with the manufacturers specifications to determine if the operating range was normal. However, as this data is not readily available, an alternative solution was to purchase new sensors to test in order to provide a known good comparison. This left the customer without her vehicle for an additional day. Upon receiving and installing the new sensors it was found that the outputs were identical to the original.

Serge's team repeated the process of scanning, checking components and sensors until the diagnostic process was exhausted. This took place over a number of days, with the customer becoming increasingly frustrated. After the third day, Serge contacted a former colleague who shared that this problem could only be rectified by updating the ECU software in the vehicle – an update that would take only a few minutes to perform.

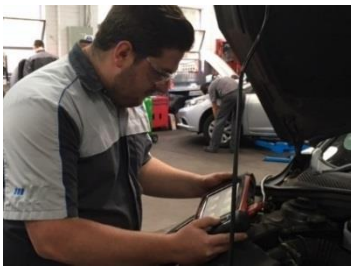
Without KTAS having access to this software update however, the only option was for the customer to take her vehicle to the dealer service centre for repair, which Serge arranged to do on her behalf. KTAS absorbed costs for all lost labour and the parts used for comparison.

Serge encounters this kind of situation on a weekly basis and therefore has begun to direct some customers to dealer service centres rather than booking them into his store. Through repeated exposure to particular problems with certain makes and models of cars, he has learnt which will require access to codes or software updates in order to fix the problem and he knows he is currently unable to access these himself. Doing this may save his customers time and money, but it impacts the profitability of his store and is disappointing for the customers whose first choice was to have the KTAS store they know and trust carry out their service or repairs.

Serge believes the majority of his customers are unaware vehicle manufacturers are withholding the data required to complete diagnosis and repair, even after the manufacturer has sold the mechanic the replacement part(s). Considering many customers have limited knowledge of their cars, engines and the ever more complex electronics systems that run them, Serge and his team have a real desire to see a job through to the end and provide quality service – it's more than just an obligation.

CASE STUDY TWO: MR AARON HULLET, STORE MANAGER AT KTAS HAWTHORN

Throughout Aaron Hullet's time as a KTAS Store Manager he has regularly encountered issues related to being unable to access vehicle manufacturer data.



<u>Aaron's customer and the issue</u>

A long-term KTAS Hawthorn customer, who drives an early 2000's model BMW 5 series. The ABS (Anti Brake Lock system – the electronic system that stops the vehicles tyres from locking when under emergency braking) warning light was activated.

<u>What did Aaron and his team do</u>?

Aaron and his team performed a diagnostic scan on the vehicle, determining the fault existed within the vehicle's ABS module (the unit that controls the braking system). The repair required the replacement of the entire ABS module – a fix that should see the customer back on the road that same day.

After checking there were no other faults, the required part was ordered from a dealer, delivered and fitted to the vehicle – a process that took approximately three hours. In order to pair the new ABS module with the vehicle (a common procedure), the stores diagnostic scan tool was connected – however more warning lights appeared on the vehicle's dashboard. Following a repeat diagnostic scan, numerous fault codes became visible – many more than had been diagnosed originally. When contacting the dealer to query this, Aaron was informed the vehicle needed to be taken to an authorised dealer service centre for the new ABS module to be synchronised with the vehicle – a process that would take half a day, cost in excess of $300 and that was not mentioned at the time of the sale.

Turning a same day repair into a two-day repair was frustrating and costly for the customer, who didn't understand why the team didn't have access to the information needed to finalise the repair that same day. It also cost Aaron and his team considerable time and put their credibility as trusted

automotive repairers into question with their customer, despite the problem being no fault of their own.

For Aaron, this scenario takes place often. The majority of his customer's vehicles are high end European makes and models, for which even basic servicing information is generally not made widely available. Aaron and his team have established a strong level of trust with their customers over the years and would be able to provide a better service to them if the data, software or tooling they need to fix some common problems was made more widely available.

CASE STUDY THREE: MR MICHAEL VOTHRONTOS, STORE MANAGER AT KTAS CHADSTONE

Michael Vothrontos spent over a decade working at Toyota and Honda dealer service centres before joining KTAS five years ago.

Michael's customer and the issue

The son of a long-term KTAS Chadstone customer who was having several recurring issues with his 2014 Audi Q5 – the engine warning light was on, the car was running poorly in the morning and was occasionally stalling. At the recommendation of his father, the customer brought his car to Michael and his team to analyse and fix the issue.

What did Michael and his team do?

A detailed diagnostic scan of the vehicle's Engine Control Unit (ECU) – the brain that controls all of the vehicle's engine, safety and electronic functions – was performed. This showed a number of fault codes, with a major one related to a pressure switch fault linked to the Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) – the device used to eliminate harmful pollution content from the engine's exhaust system.

Using KTAS' available technical references such as Repco Navigator (Autopedia) as well as external, publicly available sources, Michael attempted to further determine the definition of the vehicles fault codes without success. He then used a second ECU diagnostic scan tool to re-check the issue and from this scan he discovered that the signal output from the pressure switch was lower than it should be. To confirm his analysis, Michael sought the advice of a dealer service centre. His analysis was correct, but he had spent a lot of time uncovering the information he needed in order to ensure the costumer would not experience a recurrence of this issue, which came at a cost to his store.

The diagnosis and a repair of this type would normally be completed within the same day. Due to the time spent chasing information that was not readily available however, the job took a total of three days. The cost for this additional time could not be passed on to the customer. With KTAS Chadstone servicing many different brands of vehicles each day, a significant chunk of Michael and his team's time is spent sourcing and locating vehicle repair information from numerous vehicle manufacturers which is not currently readily available, in order to meet the needs of their customers.

WHAT PREVENTED SERGE, AARON, MICHAEL AND THEIR TEAMS DELIVERING THE BEST POSSIBLE SERVICE FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS IN THESE INSTANCES?

- No access to manufacturers technical information, including *known faults* with vehicles. This means additional labour hours were required to identify the issue, leading to the customer's vehicle being out of action for longer and the store spending more time than planned on a particular job, impacting store productivity.
- Software updates required to fix issue were not made available, meaning the customer was disadvantaged as their car had to be taken elsewhere, rather than being able to use the conveniently located repairer they know, trust and had chosen in the first place. The business was also impacted financially.
- Limited communication around required processes, such as Aaron's ABS module requiring synchronisation that could only be performed by a dealer service centre in order to operate, putting him in a position that created unnecessary disadvantage to his customer, both in time and in cost.
- Needing to advise long-term customers that their repairs would have to be carried out somewhere else due to the information required to repair their vehicles not being readily available to KTAS – putting credibility as a repairer into jeopardy even though the technicians were trained and had the required skills to complete the job.

While situations such as these are common for Serge, Aaron, Michael and the broader KTAS teams, they don't need to be. Having access to accurate, up to date information and data will enable timely, cost efficient and quality services that keep the customer at the centre. Instead of spending time chasing information, technicians will be able to spend that time working on vehicles – creating a more efficient service for customers, a more desirable outcome for their stores and a greater contribution to the community in which they operate.