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Are you getting the most out of your scan tool?

To help technicians get the most information out of cars today, scan tools are becoming more intuitive

By: Tom Venetis, Editor

While the scan tool is one of the most important and powerful of the tools that a technician has in his or her arsenal, it is often, sadly, the one that is not used to its fullest potential.

Now, with any kind of general or sweeping statement, such as the one just made, there are caveats. Getting the most out of a scan tool comes down to the comfort level of the technician with the tool, the training they have had and how easy the tool makes it to get at the necessary vehicle information.

Meet all three of those requirements and you have a shop and a technician that is getting the most out of an expensive equipment investment; and helping customers receive the highest quality of care and service for their vehicles, all the while generating valuable revenue. Miss those key points and you have a tool that is not being used to its full potential and a technician who grows increasingly frustrated with the job and the tool at hand.

The greatest hurdle a technician has to deal with today is the complexity of vehicle electronics and what information can be had from the ever-increasing number of computer systems and control modules. "There are systems today that have never appeared in cars before," says **Darryl Scott, division supervisor with Versatile Automotive Diagnostics**. "Today you have navigation systems, TPMS and functions such as headlamps that will aim themselves when the vehicle is making a turn; and many systems now are coming under computer controls that once were manually controlled. It is becoming even trickier now to understand all the complex voltages used and the numerous fuses and their placements. Simply, there is a very steep learning curve with today's vehicles because of all the electronics and computer-based systems onboard."

For a technician, this means the scan tool resting comfortably in their hands or mounted on a table has also become more complex. That tool now pulls out an ever growing amount of critical data, fault codes and mechanical and computer system information that has to be sorted through and understood. Sometimes, however, just getting that information can be challenging. This is where training comes in.

Makers of scan tools insist technicians take the time to get some training on the tools in order to understand how to best use them, and more importantly, how to extract the needed data from the vehicle using the tool. Sometimes it is not obvious, at first glance, what the tool can do and what information it can pull out of the vehicle.

This is especially important with tools that are made to work with foreign nameplate vehicles.