

MAINTAINING A TOP-LEVEL SHOP & THE BENEFITS OF OUTSOURCING

Running and maintaining a well-organized shop may be overwhelming for fleet operations. Third-party maintenance providers can take the burden of organizing the shop, hiring technicians, and maintaining safe conditions off the fleet manager's shoulders.

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Having a well-organized and maintained workspace that can accommodate the fleet's heavy-duty trucks is fundamental to the success of a fleet maintenance program. It's crucial that fleets start with their garage facilities as the first piece of evaluating what their maintenance capabilities can and should be. To maintain a top-level shop, fleets often must consider a long list of "to do" items that need constant attention to keep a shop running at peak efficiency. These tasks can be daunting, especially when maintaining a shop isn't a fleet's primary business.

This is where a third-party maintenance provider can lend fleets its expertise and outside perspective to objectively evaluate the shop's capabilities.

For example, one of the first things that Amerit does when working with a fleet is to understand if there is enough space to get the work done. The shop layout must be functional for all the types of heavy-duty truck repairs that will be needed by the fleet's vehicles. There may be a "quick lane" for small repairs, a bay for preventive maintenance checks, etc. But fleets often don't take into account situations when there may be a major repair that takes over the bulk of the shop's space. This is what a close examination of a maintenance space can determine for a fleet.

MITIGATING RISK

When a fleet operates its own maintenance facility, the company assumes the risks to vehicles, technicians, and drivers. If a technician is hurt on the job, that comes out of the fleet's budget, thus impacting the company's bottom line. If a mechanic misses a repair that leads to an accident, the fleet and the company as a whole will also likely open itself to liability.

One of the benefits of using a third-party maintenance provider is that it reduces exposure to risk along with the chances of an accident and the OSHA-related citations that will often follow. With reduced exposure to risk, liability insurance premiums—for those fleets that aren't self-insured—may also go down.

From hazardous waste disposal and complying with OSHA regulations to employee safety, shop safety, and environmental concerns, these can also lead fleets to regulatory trouble. Keeping heavy-duty fleets not only running smoothly, but compliant with safety regulations is part of the service third-party maintenance providers bring to the table. For example, **Amerit Fleet Solutions** has worked closely with its fleet customers to train its employees about safety, environmental, and health issues that could not only affect the efficiency of the fleet operation, but bring with it fines and public embarrassment.

Fleets that operate alternative-fueled trucks also face liability issues, which a third-party maintenance provider likely has expertise navigating. For instance, Amerit Fleet Solutions has experience not only tapping into the laws relating to alternative fuels that are already on the books, but keeps abreast of the changes coming down the road state-by-state. As an example, Oklahoma technicians have to go through special, state-specific certifications to work on natural gas vehicles.

Third-party maintenance providers can handle the certification and compliance headaches that cost time and money.

PROVIDING OUT-OF-THE-BOX SERVICE

Many maintenance jobs can be classified as routine. But thanks to the increasing sophistication of today's fleet equipment it is becoming more computerized and more complicated, requiring technicians with a higher degree of skill—which can make it difficult to find a technician who can readily tackle the job. Because third-party maintenance providers see a much higher volume of vehicle and equipment types in any given year, they are more prepared to work on specialized units. A job that may be out of the ordinary for a fleet, may be run-of-the-mill for a maintenance provider.

As an example of the depth of knowledge a third-party maintenance provider can bring to a fleet client, Amerit Fleet Solutions maintains more than 100,000 assets nationwide, running the gamut from light- to heavy-duty, including high-mileage

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assets, dry and refrigerated trailers and aerial equipment. The company also services alt-fuel and hybrid vehicles, including electric, CNG, and LNG.

This depth of knowledge should be used to do more than service vehicles. A good third-party maintenance provider will bring new ideas to the fleet, helping to find solutions to fleet-related problems and help to implement these ideas.

HIRING THE BEST

Finding and training technicians can add to the overwhelming set of parameters for a fleet to deal with and is something a third-party maintenance provider can handle.

Hiring qualified technicians can be a headache for a fleet-run maintenance program, particularly when it comes to recruiting, training, and coping with turnover. Using a third-party maintenance provider takes the responsibility of hiring, training, retention—and the associated costs—off the shoulders of the fleet manager.

For instance, Amerit Fleet Solutions invests heavily in **training technicians**, encouraging them to obtain industry certifications, focusing on continued career development that creates a highly motivated and qualified technician workforce.

More important for the fleet, Amerit makes sure that all of the technicians servicing the fleet's vehicles have the same expertise as any OEM technician. Through online training from different OEMs and parts manufacturers to Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) training, Amerit keeps technician skill sets at the highest standards of professional certification and experience related to new technology, providing incentives to technicians to motivate them to continue and maintain their training.

With its large pool of available technicians, staffing disruptions and expenses due to training can be minimized by providing qualified temporary workers who can take over.

Third-party maintenance providers can also add flexibility in other ways. For instance, work shifts can be scheduled around a customer's needs.



With larger staffs of technicians, a third-party maintenance provider has greater flexibility with scheduling. For Amerit, work shifts are scheduled around customers' needs. If vehicles are available during the day, technicians work on them at that time. If they're only available at night, mobile maintenance is another possibility. Instead of taking vehicles to a maintenance provider, trucks arrive on site to service vehicles after hours or on weekends when they're not in use.

Keeping employees focused on their core functions instead of spending time driving to the repair shop is another benefit of

a third-party maintenance solution. In addition to mobile servicing units that can handle off-hours repairs, third-party maintenance providers also offer vehicle pick-up and drop-off services to save employees the time at the repair shops.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO OUTSOURCE?

There are several situations that can cause fleets to consider outsourcing maintenance.

These include:

- Insufficient assets to support a brick-and-mortar garage.
- Technician shortages.
- Overloaded maintenance staff.
- Lack of management to oversee repairs.
- Too many accidents on the job.
- Operating a decentralized fleet.
- Taking on more specialized assets.
- High maintenance costs.
- Renewed focus on core competencies.

The number of assets that a company must have in order for outsourcing to make sense is quite low. Amerit, for instance, has developed solutions for customers with as few as 10 heavy-duty assets.

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By hiring the very best technicians from a large pool of qualified individuals, maintenance is done right the first time, eliminating the need to bring a vehicle back to the shop, and along with it unnecessary downtime and lost revenue.

ACQUIRING THE RIGHT TOOLS

Having the right tools is another factor in a successful maintenance program, but can add unnecessary expense to an operation if they aren't managed properly. This is another area that a third-party maintenance provider can help fleets evaluate. For example, last-minute tool acquisition is not cost effective, and the tool may not be needed for a long time if ever again. A third-party maintenance operator, such as Amerit Fleet Solutions, can help fleets identify the return on investment (ROI) of fleet tools, working closely with the fleet customer to understand the equipment needs of the fleet internally and externally, and results in determining the best tool purchases.

Keeping tools, such as diagnostic equipment, in tip-top working order can aid technicians in limiting the amount of downtime, by accounting for all of the engine types being used in a fleet's vehicles and making sure the diagnostic equipment is up and running.

Parts are another cost center that a third-party maintenance provider can help control. Because third-party maintenance providers buy parts on behalf of a number of fleets—many more than a single fleet would or could ever order—they have the ability to negotiate volume discounts that fleets wouldn't have access to. For example,



Amerit has negotiated discounts with the company's national parts vendors, and it passes these discounts and rebates directly onto its fleet customers.

PROVIDING DATA

Data is crucial to calculating total cost of ownership and overall fleet efficiency, and isn't something that is lost when a fleet uses a third-party maintenance provider. Many providers compile detailed maintenance records and inspection documents that fleets can view and download online.

For example, Amerit captures comprehensive repair history on each asset it maintains and provides detailed reporting. The company also has the capability to transmit data directly into fleet maintenance or financial systems, making it easy to integrate it into the fleet's entire operational picture.

ABOUT AMERIT FLEET SOLUTIONS

With over 100,000 vehicles and assets under contract in nearly 550 locations nationwide, **Amerit Fleet Solutions** is one of the largest providers of dedicated fleet maintenance and management services in the U.S. today. No other fleet maintenance company can compare to our depth of knowledge and expertise in maintaining and managing the broad spectrum of vehicle and asset types, including alternative fuel vehicles; managing a diverse on-site workforce; creating customer-driven **service programs** and leveraging best practices in fleet services and processes to improve performance, profitability and uptime.