

## Working Through the Parts Dilemma

Obtaining parts has been difficult in the collision industry for a little while now, and I am not so sure there is really an end in sight. It seems like we had just started to recover from the auto manufacturer strike and then COVID hit. COVID affected everything from obtaining raw materials, to manufacturing the part, to getting it delivered to the end user, and it made repair completion dates very difficult to project. Despite what may seem like a hopeless situation, there are ways to work through the parts dilemma.

The first step in overcoming the challenges stemming from both the strike and COVID is having a good partner. When I was managing a shop, my parts clerk learned quickly that he was never supposed to tell me the part was on order and understood that his job was to get the part. I believe anyone can order a part, but it takes someone with some ambition to get a part which is where having a good partner comes in. There is only one way to order a part – but several ways to get one – and you need to be associated with someone that knows the difference.

Now would be a good time to talk with your parts vendor to develop the partnership you will need to work through this dilemma in the best way possible. OEM dealers make better gross profit and receive other benefits when they can order parts through a stock order, so many of them use that as their only source to get parts. A true partner will use their parts sourcing locator to find the part at another local dealer to get you the part you need quickly. I would not ask them to do this all of the time but if you are loyal to one partner for a particular brand, they should not hesitate to honor your request. Another thing to remember is the importance of understanding their parts ordering cut-off times in order for you to be a good partner to them. If you can get your parts order to them prior to the cut-off, it allows them to use a stock order to fill your request whenever possible.

Each Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) has a system to locate and source backordered parts, and the partner you use should know all of the ins and outs of that system and be willing to use them. Simply telling you the part is on back order is not an answer and should be signaling them to take the next step. Again, that is the difference between ordering a part and getting a part. General Motors has a multiple step process to help dealers handle critical parts issues with the Service Parts Assistance Center (SPAC) being the most beneficial to collision repair facilities. It is the highest priority order type available and those assigned to SPAC strive to complete every order as quickly as possible. All OEMs have a similar system, and learning the process will help you work with your partner to obtain needed parts.

While you are working through the parts dilemma, there are several things you can do to help your partner. Submitting one parts order is the best way you can assist your partner in getting what you need. Sending in a request for a new parts requirement at various times throughout the repair process bogs down their system which can actually extend the time it takes to receive your order. Providing your partner with the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and the production date is key to not only getting a part but essential to getting the right one. Also, using a third party system like OEC/collisionlink®, PartsTrader® and those incorporated into your estimating platform allow a partner to better manage your parts request.

I have heard it stated many times that it is not the problem itself but how you choose to solve it that is important. Yes, we have a parts dilemma, but working together with a valued partner will move you through the issues and get you what you need as quickly as possible. Working with parts is just one of the challenges a collision center manager will encounter in a day, and after many of my own trials I have discovered ways to make the entire process much smoother. I hope the advice outlined in this article helps you avoid the many stresses of a parts dilemma while teaching you better ways to work through one when it comes.