THE
FIELD GUIDE
TO EFFICIENCY
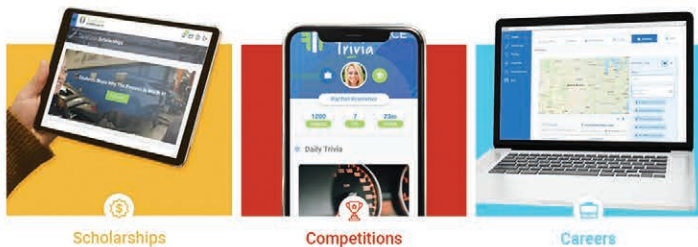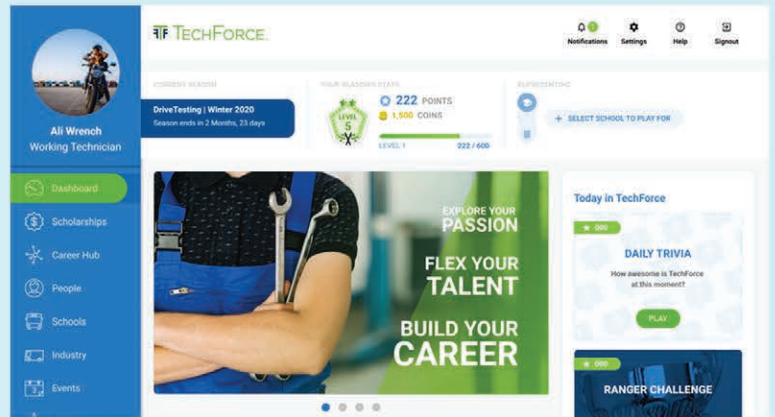
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INTRODUCTION:

Putting it all together

Here's the thing about efficiency—there's no lever to pull to simply increase it, no button to push in the morning to get it going nor shut it down at the end of the day. An efficient shop with efficient processes and efficient technicians doesn't just *happen*. For some, efficiency is a never-fulfilled goal or even a simple promise to just do a little better tomorrow. More an idea than an action, the efficient contemporary shop is a shop that's greater than the sum of its parts.

It's time to illuminate those parts a little more.

The Field Guide to Efficiency is your resource to assess your operations, learn how the best shops handle the hidden cogs that drive their business (and revenue) forward and begin to implement change where change is needed in your own day-to-day operations. These are the real-time strategies that seven-figure shops use to increase efficiency, eliminate waste and realize a more robust and valuable shop experience for the management and staff as well as the clients who depend on your services.

From customer management systems and streamlined fulfillment to increased revenue through digital vehicle inspections, quantifiable technician efficiency rates and a happy customer experience, *The Field Guide to Efficiency* is more than just a collection of disparate parts; like your shop, it's an interconnected resource meant to assess, engage and deliver upon that most basic of promises—that the customer experience matters and that the most efficient shops have discovered how to deliver it again and again and again.

Map Your Efficiency
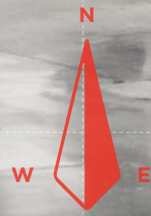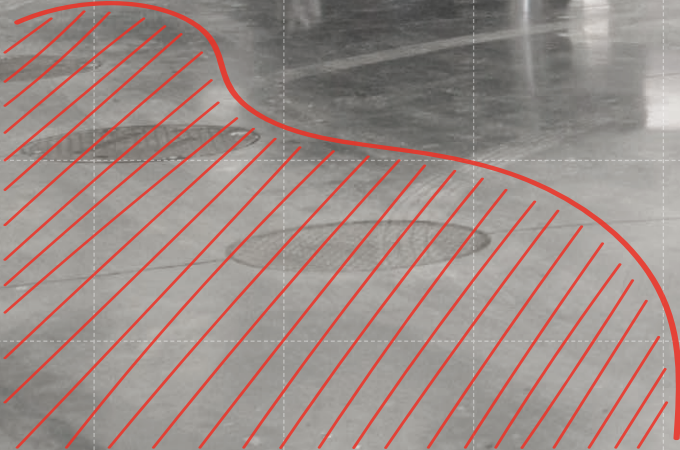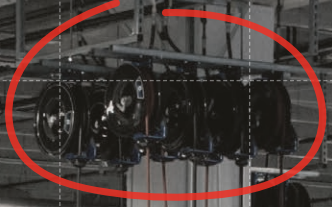
GET ORGANIZED:

Find the right shop management system to aid in efficient scheduling, communication and payment processing.

Efficiency almost always comes down to organization. Without knowing what goes where and when, or who does what and how, systems break down and precious time is easily lost. As a way to organize the vehicles coming in and out of the shop, as well as how the steps of the repair are communicated to the team and the customer, shop owners turn to the digital solution of a shop management system.

Find your shop management match.
With hundreds of different options to choose from, finding the right management system for your shop can be overwhelming. But it is vital to consider the many variations and levels of systems before investing in one for your shop. Similar to TV packages, there are bare-bones options, extensive upgraded versions, and everything in between—all coming in at different price points.

For more organized, well-trained, and operations-savvy shop owners, a more robust management system could be a good option. New shop owners should look toward simpler management systems that translate well from handwriting estimates. For example, ALLDATA Shop Manager is a simple management system for day-to-day shop essentials. Owners who are new to the position or are not as familiar with shop technology could be overwhelmed with a more complex system and may not be able to take advantage of the added features without further training. Before deciding on a management system, ask yourself which features are a necessity for your shop, and which ones you would like to grow into using.

Once you become more familiar with using a management system, you can look into upgrading your current system or finding a more advanced one that lends more guidance—all while improving efficiency along the way.

Utilize your tools and speed up efficiency.
As mentioned above, every shop management system has different features and tools to help speed up efficiency and grow your shop. Below are a few elements that aid in getting vehicles in and out of your shop quickly and efficiently.

Scheduling
One feature that can be found on almost all shop management systems is a scheduling element. A full digital calendar allows owners to schedule out customer visits while recording and archiving important customer and vehicle information. Keeping staff and vehicles rolling on a strict daily schedule pushes the flow of jobs efficiently through the shop. Additionally, housing information about customers' cars and past repairs in an organized and digital space removes paper records and makes relevant data easy to access, quickly.

Workflow management
Similar to a scheduling element, select shop management systems have a built-in internal workflow management tool. Shop owners or managers can assign out individual steps in the repair process to specific team members. The entire staff is able to visually see where a vehicle is along the process, eliminating possible confusion or "lost" jobs and allowing the team to plan for the next repair.

STREAMLINE YOUR PARTS ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

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Efficient payment processing should go beyond your customer's wallets and encompass how you pay and manage your business's finances as well. Quick and simple account management without having to log in to multiple sites allows owners to focus on the many other responsibilities that help their customers get their cars back on the road as quickly as possible. **AutoZonePro.com** has a new "Account Overview" dashboard with all the vital account information intuitively displayed so you can streamline your part activity and account management all in one place, on one site.

AutoZonePro.com streamlined account features include:

- "Account Overview" dashboard to quickly check your credit, manage due dates, pay bills online and access full transaction information.

  – Easily search any transaction made online or on the phone.

- Create estimates directly on the site or app.

- Online bill payment feature that allows you to save your preferred payment methods to quickly and safely pay online or through the app.

- **AutoZonePro.com** offers SMS integrations making the full part catalog, real-time pricing, availability and ordering services all available within your system.

Communication
Shop management systems commonly have communication tools integrated into the system for either internal or external use. With customer information directly logged into the database, direct or automatic messaging can be set up with customers to alert them where their vehicle is along the repair process. This can eliminate excess phone calls and allows timely information to get to customers faster.

Payment
Many shop management systems either have their own payment processing systems or can integrate with an existing system at your shop. Quick and easy payments with customers speed up the repair process by allowing them to pay for their repair without added hassle or processing. Some systems allow customers to pay directly online, eliminating a clumsy over-the-phone transaction or unnecessary in-shop payment.

GO PAPERLESS:

Utilize digital vehicle inspections and outside visual resources to speed up and clear up the repair process.

The repair industry has seen a huge shift in the last decade. Advancements in shop technology and tools have helped push for faster and more trusted repair visits. A large advancement has been the widespread release of digital vehicle inspections, which allow customers to have a visual representation of the exact issues within their vehicle and eliminate the hassle of paper reports.

When a customer can see with their own eyes what needs to be done to their vehicle, they can immediately understand that the repairs are vital for the safety of their car, themself and their family. This swift form of communication and education quickly gets the customer on board for the needed repairs and grows average repair orders (ARO).

Fully utilize the tool.
Each vehicle that comes into your shop should first be given a courtesy digital inspection. This report acts as an inside look for customers who may have zero knowledge of what's under the hood of their vehicle.

UTILIZE DIGITAL DIAGRAMS

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Not all repairs can be communicated to customers through photos and videos. Some issues that are complicated or are difficult to showcase simply through vehicle images deserve a more in-depth conversation with customers to get them on board and quickly moving forward.

Build trust with customers by utilizing digital inspections and other support resources available to view or download from **AutoZonePro.com**. Digital diagrams help to further build confidence with customers, allowing service writers to easily talk through and guide difficult repair conversations via text, email or face to face.
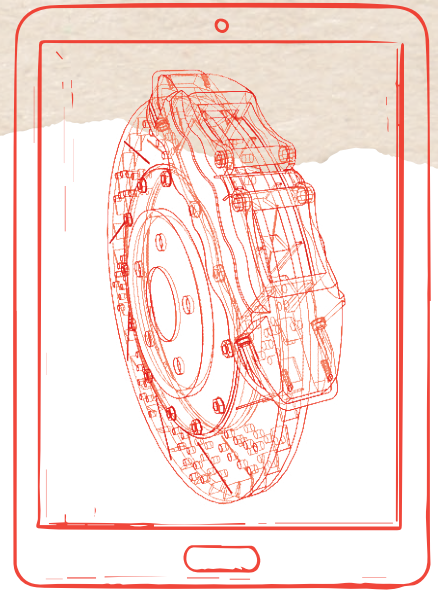
Technicians should aim to take 15-20 clear pictures for every digital inspection—more if needed to strongly showcase a complex issue. They should also take photos of the parts of the vehicle that don't need repairs at the time or could need repairs down the line. This allows customers the ability to see a digital footprint of their vehicle over time, and could be used as a way to efficiently educate and sell in the future. For photos of specific parts that need repairs, encourage your technicians to take advantage of the editing capabilities within the tool to draw deliberate arrows or circles directly on photos that may need further clarity.

In some cases, short clips might act as a more comprehensive look into the issue, since videos can demonstrate movement and sound. The more complete and thorough an inspection is, the stronger the communication will be between the staff within the shop and with customer.

Connect beyond the inspection.
Once the inspection is complete, and the service advisor has had a chance to look it over, it can be sent immediately and directly to the customer using their preferred contact method. No matter where the customer is, they can easily check their text or email and open up their entire inspection on their phone or computer. The convenience and speed of the digital form of communication lets customers see their vehicle reports wherever they are with visual examples of what needs to be repaired, eliminating further back and forth with the shop that could cause delay in the repair process.

ALLDATA offers digital inspections on their mobile app to work with ALLDATA Manage Online so you can jump-start the check-in process right at the vehicle and easily fill out digital inspections.

The advantages of a digital inspection can also move beyond the current visit to help facilitate an efficient next appointment. An ever-evolving view of the vehicle's past repairs and issues makes the next visit even more efficient. Technicians know the exact history of the vehicle and can shape how they focus their next inspection. It can also be used as a sales tool, and jobs that were not sold in the first visit can be revisited and compared to the photo of the previous service to showcase the growing issue. This cuts down time for all parties and creates a stronger, more trusted relationship with customers.

FIND THE RIGHT PARTS:

Streamline parts ordering by first owning the process and then owning the software.

The best shops don't necessarily have the best technology or the savviest technicians and service advisors at their disposal—they simply have discovered the best processes that help them turn a profit, day in and day out, week after week, year after year. Great repairs alone do not a great shop make—efficiencies aren't inherited or magically appear out of the oil-laden air. Significant efficiency improvements are nuanced, practiced, perfected.

Parts ordering is no different. Whether ordering parts online or over the phone, learning how to work with your SMS and/or parts ordering system will help streamline every repair order, help provide the best service to your customers and enhance your ability to organize and prioritize your workday (and workflow).

Business mogul Michael Hyatt says, "What gets scheduled gets done," and he's not wrong.

Be sure to stock what you need, always, especially for regular customers or common repairs or make/model components; if your shop specializes in late-model Euros, for example, there are probably some pretty specific parts, components or modules you should always have on hand. And when you have them, your advisors have an easier time pitching the repair to the customer—the part is already on hand. *No, it shouldn't take long at all. We can get started immediately.* If the part does nothing but gather dust on the shelf for ages, many vendors even offer a full refund.

Because efficiency is a process and not merely a fact, accidentally ordering the wrong part is an all too common error. Besides the headache of being reimbursed and replacing the part, you now have a customer whose repair takes longer than expected.

GET THE PROFESSIONAL EDGE WITH EASIER PARTS ORDERING

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Parts buying innovation should be geared toward your success with faster, more accurate searches with the click of a mouse. **AutoZonePro.com** is an industry-leading parts ordering and fulfillment solution that offers:

- Multi-term "smart search" and fulfillment abilities with real-time pricing and availability

- Search by job or create/customize your own

- Extended parts catalog and increased late model coverage

- Multi-view part images

- Real-time labor estimating

- Mobile app synchronization with Best-in-class VIN and license plate decoding

- Track delivery status online

- Paperless deliveries, returns and secure online bill payment

Thankfully there are several solutions to minimize erroneous ordering. Many suppliers help eliminate human error by offering multi-view images of their inventory as well as VIN scanning and even license plate decoding to help ensure the vehicle specs match the desired part, component or module. Electronic/cloud transfer of data to the shop's CMS helps further mitigate any damage.

Develop a parts ordering process.
Now that you've mastered your parts ordering scheduling, it's time to address some of the pitfalls technicians, owners and advisors fall into when ordering parts. Ordering parts, for some, is not unlike learning to type—sure, there are some champions of the hunt-and-peck style on the keyboard out there, bashing out words one at a time with their index fingers, but they won't hold a candle (or finish writing a novel) anywhere near as quickly as those who simply address the keyboard as a tool and learn to *type.*

Find the parts ordering tool that works for your shop's needs, read the manual (or online PDF) and get to work. General repair, jack-of-all-makes shops may prefer to order parts in bulk, as their needs span the repair spectrum. Smaller or more specialized shops may prefer to create specific work orders according to make or model, or order parts less frequently in order to cut down on shipping costs.

For repeat customers or repairs, be sure to use your system's notes pop-up reminders—some parts only function in tandem with others around them and they must all be ordered to match. Other times, older vehicles may have a TSB from the manufacturer that updates what needs to be ordered—something you may not have seen nor known about without doing the proper research.

What about fulfillment? Some systems offer 24/7 parts ordering tracking while others offer easy follow-up or simple options to repeat the same parts order at any interval or frequency. If you have the option to alert your clients about where their parts are in the repair process, do so—they'll appreciate the transparency, trust the process and, with any luck, return to your shop next time they suffer a breakdown or need repairs.

INCREASE TECH EFFICIENCY:

Foster a highly motivated and efficient team to get vehicles out the door faster.

In *The Shawshank Redemption*, the character Red says that geology is simply the study of pressure and time. Technician efficiency is much the same; we know the equation (hours worked divided by hours sold), but unlike Red's observation, the equation doesn't reveal everything beneath the surface: technician skill set. Labor rate. Ability to learn. Willingness to succeed.

Instead, properly motivating and rewarding technicians is a tricky matrix of on-the-clock quantitative values juxtaposed against much more intangible qualitative values. Nonetheless, people are people and many are motivated by a few simple factors. Understanding these will help those rote numbers grow (and your staff's happiness and shop revenue along with it).

SMART protocols yield efficient technicians.
What does every 20 Group, thought leader and business mogul say? If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, and they're absolutely right. So let's start there. Make your goals SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relative, time-based. If Kennedy did it in 1960 and reached the moon by 1969, you can do it in 2021 within your shop.
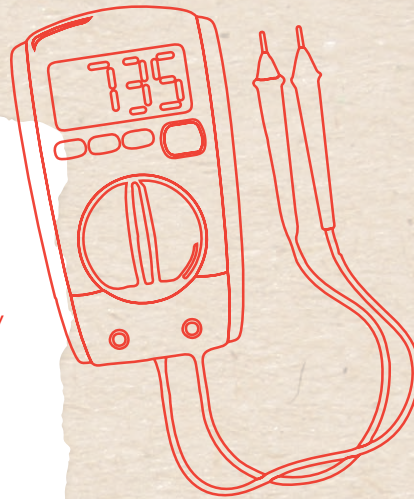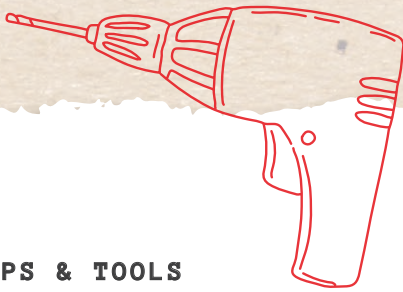
TECH TIPS & TOOLS

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In the contemporary repair shop, efficiency is fueled by data as much as anything else. AutoZone provides **ALLDATA** repair solutions to service any vehicle.

ALLDATA Diagnostics turns your shop tablet into a powerful scan tool preloaded with ALLDATA's industry-leading OEM repair information.

ALLDATA Diagnostics works with most major manufacturers to retrieve the lion's share of P, B, C, and U codes, accounting for 99 percent of most of the work coming through the shop doors. It reads and displays PIDs, delivering real-time sensor data from all modules/vehicle systems, including PCM, TCM, SRS, ABS, chassis/body systems, and more.

Furthermore, the ALLDATA Diagnostics tool is directly connected to the **ALLDATA Repair/Collision** network, and vehicle codes link to associated OE articles, including full-color wiring diagrams. Using the tool, technicians can access System Tests, Relearns, Resets, Initializations and Calibrations as directed by the manufacturer.

ALLDATA Tech-Assist also helps reduce diagnostic time and the Tech-Assist hotline is staffed by ASE-Certified Master Technicians who have seen it all. Tech-Assist can even use live video streaming to see, discuss and advise on the repair.

Last, to access ALLDATA Diagnostics, you need a subscription to **ALLDATA Repair**, the industry's No. 1 choice for OEM-direct diagnostic and repair data, including repair and maintenance procedures, diagnostic information, factory-direct diagrams, TSBs, DTCs and more. ALLDATA Repair also features over 300,000 non-OE full-color wiring diagrams.

Measure time.
Establish baseline parameters for common repairs based on your technicians' ages, experiences and skill sets. Write them down (make 'em measurable!). Now you at least have some base numbers to assess not only what your technicians are doing today, but also what you hope they'll be able to accomplish tomorrow with more experience and time in the shop.

Maximize the shop layout.
You'd be surprised how much happier technicians are when they know where everything is. If your shop floor is laid out in such a way that enables your technicians to succeed and feel a part of a larger whole, their ability to work is hindered only by new repairs or inexperience with new models or components, and *not* by their own space and tools. "Now where'd I put that wrench?," said no efficient technician ever.

Establish technician procedures.
Your technicians should be busy without being overwhelmed. Establish slow day / rain day / inefficient day protocols so your service advisors know when the technicians aren't actively making money for the shop and can advise on what's coming in, what needs to be done and how to bridge those gaps.

Ask for feedback.
Just because you're the boss doesn't mean you necessarily know best (though you *will* be held accountable). If your people are unhappy or have suggestions to improve the workday flow, listen to them. Efficiency is directly related to ability to work, and if your technicians aren't working, no one knows why better than them.

MAINTAIN A STRONG CUSTOMER BASE:

Master CRM software to boost loyalty and customer retention.

We live in a time when it's easier than ever to reach new customers (or at least reach out to them). We also live in a time when any customer can pretty easily mar your shop with a scathing online review; no business is safe from disgruntled customers keen on letting others know. Customer relationship management (CRM) is a great way to mitigate poor reviews and develop relationships and incremental business.

So how do you walk the line between outreach, retention, follow-up and high CSR scores all while running a business? Isn't it enough to just repair their vehicles?

Not anymore. Thankfully, the same software that can take you down can also build you up. That's what CRM systems are all about.

Use it or lose it.

According to recent data, there are only about half a dozen companies or so providing CRM services to repair shops nationwide, each with 3,000–10,000 customers participating in their programs. Meanwhile, there are over 35,000 shops across the country that use full-time CRM marketing campaigns. Here's the kicker—despite this saturation, over *90 percent* of vehicle owners report no follow-up call or email from their shops for service and maintenance reminders.

How is that possible?

It's possible because a tool is only as effective as the one wielding it. With CRM, the trick is to not overthink it—it's as simple as the name suggests, and the goal is to forge bonds with your customers to create loyalty. The most successful auto shops don't necessarily treat their customers as customers—they use words like "partner" or "guest" and describe the input of money for repair services as a relationship and not purely transactional.

Leverage your CRM.

The best way to attract new customers is to treat your old/current ones as if the future of your shop depends upon every interaction (which, as Yelp and Google Reviews suggests, it probably does). Many CRM systems have automated email and/or text messaging follow-ups for post-service and pre-maintenance checkpoints to keep in touch with your clients. Many owners report a 3-to-1 ROI of their CRM systems once they learn how to actually use them—it's important to remember that they're only a technological smokescreen for the living, breathing person behind the counter or in the bays.

The ability to define your ideal customers based on repair order, demographic, make/model of vehicle and frequency of visits is a powerful tool to have at your disposal; with the right CRM system, you can personalize notes and scale up/scale down your messaging to make things as personal and germane to your clients as you see fit. Combined with the advent of digital vehicle inspections (DVI) and often complimentary maintenance recommendations, it's easier than ever to let your clients know you're thinking about them even when they're not due for a service checkup for months.

Provide top-notch service.

Nothing sells like unexpected service and attention to detail. Whether offering complimentary interior vacuum and cleaning services or decent coffee or cookies in the shop, doing the little things right can lead to big opportunities, high ROs and more revenue. Here are a few strategies to bolster your relationships with your clients:

Treat old customers like new.
Most clients are used to 24/7 answers and complete transparency in all their transactions. Don't drop the ball or push old clients aside in the name of new ones; they'll see right through it and seek help elsewhere.

Listen, and then lead.
Your customers need help and depend on you to do so. They know something is wrong with their vehicles, so even if the solution is simple, listen to the complete story, summarize and assess it back to them and then make a sound recommendation for maintenance or repair.

Stay in touch.
Figure out how your best customers want to be notified and follow up appropriately. Some respond better to mailers while others love digital communication.

Be credible.
Establish trust by knowing your credentials, recommending fair and honest service and letting them know you'll do everything you can to make their car right—even if it means sending it elsewhere or telling them what they don't necessarily want to hear. They'll appreciate you even more for being upfront about your skills, limitations and finding the right solution.

AUTOZONE PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS RESOURCES

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Companies such as Mitchell 1, AutoVitals, ALLDATA and a number of others provide regular, highly targeted and bespoke email campaigns that double as both follow-ups or thank-yous for service and also keep customers aware of what your shop offers (and what their vehicles may need).

In conjunction with Autozone, Autoshop Solutions offers a robust package of tools and internet marketing services to help increase CSR scores through web, Google AdWords, phone tracking, social media and more.

The more you learn to use tools such as these to attract, retain and connect with customers, the more money you'll make and the happier your team and customers will be.

AutoZone®

PROFESSIONAL *EDGE*

PARTS BUYING INNOVATION GEARED TOWARD YOUR SUCCESS

EASIER PARTS ORDERING

Faster, more accurate searches with the click of a mouse

- Search multiple terms at once
- Search by job or create and save your own
- Search our extended parts catalog
- Search results with multi-view images
- Create estimates right on the site or app
- Upgraded mobile app featuring VIN scanning and license plate look-up

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STREAMLINED ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Intuitive experience that puts all your business needs and activity in one place

- Full transaction access
- Paperless deliveries and instant returns
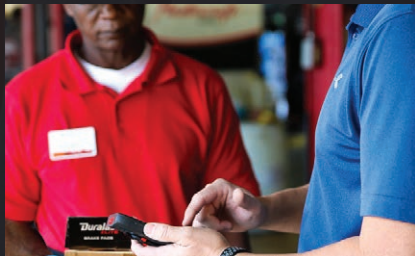- Secure online bill payment

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FASTER DELIVERY

Maximize your profit potential with less waiting

- Easily track orders online
- Expanded late-model stocked coverage
- Fastest route to your shop with GPS mapping

EXCLUSIVE PRICING

Worry-free pricing means you can order with ease

- Multi-sourced price matching intelligence
- Custom competitive pricing
- Priced to drive your success

MAXIMIZE YOUR EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY TODAY.
SIGN UP AT *AUTOZONEPRO.COM*