

## Mercedes Store Got Tired of Asking Who Has that Tool?

By Steve Finlay

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It can happen at the best of dealerships. Ask upscale Mercedes-Benz Manhattan.

A special tool — the kind that's expensive and consequently purchased by the dealership for shared use — is missing in action. It ends up taking a long time to find the tool, if it can be found at all.

"Who has that tool?" was a question being asked too often at Mercedes-Benz Manhattan's service department where about 600 specialty tools are in circulation because of the complexity of the cars the dealership sells and services.

Although replacing lost property was a management concern, even more important was productivity lost from time spent looking for errant repair equipment, says Dan Edwards, the dealership's service director.

He had the shop foreman record the time technicians spent trying to locate dealership-owned tools that were not on a pegboard or in a storage closet.

"They monitored 21 events," says Edwards. "The average search time was 30 minutes."

He says 57% of the searches ended without locating the tool. A couple of times, the tool was located but broken, with no indication of who did it.

"The shop foreman estimated that, for the most commonly used tools, technicians had to search the shop 80% of the time," says Edwards.

That prompted the dealership to participate in a pilot program using SupplyPro Inc.'s SmartDrawer, an automated tool-dispensing locker with separate storage compartments and an attached computer touch screen to control access and track who has what.

Tools are tracked from the time they are requested by technicians to the time they are returned. The system allows mechanics to locate shared assets quickly. Alerts let management know what's missing or not returned in allotted times.

More than 100 of the most commonly used special tools were included in the 3-month testing program at the Mercedes-Benz dealership in New York City.

"Not one controlled special tool was lost," says Edwards. "The average time to locate a tool from the system, regardless of whether it is in the system or checked out by another technician, was under two minutes."

Missing tools are a common problem "that costs dealerships financially and impacts the timeliness of the service they are providing to their customers," says David J. Simbari, CEO of SupplyPro, which offers various high-tech storage containers.