



**BY PHIL SASSO**  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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# Braking bad: Don't forget what pays your bills

Brake service tool sales may not sound exciting, but they're consistent.

**T**ouchscreens. Bluetooth. Wireless. New technology can be alluring.

Sometimes it's so easy to get swept up with what's new and exciting that you forget the mainstay tools and equipment that technicians use every day. Those "boring" tool sales are often the ones you can bank on and that pay your mortgage.

Brake service tools can easily become one of those forgotten tool categories.

That's not to say that there is nothing new in brake tools, there are some very interesting innovations. But the basic hydraulic braking system hasn't changed much over the last few decades.

Brake job tool innovations just make a brake job faster and easier.

**Q.** What's so special about brake tools?

**A.** There's nothing magical about brake tools. Nearly every shop does brake jobs. That means nearly every shop has technicians that need bleeders, spreaders, spring compressors and other brake tools. But it's easy to tote and promote what's hot and cool and let these consistent moneymakers fall to the bottom of your list.

"It's probably one of the top three service areas a shop performs," says Rob Kochie, specialty tools product manager at OTC Tools (otctools.com).

When you consider the other

top service areas are oil changes, tires and batteries, brakes are one of the more tool-intensive services.

"Working on brakes is a significant revenue stream for every shop," says Ken Kresyman, Jr., Global Portfolio Manager, Automotive Aftermarket with MityVac (mityvac.com). "It's a money maker ... and it's a great service ... if you want to talk about vehicle safety."

**Q.** Is there anything really new in brake tools?

**A.** Customers are always looking for new ways to solve old problems.

"We had an inventor that's a tech call in with a better way to do something," says Ross Tichy, VP of sales and marketing at Thexton Manufacturing (thexton.com). The inventor had found a way to save 15 to 20 minutes working on a GM "W" spring. "I think having the right tools to speed things up makes all the difference."

If a tool helps your customer beat book rate and make money, he'll buy it.

Speaking of innovation, automakers are investing a lot in collision avoidance systems, stability control, autonomous braking and automatic emergency braking. That means there is a lot of new technology on its way to your local independent shop.

"Twenty of the top

automakers, which is almost all of them, agreed to equip almost every American car with Automatic Emergency Braking," says Jeremiah Terry, general manager of Phoenix Systems (brakebleeder.com). This means AEB will be standard on most vehicles over the next few years.

Effective in 2013, all cars sold in the U.S. require Electronic Stability Control (ESC). Mandating ESC is estimated to have saved between 5,300 to 9,600 lives a year, Terry says. And most ESC technology depends on the braking system to function.

These and other new technologies will likely require and inspire many new tools.

**Q.** Isn't toting and promoting a brake tool a waste of time?

**A.** It depends on the price, but focusing on one tool probably isn't a good idea. However, a better approach is to consider "bundling" brake tools by service events, says Kochie.

Here's an example of four major services and how you might showcase tools together:

- Line repair/replacement—Package tube cutters and flare tools together
- Caliper/drum removal—Bundle spreaders and spring tools for drums and discs
- Brake bleeding—Show kits and various accessories
- Fluid service—Promote

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Contributing writer Phil Sasso answers the following questions:

- I was never a tech. What should I know about bleeders?
- What should I know about brake fluid?

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moisture testers and test strips with a fluid exchanger

**Q.** How can I demo brake tools when I tote and promote?

**A.** You can point out certain features by handing the customer the tool. They can usually see how an item can solve a problem. That's why it's important to not just promote common brake tools, but to actually stock them so you can show a customer the tool. And when a customer wants a brake tool, he or she usually wants it *now*.

But you make a good point; the benefits of some tools aren't obvious and may be best shown with an on-car demo. That can be awkward and time-consuming to actually do in the bay.



The OTC 6720 Flare Nut Locking Pliers removes rounded off nuts while saving the line.

So, for example, MityVac does this with videos on its parent company's YouTube channel ([youtube.com/lincolnindustrial](http://youtube.com/lincolnindustrial)). Most tool companies have demo videos on YouTube, Vimeo or their own websites.

Some shops use their truck video monitor to play these videos for clients

while they are enjoying their Monster energy drink, Kresyman says.

**Q.** Any more advice on selling brake tools and equipment?

**A.** I can't think of a downside of meeting customer demand.

"A good hand tool could last a customer's entire career," Thexton's Tichy says.

I guess you could say that means you only get to sell it once. But I really don't consider satisfied customers a downside. They'll always want more tools.

"If you seek to sell value, and the value is aligned with what the customer values, then you are going to sell the tools or equipment," MityVac's Kresyman says. **PD**

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