



BY PHIL SASSO  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing Inc. (sassomarketing.com), a technical marketing agency specializing in tools and equipment. Subscribe to his free marketing tips at [philsasso.com/blog](http://philsasso.com/blog)

# The special benefits of selling specialty tools

The tool relief for your customers' part replacement headaches

**Y**ou know how your customer's business works. As a technician, they get paid a flat rate. Anything they can do to beat book time means more money in their pocket. And any tool you can sell them to put more money in their pocket puts more money in your pocket.

Nothing cures more part removal and replacement headaches than specialty tools.

"I think the definition of a specialty tool gets a little broader every day," says Jon Bielfeldt, vice president of sales and marketing at Lisle Corporation. "A lot of people look at it as application-specific. We kind of look at it more broadly as a tool that can save a technician time – and allow them to hopefully beat flat rate."

## Special ordering vs. stocking

When it comes to specialty tools, there are two schools of thought: Stock everything, or special order everything. The first group believes if you don't stock it you won't sell it because when a customer needs a specialty tool, they need it *now*. The other group special orders everything, believing if you tried to stock every specialty tool, you'd soon run out of space and money.

The reality is somewhere between the two. It all depends on the type of tool and the price point.

"So often those jobs are happening at the moment and they call and say 'Hey, I need this tool – now!' or 'Can I see you tomorrow?'" Lisle's Bielfeldt says.

Items like a Ford broken spark plug tool have an immediate demand. If a spark plug breaks, a technician can't hold his customer's car for a week to 10 days waiting to get the removal tool.

"We have some tool deals stocked on the truck," says Chad Schley, president of Schley Products.

For the most part, Schley's specialty tools are not generally truck inventory items. They tend to be items that dealers will order as needed from their flag or warehouse distributor.

"But one of the things we've started producing a lot of are injector line sockets," Schley says.

These special split sockets are useful in



removing direct injection lines on common rail fuel systems that are hard to get at. These items tend to be something a tool dealer would stock because their customers are more likely to request them more frequently.

## Showing is selling

Lisle encourages dealers to buy one new item when it comes out, show it to customers and place an order the next week, Lisle's Bielfeldt says. This lets customers see and feel the new product and order it, while saving you from overstocking it. Then you just keep one in inventory for immediate sales as needed.

The average street price for a Lisle specialty tool is about \$50. This makes buying and inventorying one item a small commitment.

Schley, on the other hand, encourages dealers to make the time to see all the new products at their flag or warehouse distributor show so when a technician comes to them with a problem, the dealer knows the right tool to solve it. It's a step up from order-taking and involves much more problem-solving.

These specialty tool makers agree that just seeing a specialty tool rarely sells it. Most specialty tools aren't obvious. Technicians know how a wrench, a ratchet and a screwdriver work. Just

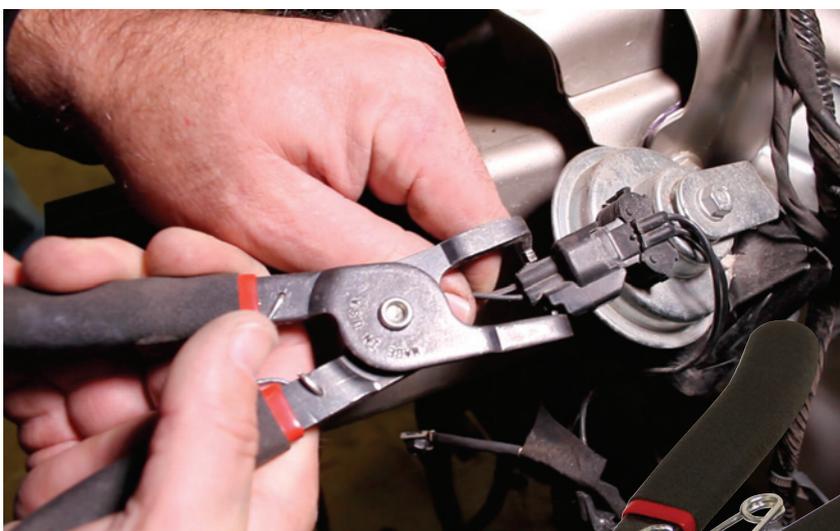
**Go online for more**

Want more sales tips? Go online for more exclusive content specifically tailored to you. Visit [vehicleservicepros.com/distributors](http://vehicleservicepros.com/distributors).

VEHICLESERVICEPROS



Photos courtesy of Lisle.



*Simply showing some specialty tools like these Lisle Disconnect Pliers (Opposite Page, Lisle part No. 37160) doesn't tell the full story. Your best option is to do a quick demo or point customers to a video demo on your truck that shows the product in use, and highlights the features and benefits.*

seeing a Schley Universal Broken Stud Drill Guide Kit, for example, doesn't explain how it works or what it does. So, demonstrations make all the difference.

This is why specialty tool manufacturers take the time to create demo videos to show how their product works and the time it saves. You can find tool

demos on the YouTube channel for Lisle at [youtube.com/LisleCorporation](https://www.youtube.com/LisleCorporation) and for Schley at [youtube.com/SchleyTools](https://www.youtube.com/SchleyTools).

### The gateway tool

Some dealers don't push specialty tools because they see them as small insignificant sales. There are no small sales, only small salespeople. Incremental

sales add up. That's why a grocery store puts gum and candy at the checkout.

"Our line's an order starter," Lisle's Bielfeldt says. "You're showing them [a specialty tool] that's of value to them. But you're also continuing the conversation that week so that you're working up to that bigger purchase that's more a considered purchase. And it just keeps you talking."

The goal is to build rapport with each customer so that when it's time for them to make a big ticket purchase, you have established a relationship with them and you are the go-to person.

Toting and promoting specialty tools isn't just about making the tool sale. It's about positioning yourself as the tool dealer who is up on all the latest new tools and understands what makes his job easier and more profitable.

### Knock knock

Not every specialty tool is a fit for every shop or every technician. A body shop tool may not be a fit for a general repair shop. But that doesn't mean a general repair tool isn't a fit for a body shop. As

I've noted before, more and more body shops are doing general repair work.

"Don't be surprised if a shop is doing more than you think," Lisle's Bielfeldt says. "Everyone has become more broad these days ... you kind of have to. It's part of survival."

"I think mobile dealers have found the value of specialty tools," Bielfeldt says. "It may not add up as quickly as say selling a toolbox, but it will keep that conversation going until you sell the toolbox. And you'll be surprised how quickly it does add up. A tool a week. That's all it takes."

Many specialty tools are less than \$100. This means you'll get your cash back quicker – or immediately – and be able to put more back in inventory and back in your pocket. 

