INDUSTRY RESEARCH REPORT

The Hidden Cost of Estimates and Inspections

Turning today's challenges into opportunities for greater shop efficiency



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Executive Summary

As vehicle technology continues to evolve, auto repair shops face growing pressure to conduct thorough inspections and turn the results into accurate estimates quickly and efficiently.

To better understand these challenges, Mitchell 1 and *Babcox Media* surveyed *ShopOwner* subscribers in May 2026. The survey included responses from 323 automotive service professionals, including shop owners, managers, technicians and service advisors.

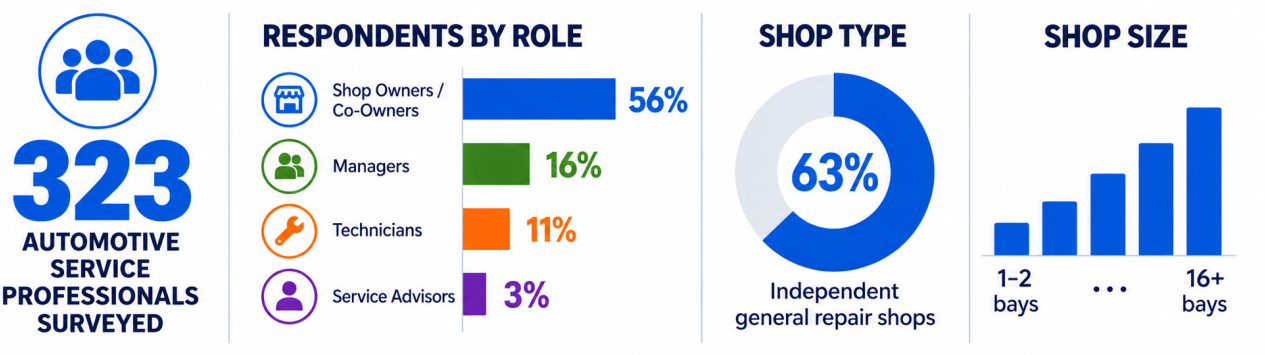
The majority of participants (63%) worked in independent general repair shops, with 56% identifying as shop owners or co-owners.

Participants worked in shops ranging from one or two bays to facilities with 16 or more bays, providing insight into estimating and inspection workflows across a broad cross-section of the automotive repair industry.

TAKEAWAY

Digital tools save time when information moves seamlessly with the job, from inspection through estimate and approval.

Survey at a Glance



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspections Survey

Key Insights at a Glance

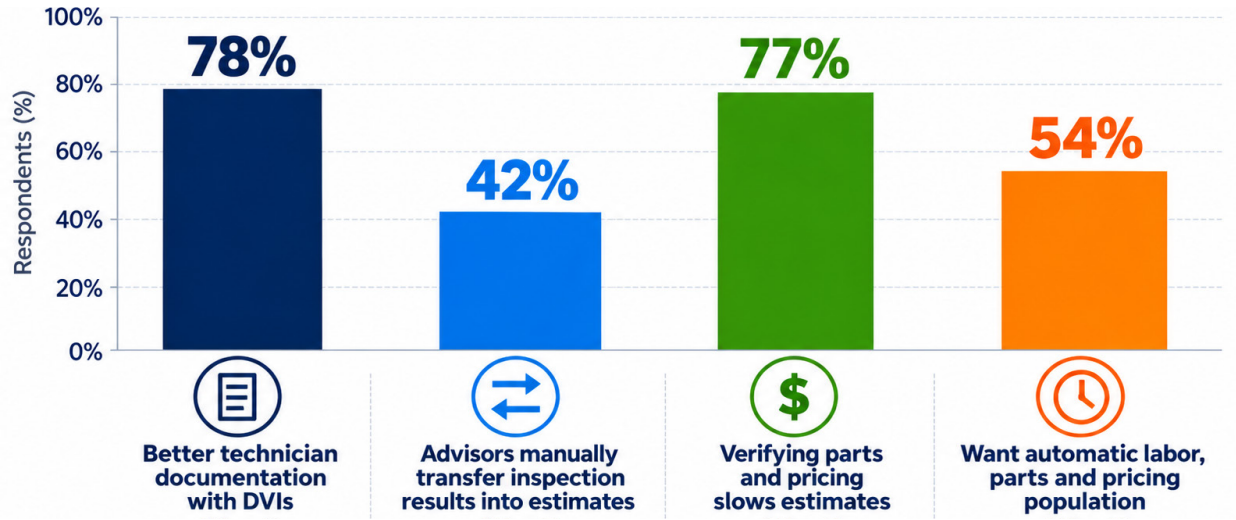
Despite widespread use of digital tools, manual work and disconnected processes continue to consume valuable time and contribute to missed opportunities. While 78% report better documentation with digital vehicle inspections, 42% still manually transfer findings into estimates, and 77% cite parts and pricing verification as a delay.

Shops see clear opportunities to improve. More than half (54%) identify automatic labor, parts and pricing population as a top improvement. Respondents also call for better integration, streamlined inspections and diagnostics, more effective staff training and clearer customer communication.

Together, these requests highlight the need for a more connected inspection and estimating process to reduce manual effort, build more complete estimates, and help vehicle owners understand and approve recommended work.

What Shops are Saying

Key survey findings highlight challenges and opportunities to reduce manual processes and improve inspection and estimating efficiency.



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspections Survey



Estimating Through the Decades

For nearly 100 years, the basic workflow inside an automotive repair shop has remained remarkably consistent: inspect and diagnose the vehicle, build an estimate, get customer approval, and complete the repair.

What has changed is how shops gather the information needed to quote the job. Service advisors once relied on printed labor guides, paper parts catalogs, handwritten estimates and calls to suppliers. Today, shop management systems, electronic catalogs and online repair information put much of that information at their fingertips.

TAKEAWAY

A faster estimate starts with having the right information at your fingertips to complete the job.

Despite these advances, many estimating challenges remain. Service advisors still search across sources to confirm labor, parts, fluids and related services, then review and interpret inspection results. Each lookup or manual handoff adds time and another opportunity to miss a detail, especially under time pressure.

What Slows Down an Estimate?

77%

Verifying parts and pricing is the leading cause of delayed estimates.

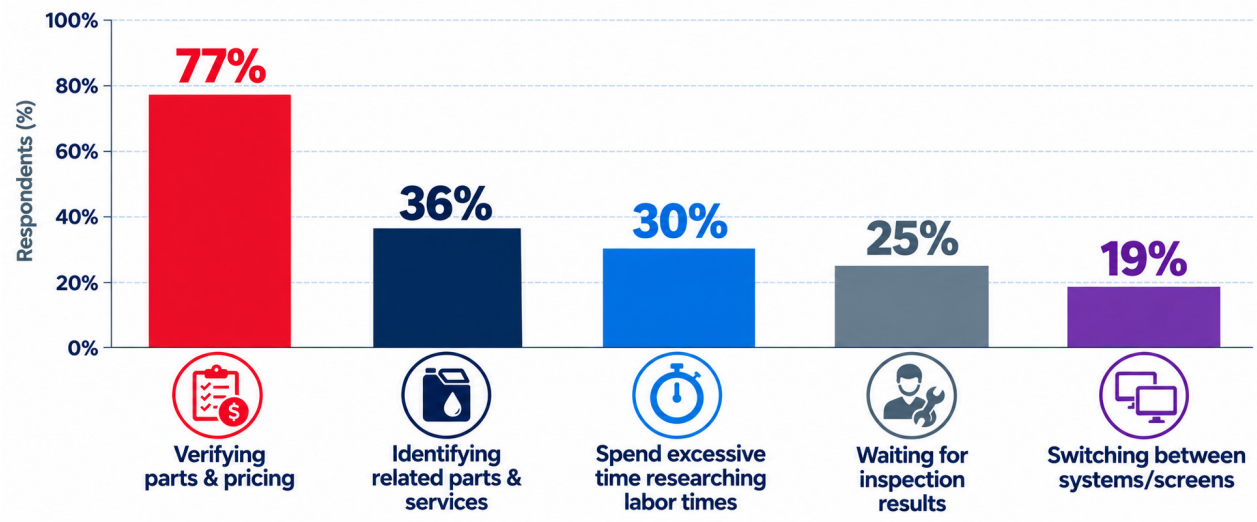
Estimating plays a critical role in shop profitability, but it can also create bottlenecks that delay repairs. For 39% of respondents, a typical repair estimate takes 10-20 minutes to build. Another 42% spend even longer.

Verifying parts and pricing is the biggest hurdle, cited by 77% of respondents. Identifying related services and fluids, checking labor times and waiting for inspection results also take time. When a shop prepares several estimates a day, those minutes quickly add up.

Even with that time invested, confidence in accuracy varies. Only 27% of respondents are extremely confident in their shop's ability to create accurate estimates. Nearly half are very confident, while about a quarter are moderately confident.

Estimating Challenges

Top causes of delays in the estimating process.



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspections Survey

WHAT SHOPS WANT

More seamless integration of parts availability, pricing, and labor times in the estimating process.

More accurate VIN-based parts and labor lookups to save time and improve accuracy.

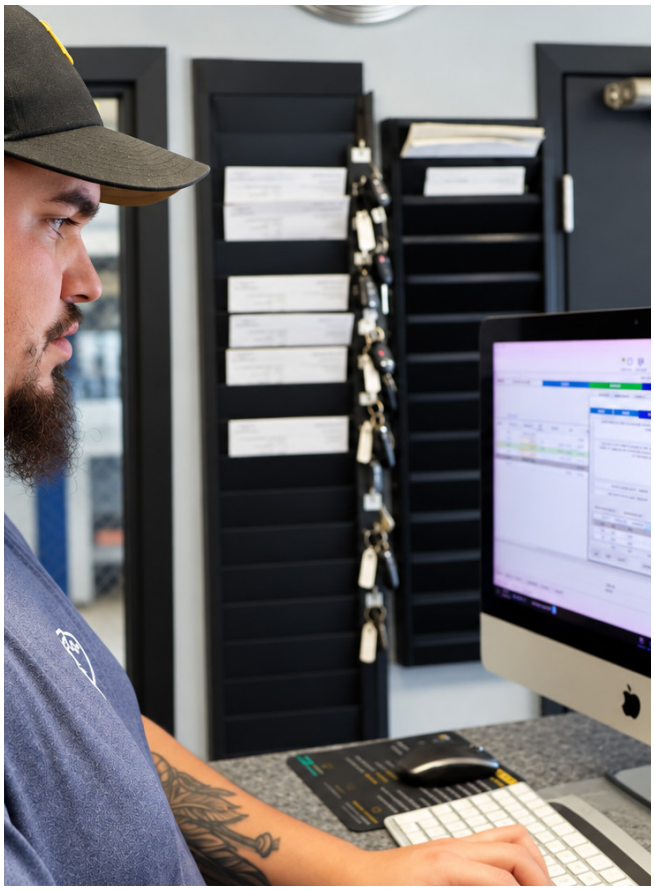
Labor costs added automatically when parts are added to the estimate.

TAKEAWAY

Fewer lookups and smoother handoffs can help shops save time and reduce the risk of missed details.



Beyond the Front Counter



WHAT SHOPS WANT

More training and knowledge for technicians and staff to support accurate inspections and reliable estimates.

More technicians using digital inspections as part of their daily workflow.

Estimating often involves more than the service advisor. The survey found that 58% of shops involve owners, while 36% rely on technicians to assist with labor and parts research. In addition, 44% reported having no dedicated service advisor responsible for estimating.

When technicians spend additional time building estimates, they aren't repairing vehicles. When shop owners are creating estimates, they aren't managing employees, serving vehicle owners or growing their business. Those lost minutes add up quickly.

Consider a shop preparing 20 estimates a week. At an average of 15 minutes per estimate, that's approximately five hours every week devoted solely to gathering information before repairs can begin. Over the course of a year, that's approximately 250 hours, or more than six full work weeks, spent building estimates.

Training can help shops make better use of that time. Resources such as webinars, video tutorials and hands-on workshops can help team members use estimating tools more effectively to build complete estimates with fewer delays and less rework. Cross-training also helps distribute the workload and reduce bottlenecks.

Digital Inspections Help Customers Understand

Digital vehicle inspections help vehicle owners understand repair recommendations through photos, videos and technician notes. The survey shows the impact: 74% of respondents reported increased trust, and 58% reported higher approval rates.

By showing drivers what technicians see, digital inspections help explain repair recommendations and reduce uncertainty. With modern DVIs, vehicle owners can review the findings, ask questions and better plan and budget for needed work. For shops, that can mean more productive conversations and quicker approvals.

Even with digital inspections, disconnected processes can slow progress. Photos may be stored separately, and approvals may be tracked through text messages, emails or phone calls. These extra steps consume valuable time and increase the risk of missed details, errors and delays.

Illustrated in “DVIs Deliver” chart on page 10.

WHAT SHOPS WANT

More thorough inspections and diagnostics, with detailed information and photos included.

Clearer communication so customers understand the complete estimating and repair process, including recommended work and budget considerations.



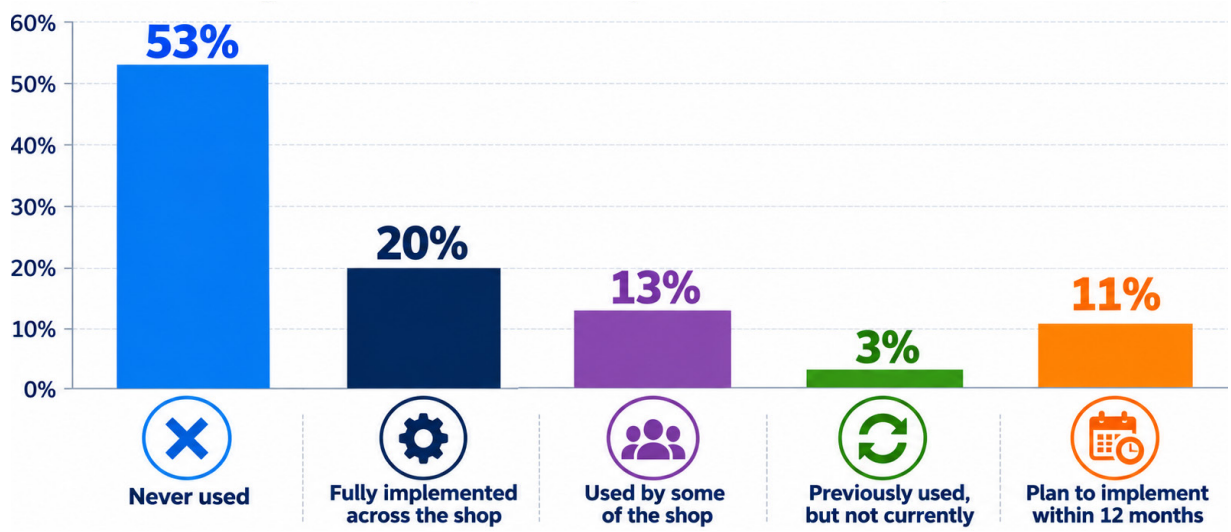
TAKEAWAY

The inspection is only part of the workflow. The next challenge is moving those recommendations efficiently into the estimate.



DVI Adoption

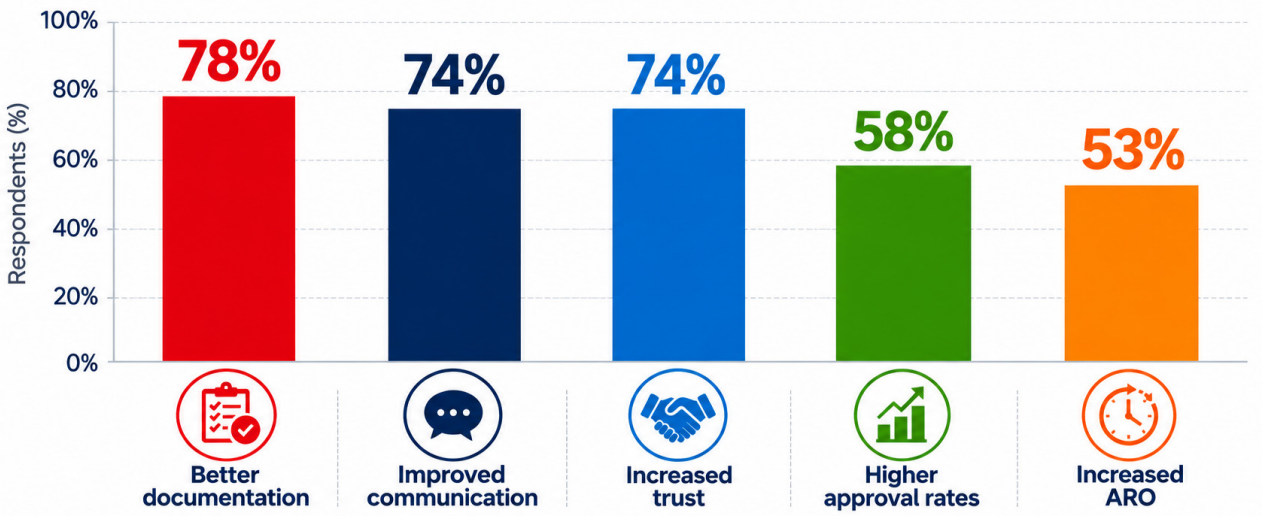
Digital Vehicle Inspection adoption varies across shops.



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspection Workflow Survey

The Value of DVIs

How shops benefit from Digital Vehicle Inspections



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspections Survey

Closing the Gap Between Inspections and Estimates

Digital inspections help shops document vehicle issues, but turning the recommendations into estimates often requires manual work.

According to the survey, 43% of respondents said their inspection and estimating tools are fully connected. The rest reported partially integrated or separate processes.

Duplicate data entry adds administrative work, slows the estimating process, and increases the risk of errors. Connecting inspection and estimating tools helps close that gap.

When technician recommendations flow directly into the estimate, service advisors will spend less time re-entering information and more time helping customers understand the recommended work and make informed decisions.

WHAT SHOPS WANT

Fewer manual steps from the digital inspection to the final estimate.

Better integration between digital vehicle inspections and estimating tools.

TAKEAWAY

Reducing duplicate data entry helps minimize errors and keeps the job moving.



Why Recommended Work Gets Missed

Time pressure was the leading reason recommended services were missed, cited by 41% of respondents. Unclear technician notes, recommendations disconnected from estimate line items and manual entry also contributed. These findings suggest that inspection results don't always translate into clear, actionable estimates.

For the shop, those gaps can mean lost revenue. For vehicle owners, it can mean leaving without complete understanding of the work required.

Connecting inspection recommendations directly to estimate line items helps service advisors present recommended work clearly and more consistently, while building customer trust.

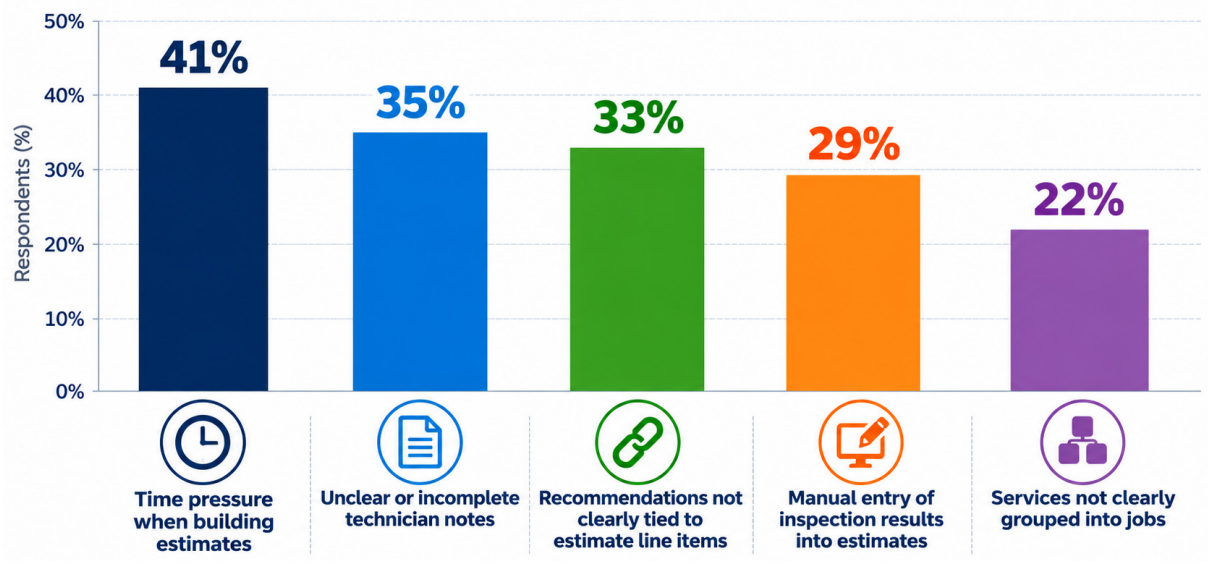
WHAT SHOPS WANT

Labor costs added automatically when parts are added to the estimate.

Recommended repair items from inspections automatically integrated into estimate line items.

Missed Recommendations

Top reasons why inspection recommendations do not make it into the estimate.



Source: Mitchell 1 / *Babcox Media* Estimating & Inspections Survey

Making Estimating More Efficient

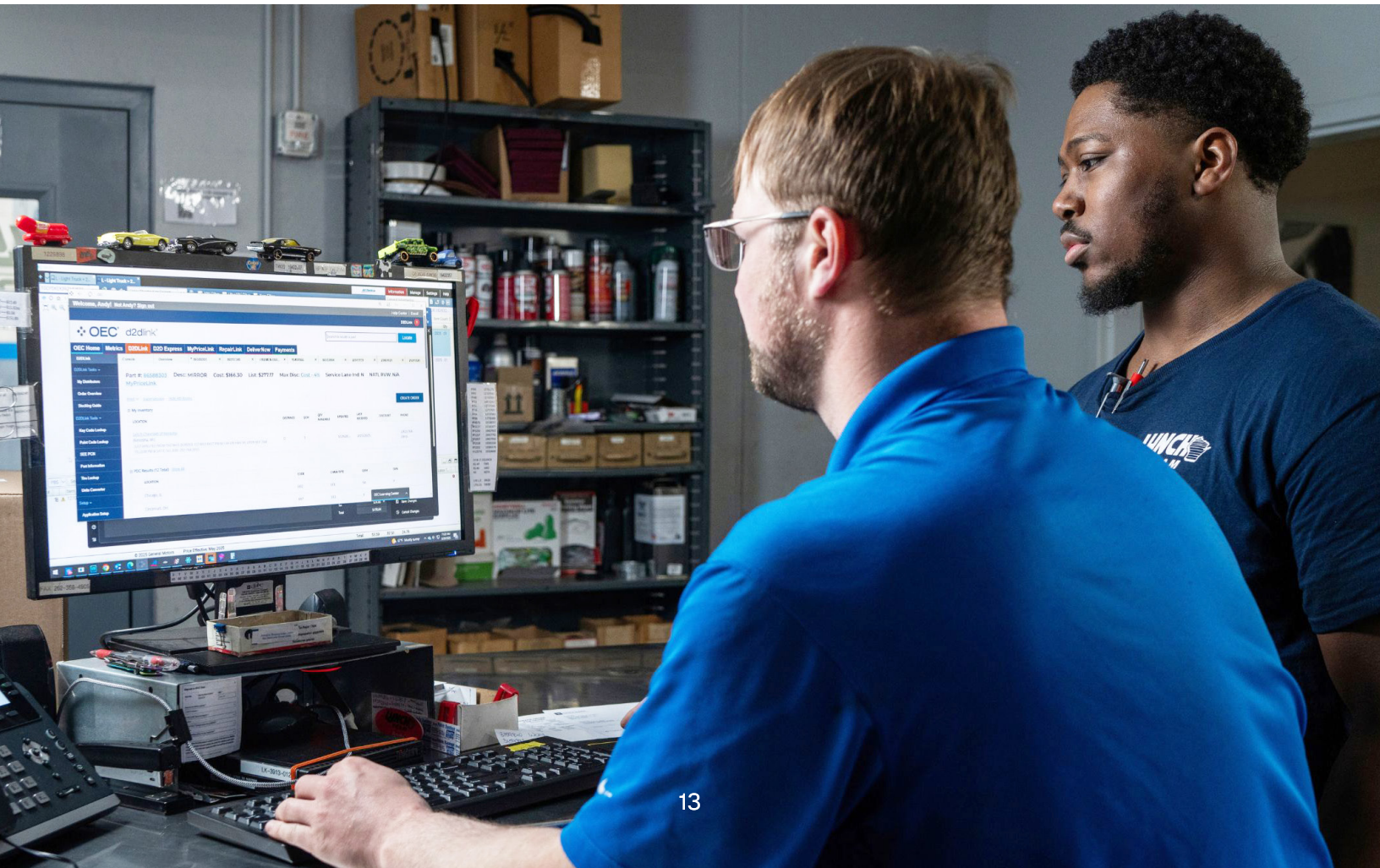
The top-requested improvement from shops was the automatic population of labor, parts, and pricing information, selected by 54% of respondents.

Additionally, 42% wanted integrated repair data and service recommendations, while 41% said inspection findings should automatically transfer into estimates.

The challenge isn't a lack of data. Shops already have plenty of it. The real opportunity lies in ensuring data accuracy and connecting inspection and estimating workflows to eliminate duplicate entry, streamline processes and create faster, more precise estimates.

54%

Requested automatic population of labor, parts and pricing.



Connecting the Bay and Front Counter

OneFlow Estimator+Inspections

A connected workflow keeps technicians and service advisors aligned and repairs moving. **OneFlow Estimator + Inspections**, an optional offering in Mitchell 1's **Manager SE** shop management system, connects inspection recommendations directly to estimates to help improve efficiency and accuracy.

Powered by the **Snap-on Digital Engine** and backed by decades of proprietary data, **OneFlow Estimator** helps advisors build more complete, accurate estimates with less manual effort.

The powerful database taps into 3.3 billion validated repair records, 5 million labor times and 3.5 million OEM parts to auto-match parts, labor and related services to every quote.

Here's how it all comes together in **OneFlow**:

- Technicians use **OneFlow Inspections** on a mobile device to document vehicle conditions with photos, videos, notes.
- The inspection results flow directly into **OneFlow Estimator**, where service advisors begin building the estimate.
- **OneFlow Estimator** automatically matches labor, parts and pricing while identifying related fluids and services for each job.
- The customer is presented with a professional organized estimate that can be approved quickly from a mobile device.

Snap-on DIGITAL ENGINE



Experience at a Scale No Human Can Reach

Imagine a service advisor writing seven repair orders daily for 10 years. That's roughly 17,000 estimates and a decade of experience learning which parts, labor, and related services belong together.

Now compare that with more than 3 billion validated repair records. To put that in perspective: at seven repair orders per workday, one person would need to work for roughly 1.76 million years to process 3 billion repair orders.

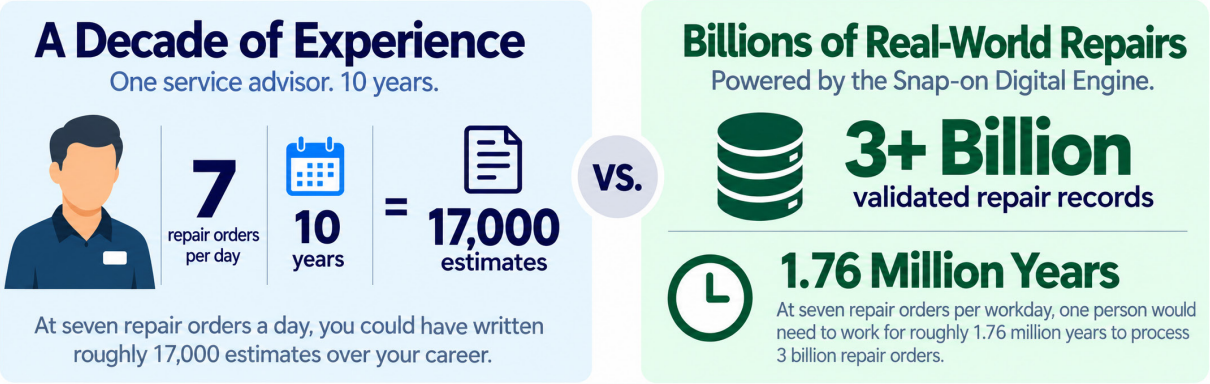
Powered by this vast collection of real-world repair data, the **Snap-on Digital Engine** identifies patterns and recommendations in seconds, helping service advisors spend less time searching and more time helping customers understand what their vehicles need.

TAKEAWAY

Billions of repair records turn decades of collective experience into answers within seconds, helping teams build fast, accurate estimates.

Experience at an Unmatched Scale

The **Snap-on Digital Engine** analyzes more than 3 billion repair records in seconds, delivering insights that would take a single service advisor 1.76 million years to uncover manually.



Turning Recommendations Into Approved Work

The research points to a clear opportunity: reduce the manual steps between inspections, estimates and customer approvals.

OneFlow Estimator + Inspections addresses these challenges by bringing technician findings directly into the estimating process and automatically matching labor, vpair details and the risk of missed items.

With photos, videos and notes to support recommendations, service advisors can help customers understand the work and make informed decisions. The result is a more connected process that helps shops build complete estimates faster and move recommended repairs toward approval.

TAKEAWAY

Less time managing information and more time serving customers and growing the business.

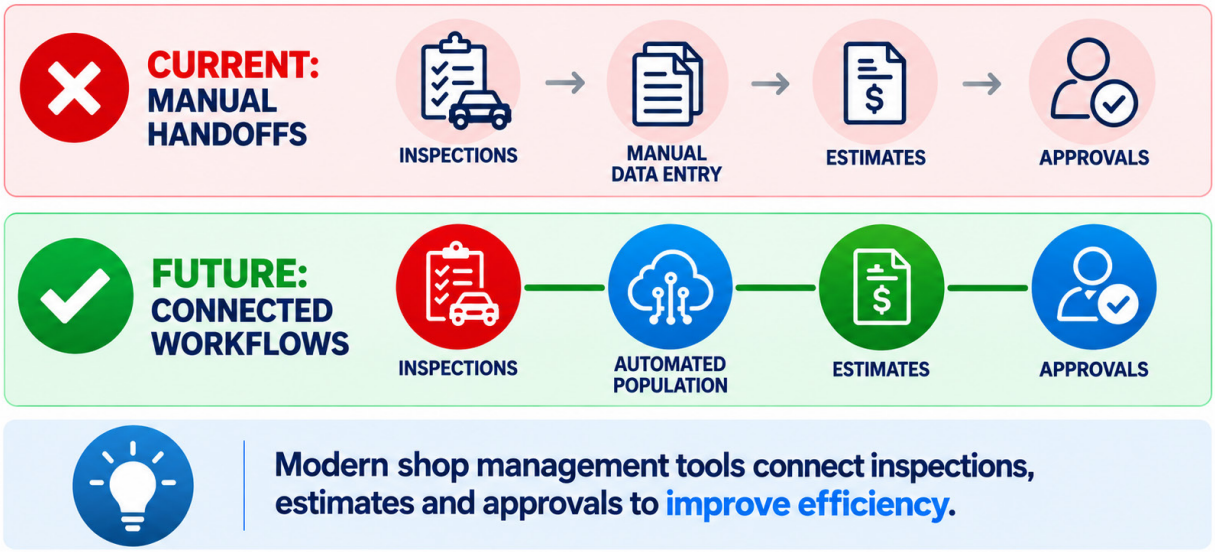


Key Takeaways

- Manual processes continue to slow shop operations, consuming valuable time that could be spent repairing vehicles and growing revenue.
- Connected workflows between inspections and estimates keep jobs moving while reducing errors.
- Digital vehicle inspections with photos, videos, and technician notes build trust, and accelerate repair approvals.
- Powered by billions of real-world repair records, the **Snap-on Digital Engine** helps service advisors build more accurate estimates in a fraction of the time.
- Access to real-world repair data helps teams identify the correct parts and required labor the first time, reducing costly rework.
- Automated population of matching parts, labor and related services helps uncover service opportunities and additional revenue opportunities.

The Opportunity

Modern shop management tools with connected workflows help jobs move faster from inspections through approvals, replacing time-consuming manual handoffs.



Mitchell1

MANAGER SE

Interested in Learning More?

You're just one click away from **Manager SE**, the industry-leading shop management system. Now with **OneFlow Estimator + Inspections**, shops can streamline workflows, accelerate approvals, and manage the entire repair process from estimate to invoice with greater speed and accuracy.

To locate your nearest local sales rep,

please visit mitchell1.com/myrep/

or visit mitchell1.com for more information.

Contact Mitchell 1 at 888-724-6742

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