



How To Select A Fleet Maintenance Service Provider

The New Year is a natural time to take stock of what your current Fleet Maintenance Service Provider helped you accomplish over the past year, or if you do not currently have one, look back on which areas could have been easier by leveraging outside expertise. Whether you are looking to partner with a new service provider for the first time or are considering whether it may be worthwhile to switch from your current service provider, here are some key factors to consider when narrowing your search for a fleet maintenance service provider.

If you choose to outsource maintenance, a fleet maintenance service provider is crucial to maintaining a healthy, well-functioning fleet and keeping your assets safe and on the road. When deciding how to select the right maintenance outsourcing partner, either for the first time or when searching for a new provider, fleet managers and senior executives should get a complete overview of the company and what it offers.

Asset downtime is costly- up to eight times more expensive than fleet owners expect with an average cost of \$760 per vehicle per day- so it's important to minimize it as much as possible.

Ideally, you will be in business with your maintenance service provider for years down the line, so it is important to make sure it is the right fit.

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There are a lot of providers to choose from- over 230,000 in the U.S. alone. But we can help you navigate the process. As you search for a provider, there are a number of factors to consider to narrow down your options.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Determine when you prefer to bring assets into the shop and if the service provider is operating at that time. If you typically conduct maintenance after hours to keep your vehicles on the road as much as possible, step one is determining if the shop accommodates your schedule. If not, the provider is not a good fit.

LOCATION

Consider where your fleet operates and choose a provider that is easily accessible for your team. If you have a fleet that operates in multiple states, consider choosing a regional or national provider. Additionally, keep in mind how your drivers operate. If drivers take their vehicles home every night, then try to choose a provider with many locations in key areas.

PRICE AND SPEED

We all want to save money where we can. Same thing applies when searching for a maintenance provider. So, make sure to ask how much the shop charges for routine maintenance services and other services tasks your assets frequently require. It is extremely important that your fleet maintenance service provider demonstrates cost transparency.

Once you know up front what you're paying for and what you're getting, as well as making sure the service provider operates with integrity and provides full transparency with their services and fees, consider how the costs provided to you fit within your fleet budget. This process will start building the foundation for a strong client relationship.

While it's tempting to choose the provider that simply has the lowest rates, don't make this mistake. One factor that is arguably more important to your business in the long run is speed. How quickly can the provider turn around an asset?

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One provider may charge \$50 for the service but take a day to complete it. Another provider may charge \$200 but gets the vehicle back to you in an hour. In the end, which provider is actually more costly? Likely the one that keeps a vehicle out of operation for an entire day.

The other important factor to consider is how well the fleet maintenance service provider is able to handle the unexpected. Every shop can have tribulations such as technicians leaving, part delivery delay, etc. How well the shop flexes its workforce during times of crisis to meet the needs of your fleet and ensure the timeliness and quality are not impaired, should be a major consideration.

EXPERTISE AND QUALITY

Your fleet likely has specialized assets like heavy-duty vehicles that you will want your service provider to have experience with. Verify that the maintenance provider can handle the scope of services you need and how they manage the quality of their service.

There is no doubt that recruiting technicians takes hard work and focus to attract the top tier technicians your fleet should have. Asking the potential fleet maintenance service provider questions about how they attract, develop, and retain their technicians will reveal whether you can count on them to hire the caliber of professionals you are looking for. Retention is another key factor and one you should ask questions about. Turnover is disruptive to the team, impacts your fleets performance and needs to be considered.

You need to ensure that your maintenance service provider communicates expectations and ensures quality. Managers should ask for clearly defined quality metrics, as well as targets for key metrics such as preventative maintenance (PM) currency and out-of-service ratios. Out-of-service ratios should be 3-5% and PM currency at 98-100% depending on the asset class and the application.

PRIORITY SERVICE AND CONSISTENCY

A maintenance service provider should provide prioritized, quality work and do so consistently. Often, this comes down to whether the shop has a standardized process for maintaining vehicles. If not, the quality, cost and time to complete a service task may vary from one visit to the next.

You should always know what to expect when it comes to the responsiveness of the service supplier. Fleet

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executives need to ensure that their provider can clearly articulate how their work will be prioritized. For instance, wherever feasible, your selected service providers technicians should be dedicated to a single client or a small group of clients.

Additionally, be sure to require that all fleet maintenance schedules are consistently maintained and all approval levels for parts purchasing are consistently adopted. Fleets should not accept anything less than exceptional performance across the board. Your fleet maintenance service provider selection should have a sole focus on fleet maintenance and uncompromising dedication to quality to exceed your expectations.

COMMUNICATION

The bottom line is when you have an out-of-service asset, it needs to be addressed as soon as possible. It's important to have an open line of communication with your maintenance provider.

When considering a provider, pay attention to how long they take to answer your calls or emails and get back to you about your questions. Service providers should continuously seek and engage with you to constantly bring new ideas to your fleet and offer to be a part of implementations and solutions.

One method to streamline communication is to establish a point of contact at the shop so you have a direct line to someone you can ask questions throughout the day. As you form a relationship, this person will learn your communication habits and fleet makeup.

RELATIONSHIP

Look at this decision as forming a long-term relationship. Ideally you will work with this maintenance provider for years down the line, so do not just focus on the present in your decision.

When considering a relationship with a service provider, think about whether:

1. The future goal of the provider aligns with the goals of your business.
2. The shop will expand as your fleet grows.
3. The provider is doing well financially and will remain in business for the foreseeable future.

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4. You respect and enjoy the people you will be working with.

SAFETY AND RISK

Creating a safe work environment for their technicians, the assets they service, and how they handle inherent risks in the industry including liability issues is a vital component when determining your fleet maintenance service provider. Some questions to consider are:

1. Do they have a safety program and how is this enforced?
2. What precautions are taken to ensure your assets remain protected while being serviced?

Insurance may be an afterthought, but it is something you should never overlook. Find out what their coverage looks like. If your asset is stolen or damaged such as vandalism, a fire or other natural disaster occurs in the shop and harms your assets, will you be covered by the shop? You do not want to find out the answer to this after the fact.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

There are a few more items to ask a maintenance service provider particularly around parts and labor warranty, parts inventory and consolidated billing.

Be sure to ask about parts and labor warranty. If service is conducted on an asset and goes out on a trip following in another state, is there a warranty that will cover part replacement and cover the labor costs to replace it? Labor warranty is typically offered by dealerships but is less common in most shops.

If your fleet visits multiple service locations, find out if the service provider you are considering offers consolidated billing. With consolidated billing, no matter which location your drivers visit, all your service charges appear on one bill. This can save major time and headache on the backend.

Lastly, look for a service provider that is reputable in their area with a solid reputation. Testimonials, case studies, or current clients you can contact to learn more about their quality of service are excellent resources. The opinion of third parties can really give you insight into how the fleet maintenance service provider handles their clients.

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It's important to keep in mind that selecting a fleet maintenance service provider is a process. You are committing to doing business with someone who has a major impact on your operations. If your fleet is not running, your business is not running. While there are a number of items to consider before committing to a provider, keep in mind this due diligence will save you time and money in the long run.

At C&P Fleet Services, we are proud to be a turn-key solution for your fleet and are dedicated to the relentless pursuit of uptime. We offer a Fleet Management System to streamline your fleet operations, fleet maintenance and repair, 24/7 Emergency Roadside Assistance and much, much more. Our comprehensive and innovative service solutions, paired with our customized approach, provides peace-of-mind while keeping your assets on the road, continually generating revenue, where they belong. Here at C&P, your fleet is now complete.

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