

Manufacturers join in the fast-fit revolution

Dealers discover while-you-wait service income helps replace lost car sales revenue

The fast-fit business has grown rapidly over the past two decades.

Since Kwik-Fit began in 1987, many manufacturers have realised the advantages of offering a while-you-wait service and the added benefits it brings, such as upselling opportunities and customer retention.

As more manufacturers entered the market so the pricing has become more competitive with the notion of independent fast-fits being cheaper than dealers not necessarily the case anymore.

Dealers are now starting to hold their own in the sector and, with new car registrations falling 24% in April, a fast-fit operation could be an invaluable extra profit stream.

With the recession still biting hard many people are putting off changing cars, good news for fast-fits as the average age of vehicles using their services is about six years.

And it is not only retail customers who are attracted to the convenience of a while-you-wait service, but also fleets.

Stewart Whyte, director of the Association of Car Fleet Operators, said there is nothing like a recession to make people evaluate their fleets and to look at prices.

He said: "The worst thing to do is to keep buying tyres from one place."

"There is a trend for people to look at areas of cost and whether there is another way.

"People with an independent account might start to compare prices to a dealer or local tyre company to check if they are doing things the right way.

Pressure to change

"The trend will be for people to re-evaluate what they do at the moment and in some cases see there is pressure to change."

However, Whyte warned about switching fast-fit companies because it could lead to running several accounts just to save £5 per tyre.

He added: "If you own your own fleet and do go through a local independent you need to look at its coverage.

"We have been saying for the last nine months every fleet operator should be looking at everything they do.

"What was nice and economical two years ago, that rule book has been scrapped and will never come back."

Dealerships offering fast-fits can benefit from new custom, new car



sales, upselling of service plans and increased workshop activity.

Some manufacturer schemes also offer discounts to fleets.

Vauxhall introduced its MasterFit fast-fit scheme in 1990 as a response to customer demand and is available at almost 400 centres in the UK.

It covers tyres, exhausts and brakes as well as regular servicing, MoTs and general maintenance.

Dealers signing up to the scheme must meet set criteria which includes erecting MasterFit signage both externally and in the reception area.

Vauxhall also provides branded marketing material.

The manufacturer said dealers who have taken on the franchise have intensified their focus on customers' needs and benefited from the fact people often chose to change their vehicle at the same place they have it serviced.

Another benefit, claimed Vauxhall, is new vehicles have been sold off the back of its campaigns.

Retailers can also take part in marketing initiatives such as those aimed at older Vauxhalls which have helped with customer retention and created added revenue.

Fleets are catered for via a specific programme which deals with more than 30 companies who are offered discounts on parts and labour.

Vauxhall said the mix of customers is 65% retail and 35% fleet.

New members are being sought to expand the scheme which also services other makes.

The emphasis behind Ford's Rapid Fit was to provide dealers with a business model they could use to compete in the fast-fit market. The concept, launched in 1993, was designed to complement the existing Ford repair centres and provide them with the broadest possible customer proposition, with all makes catered for.

Peter Wright, operations director at

Haynes Ford in Maidstone, Kent, said the dealership opened its Rapid Fit centre in 2001.

He said the brand provides another option for older vehicles if people think dealers' servicing costs are too high for their current vehicle.

Marketing is done through the local press while lapsed customers are targeted via Ford's and the dealership's databases.

Generally it serves older vehicles about six years old with repeat

Who does what

Manufacturer fast-fit programmes		
Franchise	Programme	No of sites
Vauxhall	MasterFit	346
Ford	Rapid Fit	260
Volkswagen	Express Fit	252
Nissan	Nissan Rapid Service	192
Renault	Renault Minute	76
Citroën	Express Service	75
Peugeot	Express Fit	58

Source: Sewells' Franchise Networks Report

Top five independent fast-fit rivals

Company	No of sites
Kwik-Fit	662
ATS Euromaster	470
National Tyres	200
HiQ	137
Stapletons Tyre Services	101
Other rival	
Nationwide Autocentre	220



business common, even from people who own other makes.

Wright said: "Certainly, we see Rapid Fit as a valuable extra source of business that we use to market to customers who may otherwise slip away from main dealer servicing, and for customers that are new to Haynes and Ford.

Lower cost to customer

The additional flexibility of 'while-you-wait' service allows us to help customers with an emergency or unplanned workshop visit and we keep the RF technicians up to date with Ford technical training so the skill level is just as high, albeit at a lower cost to the customer."

Retailers taking on the brand ideally need to display main road signage while customers need to see the workshop bays from the road.

The branding also relates to furniture, walls, ceilings, doors and windows to help differentiate Rapid Fit's reception and workshop areas from the rest of the dealership.

Weekend opening is expected.

The service covers tyres, exhausts, batteries, shock absorbers, brakes, clutches, MoTs, servicing and cooling systems.

Dealers taking part benefit from a tie Ford has with Pirelli Armstrong tyres which are also exclusive to Ford's Rapid Fit while quality and budget rubber is also stocked.

There are 260 centres nationally, although Ford has no plans to expand this at the moment.

Feedback from Volkswagen has

shown its dealers, whose authorised repairers are required to operate its fast-fit service, called Express Fit, as part of their franchise agreement, have included opportunities to sell new cars and service plans.

The network of 252 centres offers the service to vehicles of any age, although they must be a Volkswagen. There are no plans at present to expand the network.

A spokesman said: "Express Fit has been a great benefit to our business as we are able to refine our offers to our customers to meet their needs.

"It has helped by ensuring that we retain our focus on delivering excellent customer service and assisted in capturing business opportunities."

The scheme was launched in 2004 and offers a while-you-wait service specifically for jobs that take less than an hour and covers shock absorbers, lubrication service, batteries, exhausts, brakes and tyres.

Each business should display signage to meet the manufacturer's corporate identity. Although open times are to the individual dealer they are expected to include Saturday mornings.

Volkswagen said fleets do not have contracts specifically with Express Fit centres.

Other requirements include providing an Express Fit reception and dedicating at least one workshop bay to the scheme.

Dealers are supported by advertising literature supplied by the manufacturer which also promotes the brand on its website.

Toyota, on the other hand, does not, strictly speaking, offer a fast-fit scheme.

However it does provide an Express Service which involves an efficient procedure whereby customers' vehicles are washed and serviced within an hour.

The initiative has appealed to people who prefer to wait while the work is done rather than rely on lifts or courtesy cars.

A slight downside is that pre-booking is required although knowing what work is coming in helps the service to remain efficient.

It works by having two technicians working together with specialised equipment to speed up the process.

This avoids the need for expansion of the workshop and, with more customers, waiting reduces the pressure to have courtesy cars.

Dealers must be aware that the operation can only work efficiently if the reception, workshop and valet bay work together to eliminate downtime.

Toyota uses a control board to track the vehicles' progress to ensure the work is completed on time.

People can view new and used vehicles

while they wait which increases sales opportunities.

Additional work, such as brake pads, can also be fitted within the hour to increase the upsell opportunities.

Technicians receive training in the use of the equipment and synchronised working and are expected to operate the service during normal opening hours.

"Express Fit has helped by ensuring we retain our focus on delivering excellent customer service"



Volkswagen's Express Fit network has 252 centres

Toyota said the service has meant technicians have had to learn to work together and it has encouraged the rotation of teams to ensure cover is available during holidays.

The most difficult part has been ensuring the reception, workshop and valet bay adapt.

Looking to expand

There are 81 centres providing the service which Toyota wants to expand by another 30 by the end of this year.

Whether it provides added revenue to a dealer depends on the location and customer demand. However, one bonus is that cost savings can come from reduced courtesy car costs.

In some cases it can avoid extending the workshop or having bays off site to cope with capacity issues.

To encourage custom the service is available to all Toyota customers although does not cover other marques.

National publicity is planned as the network increases while service reminders are sent to increase custom. The scheme is also marketed by post and newsletters.

Citroën also claims to have sold new cars and service plans off the back of its fast-fit operation which has about 60 centres and opened in 2003.

Known as Citroën Express Service there are plans to expand the network which offers all the usual fast-fit services.

To broaden the customer base all makes are catered for via while-you-wait menu pricing.

Citroën said discussions are underway regarding contracts with fleets.

Kwik-Fit

Kwik-Fit entered the fleet market in 1987 by offering a tyre fitting service.

This has now expanded into other areas such as exhausts, brakes and batteries, MoTs and windscreen repairs.

Today it has 662 sites and carries out 11,000 MoTs and 6,000 services annually. It is now trialling smart repairs in six areas.

In February it secured a three-year contract to provide fast-fit services to the Leasedrive Velo Group and in March leasing company Lex was the first to sign up to Kwik-Fit's "While U Wait" servicing.

Head of Kwik-Fit fleet Mike Wise said

it has no plans to expand because the number of centres gives good geographical coverage.

At present 360 sites offer MoT and servicing which will increase to 500 by the end of this year.

Kwik-Fit claims its online service bookings are 30% cheaper than dealers and helps keep it competitive. Its centres are open 363 days of the year.

Wise said: "Flexibility is important because we have built our reputation on seven-days-a-week service.

"When people want brakes they want them there and then. This is a great

opportunity for us"

He said fleets can look at the online diary of their local Kwik-Fit centre prior to booking a service. Although 48 hours' notice is required, Wise said this can often be done the next day.

Last year computer software was introduced to 300 centres so technicians could download each manufacturers' service schedule.

Kwik-Fit's research shows people have no qualms about choosing them for servicing because the work is done to manufacturers' standards.

Jobs are not carried out overnight although this is being considered.