

# Using Technology Equals Efficiency, Profitability

*Parts lookup, web systems enhance operations in Wisconsin dealership.*

BY GREG OLSON

Over the last 15 years, Olson's Outdoor Power Equipment, has grown into one of the largest multi-line dealers in southeastern Wisconsin. I believe that one of the main reasons behind our success is that we have embraced technology-enabled solutions to support our sales and customer service efforts.

In these challenging economic conditions, there is no doubt that our attention should be focused, more than ever, on what we do best: serve our customers. We can't be all things to our business at the risk of becoming a jack of all trades and a master of none. That's why it makes even more sense to leverage the power and efficiency of technology-based tools to run a profitable operation.

At Olson's, we leverage easy-to-use, affordable tools, including parts lookup systems, website solutions and business management software to improve customer service, drive sales around the clock, attract new customers and work more efficiently overall.

## Parts Efficiency

We don't have time to look up parts information on each OEM website. At Olson's, we use PartSmart from ARI, a parts lookup software that provides fast and easy access to OEM parts catalogs in one database. This consolidation of data offers a major advantage over using multiple parts lookup systems from individual OEMs: we save time by no longer having to enter multiple passwords and navigate through different



*Serita Olson, right, and daughter-in-law Kristine are more efficient thanks to technology.*

formats. Because PartSmart is integrated with our dealer business management system from Softpower, we can view parts information and inventory, as well as order replacement parts – quickly and accurately. We can even add a note next to a part for all the team to see, say if it can't be used for a specific function. This allows us to develop and share knowledge that ultimately leads to better service and improved customer satisfaction.

Having such a fast, easy to use tool definitely helps with cash flow. Our 2,000 sq. ft. showroom is not where we make money: we're lucky to break even. As we all know, the bulk of dealership revenue comes from parts and service. Being able to look up parts quickly and correctly helps us handle

the high volume of parts we need to be profitable. Thanks to accurate parts information and schematics, we can give our customers what they need immediately, moving them in and out of the shop in a heartbeat, and keeping them happy with the right part in their hand.

Another major advantage of using a parts lookup system is better customer service. Our customer service team—my wife Serita and our daughter-in-law Kristine—are not technicians, but they can easily read and explain the schematics and find the part the customer needs. They provide service that's both friendly and knowledgeable, and when customers walk in the door, they aren't intimidated by a burly technician. This allows us to be a source of valuable information for our customers and that's

what keeps them coming back. The added bonus is that our technicians can focus their attention on doing what they do best—repair and maintenance work that customers are counting on.

We've had customers offer us tips because they're serviced so quickly and so well. If we take good care of them for small items, chances are they'll be coming back for bigger ones. Like Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's said, "Look after the customer and the business will take care of itself."

## Web Work

It's no news that the Internet has fundamentally changed the way dealers must do business today to thrive. Customers do their homework online before ever setting foot in a dealership. Statistics show that if we don't help them quickly find the information they're looking for on our website, they'll move on to our competitor's in less than a minute. That's why every dealer *must* have a powerful website. Not only does our website help us reach more customers than ever and engage them anywhere, anytime, it helps us win new business.

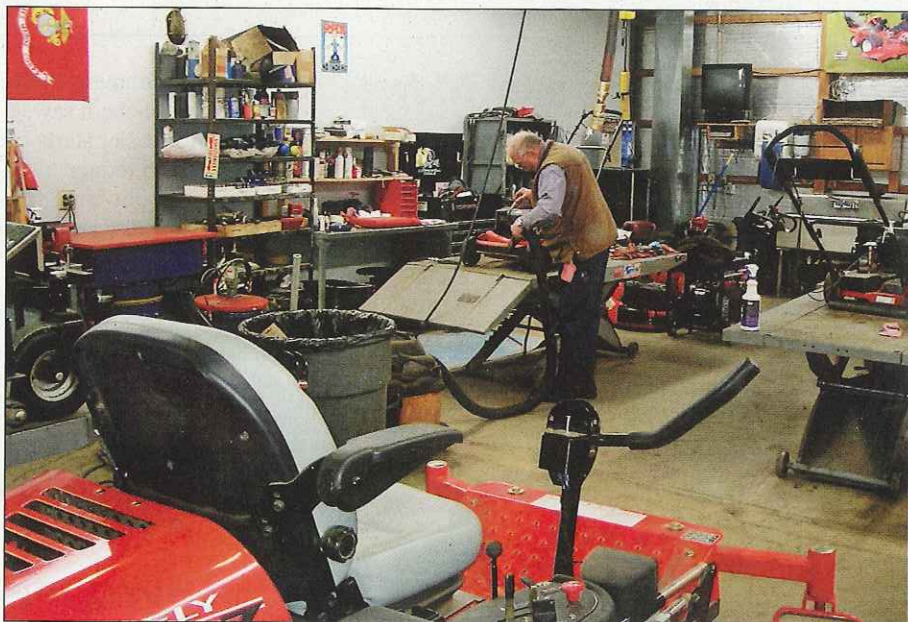
At Olson's, we use WebsiteSmart from ARI for a professional look and feel throughout our website, which has become a one-stop shop. Visitors can view new and pre-owned vehicles; buy accessories and OEM parts; and find out more about financing options—even when we're closed!

We consider our website as the face of our company online so we make sure that we update it regularly to keep it fresh and compelling with timely information and specials. We can easily make changes in just a few simple steps. No need for an in-house web guru.

Our website is a store in and of itself. We've seen a 30% increase in online sales, year-over-year, as well as higher profit margins due to lower cost of sales. Having a website is like having two extra employees!

## Engage Experts

My familiarity with software tools comes from three decades of experience as a tool and die engineer but I still recognize the need to work with providers who specialize in technology-enabled solutions. I have to be able to count on them for troubleshooting, whether it be ARI or SoftPower, our business management system provider for inventory, point-of-sale activities and work orders.



With quality digital backup, technicians are able to concentrate on actual service work.



Olson: "Having a web site is like having two extra employees."

When we're swamped, we can't afford not to have all of our tools up and running. We need the support of an expert to help with whatever technical issues may come up. For example, we have a service contract with SoftPower. They suggested having a mirrored system with two hard drives in case the server goes down. When it did, they were here in 24 hours to replace it. Buying the extra equipment and paying a little more for that service is definitely worth it.

You don't need to be a web developer to have a website that works for your dealership. Reputable providers can take the burden off of your shoulders. They will ensure the smoothest, most

consistent integration of these technologies throughout your business.

Since we went "paperless" in 1995, the technology tools available to dealers have grown significantly. It's as important to leverage technology to support our business as it is to stay up-to-date on the equipment we sell. By choosing third-party providers with expertise in proven technology-based solutions specific to your industry, you can maximize sales and profitability while focusing your time and attention on what matters: selling more.

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