

The Analyzer



THE WISCONSIN VEHICLE INSPECTION PROGRAM

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PIF Profile—Hartland Service, Hartland, WI

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Eighty years and four generations of Kusch family passion and commitment

Hartland Service has a rich history in auto repair, tracing its roots back to 1919 when Otto Kusch and his brothers worked in Milwaukee. The family business officially began in 1945 when Otto opened Kusch's Garage. The garage was later taken over by Otto's son, Jack Kusch, who continued to operate it into the early 1990s. Over the years, the business saw three generations working together, with Jeff, Mike's son, representing the fourth generation. Jeff's passion and commitment left a lasting impact on the family business, even after his passing.

Hartland Service opened its doors in April 1992 with a modest setup of six service bays and a small office. The business grew rapidly, leading to expansions in 1997 and the early 2000s, which included additional service bays, a car wash system, and new services like hydraulic hose and tank testing, detailing, and emissions testing. By 2016, the facility had expanded to nearly 20,000 square feet, featuring a specialty shop for classic cars and two advanced car wash systems. The hard work and dedication of the team, along with the support of loyal customers, earned Hartland Service several accolades, including the Wisconsin Family Business of the Year and the Golden Hammer Award from the Hartland Chamber of Commerce. The business looks forward to continued growth and serving the Lake Country community. (For more information about Hartland Service, go to www.hartlandservice.com.)

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interview with
the owner of
Hartland
Service, Mike
Kusch.***



Photo: Mike Daury



PIF Profile—Hartland Service

Interview with Mike Kusch, owner of Hartland Service

I sat down with Mike Kusch, the owner of Hartland Service, to discuss the Wisconsin vehicle inspection program and what impact it has had on his business. They have been a part of the program since it was introduced in 2012 and have built a great customer following. The intent of this spotlight is to provide insight and ideas that have worked for Hartland Service and to share those with the entire network of facilities that currently provide emission testing (or those who may want to join the program). I want to personally thank Mike Kusch for taking the time to share his story with our network.

—Mike Daury, Wisconsin Program Manager

Why did you decide to add emission testing in 2013?

For the same reason I continue it today. I looked at it as a marketing tool to grow the company. I knew it would attract customers to come to my shop with no obligation to purchase anything but draw traffic to my location. I knew this would give us the ability to add to our customer base.

What impact has this had on your business?

The number of emission customers has continued to grow, and this has a direct correlation with the growth of our customer base.

Why have you decided to test consistently 7:30 to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday?

It is important to provide the convenience to our customers. I'm shooting myself in the foot if I don't test everyday because those customers will go somewhere else and I lose the opportunity to make a positive impression on those customers.

You have a great reputation and hundreds of positive google reviews (some being emission related). Do you see emission customers returning for other work on their vehicles?

When customers come in, we type their names in our database and if they do not show up, we find out how they heard about us. Many customers mention that they had an emission test and really like the service and our shop and that is why they return.

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***—Mike Kusch,
Hartland Service***



Photo: Mike Daury

How have you found staff to do the emission testing?

We have been in the community for 30 years and we have a very loyal customer base, so word of mouth is key. We work on hundreds of cars a week, so all we need to do is put a sign on the counter and we can generate leads from our customers or our current staff. We have 5-6 part-time testers, and their role is to do the emission testing. We pay them well because we look at them as the face of the company and they can help to bring customers back to our shop for other services. During slow periods, they can help



PIF Profile—Interview with Mike Kusch (continued)

in other areas, but we have built up our customer base, so this usually only happens when the weather is bad.

Your business has grown steadily over the years. Do you attribute any of this growth to having emission testing?

Yes, they go hand in hand. We added a second tablet and testing area to accommodate the growth. During peak times, we are testing two cars at once, plus we can renew registrations at our desk to help keep the line moving. We also have overflow testers beyond our emission testing staff that can step in and help when needed. We have dedicated a lane along with signage to promote the emission testing because it continues to drive traffic to our facility and increase our customer base. We find the word-of-mouth advertising work best and because we test consistently many customers tell their family and friends to visit our location.

I believe having dedicated staff is essential. In the very beginning we could not do that, but by growing the emission part of the business, it makes all the difference.

—Mike Kusch,
Hartland Service

Your team does a great job in renewing registrations, and this has helped to increase the total revenue coming into your shop. Has this been an area of focus?

It starts with your team, and hiring the right people to do our emission testing. We have put an emphasis on finding friendly and outgoing team members and they do a great job in converting those registration renewals. They stress the convenience of getting your sticker right now and being done with the registration process and many customers like that benefit.

Your total revenue generated from emission testing/registration renewals has more than doubled compared to last year with the increase in registration fees. Has this helped to solidify your commitment to the program?

I always looked at the emission testing as a marketing program and I still believe that today. The increase in the registration renewal fee has made a big impact and now more than covers our costs.

What advice would you give to shops who are considering whether they should add emission testing at their location?

I believe having dedicated staff is essential. In the very beginning we could not do that, but by growing the emission part of the business, it makes all the difference. I don't have to take a tech or service writer away from their duties and risk losing a sale or not completing a job on-time. In addition, we decided early on that we wanted the test to be transparent and right in front of our main entrance. This allowed customers to enter our showroom and see our facilities along with seeing the test being completed. This transparency helps to build customer trust and loyalty. I would recommend adding emission testing to help grow your customer base and business. ■



Photo: Mike Daury