

ACTIVANT PRISM HELPS AUTO PARTS CENTER MAKE MEASURABLE GAINS OVER PROGRAM GROUP SYSTEM



Access to More Parts and More Revenue

Auto Parts Center began using Activant Prism™ Series 12 in the mid 1990s. When the company was ready to upgrade, decision makers did a careful assessment, comparing the program group's proprietary system to Activant Prism. According to the Auto Parts Center team, their program group's proprietary catalog capabilities were the weak link of that system. "We buy from many suppliers, not just our group," explains

Sam Howarth, vice president at Auto Parts Center. "Our program group's electronic catalog only had program-group products. We would have relied on paper catalogs for the other lines."

That strategy would have slowed counter operations at Auto Parts Center. Howarth estimates that it takes about 10 times longer to lookup parts in paper catalogs versus electronically. "It's also critical to have the electronic catalog and pricing integrated with the ordering system," he says. "The effort required to manually add new products to the system would have forced us to reduce our non-program group products, which would have decreased our revenue. An accurate, industry-wide and easy-to-use catalog is essential for a healthy automotive aftermarket business like ours."

Although the program group's system was inexpensive to operate, decision makers at the company chose Prism because it delivers integrated cataloging for all products. Now it's easy for the management team to look back and assess how well the investment paid off. "We believed the Prism system had benefits that would propel our business forward—and we were correct," Howarth says.

The ability to easily purchase and sell non-program group products increases revenue and profits on non-part accessories. "We are constantly trying new products," Howarth says. "For instance, air fresheners change seasonally. In minutes, we can try the latest style. We can try new products with a minimum investment in time or inventory. This invigorates our business. Customers see new merchandise and recognize that our business isn't stagnant. I know that translates into sales and profits we wouldn't otherwise see."

Inventory Accuracy Year Round

Two years ago, Auto Parts Center made an investment in bar coding to improve inventory accuracy. Today, managers say they can't imagine running the business without it. Personnel find that bar coding also makes inventory management much easier and faster. Instead of closing for an annual physical inventory, Auto Parts Center now uses radio frequency (RF) guns to cycle count its products throughout the year. The inventory is perpetually accurate, and the company avoids the cost associated with being closed to conduct inventory.

"Bar coding has improved our business from end-to-end," Howarth says. "For example, now we can receive a couple of pallets of filters in about half an hour. Previously a

PROFILE

Headquarters: West Long Branch, New Jersey

Sales Breakdown: 70% wholesale, 30% retail

Number of Employees: 15

Locations: 1

Founded: 1979

Affiliation: NAPA

"We've been using Activant Prism since 1998 and have continually seen bottom-line results to the business. We work so efficiently with Prism that we have increased our revenue without adding staff."

SAM HOWARTH
VICE PRESIDENT
AUTO PARTS CENTER

task like that would have taken four hours. And we have no incorrect part numbers, no transposed numbers—no data-entry errors.” Bar coding has also improved customer service at Auto Parts Center. Counter personnel can scan items for purchase in seconds. “It’s much faster, more accurate, and we can serve more customers in less time,” Howarth continues. “We would never go back to the old way.”

More Information Faster for Every Counter Person

Auto Parts Center recently upgraded to Dell systems. Counter stations and back office stations that run Prism are now networked and have Internet access. “Instead of calling a manufacturer or going to a paper catalog, we now visit manufacturer Web sites to gain needed information,” Howarth says. “We can research part specs, find interchange information and ensure we’re ordering the right parts.”

Auto Parts Center is also finding VIN Lookup to be very useful, especially for customers with limited English. In Prism, users lookup a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and can view information such as make, model, year, engine size and brake system. It’s a more accurate and efficient way to determine the right parts for each car. “VIN Lookup makes it much faster and easier to deliver the right part without guesswork,” Howarth says.

Favorite Feature? PowerPricer!

Activant PowerPricer™ is one of Howarth’s favorite features in Prism. At least once every week, he uploads new costs or changes prices. “It’s very easy to receive CDs or spreadsheets that contain new cost information from suppliers, add or change our prices and upload them into Prism,” he explains. “It takes me minutes, and it’s accurate. Before we had PowerPricer, everything was manually entered, which would take hours or days and would likely have data-entry errors. It’s another good example of how Prism’s flexibility enables us to improve our business and increase profits.”

The Immeasurable Benefits: Peace of Mind and Free Time

Auto Parts Center is truly a family-run business. Howarth’s brother and sister run the business side-by-side with him. All three appreciate the productivity gained from Prism and its effect on their lifestyles. “Our jobs are easier,” Howarth says. “We trust that scanned inventory and orders are accurate. We have time to make high-level strategic decisions and run the business, instead of needing to oversee every little detail.”

Howarth appreciates the fact that Activant is continually making improvements to its products. He’s confident that those changes will help his business today and in the future. “At a recent user group meeting in Philadelphia, I took five pages of notes on new enhancements and ways to use the system we hadn’t yet considered,” he says. “I learned from Activant experts and other users. It’s a great place to get new ideas.”

The Right Decision for Auto Parts Center

Howarth has seen the difference that Prism has made for Auto Parts Center. “I’m reminded of how powerful Prism is when I receive bulletins announcing new features and upgrades on our program group’s proprietary system, and I realize that our Prism system has been doing those functions for years,” Howarth says in closing. “Nearly all member-owners use the program-group solution. For us, that solution just wasn’t good enough. It was worth the extra investment in Prism to have a solution that better meets our needs and makes it easy to work with all our suppliers, not just our program group. We spent more initially, but it has paid for itself many times over.”



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ABOUT ACTIVANT

Activant, a leading technology provider of business management solutions serving small and medium-sized businesses, offers customers tailored proprietary software, professional services, content, supply chain connectivity, and analytics. Activant’s systems are designed to help customers increase sales, boost productivity, operate more cost-efficiently, improve inventory turns and enhance trading partner relationships.

To learn more about this or other
Activant products and services,
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