

ADVANTAGE AUTO STORES ENJOYING KEY COMPETITIVE GAINS WITH ACTIVANT EAGLE



A Better Customer Experience

It's all about the customer experience, whether at the counter, on the phone, over the Internet and every time a shop owner or technician inspects a newly delivered part. Regardless of size or location, leading automotive parts distributors are looking for new ways to enhance that customer experience and, ultimately, demonstrate the unique value of their services.

PROFILE

Headquarters: Rochester, New York

Annual Sales: \$154 million

Sales Breakdown: 85% wholesale, 15% retail

Number of Employees: Approx. 1,000

Locations: 80 Jobber Stores

9 Direct Distribution Stores

2 Pick Up Warehouses

4 Specialty Warehouses

9 Full Service Distribution Centers

Founded: 1958

Affiliation: Hahn Automotive/Auto Value

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JEFF WASHBURN
DIRECTOR OF MIS
HAHN AUTOMOTIVE WAREHOUSE, INC

As one of the industry's most respected and successful distribution organizations, Hahn Automotive has consistently established new standards for customer service, leading to unusually strong relationships with automotive service professionals and do-it-yourselfers throughout the eastern and Midwestern U.S. Hahn today operates nine full-service, nine direct and four specialty distribution centers and approximately 90 company-owned stores in eight states. And each location — large or small — exemplifies the parent company's mission to provide customers with “exemplary service and value by a well-trained, empowered staff.”

The need to preserve and enhance these competitive advantages — service, value and empowered employees — led Hahn to explore a broad range of the latest business management solutions for its core network of Advantage Auto Stores, which had long utilized the trusted Activant J-CON® platform. Following extensive research, and a disappointing experiment with another provider's solution, the distributor chose Activant Eagle® for J-CON®, the proven, next-generation Windows-based platform for multi-store operations.

“Any time you switch from one solution to another, you're initially concerned about whether the new system will do what you need it to do, whether the implementation will impact your daily operations, whether or not your employees will adapt to it, and, above all, whether your customer service levels will be affected,” said Jeff Washburn, director of MIS for Hahn Automotive Warehouse, Inc. “The good news is Activant Eagle® was already a developed product for the hardware industry, and it had a very adaptive point-of-sale program right out of the box. And now that we're implementing it across all our stores, and making tweaks as we go along, it's getting even better.”

Less Paperwork, Less Manual Labor, More Insight

Make no mistake, the switch to Activant Eagle for J-CON did have an almost immediate impact on daily operations — but that impact was overwhelmingly positive. The time needed to perform most back-office tasks was quickly reduced by 30 percent, the number of steps required to perform physical inventory counts was cut in half and Advantage locations eliminated the need to perform daily system backups. To put these time and efficiency savings into a more tangible perspective, Jeff reports that most stores using Activant Eagle are able to close out the business day 30 minutes earlier than locations still using the old solution.



“That’s a big deal to our employees, obviously. But it also points to lots of other advantages we’ve gained throughout the day,” Jeff said. “Purchase orders are easier. We don’t have to sort lines and recalculate inventory as we add parts. We have a much more extensive view of each customer’s account. And we’ve dramatically reduced the need to print out reports to find specific information — now we can spool reports and return to them at any time and drill down into the data right on the screen.”

Empowered at the Counter

Skilled counter professionals are central to the success of most leading jobber operations. Like most well-established parts businesses, Advantage Auto Stores employ a mix of counter people in their 20s, 30s and even 60s. One of the issues that kept Jeff up at night prior to the implementation of Eagle was whether “empowering” his counter staff would scare some of them off, particularly those who had never before worked in a Microsoft Windows environment.

That concern was immediately dispelled with the first Eagle installation. Rather than resisting the change, even the most seasoned counter people quickly realized the new solution made them far more efficient. “They’ve had virtually no difficulty whatsoever in picking it up and becoming proficient — it’s much better than I would have expected,” Jeff said.

These early successes have held true for each subsequent store implementation. In fact, Jeff has found that the time needed to bring a typical employee up to full proficiency on the system is just four days, compared to two weeks with the legacy J-CON platform. Point-of-sale training on Eagle for J-CON requires just 30 minutes for most employees.

Optimizing the Customer Experience

Many of the benefits that make Eagle for J-CON more convenient for employees also help enhance the service experience for Advantage Auto Stores customers. One huge benefit of the new solution is the ability to deploy the Activant Cover-to-Cover™ electronic catalog module at every counter position. This powerful graphical e-catalog tool provides the counterperson with virtually instantaneous access to detailed product images, TSBs, installation instructions, warranty details, links to manufacturer Web sites and other information that speeds the transaction. The counterperson can even e-mail part images and other information to the customer without leaving his or her workstation.

“Cover-to-Cover makes all of our people more efficient. We’re seeing 20 percent fewer errors and 10 percent fewer returns simply by providing our counter people with better information at the point-of-sale,” Jeff said.

More and better information also inevitably leads to increased efficiencies and speed. This fact can be seen in fewer part look-up errors, reduced callbacks to customers, and more-timely deliveries, according to Jeff. “We want to sell our customers the right part the first time, every time. Eagle is helping us serve our customers more efficiently and with fewer errors,” he said. “That’s what we had hoped to accomplish when we were searching for our new store solution, and it’s going to continue to improve as we explore and leverage all the bells and whistles that are built into this system.”



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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
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