

PISTON RING'S INVESTMENT IN ACTIVANT EAGLE® SYSTEM, LASERCAT® 3 ECATALOG PAYING IMPRESSIVE DIVIDENDS



PROFILE

Headquarters: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Number of Employees: Over 400

Locations: 1 distribution center, 27 company stores and 12 associate store locations throughout Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario

Founded: 1953

Affiliation: The Alliance

“In the auto parts business today, it’s not whether you can afford to implement an Activant Eagle style system; it’s can you afford not to?”

TODD TOUTANT
SENIOR MANAGER
PISTON RING SERVICE

Leveraging the Right Investments for Long-Term Growth

Remaining on the leading edge of technology is helping one of Canada’s most successful traditional hard parts distributors continue to increase its market penetration and customer loyalty. Executives at Piston Ring Service, a Winnipeg, Manitoba-based distributor with 27 corporate and 12 associate stores, view technology as a vital competitive differentiator in an age when competition from national retailers is continually increasing and applying business pressure.

“Our competition is using advanced tools and the industry has changed to the point where we’re so data-centric, that you can’t keep up without a modern business computer system,” says company senior manager Todd Toutant, who oversees IT, logistics and marketing. “We’ve never been afraid to invest in technology. The key word is ‘invest’ – too few people in the automotive aftermarket understand that IT is the lifeblood of our business.”

In keeping with this philosophy, in 2006 Piston Ring converted from the J-CON® business management system to the powerful Activant Eagle® solution. In conjunction with this change, the company also implemented the Activant LaserCat® 3 eCatalog interface. “We needed to move into the 21st Century. With our old system, we found ourselves sitting there dreaming about things we’d like to be able to do but couldn’t. Now, with Activant Eagle, when we say, ‘I wish we could do this,’ we realize we can,” Toutant says.

Piston Ring uses the A-DIS® solution to manage inventory at their over 250,000 square foot central distribution facility. Its Eagle system provides a direct interface to A-DIS, which enables counter staff at all company stores to quickly source the right parts from the warehouse. The system also empowers its front-line personnel to more efficiently serve their wholesale and DIY customers. “We pride ourselves on providing our counter people with tools to be highly effective on the job. They need e-mail, they need Internet, they need pictures, and they need the most advanced eCatalog. The Eagle system has allowed us to provide these tools to them,” he explains.

LaserCat 3 eCatalog a ‘Game Changer’ at the Counter

Throughout its history, Piston Ring has invested in the people and technologies needed to deliver a superior customer experience. This strategy was at play with the company’s selection of both the Eagle system and Activant’s revolutionary LaserCat 3 eCatalog interface, which dramatically reduces the time needed to identify the right parts for virtually any application.

"LaserCat 3 is definitely a better customer experience, not just for the countermen, but for our customers," says Piston Ring senior manager Trevor Tennant. "We definitely see a reduction in returns. The images, specifications, OE serial numbers and part numbers that are often linked to the parts data in LaserCat 3 allow our counter staff and online customers to make the right decisions."

But the benefits aren't limited merely to returns; LaserCat 3 has also helped Piston Ring increase sales through increased depth of information. Tennant estimates each store has saved at least one sale per day, on average, by finding parts that are "invisible" to competitors. "Activant's All Lines and BuyerAssist® tools have helped us identify parts that we actually had sitting on the shelf but which weren't listed or catalogued for a specific application," he explains.

Improved Buying Practices

Counter to the trend in some businesses, most auto parts distributors are carrying more lines from more suppliers than ever before. This phenomenon has led to what Toutant calls "spreadsheet buying." But without the ability to carefully manage sourcing and pricing on a daily basis, companies can experience dramatic margin erosion. The Eagle solution has enabled Piston Ring to avoid this trap.

"With an older system it's very difficult to both analyze the prices in the system and the effectiveness of them and to make changes when necessary," Toutant says. "With the Eagle system we're able to upload information, download information and change information very easily. The Activant Compass™ reporting system has a scheduler built into it so daily we have our store managers receiving reports on any transactions where any counter person has over-struck a price. And they can follow up immediately versus at the end of the month or maybe not at all."

Technology and Service Ease Transition

Continuously move forward or suffer the consequences. This philosophy has helped drive Piston Ring's success in a rapidly changing market. Resisting change is often more difficult than the change itself, according to Toutant. "Some companies fear moving to a new management system. People get comfortable with a system they have used for a long time. They're afraid their data may not transfer correctly, or that they will suffer downtime. Moving forward with the right technological tools is the right answer."

Representatives from Activant Professional Services helped Piston Ring with the conversion process to Eagle and LaserCat 3. "It was comforting to have Activant on-site as we converted our first few stores to the new system," Todd says. "They assisted with the first implementations, and we converted the remaining stores on our own."

The switch was popular among counter personnel, who appreciated the extensive arsenal of new tools and capabilities available through the Eagle solution. Tennant found that in most cases Piston Ring's staff could start entering transactions within 15 minutes of practice. "Anybody who has been exposed to Microsoft Windows has an easier time learning this software," he says. "Within minutes after their first exposure to Eagle, they are using the Activant Cover-to-Cover® electronic catalog, looking up and selling parts and handling billing functions."



"We pride ourselves on providing our counter people with tools to be highly effective on the job."

TODD TOUTANT
SENIOR MANAGER
PISTON RING



"Activant's All Lines and BuyerAssist tools have helped us identify parts that we actually had sitting on the shelf but which weren't listed or catalogued for a specific application."

TREVOR TENNANT
SENIOR MANAGER
PISTON RING

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,
please call 800.380.9015.



ACTIVANT

Activant Solutions Inc. • 7683 Southfront Road • Livermore, CA 94551
Phone: 888.448.2636 • E-mail: automotive.marketing@activant.com • www.activant.com

©2010 Activant Solutions Inc. All rights reserved. Activant, Activant Cover-to-Cover, Activant Eagle, A-DIS, BuyerAssist, J-CON, LaserCat and the Activant stylized logo design are registered trademarks, and Activant Compass a trademark, of Activant Solutions Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

09SP1ST