



Case Study March 2011

CARS OnDemand High-Gear Training for a Sector in the Fast Lane

At a Glance

- ◆ CARS OnDemand is an Internet-based training program that addresses the skills and knowledge needs of the automotive repair and service sector's businesses and employees.
- ◆ Through Internet-based learner accounts, CARS OnDemand users have access to over 300 technical and non-technical learning modules.
- ◆ CARS OnDemand replaces the satellite-based, televised CARS Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) program—enhancing and extending the former program's use, convenience, and flexibility.

CONTEXT

There are an estimated 18 million registered vehicles in Canada.¹ These vehicles are kept in working order by Canada's automotive repair and service sector, which comprises over 65,000 establishments. These businesses include almost 40,000 automotive repair and service shops (representing 59 per cent of the sector) and over 6,000 automotive parts, accessories, and tire stores (representing 12 per cent of the sector).²

- 1 See Transport Canada, "Canada's New Government Helps Canadians Choose More Eco-Friendly Vehicles," news release. February 14, 2007. www.tc.gc.ca/eng/mediaroom/releases-nat-2007-07-gc005e-4742.htm.
- 2 Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council (CARS), *Performance Driven: Labour Market Opportunities and Challenges for Canada's Motive Power Repair and Service Sector* (Ottawa: CARS, 2009), 25.

The automotive repair and service sector is important to the Canadian economy. The sector employs over 300,000 people in occupations such as automotive service technician (comprising 25 per cent of sector employment), parts counterperson (11 per cent of sector employment), installer, and technician specialist (each 9 per cent of sector employment).³ In 2008, the average Canadian household spent \$560 on vehicle repair and maintenance, and \$308 on parts.⁴ In 2006, estimates of total retail sales in the automotive aftermarket were \$17.8 billion.⁵

CARS Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) has transitioned to an Internet-based delivery system—CARS OnDemand.

The automotive repair and service sector is changing rapidly. Technology advancements have led to an inundation of new vehicle products, components, and systems, with about one new vehicle technology introduced every six months.⁶ These, along with other changes in the sector, pose increasing skills and knowledge challenges for the sector's businesses and their employees, who begin to see new vehicle technologies in their shops three to four years after they are first introduced to the market (when service warranties with dealerships typically expire). Consequently, maintaining and improving skills and knowledge continues to be a high priority for the sector and its businesses.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council (CARS)—an industry-driven, non-profit organization for sector leadership—addresses the sector's training and human resources needs, with the help of the CARS Network. (See box "About CARS Council and the CARS

Network.") Since the early 1990s, CARS Council has helped automotive repair and service sector employees keep pace with changing skills and knowledge requirements, using the best training means available. In 1997, CARS Network changed the way it delivered its training program, from classroom-based training courses to CARS Interactive Distance Learning (IDL)—instructor-led training accessible to businesses through satellite television.

About CARS Council and the CARS Network

Since 1988, CARS Council has provided value for the industry by conducting research on important sector-related issues (e.g., accreditation, retention, and skills development), providing a platform for discussion on industry opportunities and challenges, and developing training and learning tools and resources with industry and educational partners. CARS Council is supported through funding from the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program, as well as industry contributions.

CARS Council recognized that there needed to be a mechanism to *deliver* and *monitor* the impact of its tools and resources developed through government funding, as government funding to CARS Council is not available for these purposes. The establishment of a separate not-for-profit entity, the CARS Network, allows CARS Council to deliver and sustain the programs and products it has developed through industry and government support. The CARS Network collects data on industry use, as well as feedback on the impact and value that its programs have on industry stakeholders. This data and evidence provides the Government of Canada with important information on how its investments support and promote ongoing industry investment and participation.

CARS IDL has since transitioned to an Internet-based delivery system, called CARS OnDemand. CARS OnDemand provides convenient, flexible, and cost-effective training on a comprehensive range of technical and non-technical subjects, accessed through learner accounts. The program has gained in popularity since its implementation in 2006–07, helping to contribute to an increase in the amount of skills and knowledge upgrading occurring in the automotive repair and service sector.

This case study looks at the role that CARS OnDemand is playing in the sector, including the use, value, and impacts it is having on the sector's businesses and

3 CARS, *Performance Driven*, 24. The exact number—306,165—includes the heavy truck and trailer sub-sector, which was not included in previous sector estimates.

4 Statistics Canada, CANSIM data, V13879642 and V13879645.

5 See Industry Canada, www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/auto-auto.nsf/eng/am02177.html. This includes manufacture and sale of "garage tools, diagnostic service and repair equipment, automotive accessories, and performance and appearance products."

6 CARS program staff member. Telephone interview by James Stuckey, November 2010.

employees. The case study also highlights how changes to the training delivery system have affected both the use and the benefits of CARS distance learning for businesses and their employees. Finally, the case study considers challenges to, and opportunities for, maximizing the benefits of CARS OnDemand, now and in the future.

The update to the training delivery mechanism is in keeping with CARS' mission to provide training that is convenient, cost-effective, and accessible.

Qualitative and quantitative information for this case study was gathered from a variety of sources, including 19 in-depth interviews with automotive service and repair sector business owners, managers, and employees; CARS Council staff; CARS OnDemand instructors, managers, and curriculum designers; and other sector-based experts and stakeholders.⁷ CARS literature, CARS OnDemand program materials, and other relevant sources of sector information were also used.

ON THE ROAD TO THE DIGITAL AGE

In 2005, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) commissioned a Conference Board case study on CARS IDL. The case study, *Interactive Distance Learning: Putting the Training Wheels in Motion in Canada's Automotive Repair and Service Shops*, found that CARS IDL greatly expanded the reach, convenience, and cost-effectiveness of training for the automotive repair and service sector. By bringing training directly to employees in their workplaces, employees in the automotive repair and service sector no longer needed to travel to receive high-quality skills and knowledge upgrading. At that time, 1,061 automotive repair and service sector businesses across Canada subscribed to CARS IDL, enjoying benefits such as improved productivity, performance, and other positive workplace impacts.⁸

Before IDL's first broadcast in March 1999, a number of training delivery systems were considered, including CD-ROM, video conferencing, satellite television, and the Internet. Satellite television was chosen following the success of satellite-based training programs used by Ford and GM in the United States, and given the relative infancy of high-speed Internet at the time.

Since 1999, access to high-speed Internet has expanded significantly, in urban as well as rural areas. Based on the increased availability of high-speed service across Canada, including in automotive repair and service sector businesses,⁹ CARS Council returned to the idea of an Internet-based training delivery system in 2006. Funding from HRSDC was provided to migrate an initial 70 courses to the new Internet-based platform. With enthusiastic feedback from pilot users, the decision was made to implement a total conversion to the online (CARS OnDemand) format. Automotive service and repair sector businesses transitioned to the new system, and by fall 2007, every IDL user had switched to CARS OnDemand to address their training needs. (See box "A New Generation of Training Needs.")

TRAINING UPGRADES IN DEMAND

CARS OnDemand plays an important role in addressing the skills and knowledge needs of the automotive repair and service sector. The update to the training delivery mechanism from satellite television to the Internet is in keeping with CARS' mission to provide training that is convenient, cost-effective, and accessible to a geographically dispersed industry.

While the CARS IDL training program boasted 1,061 businesses subscribers, the CARS OnDemand program has 5,212 subscribers as of December 2010. This fivefold increase indicates that automotive repair and service sector businesses recognize, and have been finding value in, the Internet-based training option to meet their skills and training needs. (See box "CARS OnDemand in Use.")

7 Telephone interviews were conducted by James Stuckey between October and December 2010.

8 See Douglas Watt, *Interactive Distance Learning: Putting the Training Wheels in Motion in Canada's Automotive Repair and Service Shops* (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2005), 4-6. www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=1415.

9 In 2005, 58 per cent of repair and service shop businesses reported having access to high-speed Internet. As of 2009, that number had jumped to 87 per cent. In addition, 79 per cent of employees in the sector report having Internet access at home. CARS, *Performance Driven*, 109.

A New Generation of Training Needs

New vehicle technologies, and the evolution of existing ones, are inundating the automotive aftermarket. Within the past 10 years, vehicle complexity has increased by leaps and bounds, said one expert. “We’re at the point now where with some of the new cars, there’s almost no mechanical connection between you driving the car, and the car driving itself—it’s all done through wires and signals.”

A CARS report, *Technology Advancements and the Impact on Skills Development for the Motive Power Repair and Service Industry Workforce*, identifies 95 new technologies that “have recently been incorporated into, or are likely to be incorporated into new car, light/medium truck and heavy truck vehicles over the next 3 to 5 years.”¹ Of these technologies, about two-thirds are likely to pose “a medium to high knowledge gap for today’s workforce.”² Technological change, the report notes, is being driven by a number of factors, including consumer demand for advanced features like onboard entertainment systems and safety improvements such as run-flat tires and blind-side alerts.³ Other drivers of change include regulatory factors relating to fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions, which have led to new and emerging technologies such as hybrid technology and E85 flex fuel systems.⁴

Training needs are not limited to technical skills and knowledge. They include a variety of non-technical and business-related needs for skills in areas such as marketing, sales, computers, and financial management⁵—skills that are also critical for business success. Additionally, the industry recognizes the need for more “soft skills” training in customer service and communication to help raise its professional profile.

1 CARS, *Technology Advancements and the Impact on Skills Development for the Motive Power Repair and Service Industry Workforce* (Ottawa: CARS, 2009), 2. According to employers and employees, the five most significant new vehicle technologies that require skills and upgrading are onboard electronics, hybrid electric technology, diagnostics, advanced braking and body control systems, and emissions controls.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 8.

4 Ibid.

5 CARS, *Performance Driven*, 94.

On Air to Online

CARS OnDemand extends the advantages of the former satellite-based system in a number of key areas. Industry interviewees who transitioned from CARS IDL to CARS OnDemand noted that CARS OnDemand exceeds the former program in terms of cost, convenience, and flexibility. (See Table 1.)

CARS OnDemand in Use

CARS OnDemand is a training tool that is user friendly for automotive repair and service sector employers and employees.

Employers are given administrative accounts from which they create individual learner accounts for their employees. This administrative function allows them to monitor the courses their employees are taking and track the progress they have made.

Through easy-to-navigate learner accounts, employees access lesson modules that contain streamable lesson videos and learning guides that contain exercises and supplementary material. Every module has its own exam which, if passed, generates a certificate of completion.

For more information on CARS OnDemand, what is needed to get started, and how to subscribe, see www.cars-council.ca/ondemandIntro.aspx.

Upgrades to Course Content

Changes in program delivery have allowed improvements to course content. For example, CARS OnDemand is no longer delivered live-to-air as CARS IDL was. Being online allows repair and service video demonstrations—the central feature of CARS OnDemand learning modules—to go through an editing process that lets them get to “the heart of the matter” sooner. This makes lesson videos more engaging and useful to the user. For example, whereas CARS IDL live demonstrations included everything, such as the removal of panels, bolts, and belts, CARS OnDemand lessons focus more on key tasks. This makes course content cleaner and the learning itself more focused.

Internet-based delivery also allows learning modules to be easily revised without requiring the entire demonstration to be reshot—a major production and cost savings advantage. CARS OnDemand course designers are able to add content to pre-existing lessons on the basis of feedback (e.g., through an online feedback tool). For example, one instructor mentioned that a shop uses a different diagnostic tool than the one featured in a learning module. As a result of feedback, part of the demonstration was reshot to include the use of that tool.

Table 1
Advantages of CARS OnDemand Over CARS IDL

| | CARS IDL | CARS OnDemand |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Resource requirements | Satellite dish and decoder, television, VCR (optional for recording lessons). CARS monthly subscription fee. | Computer and high-speed Internet—common in many automotive repair and service sector shops for everyday business needs. Monthly service Internet fee. CARS monthly subscription fee. |
| Accessibility | Available anywhere via satellite dish and decoder. Reception sometimes poor in more distant locations. | Available anywhere via computer and high-speed Internet access. Some locations lack high-speed Internet access. |
| Content delivery | Live, real-time delivery. Content cannot be edited or easily revised. | Not delivered live. Greater production flexibility; content can be edited and revised based on user feedback. |
| Flexibility | Lesson videos typically viewed in staff rooms, lunch rooms, or at home if previously recorded. | Highly portable. Learning modules viewed anywhere a computer and Internet service is available (e.g., at point-of-sale computer stations, on the shop floor with laptops, or at home). |
| Convenience and availability | Users wait for a scheduled broadcast (unless previously recorded), often conflicting with business priorities, or posing time-zone difficulties. | Users select learning modules from the CARS OnDemand curriculum and view instantly. |

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Learning modules are now offered in shorter, more manageable, and more convenient learning segments. Whereas CARS IDL learning modules were delivered in single two-hour blocks, CARS OnDemand learning modules are divided into five chapters—each approximately 25 minutes in length—making it easier for users to undertake training at their own pace.

Upgrades to Curriculum

CARS OnDemand is an affordable subscription-based service. Similar to the CARS IDL program, for a typical price of \$190 per month, or \$2,280 per year, automotive repair and service sector businesses are given access to approximately 300 Internet-based learning modules in key technical and non-technical areas, in both official

languages.¹⁰ By contrast, CARS IDL offered subscribers approximately 175 learning modules.¹¹ (See box “CARS OnDemand Courses and Learning Modules.”)

PROGRAM FEATURES AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

A 2009 CARS report, *Performance Driven: Labour Market Opportunities and Challenges for Canada's Motive Power Repair and Service Sector*, identifies many of the challenges and barriers faced by sector

10 CARS OnDemand pricing arrangements are negotiated with individual organizations; volume purchases can sometimes allow for lower subscription rates.

11 CARS IDL satellite-based training required start-up costs of approximately \$2,000 for equipment. CARS OnDemand requires a monthly Internet subscription—something that many automotive repair and service sector businesses already have to meet their everyday business needs. Internet subscriptions are therefore typically not an added expense of CARS OnDemand training.

CARS OnDemand Courses and Learning Modules

TECHNICAL

- ◆ Air Conditioning Specialist (16 modules)
- ◆ Brakes Specialist (29 modules)
- ◆ Emission Specialist (24 modules)
- ◆ Powertrain Specialist (77 modules)
- ◆ Chassis Electrical Specialist (7 modules)
- ◆ Inspection and Installation Specialist (11 modules)
- ◆ Engine Electrical Specialist (43 modules)
- ◆ Chassis Specialist (16 modules)
- ◆ Body Electrical Specialist (59 modules)
- ◆ Hybrid (9 modules)
- ◆ Truck Electrical Accessories Specialist (15 modules)
- ◆ Truck Diesel Engines Specialist (30 modules)
- ◆ Truck Gasoline Engines Specialist (12 modules)
- ◆ Truck Chassis Specialist (8 modules)
- ◆ Truck Drivetrain Specialist (30 modules)
- ◆ Small Engines (3 modules)
- ◆ Rim and Tire Specialist (14 modules)
- ◆ Truck Inspection and Maintenance Specialist (2 modules)
- ◆ Truck Brake Specialist (4 modules)
- ◆ Truck Air Conditioning Specialist (4 modules)

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT

- ◆ Personal Computers (12 modules)
- ◆ Legal Matters (30 modules)
- ◆ Business Management (39 modules)
- ◆ Financial Practices (25 modules)
- ◆ Customer Relations (31 modules)
- ◆ Sales and Marketing (13 modules)
- ◆ Office Administration (4 modules)
- ◆ Operations Management (6 modules)
- ◆ Mentor Coach (23 modules)

COLLISION

- ◆ 3M (3 modules)
- ◆ PPG (16 modules)
- ◆ BASF (9 modules)
- ◆ CAR-O-Liner (1 module)
- ◆ Dupont (17 modules)
- ◆ Sherwin Williams (2 modules)

SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ Transportation of Dangerous Goods (2 modules)
- ◆ Safety and Environment (5 modules)

PARTS STORE

- ◆ Parts Sales and Marketing (30 modules)

Source: CARS OnDemand, "What is CARS OnDemand?" www.cars-council.ca/ondemandIntro.aspx. (This list is as of January 2011. CARS OnDemand curriculum is continually being updated. For updates on the availability of new courses and learning modules, see www.cars-council.ca.)

businesses to increase support for workplace training.¹² Half of the businesses identified a lack of training programs offered near the location of the business as one such impediment. Other top barriers identified include insufficient time to make training available to workers; a lack of training that meets the needs of the business; training programs that are available only during a business's busiest season; and no budget to provide training.

CARS OnDemand is a training option that largely overcomes these challenges by addressing business needs through relevant and meaningful training (including courses on all popular vehicle makes and models) that is flexible, convenient, and cost-effective. This section looks at some of the factors that make CARS OnDemand an increasingly valued and used training option among automotive repair and service sector employers and employees.

When and Where Convenient

Making training convenient is crucial to fostering its uptake. As one automotive repair and service shop owner said, "If you want people to buy in to something, don't make them jump through hoops." CARS OnDemand, for example, is easily and readily used by shops in a number of settings or environments, including training rooms, on the garage floor, and outside of work. This allows businesses to use the training program in ways that fit with their own unique contexts and demands. For example:

- ◆ a major national chain, with over 350 stores, delivers CARS OnDemand training in rooms equipped with banks of two to three computers;
- ◆ a small, independent repair shop allows employees to access CARS OnDemand through eight computer stations and two wireless laptops that can be used anywhere in the shop (e.g., a garage bay);
- ◆ another small repair shop has a room reserved for employees to take CARS OnDemand training during designated training times free from the noise and distractions of the garage; and

¹² CARS, *Performance Driven*, 110.

- ♦ a parts store facilitates employees' access to the CARS OnDemand learning modules at its point-of-sale computer stations, which they can use between customer interactions.

A significant advantage of CARS OnDemand is that it fits more easily into the work schedules of employees than off-site, classroom-based training options—which require employees to spend time away from the workplace. Employees can view learning modules when they have the time (e.g., if they are waiting for a vehicle to arrive, or if they are unable to perform their regular duties on account of injury or health-related issues). The ability to “save and hold” lesson videos results in no disruptions to day-to-day business priorities.

CARS OnDemand gives automotive repair and service shop users training at the click of a button, rather than having to wait until a course is scheduled.

The flexibility of the CARS OnDemand training program also allows learning to take place at home. A service manager at a large repair and service shop noted that some employees on medical leave log in to their CARS OnDemand accounts at home to maintain and upgrade their skills and knowledge. One parts store counterperson on a leave of absence said that CARS OnDemand allows him to keep up-to-speed and also “have a little fun at home.” (For more information on the issue of training time in the sector, see box “Training Time—A Point of Contention.”)

At the Click of a Button

CARS OnDemand gives automotive repair and service shop users training at the click of a button, rather than having to wait until a course is scheduled—either in a classroom or through televised delivery.¹³

This is a helpful feature for busy automotive repair and service sector businesses. As one interviewee noted, if a vehicle with an unfamiliar make or servicing need is scheduled to enter a shop the next day, employees can

Training Time—A Point of Contention

In the automotive repair and service sector, there are different attitudes about when training should be undertaken (e.g., during employees' time on weekends and evenings, or during paid time in the workplace).

Several business owners interviewed for this case study say they provide time at work for employees to undertake CARS OnDemand training.

- ♦ One small repair and service shop owner said that he provides time at work for his technicians, apprentice, and service advisor to take CARS OnDemand training. It is now part of the technicians' job requirements to take two CARS OnDemand courses per month.
- ♦ At a national chain, with over 600 locations across the country, CARS OnDemand training (used with in-house training material) is required for all sales staff. Time on the job is scheduled for them to complete it.

Many business owners, on the other hand, feel that paying for employee CARS OnDemand accounts is support enough, and that employees should take training on their own time. And while some employees in the sector take advantage of the availability of CARS OnDemand at home, the fact remains that a lack of time to take training outside of work is the greatest training barrier reported by employees in the sector.¹

Making time available at work for training can be difficult given the resource constraints in many automotive repair and service sector businesses (particularly small and independent ones). Nevertheless, providing time at work for employees to take training is a good way to increase the amount of training that employees are likely to pursue. It can also help to foster a workplace culture that promotes and celebrates learning achievements. (See “Good Leadership and Workplace Culture.”)

¹ CARS, *Performance Driven*, 11.

access CARS OnDemand and find a course that addresses the issue—in time to either refresh their understanding of a repair or servicing issue or learn about it before the vehicle arrives.

While there is a need for proactive training in the sector, training often occurs only when the need is immediate¹⁴ (e.g., when a vehicle with an unfamiliar or unique problem comes to a shop). In these cases, employees can access CARS OnDemand course content “on the go.” This, according to one automotive service technician, makes CARS OnDemand useful not just as a training program, but also as an interactive reference manual—a useful tool that adds to a shop's productivity and performance.

¹³ According to a national training manager of a major Canadian company, scheduling was the biggest problem with CARS IDL.

¹⁴ CARS, *Performance Driven*, 101.

Cost-Effectiveness

Another key to the value and success of the CARS OnDemand training program is its cost-effectiveness.

With the average classroom-based training course priced at about \$200 per person (a conservative figure quoted from various interviewees), the cost advantages of CARS OnDemand are easy to illustrate. For example, if five employees at a business each take classroom-based training courses six times a year, the cost to the business in course fees alone would be approximately \$6,000. This does not include the added costs of accommodation or travel—or the immediate cost to the business in terms of lost employee productivity. By contrast, if five employees each viewed six CARS OnDemand courses in a year, the cost to the business is \$2,280 a year. The cost per course, per student is \$38. Many employees, it should be noted, view many more than 12 courses a year—reducing the cost per course/per student accordingly.

Automotive repair and service sector establishments are in the business of selling their skills, knowledge, and expertise to automotive aftermarket consumers.

If an automotive repair and service sector business does not already have computers or Internet access, this is an added expense of the training program. However, computers with Internet access are increasingly common in automotive repair and service sector businesses for meeting everyday business needs.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of CARS OnDemand's cost advantage, as noted by several interviewees, is that they would not be able to support their training needs without the program. An interviewee representing a major company with over 2,000 locations across the country said this about CARS OnDemand, "I don't know where we would be without it. We would be lost in our training needs."

VALUE AND IMPACTS FOR BUSINESSES

Automotive repair and service sector businesses, including repair shops and parts stores, are in the business of selling their skills, knowledge, and expertise to automotive aftermarket consumers. It is no surprise, then, that up-to-date skills are key to business success. "We need every

inch we can get," said the owner of a small repair and service shop. "[CARS OnDemand] is a relatively low-cost way of getting everybody up-to-speed." Ultimately, this translates into increased productivity, performance, and profitability for Canada's automotive repair and service sector businesses.

Enhanced Productivity

By upgrading the skills and knowledge of employees, businesses are often able to increase their levels of productivity, as employees are able to perform their core functions—such as vehicle repair and service—with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

This efficiency is important for Canada's repair and service sector businesses—particularly the smaller shops with tight margins. Productivity must rise in proportion to increases in wages, said the owner of one small repair and service shop.

Efficiency in the automotive repair and service sector involves minimizing time spent on diagnostics and troubleshooting as much as possible. Making a good profit margin, said another repair and service shop owner, requires that employees be properly trained, with business-ready skills and abilities.

By upgrading employees' skills and knowledge, businesses may increase productivity because their employees can perform duties with more efficiency and effectiveness.

As another repair and service shop owner explained, repair and service are seldom simple matters of receiving a customer's vehicle and fixing it. New skills and knowledge requirements—even for simple tire changes—often require a certain amount of skills "refreshing" before repair and service can be conducted. Technicians, for example, need to know how to properly align directional tires and work with tire pressure monitoring systems. Skills refreshing can be minimized with proper training, making diagnostics and troubleshooting, on the whole, more efficient. This results in increased productivity and profitability.

Enhanced Performance

Working quickly, of course, is not everything. Performing a job properly is critical for business profitability—not to mention customer satisfaction. Repair and service shop owners and managers noted that CARS OnDemand improves overall employee performance, allowing for better-quality repair and servicing. As the owner of one repair and service shop put it, “This program teaches them to do it right.”

A number of interviewees said that CARS OnDemand training results in a reduction of the number of mistakes made in machine and equipment repair. Proper training also leads to a reduction in workplace accidents.¹⁵ CARS OnDemand curricula include a number of courses on safety and environment, designed to help employees identify workplace hazards and support workplace compliance with Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System regulations. In addition, a course on Vehicle Hoist Operation and Safety teaches employees how to comply with provincial *Occupational Health and Safety Act* regulations on hoists.

Features that distinguish a business in consumers’ eyes include how front-line staff interact with customers to determine what is wrong with their vehicles, and the professional and presentable appearance of a shop.

The CARS OnDemand curriculum is designed to maximize employee effectiveness—even in areas where skills and knowledge gaps are not yet recognized. For example, one repair and service shop owner said that before finding a certain CARS OnDemand training course, employees at his garage were using a scan tool at 25 per cent capacity. The employees’ abilities to use the tool more effectively increased after they took CARS OnDemand learning modules that trained them on a number of the tool’s other features.

¹⁵ See Alison Campbell, *What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You: Literacy’s Impact on Workplace Health and Safety*, July 2010. www.conferenceboard.ca/e-Library/abstract.aspx?did=3661.

Enhanced Professionalism and Sector Image

Repair and service shops are becoming increasingly high-tech work environments, and the technical skills and knowledge needed to succeed in this environment continue to rise. So too has the need to improve the sector’s non-technical skills and knowledge—including business-related skills, employability, and essential skills (e.g., communications, numeracy, business literacy, and business integrity). Interviewees noted that there is a sector-wide need to address “professionalism gaps” (e.g., in terms of customer interactions, business management, and workplace culture) now and in the future.

CARS OnDemand helps to address this need through learning modules in customer service management, including professional phone skills, sales and marketing skills, communications, and “creating a culture of customer care.” Courses such as these are important for the sector’s front-line staff, many of whom deal with increasingly knowledgeable and demanding customers. Today’s consumers are sophisticated and they know when they have had good service, said a CARS staff member. There are higher expectations, both in terms of workmanship and in the quality of customer service.

This was corroborated by a service manager at a large repair and service shop. “Customers are different than how they used to be,” he explained. “Today they are knowledgeable.” Customers no longer bring their vehicles in and just toss the counterperson the keys—they are much more involved. “So if you are not knowledgeable at the front counter as well [as on the shop floor], then you fail before you start.”

People expect that repair and service shops know how to fix a car, said one curriculum developer. The features that distinguish a business in the eyes of consumers include things such as how front-line staff interact with customers to determine what might be wrong with their vehicles, and the professional and presentable appearance of a shop. Those shops that succeed in developing these features—in addition to delivering the expert service that customers expect—are more likely to attract and retain customers.

One owner of a parts store described how his employees improved their professionalism and customer service skills after completing a number of CARS OnDemand learning modules: “Quality of customer service sure is better. They understand the basics of how to talk to a customer . . . and it makes them a little more professional, which is what we’re all looking for.”

Improved public image helps the automotive repair and service sector with its workforce recruitment needs that have been shown to be affected by poor public image.

Increasingly, automotive repair and service sector businesses recognize the critical importance of business-related, or “soft-skills” training, to business success. “It is overwhelming,” said another CARS OnDemand curriculum developer, “the number of course ideas coming from our [curriculum advisory] committees around upping the professionalism and upping the bar.” (See the “Advisory Committees and Curriculum Development” section of this case study.) He went on to add that he realizes some people have a certain image of the industry—one that everyone is working to change. Improved public image not only helps the small repair and service shop down the street attract and retain new customers. It also helps the sector with its workforce recruitment needs that have been shown to be affected by poor public image.¹⁶

New Business Opportunities

The more skills and knowledge employees have in the automotive repair and service sector (e.g., having the capacity to diagnose, service, or repair different types of vehicles and technical challenges), the more sources of potential business can be pursued. This was illustrated by a training manager speaking on behalf of his 361 stores. Before CARS OnDemand offered courses on hybrid technology, he said, his stores were often hesitant to take on hybrid vehicles. Now that learning modules provide instruction on hybrid systems and technologies, his stores and employees have the confidence and ability to pursue a new range of business opportunities.

¹⁶ Campbell, *What You Don't Know Can Hurt You*, 7.

This is also taking place in the sector’s small repair and service shops. An owner of a small shop said that even his apprentice is taking advantage of CARS OnDemand learning modules, allowing the business to bring in new types of work. (See box “A Bumpy Road Ahead” for a description of some of the challenges facing businesses that do not maintain up-to-date skills and knowledge.)

A Bumpy Road Ahead

Automotive repair and service sector businesses that do not support skills and knowledge upgrading face an uncertain future, as the vehicles they work with become increasingly complex. And there is every indication that the fast pace of technological change in the industry will remain. “It’s never-ending,” said the owner of a small, independent repair shop, referring to the steady inundation of new vehicle technologies. The owner wondered whether he would be able to maintain the current variety of repair and service work that his shop currently engages in.

According to interviewees, the result of under-investing in skills and knowledge upgrading may be an increase of sector consolidation into larger repair and service shops that have the resources to better support training in specialized skill sets, or with specializations in certain vehicle makes.¹ For smaller, independent shops (those with fewer than three service bays, which continue to make up the majority of the sector²), investing in training is necessary for future business viability.

¹ For more on sector consolidation, see CARS, *Performance Driven*, 2.

² CARS, *Performance Driven*, 2.

VALUE AND IMPACTS FOR EMPLOYEES

A full picture of the value of CARS OnDemand to the sector must include a consideration of the impacts the training has on employees. For many of the sector’s employees, CARS OnDemand is improving employability outcomes, confidence, and job satisfaction.

Employability

One of the most important impacts of the CARS OnDemand training program is its ability to help employees develop or maintain the skills, attitudes, and behaviours they need to participate and progress in the automotive repair and service sector. According

to one repair and service shop owner, a technician who goes two or three years without training will become useful for nothing but tire changes, adding “That’s not the kind of technician you want.” Nor is it the kind of technician that anyone wants to be.

For one young technician, taking CARS OnDemand training is one way to help ensure job security. These days, “It’s not as though you go to school once and learn all you need to know for the rest of your career.” Having up-to-date skills and knowledge, he said, will keep him employable at an independent shop that performs repair and service on a variety of different vehicle makes and models.

Confidence and Job Satisfaction

A number of interviewees noted that by being better trained through CARS OnDemand, they are able to perform their roles and tasks at a higher level, leading to increased confidence, professionalism, and job satisfaction. For example:

- ♦ A counterperson at a parts store mentioned that he likes CARS OnDemand training because with it, he is better able to answer technical questions from his customers, giving him more overall job satisfaction. Training contributes to an employee’s ability to perform his or her job more effectively, and to increase his or her workplace contribution—both of which serve to increase pride and passion for one’s work.
- ♦ In the words of one repair and service shop owner, CARS OnDemand training has meant that his employees “shadow” less often behind co-workers. CARS OnDemand gives his employees the confidence and knowledge needed to take initiative, act as leaders in the workplace, and solve problems independently.
- ♦ Additionally, the owner of one repair and service shop mentioned that because of CARS OnDemand’s cost-effectiveness and wide offering of courses, training is available for all of his employees; he does not need to pick and choose among employees to send to classroom-based training alternatives. The result is that his employees feel equally valued and supported in their training needs, helping to improve workplace morale.

Workplace Attraction

The availability of training such as CARS OnDemand can help attract and retain employees in the automotive repair and service sector. According to the national training manager of a large company, a repair and service technician accepted a job at one of his shops because of the training it offers (of which CARS OnDemand is a key element). The employee knew that “without training, he wouldn’t be a technician very long.” The interviewee noted that the employee wanted to make sure that “the store was qualified for him” (i.e., that it supports and recognizes the value of training).

CARS Council is uniquely positioned to address the skills and knowledge needs of the automotive repair and service sector on a national, regional, and local level.

Many automotive repair and service technicians see the connection between training and their own personal success in the industry and seek out workplaces that support this. (Some individuals, outside of the industry, also seek out and make use of CARS OnDemand training for professional success—see box “CARS OnDemand in Colleges.”) According to a number of interviewees, this is especially true among the younger generation of automotive repair and service technicians who have entered the industry at a time when rapid vehicle technology advancements are the norm, and who have a long way to go before retirement. For this generation of workers, continual skills and knowledge upgrading is a new job requirement.

PARTNERS FOR SUCCESS

CARS Council is uniquely positioned to address the skills and knowledge needs of the automotive repair and service sector on a national, regional, and local level. With the support of the Government of Canada’s Sector Council Program, CARS Council is able to connect with multiple stakeholders in the automotive repair and service sector—including employees, employers, and training and education providers—leading to a more competitive and competent workforce. (For more on the Sector Council Program, see box “About the Sector Council Program.”)

CARS OnDemand in Colleges

CARS OnDemand extends beyond the automotive repair and service shop floor. In 11 colleges, throughout seven Canadian provinces, the program is used by college instructors in the motive power repair field as a professional development resource.

Niagara College is one institution where instructors—many of whom have used CARS OnDemand in previous jobs—use CARS OnDemand for professional development purposes. According to a representative from the college, CARS OnDemand training enhances the performance of instructors at Niagara College by keeping them up-to-speed on new vehicle technologies and associated repair and servicing issues relevant to the courses in their teaching portfolios.

Some college instructors make use of CARS OnDemand courses to update their skills and knowledge on the latest developments in vehicle technology, or just to quickly refresh themselves on a few key points before entering a classroom. In addition, many instructors take CARS OnDemand exams, adding certificates of course completions to their resumé.

The Niagara College representative described the program's value to the college, in light of its busy academic schedule, this way: "It's so difficult to send some of these fellas [instructors] off campus to some of these [other professional development training options] because our programs run pretty well all year round. Now we can slot CARS OnDemand training into their non-contact hours during the week, and that works out really well."

At colleges across Canada, the representative added, professional development budgets have shrunk. Compared with other training options, CARS OnDemand is the most cost-effective program out there. For reasons such as this, the representative said, CARS OnDemand is first on the department's list of professional development expenditures to renew every year, adding that the department always makes sure to have enough in the budget for a CARS OnDemand subscription.

When asked about student impacts, the representative did not hesitate to say that with the help of CARS OnDemand, students are getting a better-quality education.

About the Sector Council Program

CARS Council is a national sector council, supported by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program. Sector councils are national partnership organizations found in key segments of the Canadian economy that bring together business, labour, and educational stakeholders to address human resources challenges. For over two decades, sector councils have acted as important bridges between the private and public sectors, building and sustaining human capital through the development of resources such as labour market information, training programs, recruitment and skills development initiatives, and national occupational standards and accreditation programs.

Through the ongoing support of the Government of Canada, sector councils continue to assist over 30 sectors in the Canadian economy to respond to skills and labour market issues. For more information on the Sector Council Program, see www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/sector_councils/information.shtml.

Advisory Committees and Curriculum Development

Automotive repair and service sector businesses are not merely in the "passenger's seat," as passive consumers of course material. They are involved at different levels of the program's development, including curriculum planning, learning module development, and program improvement. This involvement is crucial to help keep CARS OnDemand program staff up-to-speed with training needs. (See box "Eyes on the Road and Ears to the Ground.")

Advisory committee participants reflect a variety of occupations in the sector—from national training managers to repair and service technicians on the shop floor.

Curriculum advisory committees facilitate discussion on training needs and priorities in core areas (e.g., brakes, advanced technologies, or business management). CARS OnDemand curriculum developers leverage the knowledge and expertise of the advisory committee members. Their input ensures that the content of CARS OnDemand training courses meets the actual needs of automotive repair and service sector businesses and addresses relevant and realistic work scenarios. As one curriculum developer noted, "We've got automotive knowledge, and understand what some of the key topic areas are, but if we're not hitting on the most important pieces [within the CARS OnDemand learning modules], then nobody's going to care about it. It has to hit the 'pains' of the business."

Advisory committee participants reflect a variety of occupations in the sector—from national training managers of large corporations to repair and service technicians on the shop floor. Additionally, participants come from across Canada, representing regional differences in common types of vehicles and servicing needs (e.g., with a preponderance of Asian vehicle makes and models in the West, pickup trucks in the North, and older vehicles in the East, according to one interviewee). The committee's diversity helps to ensure that CARS OnDemand curriculum addresses a mix of needs.

Eyes on the Road and Ears to the Ground

CARS Council maintains a wide network of relationships with businesses in the automotive aftermarket through which information on emerging training issues is obtained. This is critical to CARS OnDemand curriculum developers' ability to anticipate future training needs, bring curriculum development project ideas to the advisory committees for discussion, and implement relevant learning modules.

For example, one CARS OnDemand course instructor noted that he frequently visits automotive repair and service shops to keep himself up-to-date, saying "It's the only way you can know what guys are encountering." He added that many CARS OnDemand program staff have backgrounds working in dealerships, with whom they keep in touch about advancements in vehicle technology. Similar relationships exist with original equipment manufacturers and suppliers in the automotive aftermarket.

Through these networks and interactions with industry, CARS OnDemand staff are able to stay ahead of the training and learning needs of the automotive aftermarket—which begins to see new vehicle models and technologies three to four years after first being introduced to the market.

In addition to brainstorming on training needs, said one curriculum developer, advisory committee meetings help to grow the automotive repair and service sector by providing a forum for sharing best practices in training and training success stories. Fostering collaboration among businesses that would otherwise be competitors is a key advantage of CARS Council's sectoral-based approach to skills development.

Government Support

While industry subscription fees support the costs of administering and delivering CARS OnDemand training, the development of new courses is funded through HRSDC. It is this support that makes it possible for CARS OnDemand to continue to address the sector's training needs. The president of CARS Council noted, "Without the Sector Council Program, CARS Council would not exist. CARS OnDemand programming would

have a challenge remaining current. Over 42,000 participants currently rely on CARS OnDemand to keep current with the latest vehicle technology, allowing them to remain competitive."¹⁷

CARS OnDEMAND TRAINING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Employer-sponsored training has been on the rise in the sector since 2005.¹⁸ CARS OnDemand has helped contribute to this increase by fostering buy-in and uptake in a brand of training that is convenient, cost-effective, and addresses a wide range of technical and business-related needs. As of December 2010, there were 39,429 individual learner accounts for CARS OnDemand,¹⁹ representing roughly 1 in 10 of the sector's approximately 300,000 employees (and a more than fivefold increase over the 7,119 CARS IDL learner accounts last counted in 2005).²⁰

Although many automotive repair and service sector businesses recognize the impacts of skills and knowledge upgrading, there is an opportunity to further increase the quality and quantity of employee engagement in CARS OnDemand training.

17 E-mail correspondence with Jennifer Steeves, President, CARS Council, January 27, 2011.

18 CARS, *Performance Driven*, 103. According to the report, in-house training is still the most common type of training occurring in automotive repair and service sector businesses; 54 per cent of business respondents in 2009 reported supporting online training in their workplaces.

19 CARS data obtained through e-mail correspondence with Linda Brown, Project Manager, CARS Council, December 7, 2010.

20 A number of automotive repair and service sector business owners noted an increase in the amount of training occurring in their shops after first subscribing to CARS OnDemand. One owner of a small repair and service shop, for example, noted a 75 per cent increase. In addition, many businesses using CARS OnDemand note year-over-year increases in the amount of training taken. The national training manager of a major Canadian company with 361 stores noted a 15 per cent increase in the amount of training taken by individual employees—a significant figure, which he attributes to employers and employees becoming more accustomed to the program. And a training manager of another major company, representing over 2,000 stores across the country, noted that training in her organization, which includes CARS OnDemand learning modules, has increased by about 20 per cent per year.

Maximizing the Quantity and Quality of Employee Engagement

In 2010, fewer than two CARS OnDemand course videos were viewed, on average, per individual learner account.²¹ This suggests that there is room to improve the participation rates of many employees—some of whom may have CARS OnDemand learner accounts, but rarely use them. One repair and service shop owner, for example, noted a recent decrease in the number of course videos viewed by employees in his shop (despite a lot of initial enthusiasm and commitment to training from his employees). This is an outcome that he considers to be the result of poor training management.

CARS OnDemand gives users the freedom to pursue training at their own pace, to take the courses that they want or need, and in multiple learning environments.

In addition, although CARS OnDemand can deliver substantial value to businesses and employees when used as an “on-the-go” reference and information tool, the program’s use as a training system is not always maximized when employees do not give course work the time and attention needed for learning (e.g., by viewing course videos in their entirety, completing learning guide exercises, or completing course exams). As a repair and service shop owner noted, a lack of CARS OnDemand exams being completed²² by employees may suggest that some are not taking advantage of CARS OnDemand’s full use and value as a system for proactive skills and knowledge upgrading.

RUNNING ON ALL CYLINDERS: HOW BUSINESSES MAXIMIZE CARS OnDEMAND’S USE AND VALUE

Training that is Internet delivered and largely undertaken independently by employees is still relatively new to an industry in which training has traditionally been

classroom based. CARS OnDemand gives users the freedom to pursue training at their own pace, to take the courses that they want or need, and in multiple learning environments. Given this flexibility, there are many things that employers can do, and are doing, to maximize employee engagement, to maximize training outcomes, and to benefit from the full use and value of CARS OnDemand as a skills and knowledge upgrading system. This includes implementing training plans, offering incentives to complete learning modules, and promoting a workplace culture that supports positive learning habits and attitudes.

Training Plans

The national training manager of a large automotive repair and service sector company says that training is like exercise: it requires commitment, discipline, and focus. Training plans that structure and direct the learning process are an important part of the overall discipline that ensures commitment and progress over the long term. As a simple technique to help prevent training “laziness,” the interviewee recommends that shop owners and training managers plan and schedule employee training time as though it were repair and servicing work. By writing work orders that set aside specific blocks of training time between automotive repair and servicing work, service sector businesses ensure that training happens on a regular and consistent basis—helping to make training a habit.

Another training manager added that CARS OnDemand is best used in conjunction with CARSability²³ (the online CARS skills and knowledge assessment tool) to identify training needs, and to plan appropriate skills and knowledge upgrading with CARS OnDemand—rather than relying on informal day-to-day monitoring of performance to identify training needs, which is currently the primary means of skills assessment for employers and employees in the sector.²⁴ The interviewee added that effective training takes patience and constant monitoring from employers.

21 In 2010, there were 39,429 CARS OnDemand learner accounts and 55,933 course viewings.

22 Although nearly 56,000 CARS OnDemand course viewings took place in 2010, the number of exams completed by CARS OnDemand learners was 12,486—less than a quarter. CARS data obtained through e-mail correspondence with Linda Brown, Project Manager, CARS Council, December 7, 2010.

23 CARSability analyzes technical skills gaps in 34 automotive after-market occupations and offers appropriate training. For more information on the online tool, see www.carsability.ca/default.aspx.

24 CARS, *Performance Driven*, 89.

The connection between the use of training plans and overall business success is demonstrated in CARS' 2009 report, *Performance Driven*. The report notes that automotive repair and service sector businesses with revenue growth from 2007–08 were “more likely to have both a training plan and a training budget” in place than those that do not.²⁵

Incentives and Recognition

Incentive systems play an important role in maximizing employee participation in CARS OnDemand training, especially in cases where employers do not provide paid time at work to complete the training.

Recognizing and celebrating training achievements encourages employees to learn, fosters a culture of lifelong workplace learning, and even promotes a healthy competition among employees to complete as many courses as possible.

Business owners encourage and motivate employees to participate in CARS OnDemand training in various ways. For example, employees may be given permission to go home early when an exam is completed or given a pair of hockey tickets. Financial incentives also exist and are important to automotive repair and service sector employees. For example, some businesses pay employees a bonus, or give a pay raise to recognize learning accomplishments.

Acquiring CARS OnDemand course completion certificates by passing exams can also be an incentive for the sector's employees to take more training. Certificates of course completion give many employees a sense of personal accomplishment, and can also create esteem, respect, and trust among co-workers.

Some business owners and managers recognize and celebrate training achievements through non-monetary ways, such as posting certificates of course completions on shop walls, or congratulating employees—who have either completed certain learning modules or passed CARS OnDemand exams—at staff meetings. Practices

such as these encourage employees to learn, fosters a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace, and in some cases, even promotes a healthy competition among employees to complete as many courses as possible.

Some interviewees suggested ways that CARS OnDemand could better recognize course completions—for example, through plaques, badges, or patches that employees can place on their uniforms. Others suggested that employees who complete a certain number of courses in a specific area or subject be recognized with formal designations such as “CARS Air Conditioning Specialist.” Additionally, CARS could recognize exceptional individual training accomplishments (e.g., in terms of number of courses completed) through provincial or national ceremonies, case study profiles of learners, ranking systems, or contests.

Good Leadership and Workplace Culture

Employees' attitudes toward training and learning depend, in part, on the workplace culture of individual automotive repair and service sector businesses. Employers have an important role to play in addressing employee indifference or resistance to training.

Owners need to see the value in supporting those employees seeking out ways to improve their performance.

As one interviewee with an extensive career in the industry, as a technician and a shop owner, explained: for many employees, admitting a need for additional training is like admitting that they are not good at their jobs. Many individuals believe that, after completing school or acquiring a trade qualification, their learning is complete. Automotive repair and service sector businesses require a workplace culture in which employees recognize when their skills and abilities need upgrading (whether to deal with new vehicle technologies or to address non-technical skills needs such as communications or customer service), and have the self-confidence to discuss these needs. Similarly, owners need to see the value in supporting those employees seeking out ways to improve their performance—whether they are shop-floor mechanics, technicians, or counterpeople.

25 Ibid., 10.

Shop owners and managers—acting as leaders or mentors—play an important role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace. Employers can lead by example by demonstrating a commitment to their own professional development and growth. They can also promote good workplace learning habits by sharing and applying their own skills and knowledge, discussing and encouraging training goals (ones that address organizational and individual needs), and reinforcing good employee learning behaviours. This may be an area that the CARS OnDemand program can further explore and address, through course modules that promote and support good workplace learning habits and cultures.

CHALLENGES TO GREATER EMPLOYER BUY-IN

CARS OnDemand is a training program that addresses and overcomes many of the industry’s most significant barriers to training (including availability of time, relevance of training to business needs, course availability, and budget²⁶). The program is also highly regarded by those businesses that use it. So what prevents higher levels of business buy-in? The perspectives offered by a variety of interviewees illustrate some of the underlying issues that prevent greater employer support for training.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

An increasing number of automotive repair and service sector businesses understand the critical need for skills and knowledge upgrading, and the positive business impacts that result from it. However, for other businesses, investing in training often takes a back seat to managing their day-to-day operations and immediate business priorities (e.g., repair and service work or sales). As one interviewee noted, the attitude of many automotive repair and service sector business owners, with respect to training, is “We’ll do it when we have the time”—a time that often remains on the horizon.

Understanding the full value of workplace training can be challenging for many automotive repair and service sector businesses. And while many of the business owners interviewed recognize some of the benefits resulting from CARS OnDemand training (e.g., better and faster

diagnostics, improved customer relations skills, reduced workplace accidents), more needs to be done to establish the connection between training investments and business success. Nearly all business owners said that they do not measure their return on training investments in any quantifiable way because it is difficult to identify and distinguish the impacts of training from other environmental or business factors (such as fluctuations in the economy, or enhanced marketing efforts).

For some businesses, investing in training often takes a backseat to managing their day-to-day operations and immediate business priorities—e.g., repairs or sales.

Keeping track of positive returns on training investments (e.g., the business impacts that stem from training) is a good business strategy, and a task that is often made easier when training is properly managed. Automotive repair and service sector businesses, however, do not require complicated metrics to track the impacts of training and learning investments (such as “sophisticated learning-impact dashboards” or “detailed return-on-training-investment scorecards”). The key is that businesses *target* their learning activities to address the most critical business issues that they face; *align* learning activities with the needs of individual employees and current and future goals of the organization; and monitor success through metrics such as improved performance, improved productivity, and customer satisfaction.²⁷ One way to support automotive repair and service sector businesses to make a stronger connection between their training investments and their training outcomes is to have them clearly articulate their training expectations (e.g., what they want to gain from a training activity).

Awareness, Promotion, and Business Buy-In

The principal means of promoting CARS OnDemand is through industry trade publications, trade shows, and presentations at corporate and industry association events. For automotive repair and service sector business owners

26 CARS, *Performance Driven*, 110.

27 Douglas Watt and Kurtis Kitagawa, *Workplace Learning in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Effective Practices for Improving Productivity and Competitiveness* (The Conference Board of Canada, March 2009).

who keep up-to-date with industry developments, and recognize the value and need for training, it seems that the current methods of promoting the use, value, and impacts of CARS OnDemand are achieving results, given the program's growing footprint in the sector.

However, many automotive repair and service sector business owners do not subscribe to trade publications, and do not participate in industry trade shows or events. There may be other venues or forms of media that CARS can use to promote industry awareness of CARS OnDemand. Publications like the 2005 case study *Interactive Distance Learning: Putting the Training Wheels in Motion in Canada's Automotive Repair and Service Shops*, and "word of mouth" from owners who have realized positive impacts from their CARS OnDemand experiences, also help to communicate the value of the training program.

Training buy-in, no matter how convenient and cost-effective a training program may be, depends on an employer's understanding and appreciation of its value.

Nevertheless, increasing buy-in among some automotive repair and service sector businesses—those that are indifferent or resistant to training—could remain a challenge no matter how much the program is promoted. Training buy-in, no matter how convenient and cost-effective a training program may be, depends on an employer's understanding and appreciation of its value. As one interviewee noted, managers who appreciate and support the value of training are often the ones who were themselves employees with positive training experiences.

THE ROAD AHEAD—INCREASING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT WITH CARS OnDEMAND

Increasing buy-in among some automotive repair and service sector employers may be a challenge, but there are a number of initiatives that CARS Council might consider to better engage employers and increase the uptake of CARS OnDemand, such as the following:

Focused Promotion

- ◆ *Produce a new series of CARS OnDemand training success stories:* CARS Council could produce more in-depth stories of individual automotive repair and service sector businesses that have successfully overcome skills and knowledge gaps using CARS OnDemand, as well as resulting business impacts. The series of training success stories would be effective endorsements of CARS OnDemand, published in a variety of formats (e.g., on the CARS Council website; in trade publications; as pamphlets or news briefs for distribution to businesses; in a monthly newsletter, or as video stories using online platforms).
- ◆ *Continue to promote CARS OnDemand training through online sites such as YouTube and industry-stakeholder websites such as Autoserviceworld.com:* In an ongoing effort to introduce new automotive repair and service sector businesses to the CARS OnDemand learning platform and learning modules, CARS Council should continue to develop and promote its series of demonstration videos and CARS learning tips.²⁸ These videos and tips generate greater awareness about the need for and value of training within the sector (or the consequences of not providing training). They offer automotive repair and service sector businesses meaningful and timely tips (a snapshot of the benefits they stand to gain from the CARS OnDemand learning platform) and they profile employers and employees that have benefited from CARS OnDemand.

Additional Assessment and Support

- ◆ *Develop a workplace culture assessment tool for employers:* CARS Council might consider developing a simple online "workplace culture assessment" tool that would help employers understand the factors that support a good workplace training culture, and help them build a culture of lifelong learning in their workplace. It would also assess an employer's level of training leadership and training "savvy."

²⁸ Examples of CARS OnDemand promotional videos and demonstrations can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cars+ondemand&aq=f. Examples of CARS Tech Tips can be found on Auto Service World at www.autoserviceworld.com/videos/.

- ◆ *Develop training plan templates, training impact assessments, and training models for use by automotive repair and service businesses:* CARS Council could develop training plan templates and how-to guides for different automotive repair and service sector businesses (e.g., large and small repair and service shops, parts shops). This would help guide businesses in the design and implementation of targeted training activities. Training impact assessment templates could also be developed to help businesses track and understand the impacts of their training investments. And training models could provide different examples of how training activities might be structured into business operations and strategy.
- ◆ *Support the development of CARS OnDemand training coaches or coordinators:* CARS Council should consider developing training coaches or coordinators (possibly volunteers) to assist business owners and managers to identify training needs and goals, help implement training plans, and provide ongoing guidance and support. Training coaches or coordinators could be regionally based or accessible through the Internet, depending on resources available.

Enhanced Website Presence and Use of New Technologies

- ◆ *Make the CARS OnDemand web pages more employer focused and user friendly:* Promotional material and information on the CARS OnDemand training program, currently located on the CARS Council website, could have greater visibility and functionality if given a separate website and domain (like CARSability). The website could be better designed to address the needs of employers, and answer common questions about subscribing and set-up, resource requirements, costs, use, value, and impacts. The website could also provide more targeted promotional material that touches on the needs of employers and employees.
- ◆ *Integrate better CARS OnDemand and CARSability:* CARS Council should consider better ways of linking the CARS OnDemand and CARSability programs in order to maximize awareness, value, and impact. CARS Council might consider providing limited

access to CARSability assessments before an automotive repair and service sector business subscribes to the CARS OnDemand package. This would raise awareness among automotive repair and service shops about the value and benefits of CARS OnDemand, and help them to better align their training needs with their business goals (e.g., zero workplace injuries, reduced service time per vehicle, and improved workplace morale).

- ◆ *Create a more robust online environment for discussion and exchange of training-related information:* CARS Council could create or make use of new web-based platforms (e.g., online forums, chat rooms, Twitter accounts, RSS feeds, or blogs) for employers, employees, and CARS OnDemand instructors to discuss new products and technological developments, and share tips and best practices.
- ◆ *Leverage new technologies and applications for maximum use and value:* CARS Council could consider ways of enhancing the accessibility of CARS OnDemand course content through different technologies (e.g., mobile devices such as iPads) or services (e.g., podcasts).

Ongoing Recognition

- ◆ *Develop new ways to recognize learning accomplishments:* Some employers and employees interviewed for this case study suggested ways that CARS OnDemand could better recognize course completions. CARS Council could, for example, send individual learners plaques, trophies, badges, or patches to place on their uniforms, in addition to the certificates of course completions that are currently offered.
- ◆ *Recognize levels of achievement:* CARS could recognize exceptional learner accomplishments (e.g., in terms of number of courses completed) through provincial or national ceremonies, case study profiles of learners, ranking systems, or contests. Or, employees who “graduate” with a certain number of course completions in a specific area or subject could be recognized with formal designations such as “CARS Air Conditioning Specialist.”

CONCLUSION

The automotive repair and service sector is getting excellent mileage out of CARS OnDemand. The training program is increasing the amount of training being undertaken in the sector, at a time when advancements in vehicle technology, along with other changes to the sector, are making skills and knowledge upgrading more important than ever for business success.

The need for high-quality skills and knowledge will remain a requirement for the automotive repair and service sector into the foreseeable future. CARS Council and CARS Network will continue to address the sector's needs for convenient, flexible, cost-effective, and accessible training, using the best means available.

Internet delivery makes the program a convenient and flexible user-based training delivery system, with a wide scope for upgrades and additions to content. CARS OnDemand program personnel are always thinking about possible program improvements, such as the addition of new graphics and effects for lesson videos, or the use of new interactive media.

CARS OnDemand demonstrates how the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program can effectively build and sustain human capital through the support of training programs. With continued support from HRSDC and industry stakeholders, there is every indication that CARS OnDemand will continue to play an important role in the development of a highly skilled and competent automotive repair and service sector workforce.

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CARS OnDemand: High-Gear Training for a Sector in the Fast Lane

by *James Stuckey*

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