

M&G Body Shop Not Afraid of Challenges

By Tricia D. Teague



Linda Weil, owner of M&G Body Shop in Cincinnati, Ohio, isn't afraid of change or challenges. In fact, she embraces them. She considers it a key factor to her success as a female shop owner in a male-dominated industry.

"Initially, the biggest challenge was being a true female owner, not just a name-only owner, but an involved, hands-on owner in this industry," said Weil, who bought her shop from its previous owner in 1999. "It's gotten a lot easier now—it's just taken 15 years to get respect. Sooner or later you're going to wear them down and they realize you're not going to go away and cry in a corner. And everything is fine," Weil said with a good-natured laugh.

When Weil purchased M&G, "the business had gone from being a very small shop to being a moderate-sized shop," said Weil. "I was retiring and looking for something to do. My husband has always been in the trade, so I thought, 'Why not? Go ahead and buy it.' We bought the business just six months after the previous owner had completed a \$250,000 addition."

The shop currently services 17-20 cars each week and has gross sales at \$1.25 million. Weil is navigating the changes occurring in the industry and the impact they have on a smaller shop like hers. "The biggest challenge is staying up to date with the technology and having to deal with the insurance company's needs,

the customers' needs, and dealing with the governmental agencies. Trying to juggle all of that at one time is a little bit tough. It's very hard for an independent shop to do that because you can't load level your work in another direction," Weil said.

Weil cites the costs associated with equipment needed to service the new 2015 aluminum trucks as an example. "To buy all the welding equipment and clean room equipment to work on those vehicles is a big investment. If you're a multi, you can load level jobs that require special equipment to one shop, and only finance one set of equipment. But if you're an independent you can't load level," Weil said. "You spend \$285,000 and maybe you see one of those trucks. It's not very cost effective. The insurance company is saying, 'You have to have all this equipment.' But they want to pay you the same rates they were paying 10 years ago and it just doesn't work that way. You have to make some educated decisions on what type of work you're going to be doing and whether you're going to move forward to that level."

Despite M&G's size, Weil said the shop has an advantage because her technicians were among the first to go through training and she has a platinum ICAR instructor on her staff. "It's up in the air for the next year or two. I think most people are in a 'wait and see mode.' Even a lot of dealerships aren't certified yet, because they haven't taken the ICAR classes yet."

Weil is still on the fence about acquiring some pieces. “The welder is the last piece of equipment we have not purchased. I’m still debating on that, because I don’t know if there’s going to be enough of the trucks out there to make it cost effective. I’ve got all the tools that are necessary, and the guys are all certified and trained, so we can do the work. Worst case scenario, I can borrow or rent the welder.”

M&G invests in the things that matter most, like training, investing an average of \$10,000 for each tech per year to keep certifications up to date. However, she also recognizes that the majority of the cars on the road are older, and the skills required to repair them are much harder to find and aren’t covered in the newer trainings.



M&G Body Shop is a small business that stays competitive through embracing change as opportunity

“The generation coming out [of technical schools] now are not being trained to do metal work. They’re not being trained to fix, they’re being trained to bolt parts on. But the industry isn’t quite there yet. On average people are driving a 12-year old car,” Weil said. “You can’t get new parts for these older cars. We had a 1991 Jag in for repair. They do not make quarter panels for this car. I told my tech, ‘The only way we can save it is to cut it off, fix it, and put it back on.’”

Using PartsTrader for ordering parts is one way M&G is using technology changes to its advantage. “When it came to our area, we were on it right away. A lot of shops in our area only did it for State Farm. I made a conscious decision—if I was going to do it for one, I was going to do it for all. It just makes life easier. I have found that, when I get estimates from other

insurance companies, I’m actually getting a better price on the parts. Which is good for me—it gives me an opportunity to make a little more profit on the product,” Weil said.

Weil estimated that as a result of spending less time on the phone calling around for parts, she saves 30% of her day. “I’m not having to call back two or three times to check on the status of something. I look in the system. It’s right there,” Weil said. “It’s given me the time to be able to go after more business and turn jobs more quickly. I’m not having to run around and send returns back and have to track all of that stuff manually. It’s all electronically taken care of now. It gives me the time to go out and do some of the marketing to get more work in here, which is always a plus for a small business. It frees up my time so I can do what I need to do versus the housekeeping things that I was doing before.”

Weil thinks PartsTrader has advantages for smaller shops that can help them stay competitive. “The industry is always in a constant state of change,” said Weil. “I think there’s going to have to be a little more give and take between the shops and insurance companies. I think that PartsTrader has leveled that out for the parts end of things.”

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