



Alan Hargreaves, Director of E.M.A. Computer Solutions, provides an insight into the business role played by estimators.

*“An estimator is someone whose efficiency will boost the bodyshop’s profitability”*

## your sales force

Whilst the process of ‘estimating’ is pretty well known, the full role of an estimator within the bodyshop business is often overlooked. It is fair to say an estimator is:

- A customer-facing sales person – as he or she meets and greets (potential) customers, who are entitled to take their cars elsewhere for repair and who will form either good or bad impressions about the whole bodyshop just from the estimator’s attitude and professionalism;
- A negotiator who frequently has to ‘barter’ with insurance company engineers in order to secure fair prices for work; and
- Someone who ‘feeds’ the shop floor with work – and whose endeavours directly affect the efficiency and utilisation of the shop’s productives.

In addition, an estimator is someone whose efficiency will boost the bodyshop’s profitability but whose mistakes or shortcomings could lead to the failure of the business. However, before taking discussions further it is necessary to ask a fundamental question: how many estimators should a bodyshop have? Surprisingly, few bodyshop owners/managers can answer this question, even though the answer is simple: one full-time

estimator per seven productives.

### Estimator to Productives Ratio

On average an estimator should do eight estimates per day and the average job should equate to 12 hours of work. So 96 hours. However, not all estimates will result in work. Assuming an 80% conversion rate, which is typical for the average estimator, that’s 77 hours of authorised work. With efficient productives to hand the 77 hours of authorised work will keep seven productives fully employed for a day.

Above we assumed an 80% conversion rate, and it is worth noting that not only does the non-converted 20% represent lost revenue but each estimate costs your bodyshop about £25 (or if calculated on Audatext £35).

Accordingly, it is important that estimators, like all good sales people, ‘qualify’ their customers – and you’ll find a useful tip on this subject at [www.emac.org.uk/body/october](http://www.emac.org.uk/body/october)

### MET Technicians are the Best Estimators

Estimators tend to come from the shop floor, so will be former painters, panel beaters or MET technicians. Of these, the MET technicians tend to make better estimators

because they pay more attention to detail. Accordingly, their estimates seldom miss the parts (clips, fixtures, fittings...) that might otherwise be omitted.

Also, ‘parts-savvy’ estimators are least likely to accept automated estimating systems at face-value. Whilst it is easy to use such tools to add panels (etc) to a list of parts needed for the repair, if the tool is not based on the ‘Thatcham methodology’ then the necessary removal and refitting of necessary fixtures and fittings may be overlooked. Indeed, (in my opinion) only one estimating tool comes close to capturing all ancillary procedures associated with a repair and that tool is Byteback Systems’ web-based ‘Aud-It’.

But whatever the background of a shop’s estimators, and whatever tools they’re using, it is important to measure, measure, measure!

- What’s the shop’s estimate conversion rate?
- What’s each estimator’s conversion rate?
- What’s the average profit generated by each estimator?
- How efficient are the productives when working on the jobs from each estimator?

**The answer to these questions will tell you how good a sales force you have.**