ACROSS THE TABLE

BUSINESS CONSULTING

INDUSTRY STACK 18 · AUTO REPAIR SHOP

The Auto Repair Stack

Seven systems for inspection, approval and the service reminders that turn one repair into a customer.

Knowledge Article I18

AI Stack Series · acrossthetable.biz

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WHO THIS IS FOR

You run an independent repair shop, a tire shop or a specialty garage. Your bays are your capacity, your technicians are your constraint, and your customers mostly arrive worried about what it is going to cost.

This guide is for the owner who wants more approved work per vehicle and more vehicles coming back, without being pushy about either.

The honest answer to both is the same thing: show people what you found.

START WITH THE WORK, NOT WITH THE APPS

These are not twenty lists of AI apps. Each stack starts with the jobs a particular business performs, then matches AI and conventional software to those jobs. Treat it as a menu to evaluate, not a shopping list.

For this kind of business the work runs in one line, start to finish:

> **THE PATH THE WORK TAKES**
> Customer → Vehicle → Diagnosis → Repair → Maintenance

Broken into the steps a customer actually moves through:

- Customer
- Vehicle
- Inspection
- Estimate
- Approval
- Repair
- Payment
- Reminder

Read that line left to right. A customer arrives with a vehicle, you inspect, you estimate, they approve or decline, you repair, they pay, and they either come back for the next service or they do not.

The approval step is where the money is. A customer who cannot see the problem declines the work. A customer who is sent a photo of their own worn brake pad, with a plain explanation, approves it — not because they were sold, but because they understood.

THE STACK, PIECE BY PIECE

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Every tool below is matched to one of those steps. You do not need all of them, and you should not buy all of them at once. Read the “What it is” column first and find the step where your business is losing the most time or money.

Tool	The step it covers	What it is	Price
Shopmonkey	Shop management	Shop management — estimates, work orders, parts and payments.	Per month by plan.
Tekmetric	Alternative shop management	Shop management with digital inspections and customer approvals.	Per month by shop.
QuickBooks	Accounting	The small-business accounting standard — books, invoicing, reporting.	Per month by plan.
Square / Stripe	Payments	Card payments, POS hardware and simple business tools.	Percentage per transaction.
Canva	Promotions	Design everything else — decks, social posts, flyers, simple video — with AI help built in.	Free tier; Pro per user/month.
ChatGPT	Customer education and marketing	OpenAI’s general assistant — writing, analysis, research and, with Agent mode, multi-step work.	Free tier; paid plans per user/month.
HubSpot	Service reminders	Customer records, marketing, sales and service in one platform.	Free CRM; paid hubs per month.

Where two names share a row with a slash between them, they do the same job and you pick one, not both. The description shows the first of the two.

The first two rows are alternatives — one shop management system runs the shop. Choose on how good the digital inspection and approval flow is, because that is the feature that pays.

What to watch out for in each one

None of these are reasons not to buy. They are the things owners tell us they wish they had known first.

- Shopmonkey — Migration takes a weekend.
- Tekmetric — Per-shop pricing.

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- QuickBooks — Only as clean as your categorization habits.
- Square — Per-transaction fees. Watch chargebacks.
- Stripe — Per-transaction fees. Watch disputes.
- Canva — Easy to drift off-brand. Lock a brand kit.
- ChatGPT — It sounds confident when it’s wrong. Check anything that touches money, law or a customer.
- HubSpot — Costs step up sharply by tier and contact count.

WHERE AI ACTUALLY FITS IN THIS BUSINESS

Inspection summaries, plain-language repair explanations, service reminders, follow-up, shop-performance analysis.

In plain terms, that means:

- Turning a technician’s inspection notes into an explanation a customer without mechanical knowledge can follow.
- Writing the message that accompanies photos of what was found, so the recommendation reads as information rather than pressure.
- Scheduling service reminders based on mileage and interval instead of hoping customers remember.
- Drafting follow-up to the estimates that were declined, at the point where the issue is about to get worse.
- Reading shop performance — hours sold, approval rates by advisor, which jobs run over — to find where the bays are losing money.

AI should never produce the diagnosis. It explains what your technician found. The moment it starts guessing at a fault from a description, you have a liability problem and an unhappy customer waiting to happen.

WHAT TO SET UP FIRST

Do these in order. Finish one before you start the next. Most owners who try to do all of it in one month end up using none of it.

1. **Run the shop on one management system** Estimates, work orders, parts and payments in one place. The paper ticket system breaks down at exactly the size where mistakes get expensive.
2. **Do digital inspections with photos** This is the highest-return change available to an independent shop. Approval rates rise because customers can see what you are talking about.

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3. **Make approvals happen by text** Waiting on a phone call to approve work is dead bay time. Text approval with photos turns a two-hour delay into a five-minute one.
4. **Set up service reminders** Based on interval and mileage. This is how a repair becomes a relationship.
5. **Then add marketing** Promotions and campaigns are worth it once reminders and inspections are working.

WHAT IT COSTS TO START

Shop management software is priced per month, sometimes by number of users or bays. The digital inspection feature is the one to evaluate hardest, because it is the one with a direct revenue effect.

Payments are a percentage of each transaction, and on larger repair tickets that is real money — worth comparing rates properly.

The right comparison is average repair order value and approval rate. If digital inspections raise approved work per vehicle at all, the software is paid for several times over in a month.

The price column in the table above tells you how each one charges — per user, per location, per contact, or a percentage of every sale — not what you will pay. That is deliberate. The charging model is what decides whether a tool stays affordable as you grow, and it is the part that does not change every quarter. Get the current dollar figure from the vendor's own pricing page before you budget.

THE RULES UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT

Legal · Privacy · Data protection · Security · Compliance · Records · Audit · Risk · Human oversight — underneath every one of the twenty stacks, not an afterthought.

Most states require written estimates and customer authorization before work begins, with rules about how far over the estimate you may go. Your system should capture authorization with a timestamp.

Warranty terms on parts and labor must be disclosed and honored as stated.

Hazardous waste — oil, coolant, batteries, tires — carries disposal and record-keeping requirements.

Vehicle and customer records are personal data. If you photograph vehicle interiors, be aware you may capture personal belongings.

MISTAKES THAT COST THE MOST

- Describing a problem over the phone instead of sending a photograph of it.
- Letting approvals sit while a bay stands empty.

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- No service reminder system, so every customer is a new acquisition.
- Never following up on declined work, which is the warmest list you have.
- Not tracking approval rate by advisor, which is usually a training opportunity hiding in plain sight.

THE CEO DECISION

- What share of recommended work gets approved? Do you know it by advisor?
- How long does the average approval take, and what is that costing in bay time?
- What is your average repair order value, and what moved it last year?
- How many of last year's customers have been back?
- Could you produce written authorization for every job you did last month?

YOUR QUICK REVIEW

- ☐ The shop runs on one management system.
- ☐ Every inspection includes photos sent to the customer.
- ☐ Approvals happen by text, with a record.
- ☐ Service reminders go out on interval and mileage.
- ☐ I track approval rate and average repair order.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
Shopmonkey	www.shopmonkey.io	Independent repair shops replacing paper tickets.
Tekmetric	www.tekmetric.com	Shops selling work through photos and video.
QuickBooks	quickbooks.intuit.com	Clean books your accountant already knows how to read.
Square / Stripe	squareup.com / stripe.com	Selling in person without a merchant-account project.
Canva	www.canva.com	Small teams with no designer who still need consistent-looking work.
ChatGPT	chatgpt.com	Your default thinking partner when you want one tool that does most

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Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
		jobs well.
HubSpot	www.hubspot.com	Small businesses that want one system of record.
Across the Table AI Assessment	acrossthetable.biz/#assessment	Fifteen minutes. Tells you which job to start with before you buy anything.
The Scaling Edge	acrossthetablebiz.substack.com	Weekly newsletter for owners without a business background.

Go deeper on the pieces

Each of these is a full guide comparing the three tools that do that job:

- Ask and reason — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/ask-and-reason/ (covers ChatGPT)
- Make the deck — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/make-the-deck/ (covers Canva)
- Fill the pipeline — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/fill-the-pipeline/ (covers HubSpot)
- Manage the money — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/manage-the-money/ (covers QuickBooks)
- Market by email — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/market-by-email/ (covers HubSpot)

CONTINUE LEARNING

The Across the Table AI Assessment takes fifteen minutes and starts from the work the shop performs.

The guides above compare the tools for each job in plain language.

READ AND CONNECT WITH ACROSS THE TABLE

Across the Table website: https://acrossthetable.biz

The Scaling Edge newsletter: https://acrossthetablebiz.substack.com

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@AcrossTheTableConnie

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