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Owner Steve Vincent places new hires into an apprenticeship program to be trained by more senior installers on remote starters and other product.

Bob Boswood, evolved from a tailgate striping business to a 17,400 square-foot, full-service car and truck accessory store. Auto Trim Design currently employs 34 staff members, with eight installers dedicated to remote starters and other mobile electronics.

Installers in extremely cold climates have a some specific installation hurdles to overcome, according to Vincent. "The cold weather creates a big problem, because most of the electronics on the market fail at about 37 degrees below zero. So we constantly have units in test in different vehicles—store vehicles as well as some of our employees' vehicles—to find out what's new on the market, and what works and what doesn't," said Vincent.

He continued, "If you don't use high-quality raw components, units have a tendency to freeze up or change their molecular structure slightly at that temperature, which changes how they operate."

While the average remote start system takes about three hours to install, Vincent stated that some of the more complex vehicles can take around six hours to complete. One of the more prominent brands the shop sells for its remote start business is Astroflex, according to Vincent.

"We had two other companies that we were working with, but they changed their manufacturing and the product started to fail at 37 degrees below zero," he said.

Auto Trim Design trains its installers. Vincent stated, "When somebody comes in to work in our shop, they don't automatically come in as an installer, regardless of the amount of experience they have. They are first set up in an apprenticeship program, so they work with a seasoned installer to get the system down."

Vincent continued, "Even after the apprentices have their own bays, they still work with a mentor who checks every installation before it goes out of the shop. We warranty all of our remote start systems as long as the vehicles are with the original owner, so we want to make sure that they operate for a long period of time."

JML Audio of Missouri Finds Its Niche in Networking and OEM Integration

Josh Landau, owner of a 12-volt shop in the suburbs of St. Louis, Mo., is determined to ride out the insurgence of complex OEM integration vehicles that are now making up the vast majority of new vehicles in the U.S.

Landau and his two-man staff are carving for themselves a niche at the core of a networking group in the St. Louis region that shares information on solving tough OEM install jobs.

For the last few months, Landau and his staff have been introducing themselves to other specialist stores in the area, as well as at industry events such as KnowledgeFest. They keep in contact through frequent phone calls, e-mails and visits to their stores. His network currently includes four specialist stores that are located within about 30 minutes of JML Audio.

Landau stated, "The bottom line is, we're not in competition with other specialist stores. A lot of the stuff is high-end custom work by appointment. We are not fighting over the same demographic."

JML Audio receives many requests to perform installs with custom interfacing on vehicles that, according to industry standards, cannot be interfaced. Landau found that a lot of shops just don't know how to perform some of the harder 2005 vehicle models such as the Lexus LX430, the Infiniti G35, and the Acura TL. He feels a sense of responsibility to assist his peers by researching and then sharing his findings with members of the network.

Landau stated, "Any newer vehicles that have a combination of factory navigation, factory Bluetooth, or some sort of speed sensor are going to be a challenge. Unless customers want to completely lose those factory systems, it's pretty hard to tie into those." Landau also relies on his tech support contacts for interface lines such as Soundgate, Metra, PAC, Peripheral, and more to help troubleshoot his installs.

"This is not really a job, but a big passion of mine, as well as the guys that work with me. It's not really a 'dollars and cents' industry, from our standpoint. We are huge audiophiles," said Landau.

Landau attributes a lot of the growth at JML Audio—in business since 1997—to their detailed but straightforward Website. Landau mentioned that the content was developed for other dealers, as well as for their potential clients.

"The Internet has definitely hurt the specialist in regard to sales, but at the same time it can help us if it's utilized properly with online photo galleries, so that anyone can look at your work. We put a ton of time into and we update it on a weekly basis with new installs and more," said Landau.

He continued, "Our Website has been crucial to our successes, and we have people driving from three to four hours away to get systems from us. It's



The design and install on this '05 Acura TL was performed by Josh Landau, Garrett Beach, and Adam Stein of JML Audio.

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not because of any other advertising other than word-of-mouth and our Website."

The retailer carries a lot of high-end specialty lines such as AudioControl, Clarion, Dynaudio, Treo and Zapco. Landau frequently gets referrals from local car dealerships as well as Circuit City, who hire his shop to perform high-end custom work like fiberglass. "It's work that they just can't do," he mentioned.

The 12-volt owner has a theory on trends with the big-box stores. "I don't really see Circuit City or Best Buy—as far as their mobile division—being around in five or ten years. A lot of these 2005 and 2006 cars are so well-integrated, and all the big boxes can do is the 'ol' deck and four.' That's no longer going to be a feasible thing," said Landau.

He continued, "We are so hard-core set in our niche that our only competition is ourselves. It's the specialist stores against the big-box stores. If I can help local specialists do better work, it helps the industry as a whole."

Sales Events at Steele Audio Bring Record Numbers During Slow Months

Northern-central California shop Steele Audio, one of the largest in the region, finds a reason just about every month to have a big sale, based on a holiday, a season, or just because, according to Jason Quinn, general manager of the store.

The store scored a record month for October—traditionally a slow time of year—with its "Customer Appreciation Sale" in mid-October. The one-day sale began early and ran until 10 p.m. to capture the business of customers who might have had to work all day. The main draw was a db Drag Racing event, with JL Audio and Rockford Fosgate manufacturers' vehicles brought in.

The shop gave away a Prestige alarm system in a raffle to one lucky winner who participated in the sound-off event. Staff members gave away t-shirts and other promotional items, and treated customers to sandwiches, cakes and refreshments brought in from local shops.

Quinn says they have a great relationship with many manufacturers and are easily able to secure demo vehicles for their event. "We have a lot of pull with all of our manufacturers, because we have a very professional shop presentation," said Quinn.

Lots of product was on sale at the event, with some items discounted up to 70 percent. The store also broke its

Performance to Specifications

