

Implementing extended service hours in a dealership's Fixed Operations department is a strategic move that can significantly enhance customer satisfaction, boost revenue, and provide a competitive edge in today's dynamic automotive market. However, this transition requires careful planning, execution, and ongoing management to ensure success. This comprehensive guide is designed to walk Service Managers through the process of implementing extended service hours, addressing key considerations, potential challenges, and best practices along the way.

Extended service hours can transform a dealership's operations by accommodating customers' increasingly demanding schedules, maximizing facility utilization, and potentially tapping into new customer segments. However, it's not as simple as just keeping the doors open longer. A successful implementation requires a holistic approach that considers staffing, operations, customer communication, and financial implications.

This guide will provide a step-by-step approach to help Service Managers navigate this complex transition. From initial analysis to continuous improvement, each step is crucial in ensuring that extended service hours become a valuable asset to your dealership rather than a drain on resources. Let's dive into the ten key steps for successfully implementing extended service hours in your service department.

1. Analyze Current Operations

Before making any changes, it's crucial to have a clear understanding of your current service department operations. This analysis should be comprehensive, covering all aspects of your service delivery. Start by reviewing your service data for the past 12 months. Look at metrics such as daily and hourly service volumes, average repair times, customer wait times, and bay utilization rates. Identify your busiest days and hours, as well as periods of downtime.

Next, examine your staffing levels and productivity. Analyze technician efficiency and productivity rates, as well as the workload of service advisors. Look for patterns in the types of services performed at different times of the day or week. Also, review your parts department operations, including parts availability and delivery schedules.

Don't forget to analyze your customer data. Look at appointment scheduling patterns, walk-in traffic, and customer feedback regarding service times. This will help you understand when your customers



prefer to bring in their vehicles and if there's unmet demand for service outside your current hours.

Pro-tip:

- Use your Dealer Management System (DMS) to generate detailed reports on service operations.
- Consider using time-motion studies to get a granular view of how time is used in your service bays.
- Involve your team in this analysis – technicians and service advisors often have valuable insights into operational inefficiencies.

Tripping point:

- Relying solely on averages can be misleading. Be sure to look at peak times and seasonal variations.
- Don't ignore seemingly minor inefficiencies – these can compound when you extend your hours.
- Failing to consider the interdependencies between different departments (e.g., service and parts) can lead to incomplete analysis.

Thought starter:

- What are your current bottlenecks in service delivery?
- Are there particular services that could be more efficiently delivered during off-peak hours?
- How does your current staffing align with service demand throughout the day and week?

2. Assess Market Demand

Understanding the market demand for extended service hours is crucial for successful implementation. This step involves a multi-faceted approach to gathering and analyzing data about your customers' needs and preferences, as well as the competitive landscape.

Start by conducting a comprehensive customer survey. This should include questions about preferred service times, challenges with current service hours, and likelihood of using extended hours if offered. Be sure to segment your responses by customer type (e.g., individual owners, fleet customers) and vehicle age, as needs may vary across these groups.

Next, analyze your local competition. This includes not just other dealerships, but also independent repair shops and national chains. Visit their websites, call for information, or even send mystery shoppers to gather data on their service hours, pricing, and special offers related to convenient service times.

Don't forget to consider broader market trends. Research industry reports and attend conferences to understand how consumer expectations for service convenience are evolving in the automotive



sector.

Pro-tip:

- Use multiple channels for your customer survey – email, text, phone, and in-person – to ensure a representative sample.
- Offer an incentive (like a discount on their next service) to encourage survey participation.
- Look beyond just hours – consider asking about interest in services like vehicle pick-up and drop-off or mobile servicing.

Tripping point:

- Low survey response rates can lead to skewed results. Ensure you're reaching a significant portion of your customer base.
- Focusing only on your current customers might miss potential new customers who don't use you due to inconvenient hours.
- Overlooking the specific needs of fleet or commercial customers, who often have different service time requirements.

Thought starter:

- How do your customers' work schedules align with your current service hours?
- Are there specific customer segments (e.g., shift workers) who are underserved by your current hours?
- What unique service time offerings could differentiate you from your competition?

3. Develop a Tailored Strategy

With a clear understanding of your current operations and market demand, the next step is to develop a tailored strategy for extended service hours. This strategy should align with your dealership's overall goals, customer needs, and operational capabilities.

Start by outlining several potential extended hour scenarios. These might include early morning hours (e.g., opening at 6 AM), late evening hours (e.g., closing at 9 PM), weekend hours, or even 24/7 service. For each scenario, consider the types of services you'll offer during extended hours – will it be full service, or limited to specific types of work like oil changes and minor repairs?

Next, create detailed staffing plans for each scenario. This should include not just technicians, but also service advisors, parts department staff, and management. Consider different shift structures like 4-10s, 3-13s, or rotating schedules.

Evaluate the potential impact on your facilities and equipment. Will you need to make any modifications to accommodate extended hours? Think about lighting, security, and access to tools and parts during off-hours.



Pro-tip:

- Create a scoring system to objectively evaluate each scenario based on factors like potential revenue, customer satisfaction, and operational feasibility.
- Consider a phased approach, starting with the extended hours that have the highest demand and lowest operational impact.
- Don't forget to factor in local labor laws and regulations regarding overtime and shift work.

Tripping point:

- Trying to offer too much too soon can strain resources and lead to poor execution.
- Underestimating the need for management presence during extended hours can lead to operational issues.
- Failing to consider the impact on support functions like IT and facilities management.

Thought starter:

- Which extended hour option aligns best with your dealership's brand and customer service philosophy?
- How can you structure extended hours to create new opportunities, like dedicated fleet service times?
- What unique selling propositions can you create around your extended hour offerings?

4. Financial Modeling

A robust financial model is crucial for justifying and guiding the implementation of extended service hours. This step involves creating detailed projections of the financial impact of your proposed extended hours strategy.

Start by estimating the potential increase in service volume. Use your market demand assessment to project how many additional repair orders you might expect during extended hours. Break this down by service type, as some services may be more popular during extended hours than others.

Next, calculate the expected revenue from this additional volume. Consider not just labor revenue, but also parts sales and potential increases in customer pay work. Don't forget to factor in any promotional pricing you might offer to drive initial adoption of extended hours. On the cost side, create detailed projections for additional labor costs, including potential overtime or shift differentials. Factor in increased utilities costs, additional wear and tear on equipment, and any new investments in tools or facilities upgrades needed to support extended hours.

Develop multiple scenarios – perhaps a conservative case, a moderate case, and an optimistic case – to understand the range of potential



financial outcomes. For each scenario, calculate key metrics like break-even point, return on investment, and impact on overall department profitability.

Pro-tip:

- Use historical data on service mix and average repair order value to make more accurate revenue projections.
- Consider the potential for extended hours to shift some volume from peak times to off-peak times, which could improve overall efficiency.
- Don't forget to factor in potential savings, such as reduced loaner car costs if faster turnaround times are achieved.

Tripping point:

- Overestimating initial adoption rates can lead to unrealistic financial projections.
- Failing to account for ramp-up time as customers become aware of and begin to use extended hours.
- Neglecting to consider seasonal variations in demand for extended hours.

Thought starter:

- How might extended hours impact your ability to sell additional services or increase your effective labor rate?
- Could extended hours allow you to better utilize your fixed costs, improving overall profitability?
- What financial metrics will you use to evaluate the success of extended hours over time?

5. Staff Engagement

Successfully implementing extended service hours requires buy-in and support from your entire team. This step focuses on engaging your staff throughout the planning and implementation process.

Begin by holding a series of meetings to introduce the concept of extended hours to your team. Start with your management team, then move on to technicians, service advisors, and support staff. In these meetings, clearly explain the rationale behind extending hours, including the potential benefits for the dealership and for employees.

Next, actively solicit feedback and ideas from your team. They may have valuable insights into operational challenges or opportunities that you haven't considered. Use techniques like anonymous suggestion boxes or small group discussions to ensure everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts.

Address concerns head-on. Common worries might include impact on work-life balance, childcare arrangements, or compensation. Be prepared with clear answers about how these issues will be handled.



Involve your team in the planning process. For example, you might form a committee with representatives from different roles to help design new schedules or workflows. This not only leads to better plans but also increases buy-in.

Finally, be clear about how extended hours might create new opportunities for staff, such as preferred shifts, increased earning potential, or new leadership roles.

Pro-tip:

- Consider offering incentives for staff who volunteer for extended hour shifts, especially during the initial implementation phase.
- Provide plenty of notice before implementing changes to allow staff to make necessary arrangements in their personal lives.
- Regularly check in with staff after implementation to address any unforeseen issues quickly.

Tripping point:

- Assuming that financial incentives alone will be enough to gain staff support.
- Neglecting to involve all affected departments, including parts and administration.
- Underestimating the importance of ongoing communication throughout the implementation process.

Thought starter:

- How can you structure extended hours to create new career development opportunities for your staff?
- What non-monetary benefits could you offer to make extended hour shifts more attractive?
- How might extended hours impact your ability to recruit and retain top talent?

6. Implementation Plan

A well-structured implementation plan is critical for a smooth transition to extended service hours. This plan should outline all the steps needed to move from your current operations to your new extended hours model.

Start by creating a detailed timeline. Work backwards from your target launch date, identifying all the tasks that need to be completed and when. This should include things like updating systems, modifying facilities, training staff, and marketing your new hours.

Next, assign clear responsibilities for each task. Identify who will be responsible for each aspect of the implementation, from updating the scheduling system to ensuring proper staffing for each shift.

Develop new standard operating procedures (SOPs) for extended



hours. This should cover everything from opening and closing procedures to how work will be handed off between shifts. Pay particular attention to communication processes to ensure smooth continuity of service across extended hours.

Create a training plan for all affected staff. This should cover not just new procedures, but also any new skills needed, such as working with different types of customers during extended hours.

Establish a clear process for handling issues that arise during implementation. Designate point persons for different types of problems and create escalation procedures.

Finally, develop a plan for a phased rollout if appropriate. You might start with extended hours on certain days of the week, or begin with a limited service menu during extended hours before expanding to full service.

Pro-tip:

- Use project management software to track the implementation process and ensure nothing falls through the cracks.
- Plan for a “soft launch” period where you can work out any kinks before heavily promoting your new hours.
- Create a detailed communication plan to ensure all stakeholders (staff, customers, vendors) are kept informed throughout the implementation process.

Tripping point:

- Underestimating the time needed for staff to adapt to new schedules and procedures.
- Failing to adequately prepare support systems (IT, security, etc.) for extended hours.
- Neglecting to plan for how you’ll handle services in progress at shift change times.

Thought starter:

- How can you use the implementation process as an opportunity to improve other aspects of your service operations?
- What metrics will you use to measure the success of the implementation?
- How will you gather and incorporate feedback during the early stages of implementation?

7. Training and Support

Comprehensive training and ongoing support are essential for the successful implementation of extended service hours. This step involves preparing your team to operate effectively under the new system and ensuring they have the resources they need to succeed.

Begin by developing a detailed training curriculum. This should



cover new procedures specific to extended hours, such as shift handover protocols, security procedures for early/late shifts, and any changes to service writing or parts ordering processes. Include training on any new software or equipment that will be used.

Consider the unique challenges of working extended hours. Provide training on managing fatigue, maintaining work-life balance, and ensuring consistent customer service across all hours of operation. For managers, include training on supervising across multiple shifts and maintaining team cohesion with a more dispersed work schedule.

Implement a mix of training methods. This might include classroom-style sessions, hands-on practice, role-playing exercises, and e-learning modules. Tailor the training approach to the content and to your team's learning preferences.

Don't forget to train on the 'why' as well as the 'how'. Help your team understand the strategic importance of extended hours and how it benefits the dealership, customers, and employees. Develop a system for ongoing support and continuous learning. This might include regular check-ins, refresher training sessions, and a process for staff to easily ask questions or raise concerns as they arise.

Finally, consider creating mentorship or buddy systems, pairing experienced staff with those new to extended hours to provide additional support and guidance.

Pro-tip:

- Create quick-reference guides or cheat sheets for new procedures that staff can easily consult during their shifts.
- Use real-world scenarios in your training to help staff understand how to handle situations unique to extended hours.
- Consider cross-training staff to increase flexibility in scheduling and to provide development opportunities.

Tripping point:

- Assuming that experienced staff don't need much training for extended hours.
- Neglecting to train support staff (e.g., porters, cashiers) who play crucial roles in extended hour operations.
- Failing to provide ongoing training and support as processes evolve and new challenges emerge.

Thought starter:

- How can you use technology to support ongoing training and communication across extended hours?
- What performance metrics should you track to identify additional training needs over time?
- How might extended hours create new opportunities for peer-to-peer learning among your staff?



8. Marketing Strategy

A robust marketing strategy is crucial to ensure that your customers are aware of and take advantage of your new extended service hours. This step involves creating and executing a plan to effectively communicate your new offerings to both existing and potential customers.

Start by clearly defining your target audience for extended hours. This might include commuters who can't make it during traditional hours, shift workers, fleet customers, or busy families. Understand the unique needs and communication preferences of each segment.

Develop a clear and compelling message about your extended hours. Focus on the benefits to the customer, such as increased convenience, reduced vehicle downtime, and how it fits into their lifestyle. Create a tagline or slogan that encapsulates the essence of your extended hour offering.

Plan a multi-channel marketing approach. This should include updating your website and social media profiles, sending email and text notifications to your customer database, and updating all in-store signage. Consider creating a dedicated landing page on your website for extended hours information.

Leverage your existing customer touchpoints. Train your service advisors to mention extended hours during customer interactions. Include information about extended hours on repair orders, invoices, and appointment reminders.

Consider running a promotional campaign to drive initial adoption of extended hours. This might include special pricing for services during extended hours for the first month, or a contest for customers who use extended hours.

Don't forget about traditional media. Depending on your market, radio ads, local newspaper features, or even billboards can be effective in spreading the word about your new hours.

Develop a strategy for ongoing promotion of extended hours. This might include regularly featuring extended hours in your social media content, highlighting customer success stories, or creating seasonal promotions tied to extended hours.

Pro-tip:

- Use geotargeted digital ads to reach potential customers in your area during times when they might be thinking about vehicle service (e.g., during their commute).
- Partner with local businesses or organizations whose members might benefit from extended hours (e.g., hospitals for shift workers, local sports leagues for busy families).
- Leverage customer data to send targeted messages about extended hours to customers who have previously mentioned scheduling difficulties.



Tripping point:

- Overwhelming customers with too much information about operational details rather than focusing on benefits.
- Neglecting to update all customer-facing materials, leading to confusion about available hours.
- Failing to train all staff, including sales and reception, on how to communicate about extended hours.

Thought starter:

- How can you use customer testimonials or success stories to illustrate the benefits of extended hours?
- What unique promotions could you create that tie into the concept of extended hours or 24/7 service?
- How might you partner with other local businesses to cross-promote your extended hours?

9. Performance Monitoring

Implementing extended service hours is not a “set it and forget it” proposition. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensure that the new hours are meeting both customer needs and business objectives. This step involves setting up systems to track key performance indicators (KPIs) and using this data to make informed decisions about your extended hours program.

Start by identifying the key metrics you’ll use to measure success. These might include:

- Service revenue during extended hours
- Number of repair orders during extended hours
- Customer satisfaction scores for extended hour services
- Technician productivity during extended hours
- Parts sales during extended hours
- Overall department profitability

Set up systems to track these metrics on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Ensure that your DMS and other software tools are configured to easily report on extended hour performance separately from regular hours.

Establish benchmarks for each KPI. These could be based on your financial projections, industry standards, or your performance during regular hours. Set both short-term and long-term goals for each metric.

Create a regular review process. This might involve daily huddles to review the previous day’s extended hour performance, weekly management meetings to discuss trends, and monthly deep dives into the full range of KPIs.



Don't just look at the numbers – gather qualitative feedback as well. Regularly survey customers who use extended hours and hold feedback sessions with staff working extended shifts. This can provide valuable insights that raw data might miss.

Use this data to make informed decisions about adjusting your extended hours program. This might involve tweaking schedules, adjusting staffing levels, modifying service offerings during extended hours, or refining your marketing approach.

Pro-tip:

- Create visual dashboards that make it easy for all staff to see how extended hours are performing.
- Compare extended hour performance to regular hour performance to identify any significant differences or opportunities.
- Look for correlations between different metrics to gain deeper insights (e.g., how does technician productivity relate to customer satisfaction during extended hours?).

Tripping point:

- Focusing too much on short-term metrics without considering long-term trends.
- Neglecting to adjust your benchmarks and goals as the program matures.
- Failing to communicate performance results effectively to staff, which can impact motivation and buy-in.

Thought starter:

- How can you use performance data to create healthy competition between shifts or between regular and extended hours?
- What unexpected insights might you gain by analyzing extended hour performance data?
- How might performance during extended hours inform decisions about your regular hour operations?

10. Continuous Improvement

The final step in implementing extended service hours is establishing a culture and process of continuous improvement. This involves regularly evaluating your extended hours program, identifying areas for enhancement, and implementing changes to continuously better serve your customers and improve operational efficiency.

Start by establishing a formal process for gathering and evaluating improvement ideas. This should include input from all levels of staff, as well as customer feedback. Consider creating a cross-functional team that meets regularly to discuss potential improvements.

Develop a systematic approach to testing new ideas. This might involve running pilot programs for new services or processes during



extended hours before rolling them out more broadly. Use A/B testing where possible to compare the effectiveness of different approaches.

Regularly reassess your extended hours strategy in light of changing market conditions, customer needs, and business objectives. This might involve periodically conducting new market research or reevaluating your competition.

Stay informed about industry trends and best practices related to extended hours and service convenience. Attend industry conferences, participate in dealer groups, and network with other service managers to gather new ideas.

Consider implementing a formal continuous improvement methodology like Lean or Six Sigma. These approaches can provide structured tools for identifying and eliminating inefficiencies in your extended hour operations.

Don't forget to celebrate successes and recognize staff contributions to improving the extended hours program. This can help maintain enthusiasm and engagement in the continuous improvement process.

Regularly update your training programs to incorporate lessons learned and best practices developed through your continuous improvement efforts.

Pro-tip:

- Create a simple system for staff to submit improvement ideas, and ensure that all ideas receive a response.
- Use customer journey mapping to regularly reevaluate the extended hours experience from the customer's perspective.
- Look for opportunities to apply successful elements of your extended hours program to your regular hour operations.

Tripping point:

- Becoming complacent once initial implementation is complete and failing to continue pushing for improvements.
- Trying to implement too many changes at once, which can overwhelm staff and customers.
- Neglecting to properly communicate and train staff on improvements, leading to inconsistent implementation.

Thought starter:

- How can you create a culture where all staff feel empowered to suggest and implement improvements?
- What incentives could you offer to encourage ongoing innovation in your extended hours program?
- How might advances in technology (e.g., AI, IoT) be leveraged to



continually improve your extended hours service?

Conclusion

Implementing extended service hours is a significant undertaking that requires careful planning, execution, and ongoing management. By following these ten steps, service managers can navigate the complexities of this process and set their dealerships up for success in an increasingly competitive and convenience-driven market.

Remember that the key to success lies not just in the initial implementation, but in the ongoing commitment to monitoring, evaluating, and improving your extended hours program. Stay flexible and be prepared to make adjustments as you learn what works best for your specific situation.

Extended service hours have the potential to dramatically improve customer satisfaction, increase service department revenue, and give your dealership a significant competitive advantage. By offering more convenient service options, you're not just changing your hours of operation – you're transforming your relationship with your customers and positioning your dealership as a forward-thinking, customer-centric operation.

As you embark on this journey, keep your focus on the ultimate goals: better serving your customers, improving operational efficiency, and driving long-term profitability for your dealership. With careful planning, strong execution, and a commitment to continuous improvement, extended service hours can become a cornerstone of your dealership's success in the years to come.

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