

# Estimating from a distance now possible



**It will come** as no surprise to you that, when trying to fit all the news from the past two months onto the pages of this magazine, some stories just don't make the cut. This month, a story about a group of U.S. bodyshops testing a remote estimating system was one of the casualties. So I decided to talk about the story here in my space, because I felt it was just too interesting to let it go.

A few days later, I received confirmation that my instincts were correct. On the monthly report telling me which headlines on our website have garnered the most readers, the remote estimating story topped the list, with four times the number of readers than any other news story last month.

I found the Boyd pilot program interesting because it hints that even more changes and challenges are on the horizon for estimators and appraisers. The adoption of DRP programs shook up these job functions a decade ago. Now, technological developments could amend the job description even further.

The Boyd Group Inc. is a Winnipeg-based multi-store operator that has collision repair and auto glass facilities in Western Canada and the United States. One of its subsidiaries, Gerber Collision and Glass, recently tested a centralized appraisal tool from Librestream, and found that the system provided more accurate appraisals and better customer service.

In this centralized appraisal model, the customer service representative at the collision repair shop operates a modified video camera that is connected to the computer of an offsite appraiser. In this trial, the appraiser was located at Gerber's Elmhurst, Ill., facility. The appraiser can see the damage, discuss it with the customer service rep in real time, and generate a damage appraisal. The appraiser, sitting at his PC, is also able to take con-

trol of the device remotely to zoom in, save still images, and record video to include with the damage estimate.

According to Gerber, the centralized appraisal pilot initiative met or exceeded all of the program's original goals. It achieved a 7% increase in appraisal accuracy, a 3 to 4% increase in capture rates, a 15-minute reduction in client wait times, and a measurable increase in repair versus replacement labour and alternative parts utilization.

There's a common saying in this industry that if five estimators assess the same crashed car, you'll get five different estimates. With new technology, that still holds true — but now you can get the same result without the trouble of having each estimator go to the vehicle.

Mitchell International has also performed some analyses recently that shed light on estimating practices. At the request of some Canadian clients, Mitchell performed a study comparing mobile and non-mobile appraisals in Canada.

Mitchell's vice-president of industry relations, Greg Horn, summarizes: "Interestingly enough, the percentage of supplements for mobile appraisals was higher, averaging 1.21 supplements per estimate when an estimate was supplemented, compared to 1.12 for non-mobile appraisers. However, the amount of the supplements for mobile appraisers was 45% lower than the supplement amount of non-mobile appraisers. When a supplement varies by that amount, I believe it indicates that the mobile estimate began as a more accurate estimate."

What we have in both these cases is affirmation that the use of advanced technology is changing estimating for the better, creating more accurate estimates more quickly. **B**

Cindy Macdonald  
cmacdonald@bodyshopbiz.com

## EDITOR

Cindy Macdonald  
416-510-6839  
cmacdonald@bodyshopbiz.com

## PUBLISHER

Andrew Ross  
416-510-6763  
aross@bodyshopbiz.com

## SALES MANAGER

Jay Armstrong  
416-510-6745  
jarmstrong@bodyshopbiz.com

## ACCOUNT MANAGER

Jim Petsis  
416-510-6842  
jpetsis@bodyshopbiz.com

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

Steven Hofmann  
416-510-6757  
shofmann@bizinfogroup.ca

## ART DIRECTOR

Lisa Zambri

## PRINT MANAGER

Phyllis Wright

## CIRCULATION MANAGER

Selina Rahaman  
416-442-5600 ext.3528

## CIRCULATION ASSISTANT

Roshni Thava

## SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES

416-442-5600 ext. 3555

## VICE-PRESIDENT

Alex Papanou

## PRESIDENT

Bruce Creighton

## BODYSHOP

is a division of BIG Magazines LP  
12 Concorde Place, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M3C 4J2  
Phone 416-442-5600 Fax 416-510-5140

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