

Is expanding your shop the best solution for more space?

Adding square footage is commonly the first thought when a shop needs more production space. Most of the time, this comes up because shop owners are looking for more room to add a technician or improve workflow. However, adding brick and mortar to your facility can get expensive very quickly. The good news is that production space can often be found within the existing footprint by doing a little measuring and reorganizing.

The first places I look at are the areas consumed by things. I can always find things in a shop that are taking up space with nobody knowing why, similar to how “we’ve always done it that way, it’s always been there” is a common reply. My favorite areas to check out are along the side walls, an easy place to put things where they aren’t thought to be in the way. However, anything on the side walls takes away from production space and it usually does so “quietly.” A floor jack gets put along the wall, then a welder joins it; next thing you know, another welder shows up and now you’ve lost about 24 square feet of production space with just a couple pieces of equipment. While 24 square feet is not enough space for a production stall, I recently added two repair stalls in a shop by relocating tables and some unused equipment. To prevent this from occurring, shop management should designate specific spots for equipment at the head of the repair stall adjacent to the technician toolboxes.

Since we are talking about relocating equipment and such, it is probably a good time to discuss 5S. [The stages of the 5S process includes Sort, Store, Shine, Standardize and Sustaining.](#) The first two are key to gaining more production space in your existing footprint. The Sort process gives you the opportunity to look at the things consuming space that have always been there. Weed out the things that are not being used or that are in disrepair, they aren’t doing anything for you but are absorbing valuable production space.

Store is the next step in 5S, and sometimes it is not the things being stored but the space available to store things. I guarantee that if you have space to store things, you will store them, whether you need them or not! In a shop I visited that wanted to add space, I found a room full of storage shelves. Some had things on them while others didn’t, but nonetheless, the shelves themselves were taking up space. A quick measurement showed that there was 1200 square feet of available space being occupied by shelves. After closer inspection and a little bit of discussion, we found a way to create an entrance to this area by installing a garage door opening space for six production stalls.

Another option to increase production space is to look at repair stall size itself. I have seen shops with repair stalls measuring 15’ X 20’ or 300 square feet, with others 12’ X 20’ or 240 square feet, and some with my recommendation of 10’ X 20’ or 200 square feet. While the first two are not optimum, they are designated repair areas, and compared to shops without designated repair stalls it is better. Remarketing two 15’ X 20’ stalls will create three 10’ X 20’ stalls and remarketing five 12’ X 20’ stalls will create six 10’ X 20’ stalls. Quite simply, a shop with ten 15’ X 20’ stalls can be remeasured and marked to create fifteen 10’ X 20’ repair spaces. Gaining five production stalls without adding brick and mortar has to be a bonus in anyone’s book.

Take a hard look at your facility before you move to add to your existing structure. I assure you that you will use the space you create by adding on, but it is best to ensure you are using your current space wisely before you invest in creating more. As you can see, sometimes all it takes is cleaning up the shop and reutilizing space to gain additional production spaces. Creating more production space within the same footprint will not only save you construction costs, but you will also increase profitability by improving your sales per square foot. Improving profitability while saving money is something anyone would be interested in pursuing.