

13 Factors in Selecting a Police Unit Upfitter

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Many agencies nationwide are taking a look at the procedures that get their police units service-ready. As these vehicles are becoming more complex, budgets and personnel pools are shrinking. In many cases, the units are delivered factory-fresh with few, if any, required "add-on items."

The tremendous amount of work required to service-ready police units can overwhelm a small garage staff. Preplanning and experience will get a technician staff through the process. However, if a fleet maintenance staff is too busy maintaining in-service vehicles, outsourcing the job of police unit upfitting must be considered. The following key factors provide guidance in selecting an outsourced upfitter:

- 1. Experience.** A vendor who has worked with other public sector agencies is familiar with the overall process and knows what may be required to do the job correctly.
- 2. Auto Manufacturer Drop-Ship Code.** Vendors must meet particular auto manufacturer criteria to obtain drop-ship codes, providing a qualification measure to assist an agency choose the right vendor.
- 3. Insurance.** This important requirement should be closely reviewed. The vendor should carry adequate insurance, and the fleet manager should receive an additional statement from the vendor's insurance carrier indicating awareness of the vendor's work on law enforcement vehicles. Often, vendors have common garagemans liability insurance that does not cover work on law enforcement vehicles.
- 4. Request Records.** With each vehicle, request a vendor-supplied record of upfitting components and equipment placed in the unit and the employee who performed the installation. This record often provides help in pinpointing a problem that could occur in more than one unit. It also motivates the technician to ensure his or her work is done correctly since the installation work is documented.
- 5. Security.** Request a security statement detailing how the vehicles will be safely stored and secured while in the vendor's custody.
- 6. Detailed Task List.** This list reveals how the vendor plans to complete your units. Review how the vendor deploys personnel. Examining the task list provides a measure of the vendor's capabilities to handle the job.

7. Resumes. Resumes should be available to review, especially for key technicians who will perform final communications equipment wiring and testing. Confirm technicians have been in the law enforcement vehicle field for a few years.

8. References. Ask for a list of references and do not hesitate to contact them. Do not be afraid to ask references such questions as, "Was the job completed in time with no issues?"

9. Consult Auto Manufacturers. OEMs know if a shop has been performing a volume of work in the area. Auto manufacturer engineers often speak to installers for input and feedback.

10. Subcontractors. A vendor's list of subcontractors is a must. You do not want to find out your vendor uses an unreputable subcontractor. Without being questioned, the vendor may not tell you.

11. Manufacturer Representation List. This list can be very helpful if the vendor represents equipment manufacturers you use. Manufacturers often run training sessions to explain detailed equipment installation procedures. However, do not rule out a vendor just because he or she does not represent your equipment's manufacturer. Many manufacturers frown on vendors who distribute competitive equipment, and this may be a reason the vendor is not an official representative of a particular manufacturer. A vendor's ability to install equipment should not be affected by service as a specific OEM rep.

12. Wiring Diagrams. These documents can be very helpful in the future to assist in vehicle repair. A vendor with experience should be able to easily provide wiring diagrams.

13. Cost. A vendor's cost is certainly something to consider carefully. Often, agencies can have vehicles upfitted by an outside source cheaper and faster than by their internal staffs. You may be surprised to discover how some install shops have the police unit building process down to a science. If a vendor's business prepares law enforcement units for service and has experience successfully fulfilling a job your size, often the vendor can save money and valuable time.

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