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Innovative Work Van Upfit Applications

New ways to upfit work vans improve safety, organization and technician productivity... and ultimately, **benefit the bottom line.**

BY SHELLEY ERNST

➔ **WHEN YOU SEE A WORK VAN ON THE STREET,** it may look pretty plain from the outside. But, what's going on inside is very important. That's because work vans must carry the cargo technicians need to do their jobs — and the way that cargo is stored can have a direct impact on their productivity.

Inside of these vans are bins, racks and shelving that allow them to store everything from large, heavy equipment like a welding machine to tiny parts like nuts and bolts. To accommodate the wide range of storage needs — and to give technicians easy access to them — while also keeping cargo and drivers safe, upfitters are continually developing new upfit applications.

The following are a few unique ways these applications have helped to improve safety, organization, and productivity.

ADJUST TO VARYING LOADS

When it comes to upfitting, every business will have its own unique needs for what to store and how to do so in a way that improves technician productivity.

Isabella Braun, international business development manager for Sortimo, said the company's van shelving system is fully customizable and offers endless configuration possibilities, allowing them to create unique solutions for every vocation and even every customer.

"Our Sortimo racks feature a modular design and create an organizational solution tailored to meet specific business needs," Braun said. "Our bins, the Sortimo BOXXes, are an innovative and functional series of van storage bins available. They can be retrofitted in the shelving or exchanged with altering business needs."

Braun said customizable racks helped a home building company that had a need to store large pieces of plywood and trim while also having

AT A GLANCE

A few innovative ways work van upfits can be used include:

- ▶ Adjust storage to varying load needs.
- ▶ Increase use of a smaller space.
- ▶ Enhance accessibility to products or tools.
- ▶ Bring ladders inside.



Pull-out shelves can provide greater use of smaller space, bringing the tools or products to the driver.

ready access to tools, fasteners, and other essentials. The company was looking for a solution that was easily adjustable, since the amount and size of the plywood and trim varied from job to job.

Sortimo's solution started with installing long component trays for storing trim pieces; these were positioned lower in the van for easy accessibility. It also featured multiple lashing rail locations for positioning restraint poles used to secure varying sizes of plywood in the middle of the floor, while still allowing access to racking on the street side and curb side of the vehicle. To keep the plywood in place, the solution also featured horizontal restraint poles to prevent forward and backward movement.

"Professional van upfits are necessary to increase organization and worker productivity," Braun said. "Another key factor is the secure storage of work materials and a safe work environment for the driver."

Plywood and trim weren't the only cargo needed to get the job done right. The home builder's solution also included FlexxRack shelves to hold smaller items. When larger quantities of plywood are needed, these shelves can fold away to make room to store more plywood in the vehicle.

In addition to providing the storage and access necessary to complete the job, Braun said the home building company saw additional benefits, too.

"Sortimo offers the industry's most innovative, lightweight, and durable van shelves, which can have a weight reduction of more than 50% compared to products made out of steel," Braun explained. "This



PHOTO: DEJANA



PHOTO: DEJANA

The Katerack system's infinitely adjustable shelves are rated for 300-pounds. The shelves bring the equipment out of the van to offer increased utility and organization to the field technician.

increases the available payload for your van and reduces fuel costs. A vehicle that drives further on a tank of gas helps the technician to spend less time refueling and gives him more time to accomplish work in the field.”

MAKE THE MOST OF A SMALLER SPACE

The opportunity for an innovative van upfit came in the form of a potentially costly ordering mistake for Jonathan Culp, director, fleet and leasing sales for Dejana.

In this instance, a soon-to-be customer ap-

proached Dejana with a problem: They had ordered 50 Ford Transit Connect vans through another upfitter and had inadvertently ordered the short wheelbase instead of the longer wheelbase.

The problem? A shorter wheelbase meant shorter shelves and less storage for the cargo technicians needed to do their jobs. It also resulted in just an 8-inch aisle between the shelves, which left no room for technicians to navigate the space. In essence, once the previous upfitter installed the racks and bins, the vans were basically useless.

Technicians didn't have enough room to store their equipment or access it, and since the vehicles didn't meet their needs, the company was considering disposing of them and taking a write off.

Fortunately, the folks at Dejana had a solution: Install Katerack shelving systems in the vehicles.

“The key was taking advantage of the benefits of the Katerack system — 300-pound rated, infinitely adjustable shelves that bring the equipment out of the van, and offer much better utility and organization to the field technician,” Culp explained.

With this innovative solution in place, the customer had approximately 300% more shelf space for their cargo, room for technicians to access their tools — and better, the vehicles were once again capable of fulfilling their mission.

“Helping the customer avoid a massive write-off was the first benefit,” Culp said. “But tactical gains by the technicians also showed cycle-time savings at each stop, as well as a reduced number of return trips to the office for a needed part that they didn't have on the van, or couldn't find due to poor organization.”

Reducing trips to the office yielded a major savings in productivity costs. Prior to acquiring new vans with the Katerack shelving system, the average technician spent a couple hours per week driving back to the office for parts they should have had for the day's jobs.

At a labor cost of \$50 per hour, eliminating these trips saved the company roughly \$100 per week, per technician, which translates to about \$5,000 per year for each technician. Do the math across the 50 Transit Connects, which the company plans to hold onto for five years, and that's a \$1,250,000 boost in productivity over the lifecycle of the vehicles, according to Dejana.

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Another innovative van upfit balanced the need to be nimble while also transporting heavy equipment.

In this case, a gas utility company needed to transport heavy meters and specialized tools and also required organized storage for fittings, valves, and other parts. To maximize productivity, it was important for technicians to be able to access parts and tools from outside the vehicle.

To accommodate these needs, Braun of Sortimo said the company's



PHOTO: SORTIMO

On the street side, the van provides storage for long components and tools, while curbside the driver has access to Flexx Rack shelving that can fold away if more space is needed.

team installed pullout load platforms and drawers used to store and access meters, regulators, and tools outside the vehicle for quick accessibility. Allowing technicians to access heavy items outside the van reduced back strain and increased technician safety. It also allows them to work quickly, which is especially important in severe winter weather conditions.

“Certain configurations can make all tools and materials accessible from the outside of the vehicle, with shelving directly at door opening and drawers and load platforms in the back of the van,” Braun said. “If each technician can save about 30 minutes

per day through this organization and mobility solution, this can sum up to millions of dollars of/in? savings per year for the whole fleet.”

To provide improved organization and ease of access, Sortimo also installed BOXXes, which are used to sort and organize fittings and valves and can be carried from curbside to worksite. These BOXXes can “click” together so several can be connected and transported together in one trip, reducing trips back and forth to the van. Once at the job site, BOXXes can be separated again with the push of a button and dispersed as needed.

“Technicians spend a lot of time searching inside the van and carrying items from the van to the jobsite. If boxes and bins are organized and securely stowed in the van, parts can be found more easily and aren’t damaged during transport,” Braun said. “It’s important to be able to transport bins and boxes easily to the jobsite because technicians are more productive if boxes and bins with tools and parts can be easily removed from the van and carried to the workplace in one run.”

BRING LADDERS INDOORS

Ladder storage is yet another area benefitted from the latest innovations. Typically, ladders are stored on top of vans, which can present problems related to safety, cleanliness, and fuel economy. But now, ladders can be stored inside the vehicle. Dejana’s interior ladder rack for full-size vans solves several of the common problems encountered with exterior ladders racks.

→ When stored internally, there’s no chance of ladders falling off the van.

→ Ladders are less likely to be stolen from inside the van.



With a pullout platform at the bottom of the van, drawers and Boxxes can be placed on top for parts and tool storage.

→ When stored inside the van, fiberglass ladders aren’t exposed to sunlight, which breaks down the fibers over time and creates a safety hazard.

→ The cost of the interior ladder rack may be lower than 25% of the cost of a drop-down ladder rack.

→ Stowing the ladder inside the vehicle prevents it from creating wind drag and reducing fuel economy.

→ A technician arriving at a customer residence has a clean and dry ladder inside the van — and

does not have to wipe snow, ice, or road dirt from the ladder before taking it into a customer’s home.

→ And finally, “No one will hit the drive-thru overhang at McDonald’s with the ladder rack,” said Culp of Dejana.

In addition to these benefits, the interior ladder rack also leaves plenty of room for storage, and can be paired with Dejana’s Durarac line of pull-out shelving to store other tools and equipment.

INNOVATIVE UPFITS EQUAL SMARTER HAULING

With innovative work van upfit applications on the market, fleets have the power to resolve their current challenges while also improving efficiency and productivity.

“Many fleets are facing the challenge of restricted space inside the vehicle, weight restrictions, accessibility of materials and tools, and the parking situation in urban areas,” said Braun of Sortimo. “With smart configuration upfits and lightweight shelving, fleets can

switch to smaller vehicles and still carry all necessary parts and tools for the job.”

With such beneficial solutions, Culp of Dejana said looking at new possibilities is worth consideration.

“Just because you have always done it that way, doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s the best way,” he said. “If better organization could allow a technician to make one more billable call each day, isn’t it at least worth considering?” wr



Vans can be configured to have wide Shelf Staxx at the curbside door for quick access to frequently needed items.