

# Online estimating service unveiled

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If Dingit.com has its way consumers will have another option in choosing a collision repair facility. The new system allows consumers to, in effect, put a request for bids online and have shops send them their estimates.

Car owners who need repairs go to the DingIT Web site, fill out information

such as make, model, and year, and submit a description and photo of their damaged car. Using an online map, they select a geographic area from which they want estimates. Once the customers submit that information, a network of shops in that area receives an e-mail with photos and details about the damaged vehicle. The shops then return an estimate to the consumer.

DingIT is an independent company

based in Los Angeles and is currently rolling out this service across the country.

Eyal Golan, DingIT's co-founder and head of marketing and sales, believes the company benefits both consumers and shops. He says consumers can have confidence that the shops are qualified because DingIT screens every repair facility in the network, and DingIT pays them 3 to 5 percent of the cost of each repair completed. Golan adds that

consumers also save time because they can get multiple estimates without having to visit multiple shops.

The prospect of additional customers is DingIT's prime appeal to shop owners, although DingIT's system interfaces with most automated estimating systems, so shops don't have to create the estimates from scratch. The system doesn't cost shops anything, but if an estimate does generate a customer, the shop pays a 15 percent commission to DingIT. Golan says that the commission can be negotiated depending on the circumstances.

"One concern that body shops will have is they may be competing with too many shops on the system," Golan says. "At first we will have no more than five to 10 shops in an area. Later we expect to have a system that limits number of completed estimates to five and then tell the others that the lead is no longer active. We don't want to people to work for nothing."

One key to DingIT's potential success is ensuring that consumer's feel confident that the repair facilities in DingIT's database are qualified. "We run some basic background checks," Golan says. "We look at Better Business Bureau records and [here in California] at Consumer Affairs Dept. records. We are also looking into things like I-CAR qualifications, their ASE certifications, the class of those certifications and other things like warranty information."

Golan addressed some potential concerns about customers entering their own data by explaining how the Web site's interface requires consumers to enter exact and complete data, but he did add that if a customer enters erroneous data (calling a Honda a Toyota, or a 2001 a 2004, for example) then the shop will be dealing with bad information.

Sal Garcia, the manager of Alexander's Auto Body in Santa Monica, Calif., says "the system is great—I think it's pretty good as far as getting work into the shop." DingIT has added a few vehicles to the shop's volume, and Garcia sees it as a supplement to the shop's regular work.

From his end of the process it's also easy to use. "All we do is write up an estimate, push a button and you're all done," he says. "I come in every day and first thing I do is check out the Web site. From what I see of the pictures I do an estimate and then it's just a couple of clicks and I send it." Garcia has been using DingIT for about seven months, and he sees it as being good for consumers as well. "People come in saying that it's easy for them and they get these competitive prices too," he says.

While DingIT is currently operating only in the Los Angeles area, Golan is rolling it out into major cities across the country. As DingIT starts operating in each city, there will be an accompanying marketing campaign. "Our main marketing on mass media—ads running on TV, commercial radio and billboards," he says. "We're also doing a lot of public relations because it has more credibility."

Golan says he expects to expand into the country's 15 largest markets in "a few months." ■