



Collision Repair Technicians United Goes Viral on Facebook

It all started as a forum where painters, techs, estimators and anyone else working in the collision industry could vent, get advice, network and share ideas with each other on a national stage. Roughly six months ago, **Marc Gabbard**, owner of *GSR Custom Collision Repair* in Yakima, WA, was looking for a way to communicate with other technicians out there in the World Wide Web, so he decided to set up a Facebook page and named it *Collision Repair Technicians United*.

He never imagined that it would go viral and become one of the most-used forms of social media in the collision industry, attracting big names and shop personnel from Hawaii to Alaska and everywhere in between.

Gabbard's shop fixes 4-5 cars weekly with a three-man crew. He started the business in 1998, doing a lot of street rods and custom restoration, but now he's 100 percent collision repair all the time.

"When I first began we were doing strictly hot rods and I pretty much had to do all of the work myself," Gabbard said. "By 2008, we were officially in our current facility and that's when things began to roll. At the beginning, I would jump in there and do most of the body work and painting. But now I'm becoming more of a full-time owner and getting away from the day-to-day production. I'm focusing on things like marketing and community outreach, so that we can grow and stay healthy."

To retain control on all of his repairs, Gabbard doesn't have any DRPs and isn't pursuing any in the near future either.

He explained, "I don't need them, because we've established a strong reputation for being fair and honest with every customer through the door. We earn all of our business by continually stressing customer service and quality."

Gabbard, 37, was already comfortable using social media to sell his business, network and communicate with friends and colleagues, so creating a page where technicians and other people in the collision industry can convene was a logical evolution, he said.

"Facebook is a very fast way for us to connect to so many people eas-

ily. I can talk to a painter in Missouri one minute and a body tech in upstate New York the next. By sharing ideas, repair techniques and useful information, we can all be better at our jobs."



Marc Gabbard owns *GSR Custom Collision Repair* in Yakima, WA and is the creator of *Collision Repair Technicians United*, a Facebook page that is quickly going popularity among professionals from every aspect of the collision industry

Gabbard said he was surprised when the page caught momentum earlier this year.

"We got a few inquires here and there and then the word got out and it started exploding. As of today, we have roughly 3,300 members and it hasn't slowed down at all. With 150-200 new members asking to be a part of this online forum every week, we should be near 4,000 soon."

Gabbard is the gatekeeper and moderator for this invitation-only page and in most cases people act appropriately while on the site. But when they don't, he's not afraid to boot them without hesitation.

"We've had a few people who tried to push their political agendas on the page, so they had to go. Some came on here and tried to antagonize other members for whatever reason and so they had to go as well. In most cases, people are fine and I've only had a few issues, so the track record is pretty darn good."

Gabbard is always happily surprised when he sees names he recognizes applying for membership on his page.

"We've got some major names from collision on this page and we're happy to have them here. Presidents of collision organizations chatting with rookie techs is a cool thing to see. If you work in the collision industry, you're welcome to join. We have a good mixture of people here and we screen folks, but we do not discriminate."

By browsing through *Gabbard's Collision Repair Technicians United* Facebook page, you can see how collision professionals from different worlds can use the site. I found topics such as:

What is the secret of fixing a door handle on a 2013 Fusion? How does your shop deal with warranty issues? Does anyone know anyone who has failed an I-CAR test? How can I get paid by the insurance company on this repair? Does anyone fix Enterprise rental cars, because they came by the shop just now? Is it better to get all of the DRPs you can? After-market parts vs. OE parts? Is aluminum really the next hot thing? Other repair chat threads dealing with issues about things such as headliners, bumpers, headlights, blending panels, grit in the paint, sanding vs. over-sanding and other related themes appear every day on the forum.

Many techs proudly show their before and after pictures and in some cases, other members will scold some technicians for cutting corners or performing unsafe repairs. Other members of the page ask about equipment and products and do comparisons online, such as: What's better—SATA guns or Iwata guns? Is waterborne paint really better for the environment? Does PPG or Pro-Spray provide better color matches? Where can I get a good car dolly?

"We're educating ourselves with valuable information from the people who are actually doing the repairs," Gabbard said. "By breaking down the geographic limitations and sharing with people all over the country, we can become effective at things like getting the right parts, finding OE repair procedures and just doing a better job overall. We're helping each other, but really the consumers are getting the benefits of a page like this."

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