

Like most technicians, I live for tools. Any bit of paraphernalia that makes my job easier, faster, more productive or just more fun has a place on my bench.

Technicians all have the usual suspects crowding our workspace: hammers, screwdrivers, hex wrenches, razor knives and enough measuring devices to make Copernicus jealous.

A lot of us also have industry-specific tools like bending irons, thermoforming plates, rubber mixing bowls and cast saws.

And every once in a while we get to draft tools from other workplaces. I've seen tools like the pipe cutter borrowed from plumbing to cut down aluminum pylons. Bondo spreaders have been hijacked from auto body repair and employed by some modifiers to apply buildups while rectifying molds.

All are fun to use, but which ones are the best? Well, each lab and technician has its favorites. But for now, here are a few that I picked up along the way with the help of half a dozen mentors. I hope you find your favorite among them.

1 Infrared ovens. If you've ever had to struggle with an old pizza oven and then discovered a well-tuned infrared oven, you'll appreciate this one. Few things are more frustrating than an oven that can't heat a large sheet of plastic evenly or within a reasonable time frame.

2 Tamarack tools. The popular Tamarack ankle joint is easy to fabricate, but when you use the product-specific tools they eliminate

all of the fiddling around. The Tamarack spanner wrench makes applying and removing the brass bushings a snap, and the hole punch puts the precise hole at the correct angle of attachment quickly and easily. The

Trigger ignition torches make using a torch easy and convenient.

4 Infrared heat sensor. Sure, it's a non-contact way to accurately determine the temperature of an object

Top Ten Technician Tools

By Steve Hill, CO



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cavity-forming vise grips, a "must" for any technician, can turn a solid ankle AFO into an articulating AFO in minutes.

3 Trigger ignition torches. This type of propane torch usually uses a Piazo-type ignition system to light the fire. It eliminates the search for that stupid "striker" that never works. (With the way everyone is quitting smoking these days, finding someone with a lighter is getting difficult too.)

(such as cooking plastic or friction sores on residual limbs) but even better...it's got a laser!

5 Automatic tapping machine. The Tapmatic™ (or any other automatic tapping machine) is invaluable for threading multiple holes quickly and accurately. Because of the uniform way it applies cutting forces to the hole, it also greatly increases tap life. Taps can last for months and I haven't broken one since I started using this tool twenty years ago. You can find them anywhere machine tools are sold.



9 *Oandp
tech.com.*

One of the best resources for the Internet-savvy technician is www.oandpotech.com, the only online O&P technical forum.

Many of its members are experienced craftsmen who are happy to lend a hand when you have questions or need a fresh


Powerfiles eat up plaster quickly and effortlessly.

perspective. If you're not already a member, apply today.

10 **Duct tape.**
Need I say more?

There are many other tools that could have been in the "Top Ten," but these are my favorites.

If you want to see your personal favorites listed in the next installment of "Top Ten Technician Tools," e-mail me at steve@delphiortho.com with a description of what it is, why you like it and, if possible, a picture of it, preferably in use. It might be something adopted from another industry or a gadget you invented yourself to accomplish a specific task. If it's a good one, a later column may feature it.

And remember to keep an open mind and an eye out for new techniques and tools that make fabricating easier. Who knows? You might even invent the next great O&P tool and make yourself rich! 

6 **Powder coating gun.** If you're not familiar with powder coating by now, you probably should be. This easy-to-use, durable finish is a must for any serious O&P lab. As easy to apply as paint and a hundred times more abrasion resistant, powder coat comes in any color under the rainbow.

with a handheld screwdriver when you can chuck a bit up in a drill and do the job in a quarter of the time? They sell for as little as \$20 at Home Depot and will definitely save you time and money.



A simple cordless drill is one of the most invaluable tools in the shop.

7 **PowerFile.** Freedom Fabrications makes this pneumatic sureform, and it eats up plaster quickly and effortlessly. With a little practice, you can halve the time spent cutting down rough casts. This is one of those tools that I never knew I needed until I used it.

8 **Drill driver.** A simple cordless drill, usually only a 12 volt, is one of the most invaluable tools in the shop. Why fumble around



Steve Hill, CO, is secretary of OPTA and CEO of Delphi Ortho, located in Asheville, N.C. and on the Web at www.delphiortho.com.