GROW AND PROFIT

WHEN TO ADD A TRUCK, AND WHEN NOT TO

More trucks can mean more revenue and less money. Do the math first.

GROWTH HAS A PRICE

Revenue is exciting, and it's also expensive. A new truck means a tech, a vehicle, tools, inventory, insurance and more work for your office. Your margin may fall for months before it recovers. Plenty of owners have grown themselves into a cash crunch while looking successful from the outside.

CHECK FOR HIDDEN CAPACITY FIRST

Before adding anything, see whether you can get more from what you have:

- What's your answer rate? More calls may be slipping away than you realize.
- What's your billable efficiency? An extra hour per tech per day may equal a new truck.
- Are your trucks fully scheduled across the whole week and year?
- Are slow seasons sitting empty while your peak season overflows?

If you can fill the shoulder months, you may not need another truck. You may just need steadier demand.

SIGNS YOU'RE READY

- You've been booked out beyond your customer's patience for months, not just during a heat wave.
- You're turning down or losing work that you'd have wanted.
- Current techs are consistently working more overtime than they want.

- You've got margin and cash to carry the new truck for several months.
- Your dispatcher and office can absorb more work.
- There's someone capable of training the new person.

RUN THE NUMBERS

Here's a simple way to model it. These are illustrative figures. Enter your own.

Monthly cost of a new service truck:

- Technician wages and burden: $7,800
- Truck payment, fuel, maintenance, insurance: $1,800
- Tools, phone, tablet, uniforms: $200
- Added marketing to feed it: $1,500
- Added office time: $700

That's about $12,000 per month. Add your parts cost. If your parts and other job costs are 25% of revenue, then that truck has to produce $16,000 in revenue a month simply to break even. Add your first few months' ramp-up, and the initial cost of tools and stock, and you can see how much cash you'll need to carry it.

Ask how long it takes to reach break-even in your business, and whether you have that much cash set aside.

WHERE WILL THE WORK COME FROM?

A new truck needs a new source of work. Options include:

- Your existing customer database, which is usually the cheapest source
- Maintenance plans, which provide steady work
- More advertising, at current lead costs
- A new service area, which adds drive time
- A new trade, which brings a new set of skills, licenses and risks

Calculate how many booked jobs a month that truck needs. Then ask whether you can actually generate them.

WHO WILL DRIVE IT?

In a tight market, this may be the real constraint. Hiring your way into growth with weak technicians is a poor trade: more callbacks, lower ratings, and stress for your best people. Sometimes the right step is promoting an apprentice and hiring a helper. See finding technicians in a shortage.

DON'T FORGET THE OFFICE

The office often breaks before the field does. Adding trucks means more calls, more dispatching, more invoices and more questions. Rule of thumb: when you're adding techs, look at phone coverage at the same time. Consider whether outside help can cover the peak without adding payroll. Run the outsourcing calculator.

ADD A SECOND TRADE CAREFULLY

Adding plumbing to an HVAC company, or electrical to plumbing, can sell more to the customers you already have. It also needs a licensed leader, its own price book, new marketing and a new way of dispatching. Start with a strong person who can lead it. Give it its own profit-and-loss statement, so you can tell whether it's working.

SET CHECKPOINTS

Before you commit, write down what success looks like at 90, 180 and 365 days: revenue, gross margin and callback rate. Decide what you'll do if you miss. Growth should be a decision you can measure, not simply something that happens to you. Before launching the new truck, read know your numbers.

Sources: Worked examples are illustrative. Service ProCall program guidance. Not financial advice.

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BEST PRACTICES: PRICING AND KNOWING YOUR NUMBERS

MAKE IT A HABIT

What good looks like

> A handful of numbers reviewed every week.

> Prices built from your real costs and target margin.

> Cost per booked job known for every lead source.

The habits

1. Pick five weekly numbers: answer rate, booked jobs, close rate, average ticket and revenue per tech.
2. Price from your true hourly cost, including drive time and overhead.
3. Review prices at least once a year and when costs change.
4. Track every job back to the source that created it.
5. Cut the lead sources that cost more than they bring in.
6. Share the numbers with your team, so everyone knows the score.

Signs it's time to get help

- You learn how a month went when the accountant tells you.
- You can't say which lead source pays best.
- Prices haven't changed in over a year.

Where we fit: ProCall Field reports by source, tech and job type, and Service ProCall reports every campaign from call to sold job.

More on pricing and knowing your numbers