

Reviewing 2024

It's nearing the end of the year again, so I thought it would be good to write an update while reflecting.

Milestones

FullBay

In February, we switched from using AppSheet to Fullbay for documentation. See [announcement](#). I think it would be interesting to show a brief history of our PM checklists:

- 2021 and prior

E203- Grottoes Fire

. A two page document that was not customizable per truck.

- Early 2022

E62- Wintergreen

. Used Jotform for a few months. This much improved form was cumbersome, still not customizable. If a device lost internet while filling it out, everything was lost.

- Mid 2022-February 2024

Waynesboro FD

. Used appsheet. This was still not customizable per truck, but worked without constant internet, and provided a way not only for PMs, but also to track repair orders. This was a fully custom built application for us. However, while work was tracked in appsheet, time was tracked in quickbooks workforce, and invoices were created after work was completed. Making invoices was a time consuming task, and often days or weeks after work had been completed.

- Current

Same truck as above

, but new form.

With fullbay, we can customize a PM per truck, and track usage (mileage, hours, time), to determine when the service is actually needed based on NFPA and OEM specs. Time is tracked right in the application, as well as parts. So whoever is doing the work, is essentially making the invoice as they complete work. This saves lots of admin time. Also, there is a customer portal, so the department can view all work history.

See more [here](#).

Vehicles

Our service truck has 300k miles. So in January, we got a service van. This is actually really nice, and much cheaper to operate. The only time we need more vehicle, is when we need bulk oil for doing on site

PMs, or pump testing, for which we use the truck and trailer. Thinking about doing away with truck and trailer, getting a small box truck for bulk oil tanks and pump test equipment.

Workload

We were a little slow during the end of 2023, and mostly current on all work. That has not been the case at all in 2024. Which is good! But now, we're being backed up a little to chronically. It takes longer to get stuff fixed than I think it should.

Our operating model to-date is: hire part time technicians, who have a full time fire/rescue job. This worked well, because if we didn't have work it wasn't a problem for the employee to skip a day. But I'm not sure this modus operandi is sustainable for future growth. While growth is NOT our objective (SERVICE is our core focus), we need to grow to keep providing the same level of service to existing and new departments.

Right now, Brigade Tek is small. We're personable, as in we often know, or get to know each other personally. I think that because of this, people in departments are quick to give us grace and be patient. This is good, but I don't want to exploit the good graces of our customers. If you've ever heard of the saying "the squeaking wheel gets the grease", well, we don't want it getting to the point of anything needing to squeak.

I'm not sure I have the answers to this problem. Nor do I believe there is a single correct solution. Kind of like our checklists evolved over time, with several solutions that worked for better or worse, I think we need to try something out and see how it works for us.

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