

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 **too** 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.

Meet the Team

Peter Fox

I live in Clover Hill with my wife Amanda, with our children Kate (2) & Victor (1). I like tinkering with things and starting new hobbies. I start more hobbies than I finish, but a few have stuck. I was homeschooled through grade school, then went to Hickory Hollow Christian school for High School. I was born in PA, moved to Charlotte Co., VA when I was 9, then here when I was 13. When I was 12, I started working on lawnmowers for some neighbors, and mowing grass for people. I'm forever indebted to a few folks who I called scores of times for questions. We didn't have internet at first, so I had to wait for shopping trips to town so I could use a computer at the library. One day, I biked 16 miles (round trip) to the library to look up some parts. Then we got dial-up internet.

After moving here, I continued working on things in our garage for a short time, then I got a job at Valley Tool Repair. I worked there through high school. I joined Bridgewater fire as soon as I got my license, then took fire academy followed by EMT. I was hired by Rockingham County Fire & Rescue in November of 2016, with a group in what I think was the first SAFER grant.

Adrian Shirk

Clayton Armstrong

Wendall Pence

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Last update: **2024/12/02 15:51**

