THE 8-FIGURE OPERATOR

The Blueprint for Building an Unshakeable Home Service Business

BY JOSHUA D. CATES

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY CASEY SPRABARY

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About the Author

Josh Cates is a lifelong entrepreneur, author, and nationally recognized growth strategist with more than 25 years of experience building companies and helping businesses achieve disciplined, scalable growth.

As founder of Hero Marketing Agency, Josh built one of the home services industry's most respected strategy and marketing firms, partnering with growth-minded operators across the United States to drive clarity, profitability, and enterprise value. Under his leadership, Hero's rapid growth earned the company a place on the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

Josh's perspective is rooted in experience, not theory. A 5X startup founder with three successful business exits, he has spent decades navigating the realities of entrepreneurship—from startup and scale to profitability and exit. He is also the author of The Marketing Revolution, his first book challenging conventional thinking about how businesses approach marketing and growth.

That experience shaped a core belief: marketing is not simply a vendor function—it is a leadership discipline. Marketing must connect directly to operations, financial performance, capacity, and the P&L.

At Hero, that philosophy is captured in their tagline: Market Like a Hero. It means rejecting vanity metrics and disconnected tactics in favor of accountability, transparency, and measurable business outcomes.

> "My greatest passion in business is helping others unlock clarity in the chaos. When you understand where your money is going, what's working, and what isn't, you gain control. And when you have control, you can scale with confidence."
>
> — Joshua D. Cates

Josh lives in Texas with his wife and two daughters. He is deeply committed to leading with integrity, investing in people, and helping the entrepreneurs he serves build not just successful businesses, but meaningful, well-lived lives.

About the Contributor

Casey Sprabary is a growth strategist and operator with a proven track record of scaling home service businesses through disciplined strategy, operational alignment, and performance-driven marketing. She played a key leadership role directly supporting the growth of a DFW-based residential HVAC and plumbing company from $5 million to over $25 million in under four years, culminating in a successful private equity acquisition.

What sets Casey apart is her ability to bridge the gap between marketing and real business performance. She doesn't just generate leads, she architects systems that convert demand into revenue, align marketing with capacity, and protect margins at scale. Her work focuses on building marketing engines that are accountable to the P&L, not vanity metrics.

At Hero Marketing Agency, Casey leads client strategy across a portfolio of growth-focused home service companies, partnering directly with owners and leadership teams to uncover inefficiencies, reallocate budgets and implement scalable systems that drive measurable ROI. Her approach integrates channel strategy, conversion optimization, customer lifecycle marketing, and operational throughput, ensuring that every marketing dollar is tied to revenue, profitability, and long-term enterprise value.

Casey's leadership is grounded in discipline and service. She is a proud veteran of the United States Marine Corps, where she developed the foundation of accountability, resilience, and execution that defines her work today. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Education, equipping her with a deep understanding of human behavior, team dynamics, and performance development. Being the only woman in a house with her husband, Chris, and their three sons, ages 6 to 21, it's no surprise she's a straight shooter.

Known for her clarity, intensity, and results-driven mindset, Casey is passionate about helping business owners break through growth ceilings, build scalable infrastructure, and ultimately create companies that are not only profitable, but valuable.

To the entrepreneurs and business owners who wake up every day and choose to build something better, this book is for you.

To my parents, wife, and daughters: your love and encouragement are the foundation everything else is built on.

And to the clients and teams who trusted us enough to go on this journey together, your stories are the heart of this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Fix What's Costing You Millions

It was a Friday afternoon in September. The owner of a $16-million HVAC and Plumbing company, I'll call him David, sat across from me at a conference table covered in marketing reports. His phones were ringing. His trucks were running. His revenue was decent. And he looked like a man who hadn't slept in weeks.

"Josh," he said, pushing a stack of papers toward me, "I can't figure out what any of this means. I pay my current agency $35,000 a month and I still don't know if it's working."

I asked him three questions: What's your actual cost per booked job? What's your booking rate? Which channel is driving your most profitable customers?

Silence.
Then, slowly, he said, "I'm not sure."

David wasn't alone. In twenty years of working with clients, I have sat across from hundreds of business owners in that exact same chair. Talented individuals. Hard workers. People who built something real from nothing. And almost all of them had, at some point, handed the keys to their most important business function to people who didn't understand their world, and never felt they could ask for them back.

That is what this book is focused on fixing.

Not with gimmicks. Not with the newest advertising platform or the hottest digital trend. With something more valuable and more durable than any of that: clarity, structure, and discipline. The same framework we have used at Hero Marketing to help companies transform from overwhelmed and disorganized to focused, profitable, and scalable.

> Here is the truth I want to share with you right from the start: most marketing companies have no idea how to make you money because they have never run your type of business. They collect checks, hide behind dashboards, and report activity instead of results, while you carry all the risk.

Growth without control is chaos.
And chaos, no matter how fast it moves, does not scale.

In the chapters ahead, we are going to walk through the exact framework we use at Hero Marketing to move trade businesses from reactive to proactive, from guessing to knowing, from surviving to scaling. Whether you are a seven-figure company trying to reach eight figures, or an eight-figure company chasing ambitious new goals, the principles in this book apply to you. The strategies scale. The systems work. The results, as you will see in the real stories throughout these pages, are proven and achievable.

David, by the way, grew from $16 million to over $34 million in revenue within 14 months under our leadership and sold a majority stake in his business. Still to this day, it's one of our greatest success stories and proof that our methods work exceptionally well when partnered with the right mindset and owner.

Let’s get to work.

CHAPTER ONE

The Illusion of Control

It rarely happens when a business is struggling.

In fact, the moment I'm about to describe almost always shows up when things look successful on the surface.

I'm sitting across from an owner, let's call him Mike. He's doing $8.7 million in revenue. The phones are ringing, the schedule is full, and he's in the middle of hiring more technicians. He even just bought another truck. From the outside, he looks like he's winning.

But within a few minutes of the conversation, you can feel it. There's tension just beneath the surface. He's talking fast, slightly on edge, circling the same thought without quite saying it out loud: *"I just feel like we should be making more money than this."*

That's usually my cue to start asking questions.

I ask him what his cost per lead is. He gives me an answer quickly, too quickly. I ask about his booking rate, and this time, there's a pause. When I follow up with what percentage of those booked calls actually turn into revenue, the pause gets longer. By the time I ask which marketing channel is producing his highest-value customers, not just the most leads, we've moved from answers to guesses.

So, we pull the numbers together and start looking at the business objectively.

Within thirty minutes, the entire story changes.

He wasn't spending 10% on marketing like he believed. He was closer to 13.5%. On $8.7 million in revenue, that's over $300,000 a year in overspend, money quietly leaking out of the business without him realizing it. His booking rate was under 60%, meaning nearly half of his opportunities were being lost before they ever had a chance to generate revenue. His close rate fluctuated depending on the source of the lead, and the channels producing the highest volume of leads were, ironically, producing the lowest-quality customers.

Nothing about his business was broken. In fact, most people would look at it and say it was thriving.

But it was out of alignment.

And that distinction matters more than most owners realize. When a business is misaligned, growth doesn't fix the problem, it amplifies it. Every additional dollar poured into marketing without clarity compounds inefficiency. Every new hire, every truck added to the fleet, every push for more leads builds on top of a system that isn't fully understood or controlled.

The cost isn't just financial, although that alone can be staggering. It shows up in eroding margins, inconsistent performance, and the quiet stress of knowing you're working harder than ever but not seeing the return you expected. It shows up in the realization that you've built something sizable, but you can't clearly explain what's actually driving its success, or holding it back.

I've seen this scenario play out hundreds of times with owners doing $3 million, $5 million, $10 million, and even over $20 million in revenue. They are smart, driven, and capable, but when you ask them where their next best dollar should go, what is truly driving profit, or what they should stop doing immediately, the answers are unclear. Not because they're incapable, but because no one ever taught them how to see their business with complete clarity.

So, they rely on what they've been given. Reports that sound good. Agencies that highlight impressions and leads. Conversations centered around growth without a clear connection to profitability. And they keep moving forward, assuming momentum equals progress.

Until something forces them to stop and look closer.

Maybe cash tightens. Maybe growth stalls. Or maybe, like Mike, they finally sit down long enough to recognize the disconnect, which is that they've built something impressive, but they don't actually understand what's driving it.

The Real Meaning of Control

Here's what most owners get wrong about being in control: they believe control means being the decision-maker. They sign the checks. They approve the hires. They set the direction. In their mind, that's control.

But that's not what control actually means in a growing business.

Real control means having clear, accurate visibility into the cause-and-effect chain that drives your revenue. It means knowing, not guessing, what happens between the moment a customer searches for your service and the moment that job shows up as collected revenue in your account.

In most home service companies, that chain is broken at almost every link. The marketing agency manages campaigns in isolation. CSRs answer phones without any awareness of where those calls originated. Technicians run jobs without knowing which marketing source generated the customer. And ownership sits at the top, reviewing revenue totals without ever connecting the dots between spend and return.

What results is a business where no one truly owns the outcome. The agency blames the website. The CSR team blames the leads. The techs blame the economy. And the owner wonders why, despite spending tens of thousands of dollars on marketing every month, they cannot seem to get ahead.

The marketing industry has gotten away with this for far too long. Marketing firms collect checks, hiding behind dashboards and reporting activity instead of results, while owners carry all the risk. That ends the moment an owner decides to own the outcome, not just the revenue number, but the entire chain of events that produces it.

Mike didn't have a marketing problem. He had a visibility problem. And the two are not the same.

What the Data Actually Shows

Think back to why you started your business. Maybe you jumped in right out of school, bought out an existing operation, or saw an opportunity in the home services industry and decided to build something that mattered. Whatever your path, one thing is almost certainly true: mediocrity was never the goal.

Yet when our team analyzed our national portfolio of home service companies, what we found was a wake-up call.

We separated our clients into two distinct groups. The first were the engaged operators, owners who attended their monthly strategy sessions, reviewed their marketing budgets, responded promptly to our team's guidance, and leaned into the process of building a better company. They were surrounded by solid operators in the space that serve as mentors and sounding boards for best business practices. The second group expected success to find them: they skipped meetings, ignored strategic recommendations, and treated our partnership as an afterthought. It was easier to look externally at why their business wasn't thriving than to challenge their mindset, look internally at their team members, and assess their operational challenges.

The results were striking. Companies actively following our Hero Growth Blueprint and showing up for their business grew topline revenue by 51% year-over-year. When we folded in the disengaged clients, that number dropped to just 35%, a 16-point gap driven entirely by the decision to show up, trust the process, and execute.

The data doesn't lie. Visibility creates accountability. Accountability creates execution. And execution is the only thing that actually moves the number.

As the late Charlie "Tremendous" Jones famously said, *"You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read."* We'd add one more factor: the coaches you listen to. The fastest path to where you want to go is following the lead of someone who's already been there.

What you hold in your hands isn't just a book, it's a proven roadmap. Every chapter, every framework, and every insight has been forged from real businesses, real struggles, and real breakthroughs. Our only job is to illuminate the path. Yours is to take the first step.

Owning the Outcome

When I talk about ownership, I'm not talking about micromanagement. I'm talking about something more foundational: the discipline to understand how your business actually works, and the courage to hold your teams, and your vendors, accountable to results that connect back to profit.

This means knowing your numbers. It means understanding which marketing channels are performing and which are draining your budget. It means having a weekly cadence of reviews where leadership examines the full funnel, from lead to booked call to sold job to collected revenue. It means creating a culture where data drives decisions rather than gut feelings or vendor promises.

It sounds simple. But in the daily chaos of running a growing trade business, this kind of disciplined ownership is rarer than it should be.

The good news is that it's absolutely learnable. And once it becomes part of how you operate, everything else, marketing, operations, growth, becomes cleaner, faster, and more profitable.

> "You don't need another vendor. You need a partner who understands your business well enough to challenge it, fix it, and help you scale it. The moment you stop tolerating confusion is the moment you take back control."
>
> — Joshua Cates

I know this because I've lived it. In more than 25 years as an entrepreneur, I've been brought to my knees more than once. There were moments I wasn't sure I had anything left, moments where the weight of it all felt like too much to carry. And every single time, without fail, someone showed up. Another owner who'd been through it. A mentor who saw something in me I couldn't see in myself. A voice that pushed me through the pain and out the other side into something greater than I imagined.

That's not a coincidence. That's the entrepreneurial journey.

Simon Sinek said it best: *"If you've found success, it's only because of those around you. I would be wary of trusting someone who's achieved greatness and claims they've done it on their own."* Twenty-five years in, and I couldn't agree more.

Before You Go Any Further

The truth is, most businesses like Mike's aren't broken. But they are misaligned. And that misalignment is quietly costing far more than most owners realize, not just in wasted spend, but in lost margin, missed opportunity, and unrealized enterprise value.

The good news is that it's fixable. But it starts with a willingness to see your business clearly, and to tell the truth about what you actually find.

Before reading the next chapter, I want you to pause and take the following exercise seriously. Not casually. Not quickly. Honestly. It will take only a few minutes, but what it reveals may be the most valuable thing you do this year.

If the answers feel uncomfortable or hard to articulate, that's not a bad sign, it's the point. Most operators don't have a clarity problem. They have an honesty problem. They've built momentum, they've built revenue, but they've avoided confronting the gaps that are quietly limiting their next level.

There's an old truth often attributed to President James A. Garfield: *"The truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable."* That couldn't be more accurate in business. Because until you are brutally honest about where your company is vulnerable, where your numbers don't make sense, where your systems break down, and where you are personally avoiding accountability, you will stay stuck at your current ceiling.

You cannot scale what you do not understand. You cannot fix what you refuse to face. And you cannot reach the next level while protecting the comfort of your current one.

This exercise is not about judgment. It's about exposure.

So, as you go through it, don't answer like the owner you appear to be on the outside. Answer like the operator who actually sits behind the curtain.

Because the moment you tell the truth about your business is the moment you finally give yourself the ability to change it.

FREE RESOURCE

To help you get started, complete our free Hero Marketing Growth Playbook, an operator-level self-assessment that goes right to the heart of where your business needs better visibility. Take the time to complete it on your own or with your team, and I promise it will be one of the best investments you make this year.

Scan Me

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Leadership & Strategic Clarity

Answer honestly. Every 'No' is a growth opportunity.		
Do you have a clear 3-year revenue and EBITDA target?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you know your current capacity vs. demand trucks, techs, install crews?	□ YES	□ NO
Are you operating with a defined growth strategy, or reacting month-to-month?	□ YES	□ NO
Who owns marketing decisions? Are you still the bottleneck?	□ YES	□ NO
Are your growth goals tied to real operational constraints?	□ YES	□ NO
Can you clearly explain what is driving revenue right now by channel?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you know your booking rate, close rate, and average ticket off the top of your head?	□ YES	□ NO
Are your marketing vendors held accountable to revenue outcomes not just lead volume?	□ YES	□ NO

Where do you need to act in the next 30 days?

HERE ARE THE FIVE CORE TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 1:

1. **Surface success can mask deep misalignment.** A full schedule, growing revenue, and new hires can all coexist with a business that's quietly hemorrhaging money. The danger isn't failure, it's the false confidence that momentum creates.

2. **Control is about visibility, not authority.** Being the decision-maker doesn't mean you're in control. Real control means understanding the full cause-and-effect chain from marketing spend to collected revenue. Without that visibility, you're managing outcomes you don't actually understand.

3. **Growth without clarity makes the problem worse, not better.** Pouring more money into marketing, hiring more people, and adding more trucks on top of a misaligned system doesn't fix the misalignment, it amplifies it. Scale is only an advantage when the underlying system is understood.

4. **The marketing industry profits from your confusion.** Agencies reporting on clicks and impressions instead of revenue and profit are measuring activity, not results. Owners who tolerate that trade the wrong scorecard for a check, and carry all the risk while doing it.

5. **Honesty is the actual starting point.** Most operators don't lack information, they lack the willingness to confront what the information is telling them. You can't fix what you won't face, and you can't scale what you don't understand. The chapter's entire arc points to one action: tell the truth about your business before trying to grow it.

CHAPTER TWO

The Numbers You're Avoiding Are Costing You Millions

He wasn't a careless operator.

That's the first thing I want you to understand about the owner I'm going to tell you about. He was sharp, experienced, and running a $12 million residential plumbing and HVAC business that had grown every single year for multiple years. He had a marketing agency he trusted. He reviewed his revenue numbers regularly. By almost any measure, he was doing the right things.

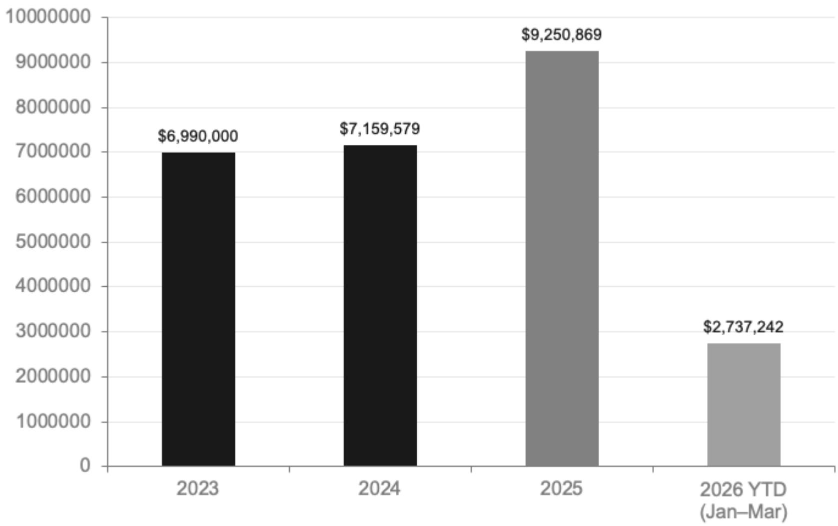
But something was bothering him.

He'd seen one of our Hero Fractional CMO ads and reached out to set up a meeting. Not because his business was in trouble, at least not on paper, but because he had a feeling he couldn't shake. His marketing spend felt like it was getting away from him. He wanted a clearer grasp on his numbers, and he suspected there was waste somewhere he couldn't see. He just didn't know where to look or what to look for. "*They just keep telling me to spend more, Josh, but can't tell me why*." Sound familiar?!

That instinct was worth more than he knew.

When our team sat down with him and pulled his actual marketing data, what we found stopped him cold.

Over four years, his ROAS (return on ad spend) had declined every single year, from 10.94x in 2023 down to 6.73x in 2026. At the same time, his ad spend as a percentage of revenue had climbed from 9.1% to 14.9%, nearly double the industry benchmark of 8–12%. His agency wasn't just failing to improve performance. They were spending more of his money to produce less return, and nobody had flagged it. Not once.



Year	Revenue	Spend %	ROAS
2023	**$6.99M**	**9.1%**	**10.94x ✓**
2024	**$7.16M**	**10.8%**	9.23x
2025	**$9.25M**	**12.2%**	8.17x
2026 YTD	**$2.74M**	14.9%	6.73x ↓

⚠ Spend growing faster than revenue every year
Industry benchmark: 8–12% of revenue. Now at 14.9%.

And it didn't stop there. When we looked at his campaign-level data, one line item jumped off the page immediately: his Cooling Services campaign had a cost per acquisition of $245, nearly double the account average, with a conversion rate of just 14.89%. He was spending $18,540 on a campaign that was underperforming every other line in his account, and it had been running that way long enough to burn through real money. Meanwhile, his Branded campaign, his single most efficient spend at $13.15 CPA and a 45.88% conversion rate, was budget-capped. His agency was starving his best performer and feeding his worst one.

$118,193 TOTAL SPEND (120 DAYS)	**1,030** TOTAL CONVERSIONS 6.23% conv. rate	**$114.79** BLENDED CPA Account average	**$29,965** ZERO-CONV WASTE 25.4% of total spend

CAMPAIGN	SPEND	CPA	CONV. RATE	IMPR. SHARE	STATUS
Branded ★	$4,404	$13.15	45.88%	75.71%	Budget Capped ⚠
Plumbing Services	$74,347	$155.42	21.83%	36.22%	Budget Capped ⚠
Drain Services	$19,141	$169.30	20.90%	40.66%	Budget Capped ⚠
Cooling Services	$18,540	$245.03	14.89%	41.20%	Budget Capped ⚠
PMax – Plumbing	$1,759	$63.54	0.22%	71.37%	No Transparency

To top it all off, 25.4% of his total spend, nearly $30,000 over 120 days, generated zero conversions. One dollar in four, straight into the ground due to poor targeting and lack of clear strategy.

He wasn't reckless. He wasn't uninformed. He was simply operating without visibility. And in a business at his scale, that invisibility was costing him far more than he realized.

This chapter is about making sure that never happens to you…or in some cases, that it's not repeated.

If You Don't Know Your Numbers, You Don't Know Your Business

In the trade industry, most business owners have a reasonably clear picture of their top-line revenue and a general sense of their profitability. What they typically lack is clarity on the middle, the key performance indicators that connect marketing activity to business outcomes. And it is precisely in that middle space where most of the money is being lost or left on the table.

There is a saying I have come to believe more deeply with every passing year: if you don't know your numbers, you don't know your business. It sounds obvious, but in practice, it is anything but.

This chapter is about changing that. Not because metrics are interesting in theory, but because the right numbers tell you exactly where to invest, where to cut, and how to grow. They are not accounting artifacts. They are a live map of your business. And like any map, they are only useful if you know how to read them.

The Six KPIs That Actually Run Your Business

When our team at Hero works with a new client, the first thing we audit is what we call the KPI stack, the interconnected set of metrics that determine how efficiently a business converts marketing spend into revenue and profit. Most owners are tracking some version of these. Very few are tracking all six, and fewer still are using them together the way they were meant to be used.

Here are the six numbers at the core of that stack.

1. Revenue Per Lead (RPL)

Forget cost per lead. The real metric is revenue per lead, total revenue generated divided by the number of leads produced by a given channel in a given period. This number matters because it tells you the true efficiency of your marketing investment, not just the volume it produces.

An RPL of $180 from Google Ads might be entirely acceptable for a high-ticket installation business. That same RPL for a maintenance call, however, might signal a serious problem. Context is everything, which is why RPL must always be evaluated alongside your average ticket and close rate. The owner in our story had no idea what his RPL looked like by channel. He only knew his total lead count. That single blind spot cost him years of compounding inefficiency.

2. Booking Rate

Your booking rate is the percentage of inbound calls that convert to a scheduled appointment. Top-performing home service companies run booking rates between 80% and 90%. If yours is below 70%, you have a significant, and often invisible, revenue leak.

Every single point of improvement in your booking rate represents thousands of dollars recovered without spending a single additional dollar on marketing. We have seen companies recover over a million dollars annually by fixing this one number alone. Think about that. Not by running more ads. Not by hiring more technicians. By answering the phone better and booking the calls that are already coming in.

3. Close Rate

Close rate measures what percentage of booked appointments convert to sold jobs. This metric lives at the intersection of your sales process and your technician training. A company with a 50% close rate and a company with a 70% close rate running the same marketing budget will produce dramatically different revenue, without any change in spend.

Improving close rate is frequently the fastest and least expensive path to meaningful growth. It requires no additional marketing investment, just discipline, training, and accountability with your team and call center.

4. Average Ticket

Average ticket is the mean revenue per job. This number can be moved through better options presentation, membership programs, service packages, and technician training focused on identifying and presenting additional opportunities at the time of service.

Small improvements in average ticket compound quickly. A business running 5,000 service calls a year that increases average ticket by $150 has added $750,000 in revenue before the end of the fiscal year, without acquiring a single new customer. That is not a hypothetical. That is arithmetic. And it is available to almost every operator reading this right now.

5. Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)

CAC is the total cost required to acquire a single paying customer, accounting for all marketing and sales expenses. Knowing your CAC allows you to evaluate whether your current marketing investments are sustainable and whether you are pricing your services appropriately.

A business paying $350 to acquire a customer with a $400 average ticket is operating on razor-thin margins. That same acquisition cost against a

$1,200 average ticket is an entirely different story. CAC without context is just a number. CAC measured against average ticket and LTV is a profitability instrument.

6. Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)

LTV is the projected total revenue a customer will generate over their entire relationship with your business. In home services, where repeat business, referrals, and maintenance contracts generate significant long-term value, LTV is one of the most powerful, and most underused, metrics available.

A customer who spends $300 on an initial service call but enrolls in a maintenance plan and refers two neighbors over five years may represent $2,000 to $3,000 in lifetime value. Understanding this number changes how you think about acquisition spend entirely. It also changes how you think about retention, follow-up, and the long-term value of a membership program. Members, on average, generate three to five times the lifetime value of non-members. If you are not tracking this, you are making investment decisions with incomplete information.

Building the System

Knowing what to measure is only half the battle. The other half is building a system that makes these numbers visible, consistent, and actionable, week after week, not just when something feels off.

Go back to the $12 million owner for a moment. He wasn't ignoring his business. He was reviewing revenue. He was paying his agency. He was making decisions. But he had no system that connected his marketing spend to his actual outcomes at the campaign level. No weekly dashboard.

No funnel review. No one accountable for the full chain from ad spend to collected revenue.

That's how $29,965 disappears into zero-conversion campaigns over 120 days without anyone raising a hand.

Every trade business owner should have access to a single-page report that displays key metrics in real time and measures ROAS against the marketing budget on at least a weekly basis. This dashboard should pull from your CRM, your call tracking platform, and your accounting software to give you a clean, accurate picture of performance across the full funnel.

The goal is straightforward: when you sit down on Monday morning to review your dispatch board, and again on Friday afternoon to look at your trailing 7 and 30 days, you should be able to look at one screen and know exactly where you stand, where you are trending, and where your team needs to focus.

That kind of clarity is not a luxury. At the scale you are trying to reach, it is a necessity.

The Operator Who Sees Clearly Wins

The difference between the owner who builds a $20 million business and the one who stalls at $10 million is rarely talent, work ethic, or even market opportunity. It is almost always clarity. The operator who knows their numbers, who can sit down on a Friday afternoon and tell you exactly which channel is producing their best customers, what their booking rate was this week, and where their close rate is trending, that operator makes better decisions faster and compounds those decisions over time.

The $12 million owner we've been discussing? Once he could see what was actually happening, the fixes were not complicated. The budget was reallocated. The underperforming campaign was restructured. The Branded campaign cap was lifted. Within one quarter, his ROAS had stabilized and his effective spend percentage was trending back toward the benchmark.

The data was always there. He just needed a system to surface it, and the willingness to look.

That is what the KPI stack gives you. Not just numbers. A way of seeing your business that most of your competitors simply don't have.

Build the system. Review the numbers. Own the outcome.

Everything else follows from there.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Financial & Marketing Intelligence

Know your numbers or find out what it's costing you not to.

Do you know your true Cost Per Booked Job by marketing channel?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you know your Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you know your Revenue Per Lead (RPL)?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you have visibility into revenue by marketing channel?	□ YES	□ NO
Are marketing budget decisions made based on ROI data not relationship or habit?	□ YES	□ NO
Do you know your profit margin as a percentage of revenue?	□ YES	□ NO
Is your Google Ads account optimized around revenue not just lead volume?	□ YES	□ NO
Can you identify where $25K–$100K/month may be wasted in your current spend?	□ YES	□ NO

Your lowest-scoring area is your biggest financial opportunity right now:

Score 6 or more YES answers? You have the foundation. Fewer than 6? This is where the money is hiding.

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 2:

1. **Revenue growth without visibility is a slow leak, not a win.** The $12M owner grew his business every year and still watched his ROAS decline and his ad waste compound, undetected, because no one was connecting the dots between spend and outcome. Top-line growth can mask a deteriorating foundation.
2. **The six KPIs aren't just metrics, they're a decision-making system.** RPL, Booking Rate, Close Rate, Average Ticket, CAC, and LTV work together as an interconnected stack. Tracking one or two in isolation gives you a partial picture. Tracking all six gives you the full map, and the ability to know exactly which lever to pull next.
3. **Your biggest revenue opportunity may require zero additional marketing spend.** Improving booking rate, close rate, and average ticket costs nothing in ad dollars. A business that increases its average ticket by $150 across 5,000 annual jobs adds $750,000 in revenue. A booking rate improvement of a few points can recover over a million dollars a year. The money is already inside the business.
4. **Agencies without accountability will optimize for activity, not results.** Budget capped on the best-performing campaign. Fully funded on the worst. $30,000 in zero-conversion waste over 120 days. None of it flagged. When no one owns the full funnel from spend to collected revenue, the owner carries all the risk while the agency reports impressions and clicks.
5. **Clarity is a competitive advantage, not just a management tool.** The operators who build $20M businesses aren't necessarily more talented or harder working than those who stall at $10M. They see their business more clearly and make better decisions faster. The KPI stack isn't about tracking numbers, it's about building the kind of visibility that compounds over time into a business your competitors simply can't keep up with.

CHAPTER THREE

Throughput: The System That Actually Drives Revenue

There is a story I must tell you before we get into the framework. It is the story of a client we had to fire.

He was running a large eight-figure business. Smart guy. Driven. And he had a booking rate below 20%.

That number is not a typo.

For every hundred people who called his business, fewer than twenty became booked appointments. Not customers, appointments. The other eighty had already decided they needed help. They had already found him, already picked up the phone, already chosen him over every competitor on the page. And then his business turned them away. Some sat on hold until they gave up. Some got voicemail and never heard back. Some were quoted prices over the phone with zero follow-up or accountability for tracking the lead. Some simply called the next number on the list before anyone called them back.

Eighty out of every hundred. Gone.

For a business at his revenue level, a conservative estimate of what that leak was costing him every single month ran well into six figures. Not potential revenue, real, already-interested customers walking out the back door while he was busy buying more ads to bring new ones in the front.

When we showed him the numbers, he didn't see a problem with his operation. He saw a problem with his leads.

That's usually when you know.

We told him what needed to change, his CSR team, his follow-up process, his entire approach to inbound calls. He disagreed. He wanted more volume. We explained that pouring more leads into a system converting at less than 20% was the equivalent of filling a bathtub with the drain wide open. More water doesn't fix a drain problem. It just creates a bigger flood.

We parted ways.

I share this story not because it reflects well on us, but because it is the clearest illustration I know of why throughput matters, and why understanding it will permanently change how you think about growth. More leads is almost never the answer. A system that can effectively capture the demand you are already generating and nurture it through to collected revenue almost always is.

What stung most about that situation wasn't losing the client. It was knowing exactly what was going to happen next. He was going to hire another agency. He was going to pour more budget into lead generation. And every new lead that came in was going to hit the same broken system and disappear the same way. The problem wasn't the market. It wasn't the competition. It was the drain, and he refused to look at it.

That refusal is more common than you'd think. And it is exactly what the throughput model is designed to confront.

Your Business Is a System, Not a Machine

Here is the truth that most marketing conversations are designed to help you avoid: in a growing trade business, your marketing (if bad) will obviously hurt your chances of growth, but if you compound that problem with a bad system I can promise you will stay in a constant state of frustration and wondering.

The throughput model forces you to see your business not as a lead-generation engine, but as an interconnected system where every stage of the customer journey either captures value or leaks it. And once you see it that way, you cannot unsee it.

The four stages are straightforward: leads come in, a percentage get booked, a percentage of those booked appointments convert to sold jobs, and sold jobs generate revenue. Each stage has a conversion rate. Each conversion rate is a lever. And the model's power lies in what it reveals, not just how many leads are entering the top of the funnel, but how efficiently your business is converting them at every handoff along the way.

A business generating 1,000 leads per month but booking only 50% of them does not have a marketing problem. It has a booking problem. The fix is not more advertising, it is better call handling, faster response times, and CSR training that treats every inbound call as the revenue opportunity it actually is.

A company with an 85% booking rate but a 45% close rate has already solved its front-end problem. The opportunity now lives on the truck, in the quality of the technician's presentation and their ability to build trust and communicate value before making a recommendation.

Every stage tells a story. Every gap in that story represents a specific, fixable problem. And unlike ad spend, which you have to keep paying for, fixing a throughput problem pays you back every single month, on every single job, indefinitely. One of our core values at Hero is not for our clients to always be spending more money on marketing, but rather improving the throughput and strategy so that the marketing dollar goes further and generates a higher return.

You can see a real example of how this plays out in the table below.

Current Trajectory	Scenario A Waste Elim.	Scenario B Waste + Fix	Scenario C Full Optim.
6.73x ROAS	**7.12x** ROAS	**8.03x** ROAS	**9.33x** ROAS
Revenue: $10.9M	**Revenue:** $10.9M	**Revenue:** $12.0M	**Revenue:** $13.4M
Spend: $1.63M	**Spend:** $1.54M	**Spend:** $1.50M	**Spend:** $1.43M
No changes made	*Remove $90K waste only*	*Waste + tracking + geo*	*All optimizations applied*

Scenario A requires no new creative, no new platforms, no new strategy, just removing identifiable waste.. It returns ROAS above the current 6.73x baseline while spending $90K less annually.

The most powerful thing that happens when you fix your throughput model is that it changes the math on every marketing dollar you spend going forward. Look at what this actually looks like in practice. The $12 million owner from Chapter 2 had three paths in front of him once we completed the full analysis. Scenario A required no new creative, no new platforms, and no new strategy, just removing the $30,000 in identifiable waste from his account. That single move pushed his ROAS from 6.73x to 7.12x while spending $90,000 less annually. Scenario B waste removal plus improved tracking and geographic targeting brought his ROAS to 8.03x and his revenue to $12 million while spending less than he was before. Scenario C, with all optimizations applied, projected $13.4 million in revenue at a 9.33x ROAS on $200,000 less in annual spend than his current trajectory. Same market. Same business. Less money out, more money in. That is what happens when you stop trying to buy your way to growth and start building a system that earns it. The throughput model doesn't just improve your conversion rates; it makes every advertising dollar you do spend work harder, reach further, and return more than it ever could inside a broken system.

Case Study: Doubling Revenue Without More Leads

One of the clearest demonstrations of the throughput model I have ever seen came from an HVAC company in the Southeast. When they first came to us, they were generating approximately 1,000 leads per month and producing around $270,000 in monthly revenue. Their marketing spend was significant, and the owner was convinced that scaling required more advertising.

We ran them through a full throughput analysis. Their booking rate was 62%. Their close rate was 48%. Their average ticket was $380.

Take a moment with those numbers. They weren't catastrophic. In fact, plenty of operators would look at them and consider them acceptable. That's part of what makes throughput problems so dangerous: they rarely feel like emergencies. They feel normal.

Over the next six months, we focused exclusively on improving those three numbers. We implemented structured CSR training and scripting to push the booking rate toward 80%. We introduced a field training program for technicians focused on educational selling and service packaging, targeting a close rate of 65% and an average ticket of $520.

The results were extraordinary. Monthly revenue climbed from $270,000 to over $530,000. Same market. Same truck count. Same advertising budget. The only thing that changed was the efficiency of the system.

More leads would not have doubled their revenue. A better throughput model did.

Think about what that means for your business right now. Not in six months. Right now. If your booking rate is sitting at 60%, what happens to your revenue when it reaches 80%? If your close rate is 50%, what does 65% look like on your trailing twelve months? You don't need a bigger market. You don't need a larger fleet. You need a system that stops leaving money on the table at every stage of the funnel.

Why More Leads Can Make Things Worse

When you pour additional lead volume into a system with a poor booking rate, you are not generating proportionally more revenue. You are generating proportionally more missed opportunities. You are paying more per acquired customer while leaving more money on the table at every stage. You are burning out your CSR team with calls they cannot handle efficiently. You are straining dispatch and operations with jobs that are harder to close.

There is also an emotional cost that doesn't show up in any dashboard. It is the slow, grinding frustration of spending more every month and feeling like you have less to show for it. It is the conversations with your team where everyone points at everyone else. It is the creeping suspicion that the problem is unfixable when in reality, it has never even been properly identified.

The discipline required at this stage is the willingness to fix the system before you scale it. That is a harder decision than buying more leads because it requires you to look inward before you look outward. It requires you to hold your own operation accountable before you hold your agency accountable. But the companies that scale most efficiently the ones that build real enterprise value and maintain margin as they grow are almost always the ones who did this work first.

Optimize the throughput. Then step on the gas.

The Throughput Exercise

Take your last twelve months of data and build a simple model using these four inputs:

- Total leads generated
- Booking rate (leads to booked appointments)
- Close rate (booked appointments to sold jobs)
- Average ticket

Now ask one question: what is the revenue impact of moving each metric by just 5 to 10 percentage points?

Do the math. Write it down. Make it real.

In almost every case, you will find that the greatest revenue opportunity in your business is not in your marketing budget. It is sitting inside a system that has never been fully optimized in calls that weren't booked, appointments that weren't closed, and tickets that were left smaller than they should have been.

The client we parted ways with at the beginning of this chapter never did this exercise. Or if he did, he didn't like what it showed him. Either way, he chose comfort over clarity and his business paid for it in ways he may never fully calculate.

You are reading this book because you made a different choice. You decided to look.

Now, it's time to do something with what you find.

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 3:

1. **Most businesses don't have a marketing problem they have a system problem.** The fired client wasn't failing because his ads were bad or his market was soft. He was failing because 80 out of every 100 interested customers were slipping through the cracks before anyone ever had a chance to serve them. More leads into a broken system doesn't create growth. It creates a bigger flood.
2. **Throughput is the multiplier no one talks about.** Booking rate, close rate, and average ticket are not supporting metrics they are the engine. The HVAC company that doubled revenue from $270,000 to $530,000 per month didn't change their market, their truck count, or their ad budget. They changed the efficiency of their system. That leverage is available to almost every operator reading this book right now.
3. **Throughput problems are dangerous precisely because they don't feel like emergencies.** A 62% booking rate, a 48% close rate, an average ticket of $380 none of those numbers scream crisis. That normalcy is the trap. The companies that stay stuck at their current ceiling almost always do so because they've accepted a leaking system as the baseline instead of the problem.
4. **Fixing the system before scaling it is the discipline that separates good operators from great ones.** It is always more tempting to buy more leads than to fix what's happening to the leads you already have. But the companies that scale efficiently the ones that grow revenue while protecting margin are the ones who optimize their throughput first and then step on the gas. Scaling a broken system doesn't accelerate growth. It accelerates the cost of every flaw inside it.

5. **A better throughput model makes every advertising dollar work harder.** When waste is removed, targeting is sharpened, and the system behind the ads is optimized, the math changes entirely. Less spend. More revenue. Higher ROAS. The scenario analysis from the $12 million company makes this concrete from 6.73x ROAS on a declining trajectory to 9.33x ROAS with full optimization, spending $200,000 less annually. That's not just a marketing win. That's an operational win that marketing seldom gets credit for because most marketers lack the skill to tie operations with marketing. That's not the case with our team of former and current operators, which is why our clients are scaling at speed with efficiency.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pricing for Profit

There is a conversation I have had more times than I can count with trade business owners who have done the hard work of fixing their throughput model. Their booking rate is climbing. Their close rate is improving. Their techs are running better calls. And yet something still feels off. Revenue is up, but margin is not moving the way it should.

When I start digging, the answer is almost always the same: the pricing model is broken. Not dramatically broken not obviously broken. Just quietly, invisibly broken in the way that erodes five and six figures of profit every single year without anyone noticing.

Pricing is the most underworked lever in most home service businesses. Owners spend enormous energy generating leads, training technicians, and optimizing their call center and then quietly leave money on the table at the moment that matters most: when the customer says yes.

Here is the line I want you to remember from this chapter: you cannot market your way out of a pricing problem. But you can price your way into a margin transformation.

This chapter is about fixing that.

> "You cannot market your way out of a pricing problem. But you can price your way into a margin transformation."
>
> — Casey Sprabary

The Three Pricing Models

Most trade businesses use some combination of three fundamental pricing structures. Understanding what each one is designed to do and where each one breaks down is the foundation of a pricing strategy that actually serves your business.

Time and Materials (T&M)

T&M pricing is the oldest model in the trades. The customer pays for labor by the hour plus parts and materials. On the surface, it seems fair. In practice, it creates a set of problems that compound as your business scales.

The first problem: T&M pricing punishes your best technicians and inadvertently rewards junior technicians or your lowest performers as a result of spending a longer time on the job. An experienced tech who resolves a problem in 45 minutes earns your business less revenue than a newer tech or clock milker who takes two hours to do the same job. You have built a billing structure that rewards inefficiency or poor behavior.

The second problem: customers hate uncertainty. When someone asks what a repair will cost and the answer is, "It depends on how long it takes," that creates friction. It results in resistance and lowered trust and, in many cases, calls that don't convert because the uncertainty feels like a trap.

T&M has its place primarily in complex commercial work or diagnostic situations where scope genuinely cannot be determined in advance. For the majority of residential service companies, it works against you.

Flat-Rate Pricing

Flat-rate pricing assigns a fixed price to a defined scope of work, regardless of how long it takes. The customer knows upfront what they are paying.

The technician has a clear target. And your business has a predictable revenue model you can actually manage.

We have seen companies make the switch from T&M to flat-rate and add 15 to 20 percent to their average ticket within a single quarter without changing anything about the work they do or the customers they serve. The difference is the model.

Flat-rate pricing works because it shifts the conversation from cost to value. Instead of the customer calculating your technician's hourly rate and second-guessing whether the job should have taken 90 minutes or three hours, the conversation is focused on the outcome: your system will be repaired, it will be done right, and this is what it costs. In addition, if the technician runs into an unforeseen complication, the homeowner isn't worried about paying hundreds more for T&M. The job is the job under most common circumstances and that spells trust.

The operational requirement for flat-rate is a well-maintained price book that is regularly updated to account for all price increases throughout a given year. This is where most companies get it wrong. They implement flat-rate pricing but never invest in truly building out the price book with parts and material costs or maintaining the price book infrastructure to support it. Prices go stale. Technicians aren't trained. The price book becomes disconnected from actual cost and margin targets. A flat-rate model is only as strong as the price book and maintenance behind it.

Tiered Service Packages (Good, Better, Best)

Tiered packaging is the highest-leverage pricing structure for residential service when done well. Rather than presenting a single price for a defined scope, you present the customer with a structured set of options at different price points, each delivering a different level of outcome. This model also supports dynamic pricing a model we'll discuss shortly.

Done correctly, tiered packaging gives customers agency and a sense of control. It anchors the conversation around value rather than price. It presents your premium option in context with alternatives, making it feel accessible rather than extravagant. And it drives your average ticket upward not through pressure, but through the straightforward reality that a meaningful percentage of customers will always choose more when "more" is clearly defined and professionally presented.

Casey has seen this play out firsthand:

> "When our service call presentation went from a single-option flat rate to a three-tier, multi-choice format, our average service ticket increased by over 22% almost immediately. But the more interesting data point was that customer satisfaction scores actually improved. Customers felt more informed and in control; they felt like they were making a decision, not being sold to. The structure itself communicated professionalism in a way that a single-option presentation simply cannot."
>
> — Casey Sprabary

Building Your Price Book for Margin

Your price book is not a competitive response document. It is a financial instrument. Every line item should be built from the ground up: fully loaded labor cost, material cost with appropriate margin, overhead allocation, commissions, and target net profit.

Step one: Establish your fully loaded labor cost.

This is not your technician's hourly wage. It is their total compensation wages, benefits, payroll taxes, workers' comp, vehicle cost per hour, uniform and tool allowance divided by their billable hours in a year. For most residential service technicians, fully loaded labor cost runs between $45 and $75 per hour depending on market and experience level. If you have not calculated this number, everything downstream in your price book is built on guesswork.

Step two: Establish your material margin target.

Materials should be marked up to reflect not just replacement cost but carrying cost, ordering time, financing fees, and the convenience value of having the right part on the truck at the moment it's needed. A 30 to 50 percent material margin is standard across residential HVAC, plumbing, and electrical. If your material margins are below that, your price book is subsidizing your supply house.

Step three: Allocate overhead by job.

Your overhead rent, insurance, software, administrative staff, marketing needs to be recovered somewhere. Divide your total monthly overhead by your average monthly billable hours to get an overhead cost per labor hour, then build that into every job in your price book.

Step four: Define your target net profit per job.

Set a target net profit percentage typically aiming for 15–20%+ in residential service work and build every line item in your price book to support that outcome. To ensure you actually hit your targets after discounts, inefficiencies, and real-world variability, pricing should be modeled closer to 18–22% net, not the minimum acceptable range. When you build your price book this way, pricing stops being a guess and becomes a system. And systems scale.

Dynamic Pricing: Your Most Underused Asset

Dynamic pricing means adjusting your pricing in real-time when on site with a customer to accommodate multiple repairs or recommendations completed within the same service call period. Overhead is already accounted for; therefore, you can afford to reduce the second or even third repair or improvement option. An example of this looks like your technician diagnosing the system as having a capacitor failure, however, the contactor is pitted and they don't have any surge protection or indoor air quality solutions. The capacitor repair is full price, but the contactor, surge protection, and air cleaner or UV light can be reduced by 10-15% to get it all done in one shot.

How to Build a Dynamic Pricing Structure

Many systems allow technicians to apply reduced pricing when multiple repairs are completed on the same visit. If yours doesn't, you can still implement this with clear pricing rules and technician workflows.

Step 1: Start With the Math

Build your pricing around profitability, not discounts. Identify your most common repairs (contactors, capacitors, motors, etc.), and ensure each repair is profitable at full price. You must still hit your target margins even when multiple repairs are completed.

Then structure pricing:

First repair = full price

Additional repairs = ~10% reduction

Step 2: Example

Full Price:

Contactor Replacement: $450

Surge Protector Installation: $600

Same Visit Pricing:

Contactor: $450 (full price)

Surge Protector: $540 (10% off)

Total: $990

(Original total: $1,050)

Step 3: Technician Script

"Since we're already here and have the system opened up, I can take care of both of these today. Normally, each repair is priced individually, but when we complete multiple repairs in the same visit, we reduce the additional work since we're already on site. So, your contactor would be $450, and instead of $600 for the surge protection, it would be $540 today."

Step 4: Rules

First repair is always full price

Additional repairs get a modest reduction (10% recommended)

Discount is based on efficiency of being on site

Do not stack discounts without clear rules

Bottom Line

This is not about discounting. It's about increasing ticket value, improving the customer experience, and creating a system your team can follow consistently. "Would you like to go ahead and get on the schedule?" Most customers say yes.

CASE STUDY: THE SUMMER PRICING EXPERIMENT

One of our clients a residential HVAC company doing approximately $9 million per year came to us after a frustrating peak season. Their phones had been ringing at full capacity for six straight weeks. Their technicians were exhausted, working ten and eleven-hour days. Their customer satisfaction scores had dropped. And despite the record call volume, their margin for the quarter was only slightly better than the prior year.

The problem was that they had scaled their volume without scaling their pricing. They were running at 110% capacity at standard rates. The demand was there to support a significant premium. They simply had not captured it.

The following summer, we helped them implement a two-tier pricing structure: standard rates from April through mid-June and after Labor Day, with a 20% peak season service premium from mid-June through Labor Day. They trained their CSR team on the framing and launched without fanfare.

The result was that call volume in peak season dropped by approximately 8%, as highly price-sensitive customers self-selected out. Revenue in peak season increased by 14%. Technician overtime dropped significantly. Satisfaction scores recovered. They made more money, burned their team out less, and served their customers better. That is what dynamic pricing is designed to do.

Pricing and the Membership Model

No conversation about pricing strategy is complete without addressing maintenance agreements and membership programs. A well-designed membership model is the single most powerful pricing structure available to a residential service company not because of the monthly or annual revenue it generates directly, but because of what it does to every other number in your business.

Membership customers book service calls at a higher rate. They have higher average tickets. They refer more new customers. And when it comes time to replace a system, they convert at a dramatically higher rate than non-members. The lifetime value of a membership customer in a well-run home service business is typically three to five times the lifetime value of a non-member. It's imperative that your membership pricing with discounts takes into account your target margins so you don't cut into your profitability on members.

What Pricing Has to Do with Marketing

Here is the connection that most operators miss: your pricing model is not separate from your marketing strategy. It is part of it.

When your average ticket increases by $80, the revenue impact of every lead your marketing generates increases proportionally. A business generating

400 service calls per month at a 65% close rate and an average ticket of $750 produces $195,000 in service revenue. The same business at an average ticket of $830 produces $215,800. Same leads. Same close rate. Same marketing budget. Same technicians. $20,800 more revenue every single month or nearly a quarter million dollars per year from a pricing model adjustment alone.

This is why we address pricing in this book alongside marketing. The operators who reach $15M, $20M, and beyond with healthy margins are not just great marketers. They are great pricers. They understand that revenue is a product of volume multiplied by ticket, and they manage both sides of that equation with equal discipline.

Your next revenue breakthrough may not be in your marketing spend. It may be in your price book.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Pricing Model Health Check		
Answer honestly. Every 'No' is a growth opportunity.		
Do you use flat-rate pricing for the majority of your residential service work?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your price book updated at least quarterly?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you know your fully loaded labor cost per technician per hour?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Are your material markups consistently applied at 30–50% or higher?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Does your price book include overhead allocation per job?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do your technicians present tiered service options (Good / Better / Best) on calls?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you have a defined peak-season pricing adjustment in place?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you have a maintenance membership program with documented LTV data?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you track average ticket by technician and review it weekly?	☐ YES	☐ NO

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 4:

1. The three primary pricing models each serve different functions. Flat-rate with tiered options is the highest-leverage structure for residential service.

2. Your price book must be built from the ground up fully loaded labor cost, material margin, overhead allocation, and target net profit.

3. Tiered service packaging drives higher average tickets and higher customer satisfaction simultaneously when trained and presented correctly.

4. Dynamic pricing during peak demand is legal, ethical, and financially significant. Build your demand tiers and train your CSR team on the framing.

5. Your pricing model and your marketing strategy are inseparable. Average ticket improvement is a direct multiplier on every lead your marketing generates.

CHAPTER FIVE

More Leads Won't Fix a Broken Business

Remember the client we talked about in Chapter 3 the one we had to part ways with? His instinct, right up until the end, was the same one I hear from nearly every operator I sit across from: *just get me more leads.* He never stopped believing that volume was the answer. That belief cost him everything the data was trying to give him.

He is not unique. He is the rule.

There is a belief so deeply embedded in the home service industry that most operators never stop to question it: if revenue is flat, buy more leads. If a technician has a slow week, buy more leads. If a competitor is growing faster, the answer is obvious buy more leads.

I call it the "more leads" lie. And it is one of the most expensive habits the marketing industry has ever created. More leads in a market laden with private equity-backed companies is often not even a possibility due to inflated lead costs, so it's imperative to maximize every opportunity to the fullest extent.

Marketing firms have built entire businesses on this assumption. And why wouldn't they? It is in their direct financial interest to make you believe that growth lives upstream of your funnel that the solution to every problem is more volume at the top. They get paid whether the leads convert or not. They get paid whether your booking rate is 90% or 40%. They get paid whether your technicians are closing at 70% or leaving half their opportunities on the truck.

> The operators running the most efficient businesses aren't the ones spending the most on marketing. They're the ones who stopped needing to.

What Your Numbers Are Actually Telling You

Consider two companies. Both running 100 calls a day. Same market. Same booking rate of 92%. On paper, they look identical at the top of the funnel.

But here is where it diverges.

Company A closes service calls at 56% and averages $705 per ticket. Company B closes at 62% and averages $800 per ticket. That six-point difference in close rate and $95 difference in average ticket produce a revenue gap of more than $5 million per year. And Company A is spending over a million dollars more in marketing just to compensate for performance gaps that a training investment could fix for a fraction of the cost.

That is not a marketing problem being solved by more marketing. That is a performance problem being treated incorrectly and expensively as a marketing problem.

Stop asking how to get more leads. Start asking why the leads you already have aren't converting at the rate they should.

THE THREE LEVERS

Close rate. Average ticket. Tech turnover rate. These are the only three numbers that let you grow revenue while reducing or at minimum, holding flat your marketing spend. Every other lever in your business flows from these.

The Three Levers That Actually Control Growth

Close rate. Average ticket. Technician turnover rate. These are the only three numbers that let you grow revenue while reducing or at minimum, holding flat your marketing spend. Every other lever in your business flows from these.

Before we look at what moving those numbers actually produces, it's worth spending a moment on the third lever, because it is the one most operators either don't track or don't fully understand.

TTO: Technician Turnover is the rate at which your technicians identify and present an installation opportunity during a service or maintenance call. A technician running a tune-up on a 15-year-old system is sitting in front of a replacement conversation waiting to happen. Whether that conversation occurs and whether it leads to a sold install is entirely a function of training, process, and accountability. Most companies run TTO conversion rates between 8% and 12%. Elite operators push that number to 14% and beyond. And given that the average install ticket runs anywhere from $6,000 to $12,500 or more, every percentage point of TTO improvement is worth an extraordinary amount of revenue on an annualized basis.

Here is what it looks like when you move all three levers together across three performance scenarios:

Metric	A - Current	B - Improved	C - Optimized
Leads Required	29,000	25,000	22,000
Service Close Rate	56%	60%	62%
Avg. Service Ticket	$705	$750	$800
Avg. Install Ticket	$6,176	$8,500	$12,500
TTO Conversion	10%	12%	14%
Marketing Spend	**$3.3–$3.5M**	**$2.75–$3.0M**	**$2.25–$2.5M**
Total Revenue	$22–$23M	~$25M	$27M+

Notice what happens as performance improves. Revenue climbs from $22–23M to over $27M. Marketing spend drops from $3.3–3.5M down to $2.25–2.5M. You need 7,000 fewer leads. Your cost per lead falls. Your customer acquisition cost falls.

You did not buy your way to growth. You earned it by getting better at the job you were already doing.

THE DAILY MATH

Let that table sink in for a moment by reducing it to a single day.

Same 100 calls. Scenario A closes 57 jobs and books seven installs. Scenario C closes 62 jobs and books nine installs. That's two additional installs every single day at an average ticket of $12,500. Annualized, before you've spent a single additional dollar on marketing, that represents over $9 million in additional install revenue alone.

Not from a new market. Not from a new product line. Not from a bigger ad budget.

From two more installs a day.

That is the math your marketing agency will never show you, because it has nothing to do with their invoice.

> "Stop asking how to get more leads. Start asking why the leads you already have aren't converting at the rate they should."

Why the Habit Is So Hard to Break

Part of this is psychological. Buying leads feels like action. It feels like you are doing something about the problem. Improving close rate or average ticket requires a different kind of work training, accountability, compensation structure, process. That work is harder, less immediate, and far less comfortable to confront directly.

Part of it is the relationship dynamic with your marketing vendor. Most agencies are compensated based on spend or lead volume. They have no financial incentive to tell you that your booking rate needs work or that your technicians are leaving money on the table, and most lack the experience to even do so. In fact, they have every incentive to keep you focused on the top of the funnel where their value lives and away from the middle, where yours does.

And part of it is that the lever simply isn't visible. When you buy leads, you can see the number go up. When you improve close rate by five percent, the math is invisible to most operators they don't have a model built to show them what that change is actually worth. The performance table above is designed to fix that. Once you see the numbers side by side, the argument for chasing more leads instead of improving performance becomes very difficult to make.

Self-Assessment: Throughput Performance Check

Before you increase your marketing budget this year, answer these questions honestly. Every "No" is a growth opportunity.

If you answered "No" to three or more of those questions, you are not ready to scale your marketing. You are in need of dissecting your operational performance. More spend on top of those gaps doesn't accelerate growth it accelerates the cost of every weakness inside your operation and weakens your bottom line month after month.

The correct order of operations is to earn the right to spend more on marketing by first proving you can close, convert, and monetize the demand you already have.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Throughput Performance Check		
Answer honestly. Every 'No' is a growth opportunity.		
Is your booking rate consistently at or above 80%?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your service close rate consistently at or above 60%?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your average service ticket at or above your target for your market?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your TTO (Technician Turnover Rate) conversion rate tracked and improving?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you have a structured CSR training and scripting program in place?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you track close rate by technician and coach to it weekly?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you know the revenue impact of a 5% improvement in your close rate?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your marketing spend declining as a percentage of revenue year over year?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do you track average ticket by technician and review it weekly?	☐ YES	☐ NO

What to Do with This Information

Marketing matters. You need leads. Nothing in this chapter is an argument against investing in customer acquisition, rather it is an argument for making sure that investment lands in fertile ground.

The businesses that scale past $20 million, that build real enterprise value, that grow revenue while protecting margin they almost all share one thing in common. They fixed their performance model before they scaled their marketing model. They trained their CSRs before they bought more calls. They coached their technicians before they ran more ads. They built the system first, and then poured fuel on it.

That sequence is not accidental. It is a discipline. And it is available to you right now, regardless of where your numbers currently stand.

The gap between where you are and where you want to be is almost certainly smaller than you think. It may be as simple as two more installs a day.

HOMEWORK

Take these questions seriously. Write your answers down. Calculate the annual revenue impact of each improvement. Then ask yourself one final question that sits beneath all of them:

What percentage of your current marketing spend is compensating for performance gaps rather than fueling genuine growth?

That number whatever it is is your starting point. And the moment you know it, everything changes.

- What is your current service close rate, and what would a 4-point improvement be worth annually?

- What is your average service ticket, and are your technicians trained to present premium options?
- What is your TTO conversion rate, and do your techs know how to create an install opportunity from a service call?
- What percentage of your current marketing spend is compensating for performance gaps rather than fueling genuine growth?

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 5:

1. **"Buy more leads" is the most expensive habit in the home service industry.** It feels like action. It looks like growth. But pouring more volume into an underperforming system doesn't solve the problem it funds it. Marketing firms profit from this belief whether your leads convert or not, which is exactly why no one in their financial interest will ever tell you to stop.
2. **A six-point close rate difference and a $95 ticket gap can cost you $5 million a year.** Two companies. Same market. Same call volume. Same booking rate. The only difference is performance on the truck and on the phone and the revenue gap between them exceeds $5 million annually. That gap isn't a marketing problem. It's a training and accountability problem being treated, incorrectly and expensively, as a marketing problem.
3. **TTO conversion is the most underutilized lever in home services.** Most operators either don't track TTO conversions or don't fully understand what moving the needle there is worth. Two additional installs per day at a $12,500 average ticket represents over $9 million in annualized revenue without a single additional dollar in ad spend. That math is available to almost every operator in this industry right now.

4. **As performance improves, your need for marketing spend decreases.** The scenario table makes this undeniable. Moving from current trajectory to fully optimized adds over $4 million in revenue while reducing marketing spend by more than a million dollars annually and requiring 7,000 fewer leads. You don't buy your way to that outcome. You earn it by getting better at the job you were already doing.
5. **You have to earn the right to scale your marketing.** The correct order of operations is performance first, then spend. Train your CSRs before you buy more calls. Coach your technicians before you run more ads. Build the system before you pour fuel on it. The businesses that scale past $20 million and protect their margins on the way up almost universally did this work first and the ones who skipped it are still wondering why growth feels so expensive.

CHAPTER SIX

Marketing That Actually Works in the Trades

Here is the most important thing I can tell you about marketing a home service business: you are not trying to create demand. You are trying to capture it. The trades are different from most other industries, and marketing for a trade business requires a different mindset.

Your customer does not scroll Instagram on a Tuesday morning and suddenly decide they need a new HVAC system. They wake up at 2 a.m. in July with no air conditioning, grab their phone, and search for the fastest, most credible option available. Your job is to be there when that search happens, look trustworthy when they find you, and make it easy for them to call.

That distinction between capturing existing demand and creating new demand is the foundation of every intelligent marketing decision in the trades. It changes how you allocate your budget, how you evaluate your channels, and how you measure results.

The Demand-Capture Foundation

For a trade business at any stage of growth, the following channels form the non-negotiable foundation of an effective marketing strategy. Before you spend a dollar on anything else, these need to be working.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO is the foundation of long-term, sustainable lead generation. When done well, it puts your business at the top of Google's organic search results for the terms your customers use most frequently. The value of SEO is that it generates high-intent leads without a per-click cost. The challenge is that it takes time typically six to twelve months of consistent effort post website completion before results become significant. Companies that invest in SEO early and maintain it consistently have a structural advantage that compounds year over year.

Google Ads (Pay-Per-Click)

Google Ads places your business at the top of search results immediately, paying only when someone clicks. For trade businesses, PPC is one of the highest-performing paid channels available because it targets people with active, high-intent search behavior. The key to profitable PPC management is disciplined keyword targeting, conversion-focused landing pages, and consistent optimization of cost per lead against your revenue targets. Poorly managed PPC campaigns those that target broad keywords, lack negative keyword lists, or drive traffic to a generic homepage can burn through a significant budget with minimal return.

Local Service Ads (LSA)

Local Service Ads are Google's pay-per-lead product for home service businesses, and they have become one of the most cost-effective lead channels in the trades. Unlike standard pay-per-click (PPC), you pay only for verified leads actual phone calls or messages from people in your service area in need of immediate service. LSA leads also carry a "Google Guaranteed" badge that significantly increases consumer trust. Maintaining strong LSA performance requires consistent five-star reviews, a complete and accurate profile, quick response times to inbound leads, and ranking leads in your LSA dashboard to alert Google to what is working vs. what isn't.

Online Reviews

In the trades, reviews are not just a reputation management tool they are an active conversion driver. A business with 500 Google reviews averaging 4.8 stars will outperform a business with 50 reviews at 5.0 stars in almost every conversion scenario, even when underlying service quality is identical. Reviews influence LSA ranking, affect organic search visibility, and are the first thing a prospective customer looks at when deciding whether to call you. Building a proactive review generation system is one of the highest-ROIs that a growing trade business can make.

Call Tracking and Attribution

Call tracking is the tool that makes every other channel more effective. By assigning unique phone numbers to different marketing sources, it provides definitive data on which channels are generating calls, generating booked appointments, and producing revenue. Without this data, you are making investment decisions based on guesswork, more commonly referred to as "gut decisions". With it, you can optimize your spend with precision and cut the channels that are not performing. This is non-negotiable at any stage of growth.

CASE STUDY: LSA Recovery: How One Company Recovered Lost Ground

A well-established plumbing company in the Mid-Atlantic had been relying heavily on Local Service Ads as their primary lead channel. After relocating their main office, their LSA performance dropped dramatically over about six weeks. Call volume fell by nearly 40%, and the owner was frustrated and confused.

When we audited their LSA setup, the problem was clear. The office relocation had created NAP inconsistency their business Name, Address, and Phone number were now listed differently across their website, Google Business Profile, and online directories. Google's algorithm had flagged the discrepancies and reduced their ad visibility accordingly.

We conducted a full NAP audit across more than 40 online directories, corrected every inconsistency, updated their Google Business Profile, and worked with a Google account representative to restore their verification status. Within 60 days, their LSA visibility had fully recovered. Within 90 days, their cost per lead had actually improved from pre-relocation levels.

The lesson: in digital marketing, execution matters more than strategy. You can have the right plan and still lose ground due to technical details that carry enormous weight with the algorithms controlling your visibility.

The Demand-Creation Layer

Once your demand-capture foundation is solid, a second category of channels becomes available to you: demand creation. These channels do not capture customers who are already searching. They build the brand presence and awareness that primes future searches and shortens the decision window when the need arises.

Adding demand-creation channels before you have captured the available bottom-of-funnel demand is like watering a garden before you have planted anything. But once your digital foundation is producing consistent results, these channels can meaningfully accelerate your growth.

Email Marketing – Your Highest-ROI Owned Channel

Email marketing is not glamorous, but for a home service business with a customer database of any real size, it is consistently one of the highest return investments available because you own the channel completely and the incremental cost of reaching an existing customer is essentially zero.

The foundational use case is reactivation: reaching customers who have not had service in 12 to 24 months and creating a reason to re-engage. A well-executed reactivation campaign in a database of 5,000 dormant residential customers will produce booked jobs at a cost per acquisition that no paid channel can match.

SMS – The Channel Your Competitors Are Ignoring

If email has the highest ROI of your owned channels, SMS has the highest open rate of any channel you will ever use. Text message open rates consistently exceed 95%, with most messages read within three minutes of receipt.

The appointment reminder use case alone justifies the investment. A business running 400 service calls per month with an 8% no-show rate is losing 32 jobs per month. An automated SMS reminder sequence sent 24 hours before and two hours before each appointment routinely cuts no-show rates by 50% or more. At an average ticket of $800, that is over $150,000 in recovered annual revenue from a single automated workflow. Most of your competitors do not have this. You should.

Brand Investment Channels (This Is What Multiplies Everything Else)

Once your pricing structure and demand capture channels are in place, the next layer is brand investment.

Cable, streaming, billboards, radio, direct mail, and organic social are not direct lead generation channels. They are brand-building channels that create familiarity with your name in the market.

Your customer is not choosing from a blank slate when they search. They are choosing from the names they recognize and trust. When someone has seen your brand across multiple touchpoints, they are more likely to:

- Click your ad over a competitor
- Trust your company faster
- Convert at a higher rate

This is how brand investment improves the performance of your demand capture channels like SEO, PPC, and Local Service Ads. Instead of viewing these as "extra," they should be treated as force multipliers for everything you are already doing.

Direct Mail – The Channel That Came Back

As digital advertising has become more crowded and CPLs have increased, the physical mailbox has become one of the least competitive channels in the trades.

Direct mail builds presence in a defined geography and reinforces your brand over time. The most effective operators target new movers, saturate key zip codes, and align direct mail with their digital efforts.

A homeowner who receives a mailer and then sees your ad in search results is significantly more likely to convert than one who only encounters a single channel.

OTT and Streaming Video

Streaming and connected TV deliver the reach of traditional television with the targeting precision of digital. These platforms allow you to serve video ads to specific households based on geography, homeownership, income, and behavior.

A meaningful presence typically requires a monthly investment of $5,000 to $8,000, making it best suited for companies ready to scale brand alongside performance marketing.

Radio

Radio builds frequency and repetition in a local market. It keeps your brand top-of-mind during everyday routines like commuting, which is when most homeowners are mentally available but not actively searching.

Consistency is what makes radio work. Over time, repeated exposure increases recall, so when a need arises, your name is already familiar.

Billboards

Billboards create constant visual presence in high-traffic areas. They are less about immediate action and more about long-term brand recognition.

Strong billboard campaigns focus on simplicity, memorability, and repetition in the same locations. Done right, they reinforce your brand every time someone drives through your service area.

Organic Social

Organic social builds trust and relatability by showing your company in action your technicians, your work, your culture, and your customer interactions.

It keeps your brand visible between service needs and adds a layer of credibility when customers research you after finding you through other channels.

How to Think About It

PPC captures demand

SEO captures demand

LSA captures demand

Brand channels increase the likelihood that demand chooses you

The Real Impact

When executed consistently:

Cost per lead decreases over time

Conversion rates increase across all channels

Branded search volume increases

Your company becomes the obvious choice

Bottom Line

If demand capture gets you in the game, brand investment helps you win it.

You are not just competing on price or speed; you are competing on recognition and trust before the customer ever picks up the phone.

The AI Search Revolution: Act Now or Fall Behind

This section will age the fastest because the technology is moving faster than any book can capture in real time. But the strategic principle will not change.

Artificial intelligence is fundamentally reshaping how consumers find service providers. When a homeowner types “who is the best HVAC company near me” into ChatGPT, Google’s AI Overview, or any emerging AI search tool, they are not getting a list of ten blue links. They are getting a synthesized answer. One company, maybe two, named directly. Everyone else is invisible.

This creates a visibility problem the home services industry has not yet fully reckoned with. Your SEO ranking still matters. Your Google Ads position still matters. But increasingly, whether an AI recommends you is a function of something different: the quality, volume, and consistency of the information the AI can find about your business across the entire web.

Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is the practice of structuring your online presence to be referenced, cited, and recommended by AI-powered search engines. The core principle for a home service company: AI models learn to trust and recommend businesses that have dense, consistent, high-quality information across multiple authoritative sources. Your Google Business Profile is complete and regularly updated. Your website contains detailed, locally relevant content that answers the specific questions homeowners in your market are asking. Your reviews are numerous, recent, and replied to within 24 hours.

Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) is a related practice: structuring your website and content so that your business is the source AI tools pull from when answering specific consumer questions. When a homeowner asks an AI “what should I do if my AC stops working in the middle of the night?”

your company's step-by-step answer, published on your website with clean formatting, is what gets cited. This is not a complicated content strategy. It is the disciplined practice of answering the questions your customers are actually asking in the format that AI systems are designed to retrieve and repeat.

> "In the trades, the best marketers are not the ones who use the most channels or spend the most on ads. They are the ones who know exactly why each channel is in the mix and what it would cost to remove it."
>
> — Casey Sprabary

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 6:

1. Trade marketing is about capturing demand, not creating it. Your customer is already searching.
2. The non-negotiable foundation: SEO, Google Ads, Local Service Ads, online reviews, and call tracking. These come before anything else.
3. AI search is reshaping how consumers find service providers. Building structured, locally relevant content now creates a compounding advantage as AI-generated recommendations become the default.
4. Email, SMS, and direct mail are high-ROI owned and near-owned channels most operators underinvest in all three.
5. Add demand-creation channels (OTT, streaming, direct mail) only after your demand-capture foundation is producing consistent, measurable results.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Where Growth Breaks: The Gap Between Marketing and Operations

There is a moment in the growth of almost every trade business where marketing starts to work really well and then the problems begin. A $6M AC & heating company in the Midwest came to us jaded after two bad agency experiences. They had been without one for over a year, and it showed website performance declined. An in-house writer can only do so much without technical SEO and ongoing optimization.

Lead volume dropped. Revenue followed. In response, they grabbed every lead gen tool they could find. But without clear tracking, they had no understanding of performance or return so they compounded the problem.

At the same time, the owner was shouting for more leads. But that wasn't the issue. They had an overhead problem and an efficiency problem. The team was built ahead of growth, but revenue couldn't support it. And their close rates weren't as strong as they thought.

Leads were missed. Opportunities weren't maximized. And without visibility, no one could see where things were breaking. More leads wouldn't have fixed it, only masked it. They didn't need more marketing they needed clarity.

What we found was telling.

On the surface, they had a strong team. Underneath, complacency had crept in and visibility into core metrics was gone. The issue wasn't effort, it was clarity.

Once we fixed their tracking, everything changed. They could finally see the breakdowns, and fix them. Improving close rates. Getting the right tech to the right job. Proper call classification. Tying revenue to campaigns.

Once the visibility was there, the path forward became obvious. There was no single big fix, just disciplined adjustments, better accountability, and the right people in the right seats. As those pieces aligned, performance followed.

Not because they generated more leads, but because they gained better control of the opportunities they already had. The problem wasn't marketing. It was execution.

The phones ring more than the CSR team can handle. Call abandonment rates spike. Technicians are booked out two weeks in advance, and customers who needed help today are calling a competitor. Online reviews start reflecting service gaps created by the strain. And ironically, the better the marketing performs, the worse the customer experience becomes.

This is the alignment problem. It is one of the most common growth killers in the trade industry. And it is almost entirely preventable.

Most business owners think about marketing and operations as separate functions. Marketing generates demand. Operations fulfill it. At low volume, this separation is manageable. At scale, it becomes a structural threat to growth because the decisions that govern one function are being made in complete ignorance of the other.

Your Dispatch Board Is Your Real Marketing Dashboard

Here is a shift in thinking I share with every client: your dispatch board is your real marketing dashboard. The state of your dispatch board how full it is, how far out you are booked, and what percentage of your available time is being utilized should be informing your marketing spend decisions in real time.

When your board is full and your technicians are stretched, aggressive marketing investment is precisely the wrong move. You are generating leads you cannot service well, burning out your team, and creating the conditions for bad reviews that will undermine your future marketing performance. The smart move is to pull back on spend, protect service quality, and use the window to hire and train before re-accelerating.

When your board has capacity, that is the moment to step on the gas. Marketing investment in a well-resourced operation converts at a higher rate and generates better customer experiences, which feed the review and referral engine that sustains long-term growth.

Marketing should control demand, not just generate it. And controlling demand requires constant, honest communication between your marketing strategy and your operational capacity.

CASE STUDY: When Success Became The Problem

A residential electrical company in the Southeast came to us with a problem they were embarrassed to admit: their marketing was working too well. They had invested heavily in Google Ads and Local Service Ads, and lead volume had grown significantly. But rather than enjoying the revenue growth they had anticipated, they were drowning.

Their CSR team was fielding more calls than they could handle, leading to call abandonment rates above 25%. Their technicians were booked out 11 days. Their Google review rating had dropped from 4.8 to 4.4 stars in four months and declining reviews were beginning to suppress their LSA performance, creating a self-reinforcing negative cycle.

The most important decision we made together was counterintuitive: we reduced their marketing spend by 35% immediately. We redirected the freed budget toward emergency hiring support and used the reduced lead volume to give the team breathing room to deliver excellent service. Within two months, review scores recovered. Call abandonment dropped below 8%.

Then, with two new technicians onboarded and a retrained CSR team, we reintroduced the marketing investment. Revenue growth continued, but this time, it was supported by an operation capable of delivering on the promise

Building the Alignment System

The structural solution to the alignment problem is a regular cadence of cross-functional communication between your marketing leadership and your operations leadership. For most companies in the $5M to $15M range, this looks like a weekly meeting no more than 30 minutes where dispatch capacity, current booking rate, and marketing performance are reviewed together.

The outcome of that meeting should be a clear, shared understanding of whether to accelerate, maintain, or pull back on marketing spend for the following week. This kind of dynamic, capacity-aware marketing management is what separates companies that scale cleanly from those that grow in cycles of feast and burnout.

Simple in concept. But it requires two things that are surprisingly hard for growing businesses: the discipline to build the system, and the trust between marketing and operations leadership to have honest conversations about where the business actually stands.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: OPERATIONS & MARKETING ALIGNMENT AUDIT		
Answer honestly. Every 'No' is a growth opportunity.		
Does your marketing team know your current dispatch capacity before buying leads?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Do your CSR and dispatch teams know which marketing channels are driving calls?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is there a weekly cross-functional review between marketing and operations?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Are marketing promises (speed, availability, pricing) aligned with what ops can deliver?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Is your call-to-book rate tracked and reviewed weekly?	☐ YES	☐ NO
6 Do you pull back marketing spend when your dispatch board is full?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Does your marketing team know your technician capacity by zone and day?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Has your ops team ever been asked what their capacity ceiling is and do you honor it?	☐ YES	☐ NO

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 7:

1. Marketing and operations are not separate functions they must be actively aligned to scale successfully.
2. Your dispatch board is a real-time signal for marketing investment decisions.
3. Overmarketing into an under-resourced operation creates service failures that undermine future marketing performance.
4. A weekly cross-functional review between marketing and operations is one of the highest-leverage meetings in a growing trade business.
5. Controlling demand is as important as generating it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Building the Machine That Prints Money

There is a meaningful difference between a company that runs marketing campaigns and a company that has built a growth machine. Most companies run campaigns. The best companies build systems.

A campaign is a discrete initiative with a beginning, an end, and a specific objective. It is a project-based approach to growth that produces results in bursts rather than building compounding momentum. It requires constant manual attention to keep moving and can result in reactive scrambling to try to catch up when the funnel dries up.

A growth machine is different. It is a set of interconnected systems marketing, operations, reporting, and leadership accountability that work together continuously to generate, convert, and retain customers. Once built, it requires maintenance and optimization rather than constant reinvention. And over time, it compounds.

Here is something that should concern you: eight out of ten companies we onboard at Hero have never built or followed an annual marketing budget. They do not have a marketing strategy. They have a series of monthly spend decisions. The difference between those two things is the difference between running and winning.

Did you know: Most owners don't have a marketing strategy they have monthly spend decisions. In fact, 8 out of 10 companies we work with have never built or followed an annual budget based on their actual operational performance metrics or historical trends.

The Four Components of a Growth Machine

1. A Unified Data Infrastructure

The foundation of any growth machine is data that is clean, connected, and visible. This means your call tracking platform, CRM, marketing dashboards, and financial reporting all pulling from the same source of truth. When a lead comes in from a Google Ad, your team should be able to trace that lead through booking, job completion, and revenue collection automatically, not through a monthly manual reconciliation. Manual reconciliation always falls to the wayside when business booms and you're left wondering what happened to your marketing budget when the dust settles and it's crickets.

2. A Weekly Performance Cadence

Growth machines run on discipline. Specifically, they run on a weekly cadence of structured performance reviews where leadership examines the full KPI stack, identifies trends, makes decisions, and assigns ownership. This cadence is the heartbeat of the machine. Without it, even great data infrastructure turns into a dashboard that no one looks at.

> "At Hero, we run two standing internal team reviews every week without exception. Monday is capacity alignment we look at every client's dispatch board and adjust ad spend accordingly. Friday is performance trailing 7 days, 30 days, quarter, and year, for every client in the portfolio. That cadence is how we catch trends before they become problems and pivot before a slow week becomes a slow month."
>
> — Joshua Cates, Founder

3. Channel Attribution and Optimization

A growth machine always knows where its best leads are coming from. It has clean attribution across every marketing channel, and it actively optimizes spend toward the channels producing the lowest cost per acquired customer and the highest lifetime value. This is not a set-it-and-forget-it process it is a continuous cycle of measurement, analysis, and reallocation.

4. Leadership Accountability Structures

The most important and most frequently overlooked component of a growth machine is leadership accountability. Someone in your organization needs to own the full funnel from marketing spend to revenue collected and have the authority and the data to make decisions that affect multiple departments. In companies below $10M, this is often the owner. Above $10M, it typically requires a dedicated marketing and operations leader who reports directly to ownership and is accountable for the full revenue engine.

CASE STUDY: From Chaos To System: $6m To $11m In 12 Months

A $6 million HVAC company came to us in a state I would describe, charitably, as organized chaos. Solid technicians. A loyal customer base. A market position that should have been producing significantly more revenue than it was. But no reporting infrastructure, no accountability structure, and no consistent process for making marketing decisions.

The owner was making spend decisions based on which vendor called him most recently or which relationship felt the strongest. There was no weekly review of performance data. No attribution model connecting marketing spend to revenue outcomes. Each department operated in its own silo.

Over the first 90 days of our engagement, we built the infrastructure: call tracking integration, CRM cleanup, a unified weekly dashboard, and a performance review cadence that included the owner, the office manager, and the lead dispatcher. We established clear KPI ownership who was responsible for booking rate, who owned average ticket, who managed cost per lead and built a weekly rhythm around reviewing and improving each metric.

Within 12 months, the company had scaled from $6 million to just over $11 million. Not because we discovered some revolutionary marketing channel, but because we built a system where good decisions could happen consistently, and where the data to make those decisions was always visible and actionable.

The Compounding Effect

Here is what I want every business owner reading this to understand: systems compound. A booking rate improvement that feels small in month one becomes enormous by month 12. A $30-per-lead reduction in cost per acquisition looks modest on a quarterly review but represents hundreds of thousands of dollars saved over three years. A leadership team that reviews performance weekly makes hundreds of small, correct decisions per year that collectively transform the trajectory of a business.

The companies that break through to $25M and beyond are not the ones with the biggest advertising budgets. They are the ones that build systems early, maintain those systems with discipline, and continuously compound the gains those systems produce.

> "We don't obsess over outcomes we engineer the process that produces them. Revenue, profit, growth: those are byproducts of a great process. Win the process, and you win the outcome."

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 8:

1. The difference between running campaigns and building a growth machine is the difference between bursts of growth and compounding momentum.
2. A growth machine requires four components: unified data, a weekly performance cadence, channel attribution, and leadership accountability.
3. Systems compound. Small, consistent improvements across multiple metrics produce extraordinary results over time.
4. Leadership accountability is the most frequently overlooked and most important component of a scaled growth system.
5. Build the machine before you need it. The time to create structure is before complexity overwhelms you, not after.

CHAPTER NINE

Why Most Companies Stall Below $5M

The $5 million mark is one of the most significant ceilings in the home service industry. I have watched talented, hardworking business owners do everything right invest in marketing, build a great team, deliver excellent service and still find themselves circling just below that threshold for years.

The reason is not what most people think. It is not a marketing problem. It is not an operations problem in the traditional sense. It is a leadership problem. Specifically, it is the problem that arises when a business outgrows the model that got it to where it is.

At $2 million, hustle works. The owner is everywhere, making every important decision, keeping everything together through force of will and personal commitment. At $3 million, hustle is starting to show its limits, but a talented owner can still hold it together. At $3.5 million to $4.5 million, the model begins to break. The business has become too complex, too multi-faceted, and too fast-moving for any single person to manage through direct involvement.

The companies that break through to $5 million and beyond are the ones whose owners make the transition from operators to leaders and build the team and structure to match the scale they are trying to achieve.

Building a True Leadership Team

Below $3 million, most trade businesses have capable people in key roles, but they are executing rather than leading. At the $5 million and beyond threshold, you need people who own their functions completely who think strategically about their area, bring data-driven recommendations to leadership, and are accountable for outcomes, not just activities.

This typically means investing in a dedicated operations leader, a marketing coordinator or deeply accountable marketing partner, and a finance lead who can produce real-time visibility into company performance. These are not hires you make when you reach $5 million. They are hires you make to reach $5 million with the ability to continue scaling your business.

Systematizing What Has Been Informal

Below $10 million, a lot of what drives performance exists in people's heads. The owner knows instinctively when to push marketing harder and when to pull back. The dispatch manager has an unwritten system for prioritizing calls. The top technician has a presentation approach that produces far better close rates than anyone else on the team but it has never been documented or taught.

At scale, informality becomes fragility. When your best dispatcher leaves, that unwritten system leaves with them. When your top technician takes a vacation, close rates drop. The $10 million breakthrough requires systematizing what works turning instinct and individual excellence into documented, trainable, repeatable processes.

Marketing Discipline at a New Level

The marketing rigor required at $10M is meaningfully different from what gets a company to $5M. At scale, you need formal budget allocation frameworks, regular agency performance reviews with revenue-accountability standards, a clear strategic roadmap for the following 12 to 24 months, and a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between marketing investment and enterprise value creation.

The companies that break through treat marketing as a strategic business function not an expense category. They own the data. They hold the vendors accountable. They manage the full funnel. And they make investment decisions based on what the numbers say, not what the agency recommends.

There are some lessons best taught by the people who have lived them firsthand.

For this part of the chapter, I want to turn things over to Casey Sprabary, our Director of Client Strategy at Hero Marketing. Before joining Hero, Casey spent years on the operator side of the home services industry, where she experienced firsthand what it takes to scale a company, build accountability, and turn marketing into measurable revenue.

What follows is her experience, in her own words.

1. Automated Rehash: Unlocking Revenue That Was Already There

As we scaled from $5M to $25M, one of the biggest breakthroughs wasn't new lead generation it was capturing revenue we were already creating and losing.

We implemented a fully automated rehash program targeting unsold estimates. Every missed opportunity triggered a structured follow-up sequence across SMS and email paired with clear internal accountability on estimate tracking and status.

Within the first year, this program generated just under $1M in recovered revenue without increasing lead volume.

The takeaway: Growth doesn't always come from more leads. Sometimes it comes from maximizing the opportunities you're already paying for.

2. Brand Dominance: Letting the Market Come to Us

Instead of relying heavily on traditional lead generation channels, we made a deliberate shift to brand-first marketing. We invested aggressively in direct mail, streaming and cable, and community-based marketing to build consistent visibility and recognition in our service area. Over time, this created a level of familiarity where homeowners already knew our name before they ever searched.

As a result, we were able to simplify our lead generation strategy to primarily:

Branded PPC
Local Service Ads (LSA)

We weren't competing for attention we were being searched for directly.

This approach drove:

Higher conversion rates
Lower cost per lead
Stronger trust at the point of contact

The takeaway: When your brand is strong enough, you don't chase demand you attract it.

3. Alignment: Where Marketing and Operations Actually Scale

Scaling to $25M wasn't just about marketing it was about alignment across the entire business. In my role as Marketing & Recruiting Manager, I worked directly with the GM, office manager, and operations manager to ensure that what we were selling in marketing could be delivered operationally and that the team was staffed and trained to support it.

This included:

Aligning lead volume with technician capacity
Coordinating hiring with marketing growth targets
Ensuring CSR performance supported booking goals
Creating feedback loops between field performance and marketing strategy

This level of alignment eliminated bottlenecks, reduced wasted spend, and allowed us to scale efficiently without breaking the business.

The takeaway: Marketing doesn't scale a company alignment does.

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 9:

1. The $5M ceiling is a leadership ceiling, not a marketing or operations problem.
2. Breaking through requires transitioning from operator to leader and building the team to match.
3. Informal systems that worked at $5M become liabilities at $10M. Systematize what works before it becomes a fragility.
4. Marketing at $10M requires a higher level of strategic rigor, budget discipline, and vendor accountability.
5. The most important investment you will make at this stage is often a leadership hire not a new advertising channel.

CHAPTER TEN

Build a Business Buyers Actually Want

The most common reason well-run home service businesses fail to achieve the valuation they deserve is not performance. It is presentation.

The business generates real profit. The owner has worked a decade to build something genuinely valuable. And then they sit across from a private equity firm or a strategic buyer, hand over their financials, and watch the offer come in at a fraction of what they expected because the books tell a story that obscures the value rather than revealing it.

Understanding your financial architecture is not just an accounting exercise. It is one of the most powerful strategic tools in your business. It determines how much you can invest in growth. It determines how clearly your leadership team can see what is working. And when the time comes to sell, it is the difference between a premium multiple and a disappointing one.

The buyer is not purchasing your revenue. They are purchasing your earnings and their confidence that those earnings will continue.

> "The buyer is not purchasing your revenue. They are purchasing your customer list and earnings and their confidence that those earnings will continue.

What EBITDA Actually Is and Why It Matters More Than Revenue

EBITDA stands for Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization. It is the metric sophisticated buyers use to evaluate the underlying operating profitability of a business, stripped of financing decisions, tax strategies, and accounting-driven non-cash charges.

Home service businesses in the HVAC, plumbing, and electrical sectors are typically valued at a multiple of EBITDA. That multiple depends on the size of the business, the quality of its systems, its market position, the depth of its leadership team, and the predictability of its revenue. Residential service businesses in the $10M to $25M range commonly trade at multiples between 4x and 8x EBITDA, with well-structured, high-quality businesses at the upper end of that range.

The math of that multiple deserves a moment of your attention. A business generating $2 million in EBITDA and commanding a 5x multiple is worth $10 million. The same business, restructured to generate $2.5 million in EBITDA, is worth $12.5 million at the same multiple or potentially more, because higher EBITDA often justifies a higher multiple to begin with. A five-hundred-thousand-dollar improvement in EBITDA, properly documented and presented, can add $2.5 million to $4 million to your exit value.

That is not an accounting detail. That is a life-changing number. That is an opportunity to create generational wealth.

Add-Backs: The EBITDA Adjustment Most Owners Miss

An add-back is a non-recurring, discretionary, or owner-specific expense added back to your reported net income to produce a normalized EBITDA that accurately reflects the true earning power of the business.

Home service companies routinely run personal or discretionary expenses through the business: the owner's vehicle, personal travel, family members on payroll, one-time legal settlements, consulting fees paid to related parties. None of these expenses reflect the ongoing operating cost structure under new ownership. A sophisticated buyer will identify these items and add them back to your earnings but only what you can document and defend.

An add-back without clean supporting documentation is worth exactly nothing in a negotiation. A well-documented add-back schedule, prepared by your accountant and presented clearly in your financial package, is a direct line to a higher offer.

> "When we were preparing for the acquisition, one of the most valuable things we did was build a formal add-back schedule 12 months before we expected to go to market. That window was deliberate. It gave us time to identify every legitimate add-back, document it properly, and in some cases, restructure how certain expenses were recorded going forward so the normalization story would be as clean as possible."
>
> — Casey Sprabary

The add-back schedule Casey's team ultimately presented to buyers included the owner's personal vehicles, a one-time legal settlement, above-market compensation to a family member in a role that would be restructured post-acquisition, and the owner's personal health insurance premiums run through the business. In total, those add-backs represented just over $380,000 in annual expense all of it legitimate, all of it documented. At the multiple they ultimately received, that $380,000 in add-backs was worth well over $1.5 million in transaction value.

No documentation. No add-back. No value recovery.

The Chart of Accounts: Building Financial Clarity from the Ground Up

If EBITDA is the destination, your chart of accounts is the road map. Most home service companies inherit a chart of accounts by default their bookkeeper set up QuickBooks, accepted the standard template, and has been using the same category structure for years. The result is a P&L that technically adds up but tells you almost nothing about where you are actually making and losing money.

A chart of accounts built for a scaling home service business gives you at a glance visibility into gross margin by service type, marketing cost by channel, labor cost by category, and overhead as a percentage of revenue. That level of detail does not come from a default accounting template. It comes from intentional design.

Income Accounts: Breaking Revenue Down to What Actually Matters

Your income accounts should separate revenue by service category at a minimum: service and repair revenue, installation and replacement revenue, maintenance agreement revenue, and if applicable commercial revenue. If you blend all of these into a single revenue line, you cannot see which part of your business is driving your margin and which part is diluting it.

Cost of Goods Sold: The Gross Margin You Cannot Afford to Miss

Your COGS should capture every cost directly tied to delivering your service: technician labor, subcontractor costs, parts and materials, and direct field costs. The difference between your revenue and your COGS is your gross profit. For residential home service companies, target gross margins by category are roughly: service and repair, 40–55%; equipment installation, 25–40%; maintenance agreements, 50–65%.

Operating Expense Accounts: Where Overhead Lives

Your marketing spend deserves its own detailed structure broken out by channel, not lumped into a single "advertising" expense. At minimum: paid digital, traditional media, LSA and lead generation services, and agency fees. When your marketing expense is a single line item, you cannot perform meaningful channel-level ROI analysis. When it is properly separated, your P&L itself becomes a marketing performance dashboard.

The Timeline: When to Start Preparing

The ideal preparation window for a business planning to go to market is 24 to 36 months before the anticipated transaction. That timeline allows you to address chart of accounts issues and let clean financials accumulate for at least two full fiscal years. It gives you time to identify, document, and in some cases, restructure add-backs. And it gives your EBITDA time to reflect the improvements you have made.

The businesses that exit at premium multiples are not the ones that cleaned up their books in the six months before going to market. They are the ones that built clean, transparent, well-structured financial systems years before anyone asked.

FINANCIAL PREPARATION CHECKLIST
36 months before exit:
• Review and restructure chart of accounts
• Separate revenue by service type
• Break out marketing spend by channel
• Separate field labor from administrative payroll
24 months before exit:
• Begin building your normalized EBITDA model with your CPA
• Identify and document all potential add-backs
• Establish clean recurring revenue tracking for maintenance agreements
12 months before exit:
• Ensure three years of clean, consistent financials are in place
• Address any customer or revenue concentration issues
• Begin building the narrative around market position and leadership depth
6 months before exit:
• Finalize add-back schedule with CPA support
• Begin investment banker or M&A advisor selection process
• Prepare management presentation materials

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 10:

1. EBITDA is the primary valuation metric for home service acquisitions. Every percentage point of EBITDA margin improvement translates directly and multiplicatively into enterprise value.
2. Add-backs can represent hundreds of thousands of dollars in normalized EBITDA. They are only recoverable if documented, defensible, and presented clearly.
3. Your chart of accounts is a strategic tool, not just an accounting structure. Revenue segmentation and channel-level marketing expense are the minimum for a scaling business.
4. Gross margin by service type is one of the most important and most frequently invisible metrics in the trades.
5. The preparation window for a premium acquisition starts 24 to 36 months before you expect to go to market.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Scaling to $25M and Beyond

Above the $25 million mark, something fundamental shifts in how you think about your business. You are no longer simply operating a service company. You are operating an asset.

An asset has value that extends beyond its current-year revenue value rooted in predictability, scalability, customer retention, brand position, and leadership depth. A service company that generates eight figures but is entirely dependent on the owner to function, has no documented systems, and operates with minimal marketing infrastructure might generate huge top-line revenue. But its enterprise value what a sophisticated buyer would pay for it will be a fraction of what a well-structured $25 million company commands.

The companies I have watched reach $25 million and exit successfully share a common characteristic: they started thinking about enterprise value early, built toward it intentionally, and made every major operational and marketing decision through the lens of sustainable, scalable performance.

> “Build well. Build with discipline and with purpose. The numbers will follow.

EBITDA: The Number That Drives Everything

At the $25M level, every percentage point of EBITDA margin improvement represents hundreds of thousands of dollars in enterprise value. Marketing waste elimination, operational efficiency, and revenue mix optimization all flow directly into EBITDA.

This is why the disciplines we have discussed throughout this book throughput optimization, pricing strategy, attribution clarity, aligned marketing and operations are not just tactical improvements. They are direct inputs to the number that defines what your business is worth. Every dollar you recover from wasted marketing spend, every percentage point you add to your close rate, every dollar you add to average ticket: these are not just P&L line items. They are EBITDA contributions that multiply into enterprise value at the moment of sale.

Brand Dominance

In most local and regional markets, the home service company that dominates the brand conversation—the one customers think of first, that has the most reviews, that owns the most search visibility, that appears most frequently in front of the most relevant audiences commands a significant revenue and margin premium over competitors.

Building brand dominance is a long-term, cumulative effort that requires consistent investment in reputation management, SEO, content, and community presence. It is not built quickly. But once built, it is extraordinarily durable. And it is one of the factors buyers pay a premium multiple to acquire.

Market Share and Defensibility

A business that controls 15–20% of the addressable service demand in its core markets is significantly more valuable than a business with the same revenue that holds a 3–5% share. Market share creates defensibility; it raises the cost for competitors to compete effectively, generates economies of scale in customer acquisition, and signals to potential buyers that the business occupies a structural position that is difficult to displace.

The path to meaningful market share is the sum of everything in this book: a throughput system that converts leads efficiently, a pricing model that maximizes average ticket, a marketing infrastructure that captures demand across every relevant channel, and an operations team that delivers the kind of service that generates reviews, referrals, and renewals.

Strategic Acquisitions as an Accelerant

Many of the most successful home service companies in the $15M to $25M range have used strategic acquisitions to accelerate their growth in ways that organic marketing alone cannot match. Acquiring a complementary company whether a smaller competitor in a new geography, a different trade service that opens cross-sell opportunities, or a specialty operator with a valuable customer base can add revenue, capacity, and market position simultaneously.

Done well, acquisitions are an accelerant. Done poorly, they are a distraction. The companies that execute them successfully have strong operational systems in place before attempting them. They are not buying growth to compensate for operational weakness. They are buying growth to multiply operational strength.

At $12M, most companies don't have a marketing problem. They don't even have an operations problem. They have a structure problem.

Everything still runs through the owner. Decisions bottleneck. Pricing is inconsistent. Hiring is reactive. Marketing is judged by feel instead of data. And while the business may be profitable, it isn't scalable and it definitely isn't valuable in the eyes of a buyer.

We've seen this transition up close. And we've lived it. What follows are three real-world shifts that separate a $12M operator-run company from a $25M asset-quality business.

Story 1: From Operator-Run to Asset-Quality

When we first stepped into the business, it was doing just over $10M. On paper, it looked strong. In reality, everything depended on one person.

The owner was:

- Reviewing pricing decisions
- Handling escalations
- Weighing in on hiring
- Making judgment calls on marketing spend

Nothing moved without them. The first shift wasn't hiring more people; it was removing decision dependency. We started by systemizing pricing. Every repair, every install, every membership offering was built to hit target margins. No more "gut pricing" in the field.

Then we implemented:

- A structured CSR booking process with accountability metrics
- A defined turnover process from service to install
- Clear KPIs by role (not just revenue as a whole)

Marketing was no longer judged by "how it felt." It was tied directly to:

- Cost per lead
- Cost per paying customer
- Revenue per call

Within 12 months, the business didn't just grow it stabilized. And that's the difference. A $12M business can grow; through effort. A $25M business grows through systems that produce consistent outcomes without constant oversight.

That's when it becomes an asset.

Story 2: Brand Dominance That Paid Off at Exit

Most companies treat brand like a luxury. Something you invest in "once you have extra money."

We took the opposite approach. As the business scaled past $15M, we made a deliberate decision to invest heavily in brand-first channels:

- Direct mail saturation
- Streaming and cable
- Consistent community presence

At the time, it didn't all show up as immediate ROI in a dashboard. But something else started happening:

- Branded search volume increased
- Customers started referencing ads before we ever asked
- Close rates improved across both service and install
- PPC performance became more efficient without increasing spend

By the time the business approached exit, it was no longer competing as just another contractor. It was a recognized name in the market. And buyers notice that.

During acquisition conversations, the brand wasn't treated as a "nice to have." It was viewed as a defensive moat something that would continue to produce demand, lower customer acquisition costs, and support long-term growth.

That translated into real value. Because when a buyer sees a company that owns mindshare in its market, they're not just buying revenue.

They're buying future certainty.

Story 3: Strategic Acquisition as a Growth Lever

At scale, growth isn't just about generating more leads. It's about compressing time. We saw this firsthand during a strategic acquisition of a smaller, established company in the same market. On its own, the business wasn't doing significant volume. Minimal marketing. Limited brand presence.

But it had something more valuable:

- A long-standing domain
- Existing customer base
- Local trust built over time

Instead of replacing it, we leveraged it.

We:

- Maintained the legacy brand presence short-term
- Integrated operations, pricing, and service standards
- Redirected marketing authority into the parent brand over time

This allowed us to:

- Capture existing demand tied to that name
- Strengthen organic search performance
- Expand market share without starting from zero

The acquisition didn't just add revenue it accelerated positioning. What would have taken years organically was achieved in a fraction of the time.

The Shift From $12M to $25M

None of these were one-time wins. They were structural decisions:

- Building systems instead of relying on people
- Investing in brand before it felt comfortable
- Using acquisition as a strategic lever, not just a financial one

At $12M, growth feels like pushing. At $25M, growth becomes predictable. Not easy but controlled.

The Takeaway: If you're at $12M, the path to $25M isn't a mystery.

It's a shift:

From decisions → systems
From lead generation → demand capture + brand dominance
From organic growth only → strategic expansion

The companies that make this transition stop operating like a business. They start operating like an asset someone would want to buy. And that changes everything.

Build With Purpose

I want to close this chapter with something personal, because I think it matters.

Enterprise value is a number. An important number, and the work of building toward it is meaningful and worth doing with full commitment. But the business owners I have watched reach this level and exit with genuine satisfaction are not the ones who optimized exclusively for the exit number.

They are the ones who built something real. Who built a team they were proud of. Who served their market with genuine excellence. Who created a culture people wanted to be part of and a brand their community trusted. The financial outcome was a result of those things not a substitute for them.

Build well. Build with discipline and with purpose. The numbers will follow.

HERE ARE THE FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 11:

1. At $15M and beyond, you are building an asset, not just a business. Enterprise value thinking should inform every major decision.
2. EBITDA, brand dominance, market share, and operational systems are the primary drivers of premium enterprise value.
3. Every improvement in throughput, pricing, and marketing efficiency is a direct EBITDA contribution that multiplies at exit.
4. Strategic acquisitions can accelerate market position in ways that organic marketing alone cannot match.
5. The businesses that command premium multiples are the ones with documented systems, leadership depth, and market dominance not just revenue.

CONCLUSION

Build Something Extraordinary

We have covered a lot of ground together. We built the KPI stack that measures what actually matters. We looked at your business through the lens of throughput and discovered that the greatest growth opportunities were hiding in plain sight. We challenged the most expensive assumption in the industry that more leads solve every problem and replaced it with a framework built on performance, pricing, and precision.

We walked through the marketing channels that actually work in the trades and the ones worth adding as you scale. We built the case for eliminating waste before increasing spend. We tackled the alignment gap between marketing and operations that kills growth for companies at every stage. We introduced the four components of a growth machine and showed what happens when they work together.

We confronted the $10 million ceiling and named it what it actually is: a leadership problem, not a marketing problem. And we built the financial architecture that transforms a well-run service company into an asset a buyer will pay a premium multiple to own.

> “Clarity creates control. Control creates profit. Profit creates freedom.”

That sequence is not a marketing slogan. It is the architecture of a business that works. And it is entirely achievable regardless of where you are starting from today.

I have watched business owners build this from $2 million. I have watched them build it from $8 million. The starting point matters less than the decision to start to stop operating reactively and start building with intention.

But before I let you go, I want to say something that has nothing to do with KPIs, conversion rates, or marketing budgets and everything to do with why you picked up this book in the first place.

> "In over 25 years as an entrepreneur, I have been brought to my knees more times than I care to count. There were seasons where the weight of payroll, growth, and expectation felt suffocating. Moments where I questioned everything my decisions, my abilities, my right to even call myself a leader."

And every single time, without fail, someone showed up. Another owner who had survived what I was walking through. A mentor who refused to let me quit. A voice that cut through the noise and pushed me through the pain and out the other side into something I never could have built alone.

I used to think that need that longing for encouragement was something I would eventually outgrow. That one day, with enough success and enough years behind me, I would stop needing anyone to remind me of what I was capable of. I was wrong. And the science backs that up.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow placed love and belonging at the very center of human motivation not as a luxury, but as a foundation. Above basic survival, below everything we associate with achievement and purpose, sits our fundamental need for connection. No amount of revenue changes that wiring. The CEO of a $50 million company and the entrepreneur just starting out are running the same emotional operating system. We are not built for independence. We are built for belonging.

And yet the myth of the self-made entrepreneur persists the lone visionary who willed their empire into existence through sheer force of will. Psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, who first identified impostor syndrome, found that this myth does enormous damage to high achievers. Because the more you build, the more you have to lose, and the louder that internal critic becomes. The voice that says you don't deserve this. That you got lucky. That it's only a matter of time before everyone figures it out. Encouragement from others isn't a crutch it's an external reality check against an internal voice that will never fully go away, no matter how successful you become.

Here is the distinction that changed how I think about all of it. There is a difference between seeking validation out of insecurity and seeking affirmation out of a hunger to grow.

You are not looking for someone to tell you that you are great. You are looking for someone to remind you what you are capable of when you have temporarily lost sight of it. That is not weakness. That is self-awareness. And it is one of the most underrated qualities in a great leader.

> Psychologist Carol Dweck's research on growth mindset shows that the people who continue developing long after others plateau are precisely the ones who stay open to feedback, to challenge, to being poured into.

The stakes make this harder, not easier. The more people who depend on you employees, families on your payroll, customers trusting your service the heavier the psychological load. A business crisis never feels like just a financial problem. It feels like an identity crisis because, for most of us, what we have built is inseparable from who we are. In those moments, a mentor or a fellow owner does something that no dashboard or framework can do. They act as a mirror. They reflect back to you a version of yourself that is capable, resilient, and worth betting on when you cannot generate that image on your own.

So, here is the reframe I want to leave you with: the fact that you still feel that longing for a mentor, for a community, for someone who has been where you are trying to go is not a sign that you are behind. It is a sign that your instinct for greatness is still alive and refusing to let you settle. The entrepreneurs who stop needing anyone are often the ones who quietly stop growing. Stay hungry. Stay coachable. Stay open to being challenged by people who are invested in your success.

That is what this book was built to be one of those voices. Every framework, every data point, every hard truth between these pages exists for one reason: to show you the path to the next level and give you the confidence to walk it.

You have the market. You have the team. You have the framework. And now you have the blueprint.

What comes next is up to you.

Go build something extraordinary.