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When I first started out, I spent countless hours in the driveway with a mop, a bucket, and a hose. I thought putting in that sweat equity was saving the business money. But as we grew, I learned a hard lesson about what “free” labor was actually costing us.

Every tent rental business reaches a tipping point. In the early days, you trade your time to save your cash. But eventually, you run out of hours in the day. Your inventory piles up, dirty tents get sidelined, and suddenly you are paying a dedicated crew just to scrub vinyl instead of setting up events.

When operators call me about buying a machine from us at Teeco Solutions, they almost always start by looking at the price tag. But to understand the real return on investment, you have to look at what hand washing is actively draining from your business right now.

First, there is the labor. Think about what you pay two or three workers to manually scrub a large tent for hours. An automated washer handles that same volume in

a fraction of the time, allowing you to reallocate those payroll dollars to revenue-generating tasks, like loading trucks and completing more setups.

Second, consider your inventory turnaround. A dirty tent sitting in the warehouse is a tent that isn't making you money. When your cleaning process is a bottleneck, you end up having to buy more inventory just to cover busy weekends. Automated washing gets your inventory clean, dry, and back on the shelf faster, meaning you can rent the same tent more frequently.

Finally, there is the hidden cost of wear and tear. Hand scrubbing with harsh brooms and varying pressure can wear down the protective coating on your vinyl faster than you might realize. A dedicated, purpose-built washer applies consistent, safe friction that actually extends the life of your most expensive assets.

Buying a washer isn't just about avoiding a dirty job. It is about removing the bottlenecks that keep a great company from scaling.

A Founder's Honest Account of a Hard Build

What It Actually Took to Get FORCEY Right

A Note From Steve: I've known Ramsey Duqum for 20 years, and he's one of the sharpest leaders in the industry. He's spent several years building something the industry needs, so this month, I'm handing him the cover to tell you about it.

We're a rental company known nationally for our efficiency. Over the years, hundreds of rental outfits have toured our facility trying to figure out how we do it.

Able Rents is one of this industry's salt-of-the-earth groups, and, like many of you, we had to settle for fragmented, outdated legacy technology. We didn't build FORCEY to get into the tech game. We built it because the industry needed better. Our company has never accepted an answer followed by “because that's the way we've always done it.” So, we partnered with the only company we could trust to continually innovate: ourselves.

In June of 2023, we had a 55,000-formula spreadsheet that served as our operational brain, organizing our time and people. We had a five-month runway, an outside agency, and a plan to launch a simple utility app. Then I shared it with a group of industry heavy hitters, and a friend changed the course of our history. He said if you can do this, you can bring all of our software requirements into one program. As a rental guy, I knew he was right.

We faced a fork in the road. Launch a simple, profitable app or build the ecosystem the industry actually needed. I walked upstairs to my brother's office and asked Brandon if we could afford to lose a million dollars. He said yes and asked how long it would take. I told him a year.

That was three years ago.

Building FORCEY has cost us many times what we projected. Our engineers kept coming back, saying the initial foundation wasn't strong enough and had to be rebuilt. Each time they told me it needed more work, I chose the harder answer — even when it meant missing a deadline I had announced publicly. We built a powerhouse internal tech team, and we learned the hard truth of doing something that had never been done. You don't know what you don't know.

I won't pretend anything has been easy. The struggles came weekly, and I became consumed with figuring out how to connect inventory, people, trucks, tasks, and time in one working system. One evening in the middle of all this, I was carrying my 6-week-old son on my shoulder, and the answer just hit me out of nowhere. I didn't move. I called my wife over to take him, then called our director of sales immediately. He listened, went dead silent, and finally said, “Can we actually do that?” I told him I didn't know, but I was going to find out.



We found out. Two teams with one mission between them made it happen. Our rental company is Team Red, and FORCEY is Team Blue. Able Rents uses the system under real pressure, identifies problems, and provides immediate feedback. Our software team fixes and deploys. We take the punches before our users do. We're a living laboratory, and this year, that laboratory got its rainbow after the storm.

During our 10-day NFL Draft project, I watched FORCEY automatically route people, trucks, and tasks while avoiding overtime and balancing employee capabilities. I was on my deck at midnight, watching a logistics miracle unfold on the screen. After everything it took to get there, we had proof that the larger vision worked.

Now, we're focused entirely on getting FORCEY ready for our early adopters and the companies that have been waiting patiently for the software. You won't see us at the shows this year because promotion isn't the priority. Our users are.

The whole point of telling you our story is so you know how hard it is to get this right. We're not vibe coding here. We're passionate rental people building what rental people need, and a broader rollout is coming. When we open the doors, we'll make sure the whole industry knows.

-Ramsey Duqum

Marketing vs. Business Development

ONE BUILDS VISIBILITY. THE OTHER BUILDS GROWTH.

Early on, many business leaders treat marketing and business development as the same thing. While they are closely connected, they aren't doing the same job. Marketing is mostly about helping the right people notice, get to know, and consider a business. Business development focuses on identifying relationships, markets, partnerships, or opportunities that can drive future growth.

Marketing builds visibility.
Marketing isn't just advertising or posting on social media. At its best, it helps a company understand its audience and communicate why its products or services warrant attention. The work often starts with the message itself. A good marketing effort helps explain who the company serves, what problem it solves, and why the buyers should pay attention now.

The work is usually tied to the company's current offers. If the business already has a product, service, or solution to sell, marketing helps bring it to the right audience with the right message.

Business development builds opportunity.
Business development has its eyes on the road ahead. Instead of focusing only on how to promote what the company already sells, it asks where future growth might come from. That could mean building a referral network, entering a new market, finding a strategic partner, or shaping a service the company doesn't yet offer.

This is also where business development can get confused with sales. A sales team usually focuses on closing active opportunities. Business development often works earlier in the process by finding the right doors to open in the first place.

Growth needs both.
The two functions work best when they share information. If business development identifies rising demand in a new industry, marketing can position the company as a strong solution for that audience. If marketing notices certain questions keep appearing in emails, calls, or website traffic, business development can use that information to identify stronger opportunities.

Knowing the difference between these functions helps businesses diagnose problems and develop solutions. If people don't understand what you offer, your marketing may need work. If the business lacks direction on where its next growth should come from, business development may be the missing piece. The strongest growth usually comes when the company knows both how to be found and where it should be headed.



THE \$10 PART THAT COSTS THOUSANDS STOP LOSING MONEY WITH POORLY LOADED TRUCKS

People are sometimes surprised when I tell them we are really in the logistics business. All those pieces and parts sitting in your warehouse have to get to the job site at the right time, get assembled at the right time, and then come back through the whole thing in reverse. One of the biggest places it all breaks down is the truck not getting loaded correctly.

Think about what happens when a truck shows up at a job site missing one key piece. You've got five, 10, maybe 30 people standing around who can't move forward while somebody drives back to the shop for it. It might be a \$10 part, but the cost of that crew sitting there is astronomical.

Getting a truck loaded right starts before anything actually touches that truck. When the salesperson takes the order, it is entered into the software, which then creates a pick list for the warehouse. If you don't have software that does this, get it. Life is a whole lot easier when you can build a process around good paperwork.

The best system I've seen takes it from there. Every truck gets its own square taped off on the warehouse floor. The warehouse crew picks the parts and places



everything in the square for the truck it belongs to. When the driver comes in, he grabs the pick list and checks off every item with a pen before it gets loaded. That gives you two checks between the warehouse pick and the driver's count. Everything sits on carts and crates designed to load fast so the crew isn't fumbling around in the morning.

Accountability is the key to this system working, and it lands on one person: the driver. When something goes wrong, the manager asks them what happened. If the same driver keeps missing things, you have a people problem. If the warehouse keeps mispicking or the software is generating incorrect lists, you have a process problem. If it was a fluke, you let it go. When one person owns the outcome, they manage it tight, and that's how things get done properly.

Some owners tell me that double-checking wastes labor, but I'd argue that one stranded crew costs more than a full year of double-checks. Build the process, make one person accountable, and your trucks will go out right.

Before & After



A big THANK YOU to Chair and Equipment Rental of Rocky Mount, N.C., for providing us with the great before & after pictures of his tents that we used in our last edition! We love seeing client pictures!

GETTING THE SPARK BACK

When the Dream Becomes a Drag

Every tent rental company starts with a vision and a superpower. Maybe you're a great salesperson. Maybe you know how to put on events or can build just about anything. You leverage that one strength, the business gets going, and suddenly you're manifesting the vision. You're your own boss, and you're building something for your family. That startup energy is real, and it works.

Then something happens that breaks my heart. I talk with these same owners two or four years later, and I can see their spark is gone. The business is still doing fine, but they aren't. What they built to create freedom has become a weight around their necks, and now they're dreading the very thing they once dreamed of.

Part of the problem is that nobody teaches us how to be businesspeople. Your superpower got the company off the ground, but running it well asks for more. You need a working grasp of sales and marketing, people and culture, processes, data, and the new issues that come with growth. You don't have to master all of these things, but you have to know them well enough to keep your business moving in the right direction.

The problem, I've learned, is that the education you need as a business owner can't be taught. It has to be caught. The only way to catch it is to put yourself in environments where the lessons are flying around, like peer groups and mentorships full of people dealing with the same problems in different industries. You share stories and stay open enough to say you need help. Then you use that support to find a way forward.

The best part of all of this is that the moment you immerse yourself in learning and growing again, the fire comes back. That feeling of getting better every day is exactly what made the startup so exciting in the first place. Grow into the businessperson your company needs, and you won't just fix the business. You'll get excited about it again.

"BETTER LIVES, BETTER BUSINESS" IS BACK!

Want more on building a business that fuels your life instead of draining it? My podcast, "Better Lives, Better Business," is returning with new episodes. Scan to catch up before the new season drops!



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