

PROFESSIONAL DISTRIBUTOR

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THE PROFESSIONAL DISTRIBUTOR PLAYBOOK

Real-World Pro Tips from the Road

5 PLAYS FOR SUCCESS



PROFESSIONAL
DISTRIBUTOR

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Welcome

There is no single path to success in mobile tool distribution.

Some distributors inherit a route. Others build one from scratch. Some come from years in the bay and know exactly what technicians need. Others learn it one stop at a time.

But no matter how you started, you know this business is about more than moving tools. It is about trust. It is about consistency. It is about showing up even on the days when it would be easier not to.

This ebook brings together some of the best advice from our Pro Tip series. These insights come straight from distributors who are out there every day, running trucks, managing inventory, navigating customers' problems, and adapting to a changing market.

You will not find theory here. You will find experience.

Think of this as a conversation between pros. Take what fits your business. Adapt what makes sense for your route. And most importantly, keep building the kind of distribution business that lasts.

Let's get into it.



PLAY 1

Social media strategy

Social media strategy should be a core part of your playbook. According to a study by the University of Maine, people spend an average of more than two hours and 20 minutes per day on social media while using approximately 6.6 different social media platforms each month. That means your business has the opportunity for daily exposure to current and potential customers at no cost. To maximize results, successful professionals tailor their content and engagement strategy to each platform. Here's how they do it.

Getting ahead of the game

“Usually, if I get a new product, I’ll take a picture of it and post it on my social media and try to spread it out where people can see it. Then they’ll get a little hyped up and they might call and say, ‘Hey, can you hold me one set aside?’ Mostly that’s what it’s for. I try to get stuff in stock first before other dealers in my area will get it. That way, I can be ahead of the game and put it up on social media.”

—Brian Deakins, independent distributor

Keeping up with the group

“I have a huge Facebook following. When I was with [a flag], they recommended that you do a private group for just your customers, and as people came and went, you remove them from the group. I have 650 people on a private Facebook group that are customers, ex-customers, wives of customers, secretaries, parts guys, service advisors — people invite their friends to it now. I post specials, new stuff, and I also do TikTok ... all of that is good for business. It’s huge. When I was with [a flag], I would bet that 10 percent of my business came from social media.”

—Mike Stoner, independent distributor

Showcasing what’s new

“I have a thing called ‘Cornwell Corner’ on Saturday morning. Throughout the week if I see a guy using a tool in a way I hadn’t seen before or was pretty cool, I’ll video it, photograph it, put it up on my closed group, and next thing I know, I have three guys saying, ‘Well, I want that tool.’ So, I just sold three tools without even going to their shop.”

—Ron Davitt, Cornwell Quality Tools

Utilizing social for trade-in sales

When it comes to tool sales, Cameron Meyer believes social media is one of the most important vehicles for distributors. He’s a huge Snapchat user with about 500 business contacts. Any time he takes something in on trade, he’ll post it on his account, and it’s usually gone before he gets to his next stop.

—Cameron Meyer, Mac Tools

Creating engagement through giveaways

Mac Tools distributor Tim Lyons utilizes Facebook to communicate with customers. He posts specials and interesting car-related content throughout the week, and encourages customers to like his page by offering small giveaways like a pocket screwdriver. “I know some guys are really heavy into it, and I just probably won’t be that guy. But I’ll be a guy where that’ll be part of my overall piece.”

—Tim Lyons, Mac Tools

Keeping customers in the loop

“I’ll take and post the current flyer for the customers that have moved offshore or are working on a pipeline, whatever they do, they can visit my pages for the latest list of things coming out. I also do a lot of promotional events, races, stuff like that [for my pages], but [customers] always like to be included in what’s going on with Mac and with me.”

—Robert Tolbert, Mac Tools

Knowing where and how to use the right platform

Know where your audience is actively engaging. Once you identify your platform(s), create content based on what performs best on each one. Every platform's algorithm prioritizes specific types of engagement — the more users interact the way the platform prefers, the more visibility your content receives. Algorithms constantly evolve. Always monitor downturns in engagement and stay informed about emerging formats. Consider using AI to simplify your research and understand what content is most likely to perform well.

—Seth Hastings, Professional Distributor

Quick reference: Current best practices by platform

Platform	Content type	Primary engagement goal
LinkedIn	Analysis / POV	Comments
Facebook	Community discussion	Shares
Instagram	Educational reel	Saves / shares
X	Breaking commentary	Replies
TikTok	Fast explainer video	Watch time / completion
YouTube Shorts	Quick educational clips	Watch time / retention
YouTube (long-form)	Deep dives, interviews	Total watch time / session duration



PLAY 2

How to get customers to buy from you and not online

While it might be convenient to click “add to cart” instead of leaving the shop, technicians miss out on a lot when they forego face-to-face interactions with you, the distributor. It’s your job to show them what they’re missing and get them on your truck instead of surfing the web. These distributor-tested strategies can help keep technicians engaged, loyal, and buying directly from you.

Catch their attention online first

“Usually, if I get a new product, I’ll take a picture of it and post it on my social media and try to spread it out where people can see it. Then they’ll get a little hyped up and they might call and say, ‘Hey, can you hold me one set aside?’ Mostly that’s what it’s for. I try to get stuff in stock first before other dealers in my area can get it. That way, I can be ahead of the game and put it up on social media.”

—Gabby Libby, Cornwell Quality Tools

Keep stock and be willing to help

“Having the product in stock and offering that service, you have to sell yourself, that’s probably the two biggest things. Having a product that they can have in their hand and then being able to take care of it when something happens. My customers know that when they come to me with a problem, it’s going to be taken care of, and that will keep them coming back and buying.”

—*Brian Deakins, independent distributor*

Service, service, service

“Service. What I give them, they can’t [get online]. They can’t get the pink wigs. They can’t get the attitude. They can’t feel the love and the appreciation that I bring to the table. I’ve had guys say, ‘When you don’t show up, I’m sad for three days!’ A lot of it is what I bring when I show up ... when you can come into a shop and have an atmospheric change when you pull in and turn on the light.”

—*Robert Tolbert, Mac Tools*

Taking care of business

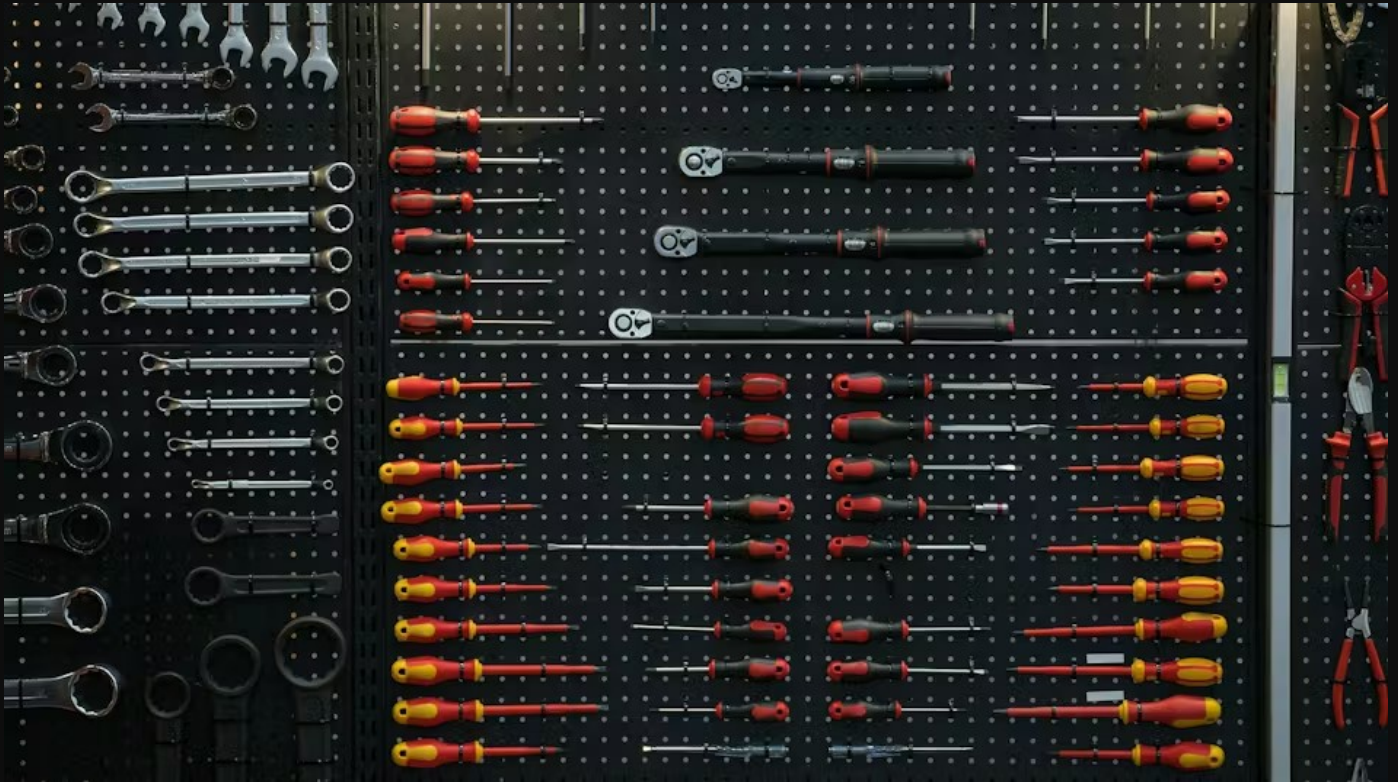
“Personal service. I mean, it’s the same old answers, but that’s really what it comes down to. It’s all in trust that if they break something, I’m going to take care of it, because otherwise I tell them, ‘You go online, that’s your responsibility.’ Whether I sell that line of Milwaukee or whatever, no. That doesn’t sound right because that sounds like I don’t want to give them service, but ... I do have to prove myself. If I go to a new shop, I have to prove myself — who I am.”

—*Gerri Schneider, independent distributor*

Make yourself their first choice

“With online competitors, service is so much more of a premium than ever before. [In years past,] customers bought from a tool dealer because they showed up and the customers didn’t really have a choice. In today’s market, they absolutely have a choice. It’s not about the price; it’s completely about the service.”

—*Steve O’Leary, Mac Tools*



PLAY 3

How to pick your inventory

Picking the right inventory for your customers can take a lot of thought and intention. You want products that are fresh, exciting, but also applicable to the types of repairs your technicians are doing day-to-day. The best distributors don't stock products by accident. Here's how industry veterans make smart inventory decisions.

Find the deals that will work for you

"Try to pick some stuff up that's on sale so you can have good profit margins. [Look] for whatever's new and selling hot. Listen to [customers'] conversations and hear what they say to other techs."

—Doug Mansell, Mac Tools

Stock your truck for your route

"Our inventory is picked per the route. So, all five of our trucks are stacked a little bit differently. For instance, Jimmy's truck, he may sell 50 boxes of rubber gloves a week because his shops aren't supplied with rubber gloves, whereas I don't sell any, because all my shops, their rubber gloves are paid for by the shop. So, every truck is stocked based on the route."

—Nick Smalley, independent distributor

Use your experience

“When I’m walking through shops, I look and see what the master techs have lying around or what they’re using. I rely on social media, or I look through my own toolbox, and I see what I had a good start with, and that’s what I try and incorporate into my inventory. It makes it even easier for me to talk about because I’ve used it before.”

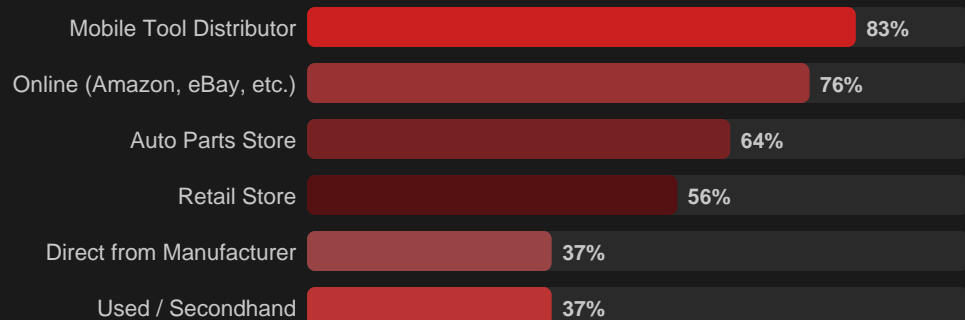
—Collin Kenehan, independent distributor

Stock up when you can, but keep track

“I ordered \$18,000 worth at the tool show at cost, which is like \$30,000 worth of tools. I’m stockpiling it, and then in two months, I grab it off my shelf, and I can go to my invoice and I can see my price easily. You almost have to mark everything as it comes in with what you want to sell it for.”

—Mike Stoner, independent distributor

Where are techs buying their tools? (2026 aftermarket profile)



Source: 2026 Aftermarket Profile, VehicleServicePros.com



PLAY 4

Handling difficult customers

When you're working in a field like tool distribution you're bound to run into a variety of customers. Ideally, every purchase or interaction will be a positive one, but it's impossible to make everyone happy. Every distributor encounters difficult customers at some point. Here's how industry pros keep those conversations productive and professional.

Handle it in stride

"I'm pretty blunt and quick-witted. I don't have a lot of tolerance for bullcrap. You mix all that together, it all works out. Don't take it too serious, and don't let it get to you [if] it's not hurting you. When [they] get off the truck everyone laughs about it and moves on."

—Doug Mansell, Mac Tools

Trust and respect

"If you take care of people, they're going to take care of you. In the years I've been a dealer, I've taken care of all sorts of issues. If they trust you, you can't do enough for them. I try to take care of people and treat them the way I want to be treated."

—Rich Rossi, Cornwell Quality Tools

Kill ‘em with kindness

“First and foremost, it is you don’t ever argue back with them. You just listen to their concern and address it in the way that you need to — no matter what the situation is. Myself and all [my drivers] know you just take care of the customers. Doesn’t matter. If we lose money on the deal, it doesn’t matter. At that point, when you have an upset customer, you just you do whatever it takes to make it right. You kill them with kindness.”

—Nick Smalley, independent distributor

Try to understand your customer’s situation

“If I go into a shop and somebody has a bill with me, and they’re kind of avoidant, then I talk to the service manager. I try to get advice from them, like, ‘Hey, is this guy quitting soon? Are you guys letting him go soon? When’s payday?’ I try and get my ducks in a row. I don’t ever like to leave somebody struggling, but I also have to, as the lender to these guys, I have to keep everything moving in the truck. I have signs posted in my truck about missed payments, or not paying me, or not communicating with me. I’m a pretty reasonable person. All you have to do is reply to a text.”

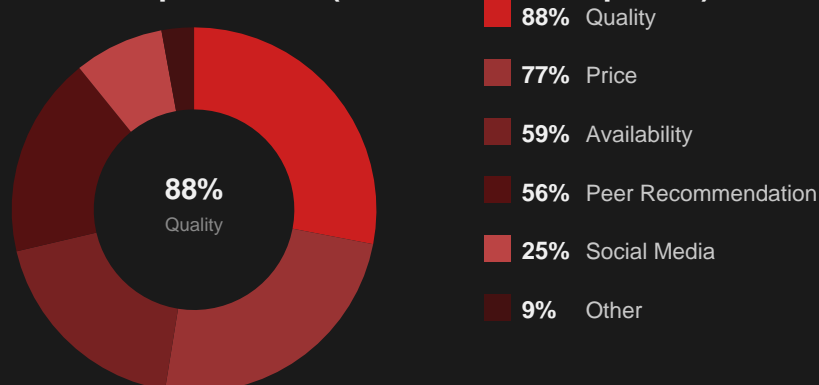
—Collin Kenehan, independent distributor

Customer service can’t be wrong

“Customers are always right, even if they’re not. If you ever say ‘No, I can’t,’ or anything other than ‘Let me check and get back to you’ to them [it could end badly]...it’s an industry-known fact that you don’t say anything negative to a customer — that’s wrong. Just tell them that you’re learning, and then you’re asking for their help. If you make that customer feel like he’s the most important person, you’ll get to know him and he’ll get to know what you’re about.”

—Robert Tolbert, Mac Tools

What drives a tool purchase? (2026 aftermarket profile)



Source: 2026 Aftermarket Profile, VehicleServicePros.com



PLAY 5

What do you do with your old truck?

There comes a time in many distributors' lives when they outgrow their tool truck. Whether it's become too cramped, too old, or you're just ready for a change, there are a thousand reasons to make the switch to a different set of wheels. Every truck has a second chapter. We spoke with distributors about what happens after it's time for an upgrade.

Pass it on

"My first truck went to my son, the second I sold to another dealer in my district, and the third went to North Carolina. I sold it on ToolTrucks.com. It's by far the best way to sell a tool truck, unless you have someone in your district who wants it. The last one, after the wreck, was sold through Copart for about \$9,500." Bonus tip: If you sell your truck to someone from another franchise, make sure to remove all your logos and graphics first.

—Jay Hashagen, Cornwell Quality Tools

Keep it in reserve

“I want to keep it in reserve because it doesn’t cost hardly anything for us to store an empty truck. When I come down,* instead of me riding along with the various routes, I can just go deliver toolboxes, and they don’t have to come in on a Saturday or go off route. So that’s one thing, but also, if we were to break down again — perish the thought — we could use it as a backup.” *Trombold no longer drives a truck for his business. He manages three routes and visits Midland one week each month to connect with his drivers.

—Chuck Trombold, Mac Tools

Add another route

“I reassigned my first truck to a secondary route under another driver, my employee Chris Williams. It was a practical way to increase capacity while keeping a reliable asset in service.”

—Robert Robinson, Mac Tools

Put it in your flag’s Facebook page

“I’m thinking about getting a new [truck], so I posted a picture of mine on Cornwell Tools’ Facebook page. I’ve reached out to my district manager, made contacts with dealers across the country. You shoot them a text, ‘Hey, my truck’s coming up for sale, this is what I’m going to be asking for it. This is the truck, this is the number of miles.’ And then just start kind of getting feelers for who’s looking for a truck. Once I get someone locked in, and I know the market is relatively good, then I’ll pull the trigger on a new truck and just start texting, ‘Hey, it’ll be ready in X amount of days, who wants it?’”

—Tracy Bourdin, Cornwell Quality Tools

Utilize all your resources

“ToolTrucks.com is an all-listing site for tool trucks. They have listings for Mac or Cornwell. Facebook Marketplace is also a good one. There’s also a lot of leasing companies that will work with you, so partnering with them when you go to sell might open the door for someone that says, ‘Hey, I can’t afford it, but I can lease it.’”

—Ryan Visona, independent distributor

Tools to stock

Imagine pulling into a shop with products technicians have been asking about before they even hit competitors' shelves. That's the advantage the right inventory can create. Successful distributors know that carrying the right mix of innovative, practical, and in-demand tools keeps technicians coming back week after week.

Here's a handpicked selection of tools and equipment to help you stock smarter, sell stronger, and stand out on your route.

Top planned tool purchases for 2026 (% of shops)



Source: 2026 Aftermarket Profile, [VehicleServicePros.com](https://www.vehicleServicePros.com)



3-pc Body Cutting Chisel Set, No. 13600CV

by Cal-Van Tools

Made from professional-grade, hardened steel. Comes with three angled chisels: flat, 15 degrees, and 90 degrees. The chisels boast an oval cutting surface that can be re-grinded for a sharp blade. Features a soft handle for safe operation and less fatigue.

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6" MEGA Open Magnetic Hook

by Gator Magnetics

Holds up to 45 lbs and is designed to work on thin steel, where traditional magnetic hooks often fall short. Its 6" extended depth is ideal for hanging and organizing power tools, cords, hoses, and bulky gear on steel tool boxes, car lifts, or other steel surfaces in garages and auto shops.

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3-pc Long Non-Turning Pneumatic Set, No. 32215

by Mayhew Tools

Engineered with an extended length to provide professionals with easy access to hard-to-reach areas. Each tool features four grooves that lock securely into the retaining balls of a quick-release chuck, ensuring maximum stability and a firm hold, allowing the tool to move back and forth on a single plane with the c-axis locked in place.

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2-pc 6" Cushion Grip Screwdriver Set, No. MT200-2M

by Milwaukee Tool

Features custom-machined tips to deliver a precise fit and reduce stripping during demanding fastening applications. The tips are laser etched to increase the gripping surface. Manufactured with high-strength, boron-infused steel for increased hardness. Includes a knurled shank for precision control, as well as quick identification markings on the handle.

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OMNI AXIS 2K Worklight

by NEBO

A multi-directional light and power bank designed to deliver adjustable lighting in a compact form. Producing up to 2,000 lm with a dual-axis head that rotates 360 degrees, the OMNI AXIS 2K runs for up to 20 hours and features hybrid cordless or wired operation. The magnetic kickstand allows for hands-free use.

[VIEW PRODUCT →](#)



Cylinder Leak-Down Test Kit, No. 33500

by Tool Aid

Diagnoses internal engine problems like leaking head gaskets, bad rings, and defective valves. Comes with a top dead center whistle that can be connected to the testing hose. Dual 2-1/2" gauges with protective rubber boot read to 100 psi/7 bar. A 0.04" orifice restriction fitting increases testing accuracy. Includes a 24-1/2" testing hose with 14mm end threads into 10mm, 12mm, and 18mm adapters.

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ArkPro Series Flat Unibody EDC Flashlight

by Olight

An upgraded version of Arkfeld Ultra, combining 1700 lm of Pure Flood, 800 lm of spotlight, 365nm UV light, and green beam in one flashlight. The UV light features both low and high power modes to reveal stains, detect leaks, and create glowing effects. Four lights can be used separately and the green beam can be used together with any of the three light sources to achieve seven combinations.

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Digital Cylinder Pressure Gauge

by AUTOOL

Utilizes digital sensing technology and high-precision chips to display pressure values. Equipped with a one-way valve, it accurately locks the maximum pressure value of the cylinder. Includes a data storage feature that records six sets of pressure measurement data. Users can switch between psi, Bar, and kg/cm². The HD 2.8" LCD backlight display ensures readability even in low-light environments.

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ONE

by *TOPDON*

A 10.1" automotive diagnostic tool designed for technicians looking for fast, accurate, and reliable diagnostics. Delivers dealer-level capability with clear network mapping, smart repair guidance, and deep coverage across modern vehicle systems. With support for advanced protocols, coding functions, and the speed of dual-Wi-Fi architecture, the ONE aims to keep workflow moving.

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ADS 10X Plus Diagnostic Scan Tool

by *Bosch Diagnostics*

Designed to perform scan speeds up to 24 times faster, with monthly software updates, and full vehicle scans in under 40 seconds with just three clicks. Features 98 percent coverage of North American vehicles including domestic, European, Asian, EV, and ADAS-equipped models. Its modular design supports evolving vehicle technologies and secure gateway access.

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Hobart Square Toe Chelsea Boot, No. 813941

by *Steel Blue Work Boots*

A 6" elastic sided Chelsea boot with an ErgoDefender steel toe cap giving the wearer room to move. The new style is ideal for technicians looking for all-day comfort thanks to the Trisole Comforting Technology system.

[VIEW PRODUCT →](#)



TORX Magnetic 8-pc Screwdriver Set in EVA Foam, No. SXTSD8

by *SUNEX Tools*

Includes eight TORX screwdrivers in a variety of sizes from T8 through T40. The magnetic tips securely grip fasteners to improve precision, reduce slippage, and make fastening tasks more efficient. High-visibility end caps display tip type and size. Laser-etched shaft sizes provide durable, permanent markings. Over-molded handles offer user comfort, lessen fatigue, and prevent the tools from rolling away.

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Closing thoughts

While no two distributors are following the same path to success, you can see that every pro tip in this ebook went back to the same core principles. Show up prepared. Show up consistent. Show up invested in your customers' success.

You operate in a competitive market. But you also operate in a relationship-driven industry.

Leverage your strengths. Refine your systems. Stay open to growth. And keep moving forward.

Your route is what you make it. Build it with intention.

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