THE CASH MACHINE · FIELD GUIDE

Get Paid in 3 Days

Deposits, same-day invoicing, and a three-touch cadence that collect what you have already earned as fast as each job allows: about 3 days for the service calls and repeat accounts you can put on a card, milestone draws for the jobs that legitimately run longer.

45 → 3

DAYS TO GET PAID

The Main Street Operator

$17

HOW TO USE THIS

This is a field guide you run by hand, with the collection scripts and the DSO calculator that put the six moves on your own numbers this week.

- **Start on the next job.** Take a deposit before the truck rolls, and send the invoice the same day the work is done.
- **Run the included files.** The three collection scripts and the DSO calculator (dso-calculator.csv) put your own numbers on the board tonight.
- **The scored version is free.** This teaches the drivers and hands you the templates; it does not score you or compute your number. The free Keystone diagnostic does that in four minutes at app.trykeystone.io.

THE SHORT VERSION

The money you earned 45 days ago can land in about 3, on the slice of work you can collect fast, without one new sale. Six moves change when you get paid, and on a $1.2M shop they free about $110,000 you already earned.

The invoice went out 45 days ago. The system in this guide lands that same money in about 3.

The work is done, the customer is happy, and the money is still not in your account. You have called twice and left one voicemail.

Now you are deciding whether a third call makes you look desperate for money you already earned.

That is the trap this guide takes apart. A service business rarely dies because the phone stops ringing; it dies because the work is finished and the cash lands 45, 60, or 90 days later.

Payroll runs every Friday, and the supply house wants paying in 30.

This field guide replaces the chase with a system: deposits before the work, billing along the way, same-day invoicing, terms with teeth, a three-touch reminder cadence, and a card on file.

45 days of chasing, cut to about 3	**6** moves in the system	**3** reminder touches, day 1 to day 30

The weight this lifts is a specific one: the low, grinding work of chasing money you already earned.

Every hour spent on a fourth follow-up call is an hour not spent quoting the next job. Every dollar stuck in a customer's account for 45 days is a dollar that cannot make Friday's payroll.

Collect faster and you buy back both the hours and the cash. Nothing in here requires a single new sale.

It is a terms problem, not a sales problem

A business with demand but cash stress usually has a terms problem, not a sales problem.

If the phone rings, the crews are booked, and you are still white-knuckling payroll, the fix is almost never more revenue.

More revenue at 45-day terms just means more money owed to you, later. Selling harder into a slow-collection system pours water into a leaking bucket.

Here is the frame that changes what you work on. The cash conversion cycle, the gap between paying for a job (the labor and materials) and collecting for it, is a design variable, not an accounting accident.

You set that gap, mostly, through how you bill and what your terms say.

Improving it can be worth more than increasing revenue, because it frees cash you have already earned instead of chasing cash you have not.

This is also why profitable growth is the most common cause of a cash crisis. A busy quarter means more materials bought and more payroll met before the invoices come back, so the more you sell at slow terms, the tighter cash gets.

Studies of small-business books (Greg Crabtree's among them) put the share of owners who underpay themselves near 90%. Reported profit almost always overstates how comfortable the bank account really feels.

The work in this guide is to shrink the gap, not to grow into it.

There is a quick self-check for whether this is your problem, the Working Capital Risk Test, four questions you can answer in a minute:

- Are your receivables growing faster than your revenue?
- How many days does a typical customer take to pay?
- What share of what you are owed is already overdue (past 30 days)?

- Does payroll go out before the cash for that work comes in?

If three of the four point the wrong way, you have a terms problem, and no amount of new work fixes it.

> *A business with demand but cash stress has a terms problem, not a sales problem.*

What the wait actually costs (an illustration)

Put a number on the wait and it stops feeling normal. The measure is Days Sales Outstanding (DSO): on average, how many days it takes to collect a dollar after you have earned it.

The arithmetic here is illustrative, round numbers to show the shape and not a claim about your business, so treat it as a model, not a valuation of your books.

The math is simple enough to run on a napkin. A day of revenue is your annual revenue divided by 365, so $1,000,000 a year is about $2,740 a day.

Multiply that by your DSO and you get the cash tied up in receivables at any moment. On $1,000,000 of revenue, every 10 days of DSO is about $27,000 of your money sitting in other people's accounts.

At 40 days DSO on that same $1,000,000, roughly $110,000 is out on loan to your customers, interest-free.

Carry one business through the whole guide. Take a commercial electrical contractor, Northline Electric, doing about $1,200,000 a year and collecting on an average of 52 days.

Northline Electric (illustrative)	Before	After
Average collection (DSO)	52 days	18 days
Cash tied up in receivables	~$171,000	~$59,000
Cash freed, already earned		~$110,000

The arithmetic is the same napkin math: 52 days on $1,200,000 is about $171,000 tied up (52 times $1,200,000 divided by 365), and 18 days is about $59,000.

Same revenue, same customers, about $110,000 back in the account. That is the prize, and it is why the cash conversion cycle is worth more attention than the next marketing idea.

DO THIS TONIGHT

Pull your last 12 months of revenue and your receivables balance (the total owed to you right now). Divide receivables by revenue, multiply by 365, and you have your DSO in one line. Write it at the top of the dso-calculator.csv in the assets folder. That single number is the scoreboard for everything that follows.

The system: get paid before, along, and right after the work

The system runs on one idea: stop treating payment as something that happens after the work, and start treating it as something that happens before, along, and right after.

Six moves do that, and they stack. The first two get cash in before the job is even finished.

The next four collect the rest fast and close the reminder loop in 30 days instead of 90.

- **Take a deposit before the truck rolls.** Get the customer to fund the job, not you.
- **Bill in stages, not one lump at the end.** Draws along the way, not one 45-day wait.
- **Invoice the same day the work is done.** Close the gap between finishing and sending.
- **Set terms that bite.** Due-on-receipt, or a real early-pay incentive.
- **Run a three-touch reminder cadence.** Day 1, day 15, day 30, friendly to firm.
- **Put a card on file.** For repeat work, make the invoice and the payment the same event.

None of the six needs software you do not already have. A field-service app, an invoicing tool, and a calendar cover all of it.

What they need is a written rule the office and the crew run the same way every time.

Move 1: Take a deposit before the truck rolls

On project work, a deposit is the line between financing the job yourself and having the customer fund it. A standard move is 30% down to schedule, due before any material is ordered or any tech is dispatched.

On a $20,000 panel-and-service upgrade, that is $6,000 in the account before the truck rolls. That covers the materials you would otherwise front out of your own cash.

The deposit does two jobs at once. It funds the work, and it filters the customer: a buyer who will not put 30% down on a scheduled job is telling you something about how the final invoice is going to go.

Make it a written policy, not a case-by-case ask, so the crew and the office quote it the same way on every proposal. A deposit quoted as a line item is standard; a deposit quoted as a question invites a no.

The most common objection is that your customers will not pay a deposit. Some will not, and that is information, not a wall.

A homeowner on a $20,000 job routinely pays a deposit to a roofer, a plumber, and a remodeler, because it is the norm in the trades.

Start with new customers and larger jobs where a deposit is already expected, hold the line for one month, and watch how few actually walk.

Move 2: Bill in stages, not one lump at the end

One invoice at the end is one long wait. Milestone billing splits a project into draws, so cash arrives along the way instead of 45 days after the last day on site.

On that same $20,000 job, billing 30% at deposit, 40% at rough-in, and 30% at final turns a single 45-day wait into three payments. Two of them are collected before the job is even done.

This is the cash conversion cycle as a design choice, not a favor you ask for. A milestone schedule written into the proposal is normal in construction and the trades, and a customer who signs it has agreed to the timing before the first day of work.

For anything running longer than a week or over about $5,000, a progress schedule should be your default, not the exception you remember to ask for.

Move 3: Invoice the same day the work is done

The quietest leak in most shops is the gap between finishing the work and sending the invoice.

A job wraps on Tuesday, the paperwork sits until the weekend, and the invoice goes out the following Monday: six days of DSO added before the customer has done anything wrong.

Same-day invoicing closes that gap to zero.

The mechanics matter more than the intention. The tech marks the job complete in the field app, which triggers the invoice from the office (or auto-sends it) the same day, with the payment link already on it.

If invoicing waits for a weekly batch, that batch is costing you 3 to 7 days of DSO on every job, every week, for no reason a customer would ever defend.

DO THIS TONIGHT

Find your five most recently completed jobs and check the gap between the completion date and the invoice date. If it is more than one day on any of them, you have found free DSO to cut this week. Set the rule now: invoices go out the same day the job is marked complete.

Move 4: Set terms that bite

Net 30 is a habit, not a law. Most service invoices default to 30-day terms because the last software did, not because anyone chose it on purpose.

Two term structures collect faster: due-on-receipt (payment expected when the invoice lands) for service and smaller jobs, and a real early-pay incentive for larger accounts.

The early-pay incentive people mean is "2/10 net 30": take 2% off if you pay within 10 days, otherwise the full amount is due in 30.

On a $10,000 invoice, the customer saves $200 by paying 20 days early, and you collect in 10 days instead of 30.

Whether giving up $200 to pull $10,000 forward by three weeks is worth it is your call, but for a business fighting DSO it usually is.

Put the terms in writing on every invoice and proposal, in plain language, above the total where nobody can miss them.

Late-fee clauses and payment-authorization wording carry legal weight and vary by state, so have a licensed attorney review your terms language. This is general education on getting paid faster, not legal advice.

Move 5: The three-touch reminder cadence (day 1 to day 30)

Most unpaid invoices are not refusals, they are oversights. A calm, scheduled cadence collects the large majority of them without a single tense call.

The rule is three touches on a fixed schedule: day 1, day 15, and day 30, moving from friendly to firm.

Set it once and it runs whether or not you feel like chasing anyone that week.

The tone ladder is the whole point. Touch 1 is a warm confirmation with the payment link, touch 2 is a short neutral nudge that assumes it simply slipped, and touch 3 names the terms and the next step, still professional, with no anger in it.

Email carries all three for most accounts, a text works well for touch 2, and touch 3 is the one worth a phone call if the email has gone quiet.

Here are the three, verbatim, using the carried example: invoice #4021, $8,450, to a property-management customer, Delta Property Group.

SAY THIS: TOUCH 1 (DAY 1, THE SAME-DAY SEND)

Subject: Invoice #4021 from Northline Electric, $8,450

Hi [contact name], thanks for the work this week. Invoice #4021 for $8,450 is attached, covering the panel upgrade at 1400 Delta Court. Terms are due on receipt, and you can pay by card or ACH with this link: [link]. If anything on the invoice needs a second look, just reply here and I will sort it.

SAY THIS: TOUCH 2 (DAY 15, THE NEUTRAL NUDGE)

Subject: Quick nudge on invoice #4021, $8,450

Hi [contact name], just making sure invoice #4021 for $8,450 did not slip through the cracks. It went out on [date] and is now 15 days old. Here is the payment link again for the card-or-ACH option: [link]. If it is already scheduled on your end, ignore this note and thank you.

SAY THIS: TOUCH 3 (DAY 30, FIRM AND CLEAR)

Subject: Invoice #4021 now 30 days out, $8,450

Hi [contact name], invoice #4021 for $8,450 is now 30 days old and past our due-on-receipt terms. Please send payment this week using [link], or reply with the date it will be paid so I can note the account. If there is a problem with the work or the invoice, tell me today and I will get it fixed. If I do not hear back by [date], I will follow up by phone to close it out.

Notice what the cadence does not do. It does not get angry, and it does not wait 90 days to say anything.

Three scheduled touches over 30 days collect most of what is owed. The small remainder still open after day 30 is a different problem (a dispute, or a chronic slow payer) that you handle by phone or hand to the tools in the next rung.

The cadence turns collections from a mood into a schedule.

> **DO THIS TONIGHT**
>
> Open collection-scripts.md in the assets folder, paste your company name and payment link into the three scripts, and set two calendar reminders, day 15 and day 30, on your single oldest unpaid invoice. The day-1 script becomes your default invoice email starting with the very next job.

Move 6: Put a card on file

The fastest collection is the one that needs no reminder at all.

For recurring service, maintenance agreements, and repeat commercial accounts, a card or bank account kept on file with written authorization to charge on completion removes the wait entirely. The invoice and the payment become the same event.

This is how the 3-day number gets real. A service call closed Tuesday with a card on file is paid Tuesday, or on the next daily batch, not in 30 days.

A maintenance plan on autopay never enters the reminder cadence at all.

Reserve card-on-file for the work that repeats, get written authorization every time, and keep that authorization language in front of your attorney.

Run the numbers on a shop doing 40 service calls a week. Move even half to card-on-file, and at a $350 average ticket that is about 20 calls a week, or roughly $28,000 a month (20 times $350 times four weeks) pulled from 30-plus days down to about 3.

Be straight about what "3 days" means. It is the design target for the collectable slice of your work, the service calls and repeat accounts you can put on a card or on due-on-receipt terms, and for that slice about 3 days is realistic.

Some work has legitimately longer terms (a large commercial account on a signed net-30, a public-sector job), and the win there is not 3 days, it is milestone draws so you are not carrying the whole job to the end.

The promise is a system that collects as fast as each job allows, not a guarantee that every dollar lands in 72 hours.

Line the money up with payroll

The six moves get the cash in. One habit makes sure it is there on the day you need it: line your collections up with your outflows.

Payroll and the big vendor bills land on a known schedule, so the job is to make the money arrive before they do, not after.

The tool is a one-page weekly cash forecast: start with the cash on hand, add the receipts you expect this week (deposits, milestone draws, the invoices in the cadence), subtract the outflows you already know (payroll, materials, rent, the tax set-aside), and read the ending balance.

Run it every Monday in about 15 minutes and you stop being surprised by your own payroll.

Keep the tax money in a separate account as it comes in, so a healthy-looking balance is not really the government's money you are about to spend twice.

This is where the freed $110,000 does its second job. Cash you collect in 18 days instead of 52 is cash that is already in the account when Friday comes, which is the difference between running the business and being run by it.

The whole system on one job (the example end to end)

Put the six moves on Northline Electric and watch the 52 days fall. The shop runs two kinds of work: project jobs (panel upgrades, tenant fit-outs) and service calls.

Before the system, both invoiced at completion on the net-30 habit and collected on an average of 52 days.

On a $20,000 tenant fit-out, the new system bills 30% ($6,000) to schedule, 40% ($8,000) at rough-in, and 30% ($6,000) at final, each invoiced the same day with due-on-receipt terms and the three-touch cadence behind it. Two of the three draws land before the job is finished.

On the service side, the top repeat accounts move to card-on-file and pay on completion, and every invoice now goes out the day the tech marks the job done.

Across the whole book, the average collection drops from 52 days to about 18. That is the same illustrative move from the table above: about $110,000 of cash freed on $1,200,000, the business's own money out of its customers' accounts.

No new customer, no price increase, no extra job, just the same money collected on the business's schedule instead of the customer's.

Where this breaks (and the fix)

Three things break this system, and all three are fixable.

The first is the crew that finishes the work but never marks it complete, so same-day invoicing never triggers. Fix it by making "marked complete in the app" the definition of done, checked at the Monday standup.

The second is quoting the deposit as a question instead of a policy, which invites a no. Put it on the quote template as a standard line item, so it is quoted, not negotiated.

The third is the softest and the most common: not running the cadence because it feels pushy. It is not pushy to ask for money you earned, on terms the customer already agreed to.

The scripts exist so you never have to find the words on a bad day, and the schedule exists so the follow-up happens whether or not you are in the mood.

A business that collects in 18 days is not more aggressive than one that collects in 52, it is just better organized.

Do this in the first week

You do not roll out all six moves at once. Here is the first week, in order, each step small enough to finish in one sitting:

- [ ] Day 1: calculate your DSO (receivables divided by revenue, times 365) and write it at the top of the CSV.
- [ ] Day 2: write your deposit rule in one line and add it to the quote template.
- [ ] Day 3: check the completion-to-invoice gap on your last five jobs, and set the rule that invoices go out same-day.
- [ ] Day 4: set your default terms (due-on-receipt for service, a milestone schedule for projects over $5,000) and update the invoice template.
- [ ] Day 5: load the three scripts, set day-15 and day-30 reminders on your oldest unpaid invoice, and send the day-1 script on the next job.
- [ ] Day 6: pick your top three repeat accounts and ask each to go on card-on-file with written authorization.

DO THIS TONIGHT

Run just Day 1. Calculate your DSO in one line and write it down. A business whose owner knows the DSO is 47 days behaves differently than one that only knows "people pay slow," and the number takes about 2 minutes to find.

Plain terms: this is general business and financial education, not accounting, tax, legal, or investment advice, and it makes no promise about your results. Your business is specific. Late-fee terms, payment-authorization language, and any collections step beyond a friendly reminder carry legal weight and vary by state, so have a licensed attorney review your terms and route a real collections matter to a licensed professional. For decisions with tax or legal weight, talk to a licensed accountant or attorney who knows your books.

YOUR NEXT STEP

The three-touch cadence and the deposit rule collect most of what you are owed. The one question left is what the slow collection has been costing the value of the whole business. **The free Keystone diagnostic** is the living, scored version of this. Answer 18 questions and get three scores (business independence, systems maturity, acquisition attractiveness) and an estimated sale price, in about four minutes, at app.trykeystone.io. It shows you not just how fast you collect, but the one constraint holding the business's value down. Next rung in the catalog: the Cash-Flow Recovery Kit (C2, $97) is the built-out collections machine: verbatim collection scripts from day 1 through pre-collections, a live A/R aging spreadsheet with DSO and aging buckets, deposit and progress-billing and late-fee template language, a five-email dunning sequence, and the 90-day cash-crunch playbook.