FOX BUSINESS ADVISORS
Practical Guidance for Owner-Operators



Roark Bluff, Buffalo National River. NPS photo.

EDITION 1 WINTER 2026–27

WINTER OUTLOOK

THE ARKANSAS OWNER'S BRIEF

What's in the news, worked out for owners in the Arkansas service trades: **what it costs you, and what to do about it.**

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Turning Chaos into Clarity

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WINTER IS SLOW EVERY YEAR. THIS YEAR ADDS MORE.

Diesel, metals and equipment all cost more than a year ago, and the Fed is holding rates up. Your customers feel the same squeeze. It's what I'm hearing from clients, from owners I talk to, and from the industry voices I follow.

None of it shows up in your books until after the quote is signed. The way through is the same in every case: know your numbers, price on them, and protect your cash before the slow months.

THE WINTER BY THE NUMBERS

$5.91
FUEL
Gulf Coast diesel a gallon, week of Nov 2

+30%
MATERIALS
Copper and brass over the past year

+39%
EQUIPMENT
HVAC equipment prices since 2021

2 of 12
THE FED
Voters who wanted another increase on Oct 28

46.3
YOUR CUSTOMERS
Consumer sentiment, 13.6% below a year ago

7.32%
YOUR CUSTOMERS
30-year mortgage rate, up from 6.19%

FUEL WEEK OF NOV 2

01

DIESEL IS $2.54 A GALLON HIGHER THAN A YEAR AGO.

$5.91

DIESEL A GALLON ON THE GULF COAST, WHICH INCLUDES ARKANSAS

WHAT HAPPENED

Gulf Coast diesel eased 4 cents in the latest week, but it's still far above last year. The national average is $6.29. The EIA expects diesel to average about $4.50 a gallon in 2027. Relief is forecast, but not for this winter.

+$2.54

Gulf Coast diesel a gallon, compared with a year ago

$6.29

National diesel average a gallon

WHO IT HITS

Every trade with a truck on the road. Service calls in HVAC, plumbing and electrical, concrete and roofing deliveries, and landscaping crews feel it first. Fuel also works its way into freight, so parts and materials follow.

FUEL THE NUMBER TO RUN 01

FUEL ISN'T THE EXPENSIVE PART OF THE DRIVE.

Most owners watch the pump. The bigger cost is the paid hour behind the wheel. Run what it costs to get a truck to one call, before a tool comes off it.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE SERVICE CALL

DRIVE TIME	40 min × $44 an hour	**$29.33**
FUEL	20 miles ÷ 12 mpg × $5.91	**$9.85**
COST TO SHOW UP		**$39.18**

$44 is a $25-an-hour tech after payroll taxes, workers' comp, insurance and the hours that aren't on a job.

+$4 WHAT THIS YEAR'S DIESEL ADDED TO THAT CALL. DRIVE TIME WAS ALREADY $29.

WHAT'S USUALLY BEHIND IT

- **Calls booked in the order they come in,** not by area.
- **Second trips:** parts runs, callbacks, nobody home.
- **A trip charge set years ago,** or set by what the shop down the road charges.

FUEL WHAT I'D DO 01

FIX THE TRIPS BEFORE YOU RAISE THE PRICE.

WHAT I'D DO FIRST

1. **Pull last month's calls and count the second trips.** Each one cost about $39 before any work got done.
2. **Set your trip charge from your own number,** not from a competitor's.
3. **Add a fuel surcharge only if the trip charge can't move.** A surcharge invites an argument. A trip charge that's always there doesn't.

THE CONVERSATIONS

YOUR OFFICE	Book by area. Hold the far-out call for the day a truck is already headed that way.
YOUR CUSTOMERS	"The trip charge covers a trained tech and a stocked truck at your door, whether the fix takes ten minutes or two hours."
YOUR TECHS	Stock the truck for the five parts that cause most return trips.

WHERE I HELP	Mostly project work? Put drive time and fuel into each job's daily cost. Building that into your pricing is part of the pricing model and rate card work I do.

WHAT IT KEEPS YOU

One less second trip a day per truck saves about $860 a month. That's more than this year's diesel adds to a truck burning 15 gallons a day.

MATERIALS SEPTEMBER PRODUCER PRICES 02

COPPER IS UP 30%. CONCRETE IS FLAT.

+30% COPPER AND BRASS, OVER THE PAST YEAR

WHAT HAPPENED

What you pay depends on your trade. Metals rose the most. Concrete barely moved. These are wholesale prices, and they reach your supplier's invoices weeks to months later, so much of this hasn't hit you yet.

+27.6% Steel	**+7.1%** Asphalt paving mixtures	**+4.6%** Plastic products
+2.3% Ready-mix concrete	**–1.2%** Cement	**+1.3%** All producer prices in September alone

WHO IT HITS

Electrical, HVAC and plumbing feel the metals. Roofing feels asphalt. Concrete mostly feels fuel and delivery.

MATERIALS THE NUMBER TO RUN 02

THE LEAK IS THE PRICE BOOK NOBODY UPDATED.

Pick your most common job. Price its materials the way you did last spring, then price the same list from this week's invoices.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE COMMON JOB		
LAST SPRING	Materials on the price book	$1,800
THIS WEEK	Same list, 8% higher	$1,944
PER JOB	What the price book misses	$144
A YEAR	6 of those jobs a month × 12	$10,368

$10,400

A YEAR, FROM ONE TYPE OF JOB NOBODY REPRICED

WHAT'S USUALLY BEHIND IT

- **A price book updated once a year,** or never.
- **Quotes with no expiration date,** so an October price gets built in March.
- **Supplier increases that show up on the invoice,** not in a letter.

MATERIALS WHAT I'D DO

02

PUT A DATE ON EVERY PRICE.

WHAT I'D DO FIRST

1. **Pull the last three invoices from your two biggest suppliers.** Check them against the price book for your five most common jobs.
2. **Put a 30-day expiration on every quote.** Re-price anything older before it goes on the schedule.
3. **On jobs longer than 60 days, lock the supplier price or add an adjustment clause.** Have your attorney write the clause.

THE CONVERSATIONS

YOUR SUPPLIER	"Which of my top 20 items changed since spring, and what's coming in the next 90 days?"
YOUR ESTIMATOR	"Nothing goes out on a price older than 30 days."
YOUR CUSTOMERS	"This price is good for 30 days. My suppliers are changing prices monthly right now."

WHERE I HELP A pricing model and rate card built on your own costs, and an estimating system that keeps it current, are project work I build with owners.

WHAT IT KEEPS YOU **Repricing that one job keeps the $10,400. A dated quote keeps the next increase off your margin.**

EQUIPMENT PRODUCER PRICES, SEP 2021–SEP 2026 03

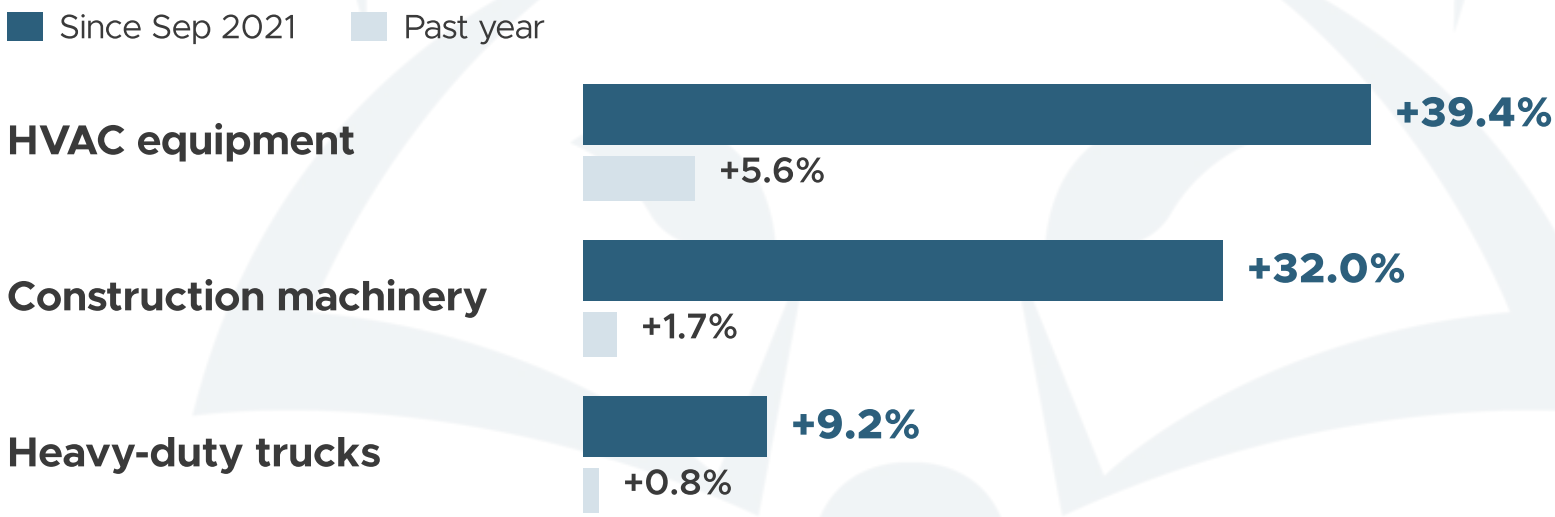
HVAC EQUIPMENT IS UP 39% SINCE 2021.

+39%

HVAC AND COMMERCIAL REFRIGERATION EQUIPMENT, FACTORY PRICES SINCE 2021

WHAT HAPPENED

Factory prices for the equipment you buy and install jumped after 2021. Most are climbing slowly now. HVAC equipment is still rising fast.



Producer Price Indexes, Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED, September 2026.

WHO IT HITS

HVAC on every install. Construction on every machine you replace, and everyone on the next truck.

EQUIPMENT THE NUMBER TO RUN 03

KEEP IT OR REPLACE IT? RUN IT BEFORE IT BREAKS.

Most truck and machine decisions get made on the side of the road. Run both sides now, while you have time to think.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE WORK TRUCK, ONE YEAR

REPLACE	$70,000 at 8% for 60 months	**$17,033**
KEEP	$7,500 repairs + 3 days down at $1,200	**$11,100**
DIFFERENCE	Keeping it, this year	**$5,933**

$5,900

CHEAPER THIS YEAR TO KEEP IT RUNNING, IF IT'S SAFE AND NOT COSTING YOU JOBS

WHAT'S USUALLY BEHIND IT

- **Decisions made under pressure,** when the truck is already down.
- **Not knowing what a truck brings in a day,** so downtime never gets counted.
- **Buying for a year-end tax break** without checking what it does to cash.

EQUIPMENT WHAT I'D DO 03

DECIDE YOUR TRIGGER NOW, NOT ON THE SHOULDER.

WHAT I'D DO FIRST

1. **List every truck and machine:** age, last year's repairs, and days down.
2. **Set your replace trigger in writing,** like repairs over a set share of its value, or more than five days down in a year.
3. **If you install equipment, price from this week's supplier quote.** A $6,000 unit up 5.6% is $336 an install. Fifty installs is $16,800.

THE CONVERSATIONS

YOUR BANKER	"What would you lend on a truck today, at what rate, and does it touch my line?"
YOUR CPA	"What does buying before Dec 31 save me in cash, not just in taxes?"
YOUR SUPPLIER	"What increases are announced for the first quarter?"

WHERE I HELP

Buying or leasing major equipment, or adding a truck or crew, is strategic decision support: we run it through your numbers before you sign.

WHAT IT KEEPS YOU

A decision made on your numbers instead of on the shoulder. This year, that's about $5,900 on one truck.

INTEREST RATES OCT 28

04

THE FED HELD RATES. TWO MEMBERS WANTED ANOTHER INCREASE.

3.75–4%

THE FED'S BENCHMARK RATE, HELD ON A 10–2 VOTE

WHAT HAPPENED

The Fed raised its rate a quarter point in September, its first increase in three years, and held it on Oct 28. Two voters wanted another quarter point. Its statement says inflation "remains elevated." It meets again Dec 8–9.

3.7%

Consumer prices, year through September

Dec 8–9

The Fed's next meeting

WHO IT HITS

Anyone carrying a line of credit or an equipment loan that floats with the prime rate. Banks are getting more careful too: in the Fed's October survey, they tightened standards and collateral on small-business loans.

INTEREST RATES THE NUMBER TO RUN 04

THE RATE ISN'T THE RISK. RUNNING SHORT IS.

Before you worry about a quarter point, run your slow-month gap: what the slow months cost you that the work doesn't cover.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE SHOP, DECEMBER TO FEBRUARY

MONTHLY GAP	$45,000 fixed costs − $30,000 gross profit	**$15,000**
THREE MONTHS	$15,000 × 3	**$45,000**
CASH ON HAND	Covers part of it	**$30,000**
SHORT	What has to come from a line	**$15,000**

$50,000

FREED BY COLLECTING 15 DAYS FASTER ON $100,000 A MONTH OF BILLING

WHAT'S USUALLY BEHIND IT

- **Invoices that go out days after the job,** or at the end of the month.
- **Nobody owns collections,** so past-due accounts sit until the owner notices.
- **No deposits on material-heavy jobs,** so you finance your customer's project.

INTEREST RATES WHAT I'D DO 04

COLLECT FASTER BEFORE YOU BORROW MORE.

WHAT I'D DO FIRST

1. **Run your slow-month gap this week,** before December, not in February.
2. **Invoice the day the job is done.** Call on anything at 31 days.
3. **Take your gap and your plan to the bank now,** and ask about renewing or raising your line before the Fed meets Dec 8–9.

THE CONVERSATIONS

YOUR BANKER	"Here's my slow-season gap and how I'm covering it. What can you do on my line?"
YOUR OFFICE	"Invoices go out the same day. Anything over 30 days is on my desk Monday."
YOUR CUSTOMERS	"Payment is due when the job is done. On larger jobs, I take a deposit for materials."

WHERE I HELP Billing, collections and change orders, and a cash plan for the slow seasons, are project work I build with owners.

WHAT IT KEEPS YOU **Collecting 15 days faster frees about $50,000, and saves about $1,500 in interest you'd pay to borrow it for four months at 9%.**

YOUR CUSTOMERS OCTOBER 05

HOMEOWNERS ARE STRETCHED. COMMERCIAL IS STEADY.

46.3 CONSUMER SENTIMENT IN EARLY OCTOBER, 13.6% BELOW A YEAR AGO

WHAT HAPPENED

Shoppers said buying conditions for big purchases fell on high prices and borrowing costs. Mortgages cost more, and banks are tight on consumer credit. Commercial work is steadier: industrial, health care and data center projects are carrying Arkansas's pipeline.

7.32%

30-year mortgage, up from 6.19% a year ago

+3%

Electric heating bills in the South this winter, about $1,079. Gas heat is down 15%.

WHO IT HITS

Residential work hardest: big-ticket replacements, roofing and flatwork homeowners can put off.

YOUR CUSTOMERS THE NUMBER TO RUN 05

YOUR WIN RATE WILL TELL YOU BEFORE YOUR BANK ACCOUNT DOES.

When customers get careful, it shows up first in quotes that sit. Run your win rate by type of work, this fall against last fall.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE SHOP, ONE YEAR

QUOTES	200 a year at $3,000 each	**$600,000**
WIN RATE	35% slips to 32%	**–6 jobs**
LOST	6 jobs × $3,000	**$18,000**

$18,000

FROM QUOTES YOU ALREADY WROTE, GONE WITHOUT A NO

WHAT'S USUALLY BEHIND IT

- **Quotes sent and never followed up.**
- **One price, take it or leave it,** on jobs where options would close.
- **Slow quotes.** The customer got three, and the first one back usually wins.

YOUR CUSTOMERS WHAT I'D DO 05

WORK THE QUOTES YOU HAVE BEFORE YOU CHASE NEW ONES.

WHAT I'D DO FIRST

1. **List every open quote over $1,000 and call each one this week.**
2. **Offer two or three options on bigger jobs,** including a way to do it in stages.
3. **Sell service or maintenance agreements to customers you've already served.** They're the steadiest revenue you'll have this winter.

THE CONVERSATIONS

HOMEOWNERS	"Wanted to see if you had questions on the quote. If timing is the issue, we can do it in two steps."
CONTRACTORS	"What do you have coming in the spring, and when do bids go out?"
YOUR OFFICE	"Every quote gets a call at three days and again at ten."

WHERE I HELP Bid follow-up, win rate by type of work, and a recurring revenue program built to steady the slow months are project work I build with owners.

WHAT IT KEEPS YOU **Winning back those 3 points is $18,000 from quotes you've already written.**

WHAT COULD CHANGE PLAN FOR A RANGE

BETTER, EXPECTED, WORSE.

The expected case follows published forecasts. The other two are what happens if the big drivers break one way or the other.

DRIVER	BETTER	EXPECTED	WORSE
Oil and diesel	Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz recovers faster and diesel eases.	Crude near $105 through year-end; diesel about $4.50 in 2027. Relief next year.	New disruptions push diesel back to September's highs or beyond.
Interest rates	Inflation cools, increases stop, cuts come in 2027.	Held in October with two votes for more. A December increase is possible.	More increases, and banks tighten further.
Materials and equipment	Metals level off as energy eases.	Increases slow but don't reverse.	Steel and copper keep climbing on tariffs and freight.
Weather	A mild, drier winter gives more working days.	NOAA favors wetter and warmer than average across the South.	Wet weeks and hard freezes: lost days, more emergency calls.

EITHER WAY **Current prices, enough cash for the slow months, and a banker who already knows you help in every case.**

WHAT TO WATCH ONCE A MONTH

FOUR SIGNALS TELL YOU WHICH CASE YOU'RE IN.

SIGNAL	WHERE TO CHECK	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Diesel price	Your fuel card, or the EIA weekly Gulf Coast price	Whether your trip charge and fuel surcharge still cover the drive
Your top five material prices	Your supplier quotes	When it's time to reprice your most common jobs
The rate on your line of credit	Your bank statement, and the Fed's Dec 8–9 meeting	What carrying the slow months on credit costs you
How fast customers say yes and pay	Your own records: quotes won, and days from invoice to payment	Whether the customer squeeze is reaching you

Three of the four come from your own records. That's the point: the news tells you what's coming, and your numbers tell you whether it's reached you yet.

ONE SHOP, THE WHOLE WINTER ILLUSTRATION

WHAT THIS WINTER COSTS ONE SHOP, ALL IN.

A made-up shop: HVAC and plumbing service, six trucks, $1.2 million a year, about 10% profit. November through February, if nothing changes.

WHERE	WHAT IT COSTS	4 MONTHS	WHAT FIXES IT
Fuel	Six trucks at $838 a month more	**$20,100**	One less second trip a day per truck
Your customers	Win rate slips 3 points	**$6,000**	Follow up every open quote
Equipment	Installs priced on last year's units	**$5,600**	Price from this week's quote
Materials	One job type not repriced	**$3,500**	Reprice and date every quote
Interest rates	Borrowing the $15,000 gap at 9%	**$450**	Collect faster
Total	**Against about $40,000 of profit in those months**	**$35,650**	**Most of it is recoverable**

THE ORDER I'D TACKLE IT IN

1. **Cash first.** Run the gap and fix collections, so the business is safe while you work on the rest.
2. **Then the biggest leak.** Here it's second trips and the trip charge.
3. **Then prices and quotes,** before spring work gets bid on winter numbers.

ISAAC'S SUMMARY MY READ ON THIS WINTER

IT'S A SQUEEZE, NOT A CRISIS.

Most of what this winter costs is already inside your business: drive time nobody prices, quotes nobody follows up, prices that haven't caught up, invoices that sit. The headlines just make those leaks cost more.

The owners who come out of this winter in good shape won't be the ones who guessed right on diesel or the Fed. They'll be the ones who knew their numbers in November and acted on them.

THREE THINGS I'D DO THIS MONTH

1. **Run your slow-month gap.** Know how many months your cash covers before the work slows.
2. **Reprice your five most common jobs,** and put a date on every quote.
3. **Count your second trips and your open quotes.** They're the fastest money you'll find.

HOW I WORK **Numbers find it. Operations cause it. Conversation settles it.**

ISAAC'S SUMMARY WHERE I CAN HELP

START WHERE IT MAKES SENSE.

Every one of these starts with a free 30-minute conversation. Past the Diagnostic, the work is scoped and priced in writing before anything starts.

IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE YOU	WHERE I'D START
Something's off, and you're not sure where	**The Diagnostic.** A review from the bid to the bank, with a dollar figure on each leak. $3,000, and it pays for itself or it's free.
Your prices haven't kept up	**Pricing model and rate card,** and an estimating system built on your costs.
Cash gets tight every winter	**Billing and collections,** and a cash plan for the slow seasons.
Quotes go out and nothing comes back	**Bid follow-up** and win rate by type of work.
You want steadier winters	**A recurring revenue program,** like maintenance agreements, priced to pay.
A truck, crew or big job is in front of you	**Strategic decision support.** We run it through your numbers before you sign.
You've got the plan and want backup	**Implementation support,** or hands-on help as a fractional COO.

FIVE HEADLINES. ONE QUESTION.

HOW MANY SLOW MONTHS CAN YOUR CASH COVER?

Add up your monthly fixed costs: core payroll, truck and equipment notes, insurance, rent. Divide your cash on hand by that number. That's how many slow months you can carry.

If you do one thing this month, reprice your five most common jobs, then run that number. If something doesn't add up, that's usually where the money is going.



I'm glad to look at it with you.

I'm Isaac Fox. I work with owner-operators in the Arkansas service trades. The first 30-minute conversation is free.

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SOURCES

Figures as of Nov 3, 2026. Diesel and rates move weekly. Illustrations are worked examples, not benchmarks: run them with your own numbers.

FUEL

U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), weekly retail on-highway diesel prices, week of Nov 2, 2026. EIA Short-Term Energy Outlook, Oct 6, 2026.

MATERIALS

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Producer Price Index release, Oct 15, 2026. AGC Producer Price Index tables, September 2026.

EQUIPMENT

BLS Producer Price Indexes via FRED: HVAC and commercial refrigeration equipment (PCU3334133341), construction machinery (PCU333120333120), heavy-duty trucks (PCU336120336120), Sep 2021 and Sep 2025 to Sep 2026.

INTEREST RATES

Federal Reserve FOMC statements, Sep 16 and Oct 28, 2026. FOMC meeting calendar, 2026. Federal Reserve Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey, October 2026. September CPI as reported Oct 14, 2026.

YOUR CUSTOMERS

University of Michigan consumer sentiment, early October 2026, via Advisor Perspectives. 30-year mortgage rate, week of Oct 22, 2026, via Trading Economics. Federal Reserve Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey, October 2026. EIA Winter Fuels Outlook 2026–27. Arkansas Business, CDI Contractors 2026 outlook.

COVER PHOTO

Roark Bluff in winter, Buffalo National River. National Park Service photo, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

BETTER, EXPECTED, WORSE

EIA Short-Term Energy Outlook, Oct 6, 2026. Federal Reserve FOMC statement, Oct 28, 2026. NOAA 2026–27 Winter Outlook, released Oct 16, 2026.

Full links are in the online version. I'm not your accountant or your lawyer: talk to them before changing contracts, loans or taxes.