

How CFOs and Operational Staff Manage Costs by Reducing Truck Rolls

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Five ways operational data helps crews roll less and accomplish more on every trip



5 ways operational data accomplishes more on every trip

Truck rolls are one of the largest controllable costs in distribution operations. The price of a truck call is insurance, crew hours, vehicle wear, fuel, and the opportunity cost of not being available for the next call. Rural America needs to reduce calls whenever possible. Instead of reacting one call at a time, crews can work from location-aware data that makes field work more focused from the start. The result is a shorter list of likely actions, fewer repeat visits, and a more efficient use of every mile the crew drives.

1. Smarter Dispatch to Location

Meter numbers get retired and reassigned over time, but a pole's physical location almost never changes. By tying outage and blink records to GPS coordinates rather than meter identifiers alone, crews always find the right equipment in the field, even after a meter swap, without a wasted trip to confirm the address first.

This matters more than it sounds like it should. A meter that was replaced or renumbered two years ago can quietly break the link between historical outage records and the physical asset a crew needs to inspect today. Anchoring every record to a stable coordinate keeps history intact and searchable no matter how many times the equipment on that pole has changed.

2. Know the Device Type Before the Truck Leaves the Yard

Overlaying device type — transformers, switches, fuses, and reclosers — on the outage map lets a dispatcher see exactly what kind of equipment is involved in a cluster before a crew is assigned. That means the right parts and the right skill set go out on the first trip instead of a second one.

Consider the alternative: a crew arrives expecting a fuse replacement and instead finds a damaged recloser, or shows up with switching equipment for what turns out to be a transformer issue. Either mismatch usually means a second trip, a second set of windshield hours, and a delay for the member waiting on restoration. Knowing the device type in advance turns two trips into one far more often than it seems like it should.

3. Target Vegetation and Animal-Guard Work Before It Causes a Call

Circuit-level reports of small-animal and bird-related outages, run weekly or monthly, show exactly where squirrel guards, coated jumpers, or transformer conversions would prevent the next nuisance outage. That turns a pattern of repeat truck rolls responding to the same recurring cause into a single planned maintenance visit that heads it off.

These nuisance-cause outages are also some of the most predictable in a cooperative's entire outage history, because the same equipment tends to generate the same complaint repeatedly until it is physically modified. A circuit that shows three or four animal-related interruptions in a season is not unlucky; it is telling dispatch exactly where a guard or jumper coating would pay for itself many times over in avoided calls.

4. Hand Crews a Ready-to-Use Field Report, Not a Data Dump

A worst-feeder or worst-cause report, exported to PDF or Excel, turns into a simple instruction a crew can act on directly: ride this circuit, install guards here, trim vegetation there. When the report is already organized around what needs to happen in the field, there is no separate trip just to figure out the plan.

The format matters as much as the content. A raw data export still requires someone to interpret it before a crew can act, which is itself a kind of hidden trip — an office visit instead of a field one, but a delay all the same. A report built around what a crew does on site, organized by circuit and by task, removes that translation step entirely.

5. See the Full Outage Footprint, Not Just the Count

A report that says "100 customers affected" tells you the scale of a problem. A report that includes each of those 100 customers' individual meter locations tells you exactly where they are, so a single

visit can be planned to cover the full footprint of an outage rather than responding to it in pieces as individual calls come in.

Without that location-level detail, a large outage tends to generate a trickle of individual truck rolls as scattered members call in over the following hours, each treated as a separate, unrelated event. With it, a single crew visit can be planned to address the entire footprint at once, closing out what would otherwise have been handled as several disconnected trips.

Where Co-ops Can See the Fastest Payback

Every one of these practices shares the same goal: give the field crew enough information before they leave the yard that the first trip is also the last one. Not every cooperative should adopt all five practices in the same order. The fastest payback usually comes from whichever pattern is already generating the most repeat trips today. A territory with heavy vegetation and animal activity often sees the quickest return from cause-coded targeting. A cooperative with an aging or recently renumbered meter base may get more immediate value from anchoring dispatch to stable location data. A team that regularly juggles multiple crew types may find device-type filtering the highest-leverage change.

The right starting point is less important than starting somewhere and measuring the result. Each of these practices produces a visible, trackable change — fewer repeat visits to the same pole, fewer trips that arrive without the right equipment, fewer calls treated as isolated events when they are part of one larger outage — which makes it straightforward to confirm the change is working before expanding to the next practice on the list.

The Cumulative Effect

None of these five practices depends on the others, which is part of what makes them practical to adopt. A cooperative can start with the one that addresses its most expensive pattern today, whether that is repeat animal-outage calls, split trips caused by meter reassignment, or crews arriving without the right equipment, and add the rest over time.

The common thread is that each shifts a decision earlier: from figuring something out in the field to knowing it before the truck leaves the yard. Over a full year of dispatching, that earlier decision point is where the avoided cost actually accumulates, not in any single trip, but in the steady reduction of trips that never needed to happen in the first place.

Ask us how PwrMetrix's location, device-type, and cause-coded reporting can help your team plan fewer, more effective truck rolls.

Talk to Aerinet: infoweb@aerinet.com

