Transcript

Krystal Hobbs 0:04
Welcome to Beyond The Tools, the podcast that helps contractors attract more leads, grow their business, and finally get off the tools. In each episode, you'll discover marketing tactics that work. You'll get actionable insights from other successful contractors, and connect with experts to help you grow. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs, owner of a social media agency that helps contractors attract and convert more leads. Get ready to take your business to the next level so you can finally enjoy the fruits of your hard labor. Ready, let's go!

Krystal Hobbs 0:47
Hey, contractors, welcome back to Beyond the Tools. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs, and today's episode is all about how earning your technicians trust will earn you market share. Our guest today is Aaron Salow, the CEO and founder of XOi technologies, which is a complete curb-to-curb communication tool for technicians. What we dig into today are some of the day-to-day challenges that technicians face in their jobs and how a lot of the technology that already exists is about working on the business but doesn't actually help to support technicians when they've got a challenge that they can't solve. Aaron talks about how better supporting your techs will ultimately improve productivity and their satisfaction, helping you to retain them more, provide a better customer experience, and ultimately grow your market share. This is a really impactful conversation and not a topic that we have really dug into before so I loved hearing Aaron's insights on this. And I think this is something that can really improve your business. So let's head on over and chat with Aaron.

Krystal Hobbs 2:07
Welcome to the show, Aaron, so excited to have you here.

Aaron Salow 2:10
Thank you for having me. Excited to be here.

Krystal Hobbs 2:13
So I know what we're talking about today is really how earning your technicians' trust can earn you market share. And I'm really excited to dig into that. But before we do, I am curious what makes you so passionate about this industry?

Aaron Salow 2:30

Absolutely. So I grew up in a bubble, I say in a good bubble, I think where everyone I knew - my grandparents were farmers, my dad was in manufacturing, aunts and uncles were all in the trades - bubble that told me, Hey, to earn a living is to do with your hands, something you should be proud of. And I think that that's a good way to be brought up. And something I still believe very deeply today. So everyone I loved and learn from in my life growing up did these types of jobs and I realized that they're also some of the best salt of the earth people on the planet. And so it gave me a deep passion for what we refer to as blue-collar people that work really hard every day to make a difference in the things we all probably take for granted and for us. And so, starting a company to address some of the skilled trades gaps, the issues kind of something for the tech, the men, women in this field was an easy passion for me because it was genuine.

Krystal Hobbs 3:22

I love that. Talking about the skills trade shortage, we all know the challenges that come with that. And obviously, if you don't have the people, particularly the technicians, growth is extremely challenging. So as we're going into a new year soon, what are some of the specific challenges that you've been hearing, like, what's happening in the industry right now from your viewpoint?

Aaron Salow 3:51

Specifically around technicians. I think more and more you're hearing about hiring for attitude, not aptitude. And I can teach that side of it, I think, the supply chain, not only crisis that a lot of people are talking about, but also a lot of the car changes that are happening a lot, the Department of Energy's rolling out these changes now every couple of years, a big one like commercial coming in January. So we kind of have this interesting knowledge dissipation on both ends where we've got more retiring technicians than ever before but the equipment's actually changing as well. So what knowledge is embedded and tribal knowledge inside technician says needs to change as well, because of those changing requirements. So it's an interesting time. I think people are also thinking about construction slowing down. There's a lot of backlog from what's been a pretty hot couple of years in terms of construction and that's getting that slowing and they see where that pipeline is starting to slow. So, service is getting a real focus. We're hearing some commercial customers doing more in-house-type stuff, starting to translate construction workers over to the service side. So those are just a handful of things that we're talking about with customers today.

Krystal Hobbs 5:01
I'd love to dig into a few of those things. But I guess I'll open up with what aren't we thinking about when it comes to the technicians' day-to-day lives.

Aaron Salow 5:15
It's interesting, I think, even within the industry in which the business owners, the service leaders that run the technician groups, a lot of them used to be technicians themselves. And I don't know if this is the nature of technology, the nature of the need, I could probably sell box on my thoughts on it. But the reality is, the facts are the first kind of 20 years of staff, software enablement, and service technology or field service was field service management platforms that worked on the business. And what that means is we're service dispatch, we're doing inventory, we're doing labor rates, we're doing everything around the kind of running the business. And the interesting reality of it is that there wasn't, there isn't, and still today, in most cases, doing anything for the technician. It's having them use something that a lot of times, they're not a big fan of, to go do the thing they really want to do which is fix stuff, which is what technicians and people with their hands want to do. It's like I didn't get hired in this job to play with technology all day. Younger generations are more adept at that, and maybe more interested in that. But a huge lion's share of guys and gals today just don't have that mindset. So what I would say about the broader technician challenge with technology, and just overall is that we kind of underserved the moment in time in which they're doing what they're experts at, which is fascinating. It's like, hey, we'll wake up with you and tell you where to go. We'll dispatch you, we'll show you the address, we'll maybe give you some notes about the last thing, but once you get on the job to do the thing that you really are supposed to do, like, figure that out, call it buddy, call your boss, look up Google wait on hold with no yum for four hours. And just figure it out, and fix it, right? That's what you're supposed to do. And so it's interesting, as we learn more about this curb-to-curb space, how kind of broken the communication was there, how underserved the technician was there. And for us who started in smart glasses, we were a little too cute going, Hey, technicians are going to use live video from $2,000 pair of smart glasses, and we're kind of violating our own core value, which is, hey, that's a pain in the butt like these guys have to charge it and connect it to a hotspot. And it's usually things that are too much. But if we wouldn't have done that we wouldn't have learned so much about what little was happening in that curb-to-curb job site for the tech. And so that's what kind of got us to that point. We're saying like, Man, this is the most important

heartbeat of this entire industry. If we can enable technicians, enable contractors, it can be really a powerful thing.

Krystal Hobbs 7:42
That's so interesting and true. So when a technician gets to a job, there's obviously that challenge of figuring something out or needing to pull on resources. What are you seeing with successful companies that are better supporting their technicians?

Aaron Salow 8:03
So I think that what we're thinking, and certainly, the way that we've been able to work with folks is to say, Hey, what are the things that technicians are actually looking for most often what's spending, what have they spent the most time on. And what we found early on with documentation was simply islands, manuals, wiring diagrams, and things like that. In fact, we ran a study with one of our customers who analyzed every call that their technicians made when they had issues with a job site. So when there was an extended kind of service ticket, or whether it was a second truck roll or call back, that did an analysis. And it was fascinating. Over three years, the average number of calls the tech made when they had an issue, any guesses, it was way more than I thought, it was five, which is high for I thought maybe two or three people they call. They call five fellow technicians when they had an issue, so voicemail, I'll call you back. I've never seen that problem anymore. That's crazy amount of times, right? And so if you do that a handful of times, you've got five different people who are setting their tools down, answering that call, if we're honest, talking about the game, talking about whatever else, and then getting into it. And again, you want to have that social fabric of your team to some extent, but that's also a lot of cycles happening every day. And a lot of times, it's Hey, do you have a manual on that system? Or have you ever seen this problem before? Or what do you think? And so fascinating data over a long period of time, about how much that was really happening and most people don't really know. They know generally, like text call each other and that's fine. If they knew well, God, those calls are hundreds a month sometimes. Maybe I could get more efficient in the midst of a skilled trades gap by saying hey, how can I give you that stuff a little bit faster? We want you guys to be buddies. We know there's coffee time. we can doughnuts, whatever it is you do, but gosh, if we could call that down and get one more job done a month pretty big for our business when we can't find people. So that's just one dataset. One example, we also think about video content, live video support whether we enable our customers to do it, and whether there are other companies besides XOi to do that as well. So I think

those are just some examples in some data that kind of give you a sense of how much opportunity exists there.

Krystal Hobbs 10:20
Absolutely. And I think that goes back to some of the things you've talked about before in terms of we've really been neglecting our technicians but not realizing the bigger impact that it has on your business. So when you talk about earning your technicians' trust, how does taking care of them really helped to increase your market share?

Aaron Salow 10:46
That's great, great call out. So I'll give you some more interesting kind of data around that and ladder you as an example. So we launched a virtual mentor center for our customers, in large part because technicians had this overwhelming feeling that if they were going to call their boss, or someone that was in the organization, that we're going to support them that it would somehow negatively impact their review, or their ability to get a raise, or whatever the case may be. They're gonna think I'm dumb, I don't want to call that I rather call someone else. And so what we saw is companies that didn't get calls from the field at all to the kind of embedded senior experts that would be in their offices to take calls, all the sudden be calling the XOi virtual mentor center all the time, because they felt like it was a safe space, because we would say, Hey, this is available to you, etc. And so what I've already seen is some of my customers go on air. And thank you for that service. I'll take it on now. Because what I've done is I've created a cultural shift in my organization where I said, it's okay for you to call, we encourage you to call, we want you to call, because it's not going to impact any of these things, you're still going to get your raise, you're still going to have your bonus opportunities. And so it was a really interesting example of earning technician trust, like, well, to earn trust, you must, point to the fact that it's broken, I wouldn't say that owners always know that they have an issue there even if they earned to have that trust broken, but it's like a psychological thing for a technician to go, Well, I'm sure if I call too often, they're gonna think I'm an idiot. And I don't want to do that, right? And so that's an example of one thing where it's not it's earning tech trust to say, look, we want you to make the customer happy. We want you to learn. We want you to make sure you're effective, and you banging your head against the wall for three hours on a job, trying to figure it out isn't going to help us do that. It's okay. In fact, some companies even incentivize the columns a little bit saying there's an extra bonus to this because that's how much we want you to know. It's okay. Because some people are like, Really? Right. You can call him for help. So that's one example of earning market share because then you got a

happier technician base got happier customers. I also think that contractors who I know listen to this more than anything, can weaponize what's happening in that space to ensure that OEMs and distributors are earning their trust in their technicians trust in the field. And thus, they will want to earn market share as a result, but the contractor owns the power to that. So we talked to big OEMs about what's missing. Well, therefore our wait times are not helping contractors and technicians trust them, them being so worried about the legality of an installation video workflow to never approve one so that a technician can actually install something correctly, a new technician, or wherever the case may be, that erodes trust, that erodes their market share. And so our message to them is, hey, if you want to earn this technicians market share this contractors market share, you have to earn the technician's trust. Well, as a contractor, I should know that's the case and be able to leverage, okay, that's true. I have the buying power, I have the customer voice, I have the technician. And I should expect that if they want my business, I don't have to wait on hold for hours, they're not going to lock down software, and they are going to give me really good insulation content. And so those are some areas in which that kind of earning trust matters across the ecosystem for the contractor and the technician.

Krystal Hobbs 14:11
That's incredible insight. And I think something that probably a lot of contractors aren't really thinking about.

Aaron Salow 14:19
I believe in the next 10 years, the contractors that set themselves apart will believe that their technicians and the athletes they serve are a big unknown frontier and opportunity for their business that sets them apart in their marketplaces and sets them apart in terms of their growth path as an organization. The other odd set of not supporting techs with good technology is that most contractors don't know their assets in the day. What I mean by that is they're asking a technician at a 130-degree heat index to type out make model and a 29-character alphanumeric serial number into their FSM. They don't do it because they're hot and they got eight jobs and dispatchers on their butt about doing the next thing. And then they go, Hey, what assets? Do you service? How old are they? When are they going to die? And they go asset registration is really poor. Why? Because we told technicians who are killing themselves in 14-hour days to take out those big hands, a small keyboard, and go to C F capital t nine. And as a result, we don't know what's our technician digital resumes look like. Like we're doing super cool stuff with people. Now we're saying, Hey, Joe 62% of the time is working on Linux

model number blank carrier model number blank, Joe is going to retire soon. So if we want to fortify with Joe's learning, let's train the rest of our team on carrier model number blank train model number blank. That's what happens when you connect people and equipment. And so I think I think again, back to the point, like the folks that own the technician experience that the tribal knowledge that exists there and understands their assets, again, where they are, how old they are, when they fail, why they fail, will have a huge advantage in the future because that's kind of really Greenfield. So everyone's got a field service management solution. Everyone's using some sort of software at some level. But those systems haven't solved for skilled trades, parts assets, that whole thing that's plaguing us right now.

Krystal Hobbs 16:18
And that knowledge transfer, obviously is so important with, as you said retiring technicians, and then we're also hiring people that don't have that skill set and training them up from the ground up. So you need something to be able to pass that information off. So when it comes to the technologies that you guys use, how exactly does that work? What are some of the ways that you support technicians and the companies they work for?

Aaron Salow 16:51
So kind of give through the eyes of the technician what his or her experience is on a job site when they walk up to a piece of equipment with the XOi application on their phone or tablet, they take a picture of a data plate. Our system, called journeyman, actually looks up, and quickly deciphers that picture for make model serial number. And then in a matter of 30 to 45 seconds, our system identifies and serves up to the technician, the manual, the wiring diagram, any type of history, visual history on that unit. So not even just that serial number. But that model family as well, anyone who's ever worked in that model family within their organization, any service bulletins on that unit.

And so, again, the whole thing in our product we talk about all the time is what is the smallest possible app from the technician with the biggest possible outcome? Well, what I just described to you typically takes on average, and in some of the studies, we've done 30 minutes on a job site to look up just documentation and find it. We just described asking the tech for one photo and 30 seconds and our information is just there. And we have data science in the background kind of working in articulating all this data always read controlling it, pulling it up, and putting it together. And so I follow that doesn't help them solve a problem or work through an issue, we offer live video support to an expert on that asset because we already know which asset is grounded, and we

can direct them to that appropriate expert. We record those live video AR interactions. And then we push it to the next technician that takes a picture of that model family so they can learn from that. So we view live video AR as a means to an end meaning the real solution here self serve diagnostic is taking the tribal knowledge that everyone has decades and decades of experience that we all hear folks talk about pulling it together into a digital smart format and ultimately giving a technician the opportunity to self serve, diagnose, and anything that they're working on. And so all that happens again, with a picture of a data plane. That's step one, part one of a workflow,

We then have workflows that dictate every other process and drives that they do, not just diagnostics, not just information, safety, sales, PMs, and the way we've done it is with this kind of new generation of young technicians in mind, meaning every step has microlearning to it, 25 to 32nd video clips. How do I learn these things quickly? And so we're identifying opportunities, say step one, here's a small video on how to do this. Step two, here's the wiring diagram that tells me that it's wired. And they're documenting every step along the way as well. So I think a big key to how XOi has been successful is that we're valuable to attacking a company and a customer on every job site. So the episodic nature of really cool use cases like smart intelligence, like live video. We can serve up those episodic rich use cases because we're building that trust with an attack every time where they're covering their butt. They don't have to type all information. We handle their notes, forum, links, et cetera. So that's how XOi works to kind of build that trust by offering some relief from things they don't like to do every day. Save them time for now looking for things and then also delivered them assistance when they need it.

Krystal Hobbs 20:03
So being specially designed for technicians sounds like a no-brainer that this would be something that would make their day-to-day work lives easier. But of course, change is hard. Nobody wants to do something new. How do you get your technicians to buy into the process?

Aaron Salow 20:21
It's a great question. So it takes first and foremost, it takes strong leadership in an organization. We've learned that lesson, the hardware, the business as a startup, and our growth company, that when the perspective is, we just let guys decide what they want to do or not when it comes to technology, it's you can't be successful. I don't think in any technology deployment. The same as for the folks that went from paper to an FSM. You didn't go invest in one of these big field service management solutions to go guys, if you still want to do your stuff on paper, you can, it's up to you, right? This is No,

hey, this is how we do business now and, so that's an important piece, and that culture is important. It's not that they don't get their buy-in, it's not they don't get the why, it's not that all those things have to happen out of respect, and how you should build a good culture. But when a business leader makes the decision to move forward with something their customers enjoy, then you move forward with it. So I think that's important key number one around change management.

Number two, we found some really interesting things, great technicians care more about what the customer says about their work, and about their use of technology than they care about what their boss hammers them and tells them to do. So what we've noticed as part of our platforms, and really successful is showing visual content to customers. That's a core piece of what we do. So like, "Mr. Smith, this is what we did at your home. This is why we recommended a repair, whatever, hey, facility manager, Joe, this is what we're doing in your facility. This is why we did it." This is our recommendation those customers love that transparency and trust, when they tell the technician "I love that content, they've actually helped me justify this expense to my boss kind of covered by but I appreciate you," that's gonna get them to continue to rely on it more than their service manager going, "Why don't you use this thing? What's going on? It's like, that's annoying, whatever, man, I gotta go to my next job." So that's really important. And then I think I think some of the other things that we see that we've been put on our website, but we tell technicians and training is cover your butt. The longer a technician has done this, the more they've had the customer. I've heard all so many things like screws on the ground, my wife ran them over with their new SUV, you got to pay for my tires. Like I didn't leave screws in the ground or whatever. I let the panel off. So just for them, it's a documentation thing to where they go, "I'm not going to have that situation. So I'm going to show what the jobs looked like when I got here. I'm going to show what it looked like when I left." And we're all on the up and up. So anyway, just a couple of examples of how we think about change management and the things we've learned that are interesting about technician engagement.

Krystal Hobbs 22:48
That's incredible. And I can see why technicians love to use it. So I'm sure anyone listening would love to learn a little bit more about you, Aaron, and about XOi technologies. So what's the best way for them to connect with you?

Aaron Salow 23:04
So xoi.io that's our website. We have a ton of resources. We have an incredible marketing team that probably has 50 case studies in there and 50 videos and all sorts of

content. Learn more about XOi, pretty heavy social media following on LinkedIn for sure, too. You can find us there. But I, love to have a chat if you think this is something we can try to help you with and your business.

Krystal Hobbs 23:26
Amazing. And we'll put all those links and details in the show notes as well. So if you're listening, you can go to beyondthetoolspodcast.com to grab that and connect with Aaron. This has been super insightful. So I'm really appreciative of you coming on the show. Thank you so much, Aaron.

Aaron Salow 23:44
Thank you for having me. Really appreciate it.

Krystal Hobbs 23:50
Hey, guys! If you love this episode, if you've learned something here from Beyond The Tools, you can actually head to our website at beyondthetoolspodcast.com and you can sign up to get updates whenever we have a new episode. So go to beyondthetoolspodcast.com, you'll see the option there to sign up and we'll send you the new episodes as soon as they're released.