

LPGAS

Cellular network shutdown:
AT&T's 2G sunset explained

Research partner: How a
midstream association is
serving propane interests

Retailer Technology: J&J Gas'
transition to new software

DAWN OF THE DRONE



**Drones take off
as components of
propane companies'
marketing strategies**



PROPANE



Test Date
10-16
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9-15
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NOT

EMERGENCY
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What's new?

A retailer technology column and a propane profile usher in 2017.

Only you know what's truly best for your business. Or do you? Are some areas of your business left alone because, quite frankly, you've always handled them that way and, well, they work just fine? Meanwhile, in the back of your mind, does a faint voice acknowledge the logic of exploring a new process, piece of equipment or technology that will lead to better results and secure your business' future?

It's never easy to move in a different direction with anything in life, including business operations.

Brandon and Brittany Hewett found themselves in this exact position with their business several years ago. J&J Gas in Mayo, Florida, needed new fuel distribution software, but the thought of transitioning to a newer system that would reshape their processes left them feeling a bit uneasy. They also never spent much time marketing the business, but a new connection helped to build their brand through new ideas and digital tools.

We won't spoil their story (page 44), but I mention it here because the column in which it appears is new for us in 2017. We're calling the column "Retailer Technology," and our goal is to have retailers share stories of how and why they incorporated a certain technology into their businesses. Please contact me if you'd like to share your story.

We believe technology is one way for the propane industry to thrive in the coming years. (Addressing issues such as employee-hiring challenges and attracting young talent is another way, but we'll save these topics for an-



Independent Technologies President and CEO Daryl Ingalsbe was a familiar face in the industry. The company he launched over 30 years ago makes WESROC tank monitors. Ingalsbe died in December.

other issue and another day.)

That's why we feel our first issue of the new year – with its technology theme – is a good time and place to launch this retailer-based column. Having progressive and fearless retailers share their stories and introduce new technologies will only help the industry in the long run.

People of propane

The propane industry is composed of interesting people, people with great stories to tell, inspiring stories and leaders.

Sometimes our challenge is deciding exactly where to introduce these people or where to tell their stories in the magazine. That's why we're launching "A Propane Profile" on page 10. This new page, in a question-and-

answer format, will allow us to profile an individual from any segment of the industry, from any company working in any position, on a monthly basis.

So, do you know a good subject for our new page? Maybe it's a colleague, a boss, a customer, a partner. Let us know, and we'll pursue that profile. Retiring Propane Gas Association of New England President Joe Rose gets the distinction of being our first.

Tragic loss

Before this issue went to press, we learned about the late-December death of Independent Technologies President and CEO Daryl Ingalsbe. He and a friend died when a small plane Ingalsbe was piloting crashed at a small airport in Florida. Ingalsbe was 67.

Ingalsbe's company, which he launched more than 30 years ago, makes tank monitoring systems under the WESROC brand name.

A seasoned pilot, Ingalsbe often flew his plane to industry events. I can recall – and enjoyed listening to – the former U.S. Army veteran talk at trade shows about his latest aeronautical journey to that particular city. The company appointed Hank L. Smith, who had been vice president of sales, as its president and CEO.

We at *LP Gas* magazine send our deepest sympathies to Ingalsbe's family, friends and colleagues. **LPG**

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What we didn't know

Software, digital technology help streamline and expand our business

Ever since J&J Gas was founded in 1974 in Mayo, Florida, we've made it our mission to provide nothing but the best reliable hometown service. Anyone can sell propane, but we know what it takes to build long-term relationships with our customers and nurture them. We can truly say hometown service by hometown people.

Implementing new technologies

In 2012, my wife Brittany and I started looking for a new fuel software program to help streamline our business. The software we were using was outdated, irrelevant, time-consuming and not at all user-friendly. However, it was how we had "always" done it, so the idea of change was a bit scary.

After much deliberation and convincing, we began doing some research and exploring our available options. We purchased a fuel distribution software system and began to upgrade our service and bobtail trucks to each include a computer and printer. Every change was made with lots of thought and hesitation, making sure it was the right move.

This software alone saves our employees over an hour each day, as the purchase tickets are now uploaded and logged straight into our computers at the office from the truck, instead of being put into our computers by hand. When we upgraded our printers and began to use the new software system, we saved at least two to three days a month on folding, stuffing, sealing and mailing monthly statements. This extra time allows us to focus on growing our business and day-to-day operations.

The customer behind the idea

In 2014, we started a large and essential initiative to improve our reach and increase our company's marketing efforts. A customer in a neighboring town, less than 20 miles away, called to ask if J&J Gas delivered propane to her area. We responded and said yes, giving her a short background of the business. As it turned out, she never knew J&J Gas Service existed, and she's lived locally her entire life.

We wouldn't stop thinking about this phone call. If she did not know we were located right down the road, what other customer base were we missing? This became a major problem for us, and over the next year we began brainstorming with J&J Gas Service sales representative Robert Fissell.

Our journey

Robert knew of a woman who developed websites, so we contacted her – and it turned out to be so much more than that. Not only did she develop websites, but she was the president of a marketing agency, as well.

After having a few long conversations with her about our business goals, we began to put more thought into our next steps. The amount she said we needed to spend was mind-blowing at first, but we knew we must invest in our business in order for it to grow. And to be honest, in the 41 years prior, we had spent very little investing in our own marketing.

In April 2015, we decided to move forward with this marketing investment. And with this change, we re-branded and modernized company collateral, updated our logo and cre-

ated a consistent corporate presence, purchased new uniforms, branded our bobtail and service trucks, developed a responsive website, created seasonal campaigns and incorporated social media into our mix. We hired a professional photographer so we could use photos with our marketing.

Prior to hiring a marketing firm, our marketing consisted of supporting our local high school and community baseball programs, which we still do and love. However, we now support our community while having a clean, modern presence – both online and offline.

Gas expands and so do we

In just over a year and a half after hiring a marketing firm, we are pleased to say that our business and propane gallons sold have grown significantly. Our customer reach has increased immensely – and continues to each day. This allows us to make new technology investments as we see fit.

Before September 2015, the calls we received were "Do you serve our city?" Now we have to ask, "What's your address so we can see if you're in our service area?" **LPG**

Brandon Hewett is the president of J&J Gas Service in Mayo, Florida. He can be reached at brandon@jgasservice.com.

Retailer tech stories: Are you a propane retailer with a story about how technology has improved your business? Let *LP Gas* magazine know. Email brichesson@northcoastmedia.net or call 216-706-3748.