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The Challenge of Modernizing Operations

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May 12, 2025



For many businesses, modernizing operations is still a challenge to tackle. Automation and moving over to digital processes can drive better efficiencies and growth, from how field technicians are dispatched and routed to things like inventory management.

Zuper is one company that offers solutions like all-in-one field service management software. Zuper CEO Anand Subbaraj recently spoke with *Cleaner* magazine to provide some insights.

Cleaner: What are some of the biggest operational challenges service-based water and wastewater businesses are facing today, and how are these evolving with customer expectations?

Subbaraj: The real challenge isn't just coordination — it's coherence. Too many service businesses are still running on a patchwork of whiteboards, spreadsheets, and phone calls. It slows them down and creates room for error. Meanwhile, customers expect real-time updates and seamless experiences — just like they get from ridesharing or delivery apps. The disconnect between internal operations and external expectations is widening, and that's a strategic risk. Modern field service platforms close that gap, not just by improving efficiency, but by aligning operations with what today's customers actually expect — transparency, speed, and a sense of control throughout the service experience.

Cleaner: Where do you see the greatest opportunity for these businesses to modernize their operations, and what kind of impact can digital transformation have at a practical, day-to-day level?

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Subbaraj: Modernization starts with the fundamentals. Scheduling, dispatching, job updates, invoicing — these aren't just checkboxes; they're the backbone of a smooth operation. When these processes are manual, they create friction. When digitized, they unlock speed, accuracy, and visibility. The impact? Technicians show up informed, managers make data-driven decisions, and customers stay in the loop. It's not about digitizing for the sake of it — it's about creating a system where every role, from back-office to field, runs smarter and with fewer roadblocks.

Cleaner: Many businesses still rely heavily on manual or paper-based systems. What are the risks of staying analog in today's competitive environment, especially when managing field teams, contracts, or inventory?

Subbaraj: Staying analog is no longer just inefficient — it's risky. It slows you down, introduces errors, and makes it hard to grow. If your competitors can quote faster, dispatch quicker, and keep customers informed in real time, you're not just behind. You're invisible. Manual processes also mean you're flying blind. Without digital data, there's no way to spot patterns, anticipate issues, or scale with confidence. In today's environment, being digitally unprepared is like navigating a storm without a compass.

Cleaner: How can automation and smarter routing/dispatching technologies improve not just operational efficiency, but also employee and customer satisfaction?

Subbaraj: Automation is not only about doing more, but also about doing it better. Smart dispatching tools ensure the right tech shows up for the right job, every time. That reduces idle time, eliminates guesswork, and leads to faster service. For teams, it creates clarity. For customers, it builds trust. And when automation handles confirmations, ETAs, and feedback loops? You don't just save time — you create a consistently great experience at every step. That's how you turn operational improvements into long-term loyalty.

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Cleaner: What should business owners look for when evaluating digital platforms or tools to modernize their operations? Any red flags to watch out for?

Subbaraj: The best technology doesn't ask you to reinvent your business. It adapts to how you already work, then helps you do it better. Prioritize tools that are flexible, easy to adopt, and designed with both office and field teams in mind. It should integrate well, provide clear insights, and be simple enough that your team actually uses it. Be cautious of rigid platforms that lock you into a narrow way of working or demand layers of add-ons. Great tech should unify your workflows, not multiply your headaches.

Cleaner: Looking ahead, what do you think the future holds for operational innovation in this space? What trends should business leaders be preparing for now?

Subbaraj: We're heading toward a future defined by intelligence and integration. AI will become a strategic partner helping businesses predict issues, optimize schedules, and even prevent service disruptions before they happen. Field operations will no longer live in silos. Data from inventory, customer interactions, fleet tracking, and finance will converge into one smart ecosystem. Leaders who embrace this shift early will gain an edge — not just in how they operate, but in how they grow. The next era of field service isn't reactive. It's predictive, connected, and customer-first.