

Contents

Preface	xi
---------------	----

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Cleaning Services	1
---	----------

The Driving Forces	2
--------------------------	---

Chapter 2

Startup and Operations	7
-------------------------------------	----------

What Are the Qualifications?	9
------------------------------------	---

Predictable? Yes and No.	10
-------------------------------	----

Franchise or Independent Operation?	12
---	----

Buying an Existing Business.	12
-----------------------------------	----

Chapter 3

Residential Cleaning Service	15
---	-----------

Who Are Your Customers?	16
-------------------------------	----

Beyond Individual Homes	18
-------------------------------	----

Who Are Your Competitors?	19
---------------------------------	----

Equipment	19
-----------------	----

Supplies	21
----------------	----

Standard Operations.	22
---------------------------	----

What Will You Clean?	22
How Will You Clean?	23
Scheduling	25
What Does a Typical Day Include?	25
From That First Phone Call	26
Maintaining Customer Records	28
Pitfalls	30
Oops!	32

Chapter 4

Janitorial Service	39
Who Are Your Customers?	40
Who Are Your Competitors?	41
Equipment	42
Floor Cleaning Equipment	43
Chemicals	44
Standard Operations	44
Laundry	48
Maintaining Customer Records	48
Bidding	48
Estimating a Job	50
Be Prepared to Answer Questions	53
Cash Flow Issue	54
Security	55

Chapter 5

Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning Services	59
Who Are Your Customers?	60
Who Are Your Competitors?	60
Equipment	61
Cleaning Methods	62
Chemicals	64
Carpet Cleaning Basics	65
Carpet Cleaning Specifics	68
Handling the Initial Service Request	68
Visiting the Customer's Home	68
Writing the Invoice	69
Performing the Service	70
Furniture Cleaning Specifics	70

Inspecting Furniture Before Giving an Estimate	70
Writing Your Estimate	72
Cleaning Furniture	72
Cleaning Drapes	73

Chapter 6

Other Cleaning Businesses	75
Window Cleaning	76
Disaster Cleaning and Restoration	77
Blind Cleaning	77
Pressure Washing	78
Restroom Cleaning	78
Chimney Sweeping	79
Ceiling and Wall Cleaning	79
Post Death and Trauma Cleaning	81

Chapter 7

Developing Your Plan	83
Business Plan Elements	84
To Market, To Market	85
Are You on a Mission?	87

Chapter 8

Structuring Your Business	91
Naming Your Company	92
Trademarks	93
Protect Your Mark	94
Legal Structure	94
Licenses and Permits	95
Professional Services	97
Create Your Own Advisory Board	99
Insurance Issues	101
Deliveries and Storage	101

Chapter 9

Money Matters	103
Sources of Startup Funds	104
Setting Prices	105
Labor and Materials	106

Overhead	106
Profit	107
Setting Residential Cleaning Service Prices	107
Setting Janitorial Service Prices	108
Setting Carpet Cleaning Prices	109
Keeping Records	110
Billing	111
Establishing Credit Policies	113
Red Flags	113
Accepting Credit and Debit Cards	114

Chapter 10

Setting Up Your Business	117
The Homebased Tax Advantage	118
The Commercial Option	119
Vehicles	119
Build a Fleet	121
Check Out the Drivers	121

Chapter 11

Human Resources	123
What Makes a Good Cleaning Service Employee?	124
Look In the Right Places	125
Evaluating Applicants	127
Take Care of Your Employees	128
Now That They're Hired	129
Training Techniques	130
Uniforms	132
Employee Benefits	132
Child Labor Laws	133
What Should You Pay?	135
Employee Theft	135
When You Suspect a Problem	136

Chapter 12

Purchasing	139
Choosing Suppliers	140
Buying Supplies	141
Dealing with Suppliers	143

Suppliers Are Also Creditors 143
 Negotiating a Deal 143

Chapter 13

Equipment 145
 Basic Office Equipment 146
 Telecommunications 148
 Telephone 149
 Answering Machine/Voice Mail 150
 Cell Phone 150
 Toll-Free Number 151
 Email 151
 The Best Equipment Is Information 151

Chapter 14

Marketing 153
 Researching and Defining Your Market 154
 Communicating with Your Market 155
 What About Your Website? 158
 The Elements of Image 159
 Trade Shows 160
 Trade Show Tips 162

Chapter 15

Tales from the Trenches 163
 Never Stop Learning 164
 Tap All Your Resources 164
 Clean It Like It's Your Own 164
 Develop Systems 164
 Be Careful! 164
 Don't Undersell Yourself 165
 Take Care of Your Employees 165
 Prepare for the Worst 165
 Watch Your Chemical Combos 165
 Find a Niche 165
 Develop Your Computer Skills 166
 Track Labor Costs 166
 Invest in Customer Service 166
 Keep Your Eye on the Economy 167

Don't Take Every Job 167

Appendix

Cleaning Services Resources 169

Associations 169

Consultants and Other Experts 171

Credit Card Services 172

Equipment and Supply Sources 172

Franchise and Business Opportunities 173

Internet and Government Resources 175

Magazines and Publications 175

Successful Cleaning Services 176

Glossary 179

Index 181

An Introduction to Cleaning Services

No matter what it is, if it can get dirty, chances are someone will be willing to pay you to clean it. And that's why few industries can claim the variety and depth of opportunities that professional cleaning can.

The cleaning industry has two primary market groups: consumer and commercial. The consumer arena consists

primarily of residential cleaning services (traditionally known as maid services), along with carpet cleaners, window cleaners, and a variety of other cleaning services required on a less frequent basis. The commercial arena is dominated by janitorial services, which typically provide a wider range of services than residential services, along with other cleaning companies, such as carpet and window cleaners, that target businesses rather than individual consumers. While it's recommended that you decide on a niche and concentrate on building a business that will serve your chosen market, it's entirely realistic to expect to be able to serve multiple markets successfully.

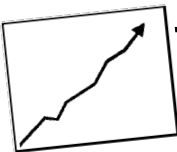
With all this opportunity, what does the competition look like? Glance through your telephone directory or do a local internet search—the number of cleaning services may make you think the market is already flooded and there's no room for you. That's not true.

First, anyone can list in the Yellow Pages just by having a business telephone line. A mere listing doesn't mean the company is offering quality service to the market you're targeting. Anyone can get on the internet by setting up a website. And while a website is an important part of being in business today, simply having a website doesn't mean you have a competitive business.

Second, the demand for cleaning services is tremendous. Plenty of residential cleaning companies have waiting lists for clients because they simply can't serve the entire market. Many carpet cleaners and other types of specialized cleaning services aren't full-time operations and therefore don't offer serious competition. And a significant number of janitorial services are mom-and-pop operations run by people who want just enough work to earn a living.

Third, cleaning service customers want quality, and many operators are unable to deliver that. Ask anyone who has ever hired a company to clean something in their home or office if they've had any bad experiences, and chances are you'll hear some nightmarish stories of poor-quality work, damage to property, and even theft.

If you offer quality service, operate with integrity, and charge reasonable prices, you'll be a success in a cleaning service business.



Stat Fact

Independent residential

cleaning service operators can easily net \$10 to \$25—or more—per hour cleaning homes on a part- or full-time basis.

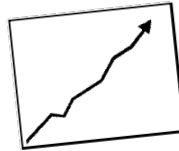
The Driving Forces

Shifting demographics and changing lifestyles are driving the surge in residential cleaning businesses. Busy consumers don't have the time or inclination to clean for themselves; they want to spend their limited leisure hours doing things they enjoy, so they're looking for

personal support in the form of housecleaning services, lawn maintenance, errand-running services, and more. They want someone else to handle these tasks, and they want them done well.

The service providers in these areas that will thrive will be the ones with an emphasis on quality and personal service. “Every one of my customers is different and special, and I treat them that way,” says Wanda Guzman, owner of Guzman Commercial Cleaning in Orlando. Guzman began her business as a residential cleaning service and expanded to commercial accounts. “It’s a relationship—I take care of them, and they are loyal to me.”

On the commercial side, the dual trends of outsourcing and niche businesses are behind the growing number of janitorial and specialty cleaning services. Businesses need to have their offices and plants cleaned, but it doesn’t always make sense for



Stat Fact

There are an estimated 1.4 million maids and housekeeping cleaners in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and about 12 percent of them are self-employed.

Polishing the Industry’s Image

The cleaning services industry provides a critical service to both individuals and commercial enterprises. It requires hard work, professionalism, and an awareness of evolving technologies and information. Yet it suffers from an image problem. What’s the solution?

The first step to improving the industry’s image is developing a higher level of self-esteem in the participants. The positive results of properly done commercial cleaning include providing a safe, healthy indoor environment for workers and helping people avoid symptoms and illnesses caused by unhealthy environments. Every person on your staff needs to understand the value of the work they do.

Another critical element in industry image is appearance. Cleaners who are well-groomed and wear neat, professional-looking uniforms elevate not only their own personal self-esteem but the image of their company and the entire industry.

Finally, it’s important that everyone in the organization, from the front-line cleaning staff to senior management, work to continuously increase their knowledge and enhance their skills. This means comprehensive training at both basic and advanced levels, using a variety of learning techniques.

Bright Idea

Restaurants are a strong market for contract cleaners. By the time cooks and servers have worked their shifts, they're tired and not inclined to do a good job cleaning. Of course, your performance must meet applicable health codes, and the work is often done either very late at night or early in the morning, but the opportunity is substantial.

them to employ their own cleaning staffs. Nor does it make sense for them to own the equipment and expertise necessary for jobs such as carpet shampooing, which are done infrequently.

"We're not just a cleaning company," says Mike Blair, owner of AAA Prestige Carpet Care in St. George, Utah. "It's not just about pushing a wand or running a machine. It's not just kicking the dirt out. It's a matter of taking good care of people."

This is good news for an entrepreneur who is more interested in building a solid, profitable business than in conquering new horizons.

Before you leap into the cleaning business, it's important to look at it with 20/20 vision.

Though technology certainly impacts cleaning services, this isn't a high-tech business. Nor is there any glitz to it. And there will be times when you'll have as much trouble as comedian Rodney Dangerfield had getting respect.

The upside is that you can build a profitable business that will generate revenue quickly. Most cleaning service businesses can be operated on either a part- or full-time basis, either from home or from a commercial location. That flexibility gives this industry a strong appeal to a wide range of people with a variety of goals.

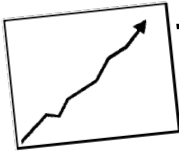
Another positive aspect of the industry is that within each category of cleaning businesses are market niches and operating styles that vary tremendously. Michael W. Ray, owner of Pro Building Services Inc. in Salt Lake City, says, "We offer a wide range of services to a very limited clientele. We have refined our customer base to a group that we feel we can best serve in a way that will allow us to maintain those customers permanently."

This means you can build a company that suits your individual style and talents. If you like doing the work yourself, you can stay small and do so. If your skills are more administrative and supervisory in nature, you can build and manage teams to do the work. For people who like working outside, the opportunities in service areas such as window cleaning and pressure washing are abundant. Residential cleaning services offer fairly predictable hours; disaster restoration and cleanup can mean calls at all hours of the day or night.

Smart Tip

Start small; test your market and operation slowly before expanding. Small mistakes are easier to correct than large ones.

Tip...



Stat Fact

The number of building cleaning workers is expected to grow 11 percent between 2010 and 2020, which is the average for all occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many of the new jobs will be in facilities related to health care.

Few industries offer this tremendous range of choices and opportunities, and the need for general and niche cleaning is expected to increase in the future. To help you find your place in this thriving field, let's take a look at the day-to-day operations of some typical cleaning businesses.