

# Cleaning



**Bizymoms**  
Career kit

# Business

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## Starting your own Cleaning Business

Many people dream of starting their own business and it isn't any different for work-at-home mothers. Getting to spend more time with your kids, working flexible hours being independent (be your own boss) are some of the many reasons that you may opt to start your own business. Starting your own business is no easy task. It needs commitment and a will to succeed. It isn't very difficult either if you have a good supply of these two. Remember after all you want to start your own business because you want to achieve your goals of financial independence and whatever other goals you may have. Never give up. Persistence and persistence will get you to your destination. Things won't happen overnight but you need to begin somewhere and when you decide you want to do it, that's when you are ready for it. This guide will help you clean your way to home business success.

If you really don't mind about your hands getting dirty and value the sense of a job well done then a cleaning service may be just the ideal home business opportunity you are looking for. One of the primary reasons that anyone starts a house cleaning business is with the idea of making money. For some others it's in a way to make money by doing what they love. It isn't absolutely necessary for you to love cleaning but in most ways it would be better off if you don't hate it either.

# The Pro and Cons of Running a House Cleaning Business

Let's start with the Pros

Great income potential

Flexible hours

Big demand for professional house cleaners

Work close to home

You're the boss

You choose who you want to work for (most of the time)

Paid daily

No nights

Now the Cons

Cleaning is hard physical work

You are exposed to a lot of germs on a daily basis

Cleaning toilets is not the most respectable job

Good employees are few and far between

You can't depend on a certain salary every week

Your earnings depend of course on you and the size of your business. It may well be a one man operation where your business is based from home and your service areas are also in close proximity. The other option is setting up a commercial operation and hiring employees.

And that's why only a small number of industries afford the same variety and depth of opportunities that professional cleaning does.

No matter what you choose to do below are a few important steps you need to consider before you actually start your business. There are a range of cleaning services to choose from making beds, vacuuming, mopping, dusting and so forth.

Please note that you won't be doing things like laundry for instance. Specialization in a particular area like cleaning carpets or cleaning windows is also possible. Make sure you research all aspects of the cleaning service business. Customer service, advertising, taxes, employees, insurance and bonding, pricing and how to do a professional job. Cleaning professionally and simply cleaning your own home is entirely different. It will take time in order to learn how to do a professional job. A client expects to find their home spotless when they pay for your services.

## **Start-up costs.**

When considering your startup costs it is inevitable that you will need to purchase equipment and tools (mops, carpet cleaning equipment, sponges and cleaners). Find out their prices and write them down next to each item.

**Transport:** costs have to be estimated here. The fact is transport costs will vary depending on the location of your client and the mode of transportation that you use in order to reach that client. Of course by having an own vehicle would no doubt be an advantage.

**Advertising:** there are various types of advertising that are available. You could use a combination of these in order to reach your target market. Free advertising in the form of word of mouth is a very effective way to reach your customers as this is based on trust and confidence. Other paid forms of advertising (placing ads in the classifieds, telephone directory etc.) are just a phone call away. Once you've gathered all this information, calculate your total startup costs.

Having a suitable name for your cleaning business is also an important factor. Some examples from the internet, 'All Shine Cleaning', 'White Glove Cleaning Service, Maid Brigade'. Having your own name as part of the business name isn't a very good idea and it is in fact an excessive practice among many house cleaning businesses. (Your Name Cleaning Services). Instead come up with a name that will make your business stand out among the crowd.

## Financing your business

It has been found that many cleaning service operators utilize their personal savings to start their businesses, and then reinvest the profits in order to finance growth. If it becomes necessary to finance purchase of equipment you should be able to find financing more so if you can show that you've put your own cash into the business. Other than traditional financing options there a number of options available when it comes to raising money.

**Your own resources.** Do a methodical inventory of your available assets. Generally people have more assets than they may immediately realize. This includes savings accounts, equity in real estate, retirement accounts, vehicles, recreation equipment, collections and other investments. At times you may also opt to sell assets for cash or make use of them as collateral for a loan. Also have a look, at your personal line of credit. Successful businesses have even been started with credit cards.

**Friends and family.** The Next step after having gathered your own resources is to approach your friends and relatives that believe in you and who want to help you succeed. Remember though to be cautious in thee arrangements, irrespective of how close you maybe with them. It is best to approach a professional approach, put it all in writing and make sure that individuals whom you approach are ready to take the risks associated with investing in your business. Don't ever ask a friend or family member to invest or loan you money which they can't afford to lose.

**Partners.** By applying the "strength in numbers" principle, search around for someone that is willing to team up with you in your venture. It maybe someone who has the financial resources and is ready to work side-by-side along with you in the business. Else you may find someone who has the money to invest but has no interest in doing the actual work itself. Make sure to come up with a written partnership agreement that will clearly define your respective responsibilities and obligations.

**Government programs** there are many local, state and federal programs that are designed to support small businesses. Your first stop should be the U.S. Small Business Administration; also investigate various other programs. It is also advisable to check up the business section of your local library when carrying out your research.

A very popular business trend in recent times is that of home based cleaning services. Your customers are never likely to ever arrive at the facility itself as your work will be done in their premises itself. However, that isn't the only influencing factor when deciding to run as a home based office or from commercial premises.

In most instances municipalities have laws that may limit the volume and nature of business that can take place in a locality.

In some cases they out rightly prohibits the establishing home based businesses. There are others that do permit such businesses but places restrictions when it comes to other issues. Traffic, employees' signage, commercially marked vehicles and noise. Prior to applying for your commercial license it is best to find out the relevant laws that govern and apply to home based businesses; it maybe necessary to alter your plan in order to comply with them.

## Learn the Zoning Regulations of Your Community

It is illegal in some zones to operate a home business in a community. Hence always check zoning regulations before starting out. This can be easily done by getting a copy of the zoning laws that govern your community through the city clerk's office or the local library.

It is a good idea to do a few free house cleaning jobs. Remember you do them in exchange for references. (This will help build your credibility) and in obtaining future paying clients that will be so essential to the success of your house cleaning business. These free jobs maybe offered to friends, non-profit organizations etc.

Make sure you let everyone know about your new house cleaning business. Placing ads in the local newspapers is a good way to announce your business. At the start it maybe needed to spend most of your time and resources in order to obtain those first paying clients. However, as you get more and more clients you will realize that you need to spend less on marketing and the greater amount of time on the job itself (house cleaning) and of course making sure that your clients are happy.

## A close look at the market itself

The industry consists mainly of two market groups: commercial and residential. The commercial arena mainly comprises of janitorial services (that usually provides a wider range of services) and the residential arena consists of maid services, window cleaners, carpet cleaners, and a range of cleaning services that will be at a less-regular basis.

In addition to these there are other cleaning operators such as window and carpet cleaners. These operators cater to the businesses and not individual customers. Its best left for you to decide upon a niche then focus your efforts on developing a business which will best service your market segment. However serving multiple markets is still very much possible.

Although technology has played its part on the cleaning industry too the cleaning business itself is not of a high-tech nature. There isn't any glamour attached to it either. And at times you'll encounter as much trouble as Rodney Dangerfield getting respect.

However, the positive aspect being able to build a very profitable business and one that you will be able to earn income from very quickly. The fact that most cleaning businesses can either be run on a full-time or part-time basis as a home based business or through a commercial location allows for greater flexibility and therefore has a strong appeal to a lot of people.

Yet another advantage of operating in this industry is that there are diverse market niches and operating styles and different categories of cleaning businesses which vary enormously.

All of this allows you to develop a company which will suit your style and skills. If you prefer carrying out the work by yourself it is possible to do so by remaining small. If your strength is your administrative skills create teams and direct teams to perform the cleaning duties. If you enjoy working outdoors there are many opportunities available in the service sector such as pressure washing and window cleaning.

## Franchise or Independent Operation?

**Franchising.** Beginning a franchisee means you will have the advantage of working closely with an established company (the franchisor) and hence it may be easier to run your company smoothly and profitably. This is true for your company particularly in the initial stages. However, as you may realize later on a franchise agreement may be a disadvantage once you have established yourself and are financially independent. This is because of the royalty fees you have to pay in exchange for use of company logo's, formulas, concept etc. As your sales increase you may find that a larger portion of your sales revenue would be paid as royalty fees. You may therefore feel hard done by and aggrieved that this eats away your profits and your hard work of obtaining new customers.

Keep in mind though that this may not be true for everybody. If you would rather follow a proven method than take a risk of developing your own system then a franchise operation is for you. Another huge advantage that many franchises provide is the extent of marketing support. Their budgets in the areas of national wide advertising and brand recognition can be hardly matched by individuals in the best of times. Franchising also means there is lower level of risk involved as you are not by your own. You simply stick to "tried and tested methods". If this sounds more suitable for you can choose from a selection of franchising opportunities available. A little research will tell you about the franchising opportunities available in your area.

**Independent Operation** .Other significant factors to consider when running as an independent service establishment is that you will not be "tied up" to any pre-determined formulas for name, concept, services etc. This could work either for you or against you. The huge advantage is that of having greater freedom and being able to do run the business your own way. The disadvantage is that there are no standards which you can follow. You have to adopt a trial and error method to determine everything from deciding upon your target market to cleaning a bathtub. If you are running as an independent service operator it is necessary that you research all aspects of the business from before starting out and during the business's lifespan so that you'll be able to start on the right track and adjust to market conditions.



# Types of Cleaning Businesses

## Maid Service

Running a maid service operation offers a great home based business opportunity that you could run independently or else by employing a service team. You may eventually expand by renting out some small office (storage space included) as and when your organization grows. However, many thriving business operators don't ever need to do so.

A common trait found in many of today's maid services is that it consists of quite a lot of cleaners on the staff. This means the owner hardly participates in the actual cleaning duties itself. Owners concern themselves more on the administrative activities and running the actual business such as sorting supplies, handling telephone calls and customer issues. This will also include preparing the payroll and billing whilst the maids engage in the cleaning activities itself.. There are owners who do the cleaning as well but as the business expands you will realize that your time will be made better use of by devoting time to managing the business itself.

The great advantage a residential based cleaning provider has is that of time savings. What would otherwise usually take some clients an entire day of cleaning or perhaps a whole weekend could be done by a single maid or a squad of maids during a matter of hours.

An influencing factor behind the incredible growth of the residential based cleaning sector is the greater proportion of women who have entered the labor force during the past 40 years. A family situation in which both the wife and husband works, it has been found that neither spouse wishes to use up their very limited spare time attending to house chores.. This makes them high potential customers. This is especially true in the case of families where both spouses are working and where incomes are greater than or equal to \$50,000.

Of course such households will not be the only single type of customers. Affluent families where the wives may not be employed but rather desire to engage in other activities along with singles that simply don't have any time and where the tendency is to get away from cleaning activities along with senior citizens that no longer are physically capable to do their own cleaning are all prospective customers.

## Janitorial Service

Whilst maid services generally clean only residencies, janitorial services cater mainly to the commercial market. This constitutes cleaning schools, business offices, restaurants and hospitals to mention but a few.

Although janitorial businesses cater to such a large market the initial set-up costs in comparison to a maid service isn't relatively high. It is still possible to start working off as a home based business with only a vehicle together with the basic equipment.

Another consideration you have to take when operating a janitorial service are the operational times. While it is pretty much "typical business hours" when it comes to maid services it is not the same with janitorial services. A majority of customers will prefer you start after their employees has gone home for the day after finishing work. There may of course be instances where you will come across customers that want the cleaning done within the day time as well.

Except in a few exceptional cases janitorial related jobs will be significantly larger in comparison to maid services. The important thing to keep in mind is not to be demoralized and breaking the job at hand into a series of tasks which could be achieved in a rational and reasonable manner.

Although not every business hires a janitorial service provider all their facilities however do need cleaning. Apart from meeting health code regulations they also have to create a good image upon their customers. Other than office buildings who are the main customers of many janitorial services, schools, universities, restaurants, hospitals, retail services, warehouses, manufacturing plants also make up a significant portion of the market.

## Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning Service

Many carpet cleaning operators begin as home based businesses. You may decide to locate into commercial premises as and when you grow. However, interestingly a great number of profitable carpet cleaning businesses do never require to operate outside their homes.

Each residential and company owner who have carpeting installed and upholstered fittings is a potential customer. Focusing on the residential market means low set-up costs and equipments, as businesses usually will need more than merely wanting carpets cleaned. (Thus more equipment will be needed). Due to the wide variety of commercial organizations (apartment buildings, offices, condos, hotels, restaurants, banks, schools, bowling alleys, churches, and transportation terminals) which utilizes carpet and upholstery cleaning services it is a very profitable market.

Many carpet cleaning service providers indeed does more than merely cleaning carpets. They usually also offer: drapery cleaning , wall cleaning, , application of a fabric protector on carpet and upholstery, , spot and stain removal from upholstery, flame-retardant treatment for drapes and upholstery , water damage restoration , ceiling cleaning, smoke damage cleanup and fire restoration, carpet dyeing and carpet restoration.

### Opening a Commercial Location

Most industry veterans are of the view in order to realize genuine growth you have to operate from a commercial facility and therefore get out of the home. Undoubtedly, doing so helps you to portray a professional image. However, before setting out your search for an office you first have to carefully think about what you need.

The office area may consist of an office space for yourself, a reception area, administrative staff as well as an area for storage of equipment and supplies. A small work area too maybe necessary for a laundry together with an area in which you perform equipment repairs as well. Also consider a small break area. That depends on the number of your staff of course.

Irrespective of the kind of cleaning service business that you have, chances of your customers ever coming into your office are remote. With this in mind a facility which meets operational requirements and one located in a reasonably secure location will be sufficient. Simply paying for a prestige address will not be worth the money.

## Vehicles

As your work will be carried out at your clients' site, vehicles become as significant to the business as well as where your office is located. Effectively your vehicles are the company on wheels.

These vehicles have to be chosen well and properly maintained both in order to make best use of and for a good image.

In the case of a maid business, a station wagon or an economy car will be sufficient. You will need enough space to pile up equipment, other supplies not to mention transporting the cleaning teams. However, it won't usually involve transporting large pieces of equipment which will require a small truck or even a van.

As far as vehicles are concerned you can provide your own vehicles or let employees make use of their own. In instances where you provide your own vehicles remember to paint your company's name, emblem and telephone number on them. It provides for an advertisement for your business wherever your vehicles go. In instances where employees use their own vehicles—which is commonplace among maid service providers remember to ask for proof of sufficient insurance which will provide cover in the case of an accident. It is also a good idea to confirm with your own insurance agent that your liability policy does cover you in such circumstances.

Size and nature of your equipment and the crew size will also determine the kind of vehicles that are needed

for a janitorial service. A station wagon or an economy car would work if you're engaged in light cleaning at small offices but in the case of a majority of janitorial operators, it is more likely that you will need a van or truck.

As far as carpet cleaning businesses are concerned what you need is a truck or van, whether it's a new vehicle or a second-hand one, per service person along with the equipment. A second-hand truck in good condition should cost around \$10,000 where as you will get a new one for around \$18,000 and so.

## Do You Need Employees?

**Maid service Business.** The initial staff requirements for this type of service depends on the amount of capital available, how big a business is needed and the number of customers that you expect to serve. It is common practice that the majority of independent operators to begin with only the owner. Some do start off with a team of maids as well. This depends on the situation and in a situation where you will be handling the administrative tasks as well you wouldn't be required to employ office staff at least straight away.

**Janitorial Business:** it isn't necessary to hire employees from the start itself for this type of service operation. Perhaps a few part-time operators. This isn't always the case though and in instances where sufficient capital is already available and the size of your operations you have to employ more.

**Administrative staff..** Another factor to consider is employing someone to handle the administrative tasks such as maintaining records and in answering the phone calls during the day time. Remember if you're going to work throughout the night you will need to find time to sleep as well.

When the business expands you need to hire additional cleaning staff not to mention separate marketing or sales people and a customer services manager,

**Carpet Cleaning Business:** for this type of service operation it is advisable hiring just one service man and maybe two at the start. One of them should be to handle clerical related work and who will book appointments and also be engaged in other administrative chores. This will depend on the strength of your pre-opening campaign and startup budget of course.

## Insurance

Be honest in your dealings. Being in house cleaning business means that people have to trust you in their homes. They have to be assured that their home is in good hands. In this regard you have to be bonded and fully insured. Your insurance provider and location of course will have some effect in determining your liability insurance rates. You may purchase your bond through a local insurance company and remember to renew it every year.

Note: your insurance needs to cover your employees too. These will be employees who are on your payroll and not sub-contractors. Sub-contractors need to have their own insurance and you will need to present their certificate of insurance to your insurance company. When hiring employees you will also need to provide workers compensation. Workers compensation rates may vary subject to which state you are located in.

# Pricing

## Setting your price

Pricing your products can be a lengthy and somewhat tiresome process. This is very much the case if you don't have a great liking for numbers. It's important not to be rushed especially in the early stages. A too lower quote will result in robbing yourself of profits or being forced to produce lower quality work. Meanwhile a too high an estimate will mean altogether losing the contract (especially when competition is very intense). An important factor to remember is that in most situations you are competing against your own customer, if the quote is too high, the customer will think, "if I have to spend that much money, I may well do it myself". In order to have a good idea of what price you should charge for your cleaning services you may also analyze your competitors. Armed with this piece of information you may determine the right price that should be charged for your services.

It is important to keep going back and keep a track of the actual costs incurred for every task. This will enable costs incurred to be compared against your estimates. A competitive pricing schedule can be determined by accurately estimating labor and overhead costs which thereby calculates profit as well.

## Pricing strategies

There are many pricing strategies that you could adopt. You could charge by room basis, charge per square foot or simply charge a flat rate per home. It maybe a better idea to charge a flat rate per home rather than per hour basis. This is because clients usually prefer one set fee, they don't really worry whether you take 2 hours or 5 hours. Another reason why clients prefer this system is because they will get to know up front what they are paying and hence doesn't need to worry about any additional charges.

However, when adopting this you do need to remember that no two homes will be the same. On the other hand it is difficult to come up with a fixed price for all homes. This will come with experience when working you will be able to develop a system that works efficiently and best suits you. You will come to know how much you have to make hourly in order to meet your expenses and make a good profit.

## Receiving payments

You may receive payments through various means. Receiving direct cash payments shouldn't be too much of a bother if you get your billing system in right order. However, credit card payments through a website are an increasingly popular mode of payment and it will be no different if you too have a website. PayPal is perhaps the most popular of online payment methods available due to its reliability. Once a payment has been made it goes directly to your account. Also keep a record of gift certificate sales as customers may use them at different times maybe even months later.

**A piece of advice:** as you start your business make sure that what you charge is in fact what you would actually charge if you had any employees. A common mistake among people is that of under charging especially when starting out in order to attract new customers only to realize later they aren't making enough money to cover employee wages once they are hired. Therefore never under price your work. Cleaning is strenuous physical work and you didn't get into this to work for nothing.

## Obtaining those first customers

The most difficult thing when starting out your own cleaning service is in getting those first clients. Since you are a new service operator most wouldn't know about your business and would ask for references. It is best to be honest about it, let your clients know yes, you are new to the business but you have done your research regarding every aspect of the cleaning business and be confident about what you are doing. This will ease them of their doubts.

Remember to go for quality especially when cleaning those first homes. It takes a quite a long time in order to do an efficient cleaning job. However, with experience you will get to a point where you will learn to do it in a short time. Be sure to create an impression among those first clients and soon the word will spread.



## Advertising

Before actually starting advertising you have to decide the kind of image that you want to portray. The image you portray is very important. Hence stick to the same logo and colors whenever you advertise.

**Magnetic Signs or Lettering for your Vehicle:** an excellent way to advertise is by displaying your business name and contact information on your vehicles. You may use the vinyl lettering. It looks more professional than magnetic signs.

**Flyers:** attractive flyers could easily be printed using your home computer. However, it is also a good idea to invest in some professional flyers. You could hang these flyers at Restaurants, Grocery Stores, Bakeries, and Laundromats and at the Hair Dressers. Also put them on car windows, the local grocery store and businesses. You could distribute them by even going from door to door in localities you hope to work in. you could put them in the front door but not in mailboxes though.

**Door Hangers:** people usually throw out flyers or ads that they get in mailboxes so door hangers provide a good alternative to them. Select a neighborhood that you hope to work in and hang these door hangers on the doors.

**Referral Program:** referral programs are another great way to get new clients. You can have a program where existing clients are offered a discount for referring a friend. E.g. by giving a discount to existing clients when the friend they referred to uses your service three times. Another way to obtain references is by doing free jobs. Actually speaking you are not doing them for free. They will be useful for future references (it adds to your credibility in order to obtain future paying customers which will prove useful for your success as a house cleaning business. Offer these voluntary free cleaning jobs to your friends and non profit organizations in the community area.

Let everyone know that you started a house cleaning business. At first you will have to spend a lot of time and money to get paying clients. Place ads in the local newspapers. As you get more clients you will need to spend less on marketing efforts and more on the house cleaning itself.

**Website:** in the modern world people lead hectic lives and hence utilize the internet as much as possible to carry out their day to day tasks. It has been found that working women shop for services while at work. Having a website has therefore become essential as this will enable them to research about your company in their own time. It isn't very costly to have a website and a little research will tell you how you too can easily have your own website.

## Absolute essentials

There are some essential cleaning materials that are needed to start your cleaning business. Here is a supply list:

- window cleaner
- furniture polish
- Clorox soft scrub with bleach
- anti-bacterial cleaner
- Soss pads
- stainless steel cleaner
- wood floor cleaner
- bathroom cleaner
- mop (we use and recommend the [Starmop Pro Mops](#) )
- broom/dustpan
- supply caddy
- dust mop
- wood floor mop
- grout brush
- small toothbrush
- cleaning cloths (terry and micro fiber cloths)
- step ladder
- By using natural products you can offer clients a healthy cleaning experience and also protect against hazardous chemicals.

Tip: Always carry hand sanitizer and wash your hands often when cleaning houses. You are exposed to a lot of harmful germs when cleaning therefore always take preventive measures. When cleaning bathrooms always wear a pair of gloves.

Also keep in mind that a majority of customers would prefer you bring your own cleaning supplies. This way your customers don't have to bother going to the store for any cleaning supplies. In some instances customers may have special cleaners for certain appliances or for their floors. These cleaners will be on hand to use when you arrive. Customers will in most cases have vacuum cleaners and it is a good idea to use them rather than carrying a heavy vacuum cleaner from door to door. When it comes to mopping have separate mops for tiles and linoleum and another one only for wooden floors.

## **Outline of a complete Business plan** (from Adams Streetwise complete Business plan software)

### Summary

- Business concept
  - Current situation
  - Key success factors
  - Financial situation / needs
  
- Vision
  - Vision statement
  - Milestones
  
- Market Analysis
  - The overall market
  - Changes in the market
  - Market segment
  - Target markets and customers
  - Customer characteristics
  - Customer needs
  - Customer buying needs
  - Customer buying decisions
  
- Competitive Analysis
  - Industry overview
  - Nature of competition
  - Changes in the industry
  - Primary competitors
  - Competitive products/ services
  - Opportunities
  - Threats and risks
  
- Strategy
  - Key Competitive capabilities
  - Key competitive weaknesses
  - Strategy
  - Implementing strategy

- Products/ Services
  - Products/ service descriptions
  - Positioning of products/ services
  - Competitive evaluation of products/ services
  - Future products/ services
  
- Marketing and sales
  - Marketing strategies
  - Sales tactics
  - Advertising
  - Promotions/ incentives
  - Publicity
  - Trade shows
  
- Operations
  - Key personnel
  - Organizational structure
  - Human Resources plan
  - Products/ services delivery
  - Customer service/ support
  - Facilities
  
- Creating the financial of a business plan
  - Assumptions and comments
  - Starting the Balance sheet
  - Profit and Loss projection
  - Cash flow projection
  - Ratio's and Analysis

## Customer Service

You need to provide exceptional customer service and not just great service in order to be successful in the house cleaning business.

Being easily accessible to clients through phone or by email is an important aspect of doing business.

Make sure you have your business calls forwarded to your mobile phone if you won't be available to answer your business phone. Nobody likes to keep on calling only to find no one to answer them and get no return calls. It is understandable that you won't be sitting next to your phone all the time but clients expect you to call back when they leave a message. Remember to check your messages a number of times a day.

Not responding back to clients' calls within a reasonable time will spell out disaster for you and loose that customer to your competitors.

Be sure to be polite in answering your customers. **Remember the golden rule “the customer is always right”** .In the event of a client calling to make a complaint about something that hasn't been cleaned properly; tell them that you will do everything possible to solve the problem. Re-visit and re clean the client's home. Your client then knows that you do care if they are satisfied with your cleaning.