

How to Start a Carpet Cleaning Business

There are two fairly new, and very important conditions existing in the world today that have not only made the carpet cleaning industry a "billion dollar business," but also practically guarantee your success as an entrepreneur in this field.

First, almost all homes and office buildings built since 1960 have wall-to-wall carpeting. Secondly, the replacement costs and the cyclical faltering of the national economy have caused people to want to make what they already own last longer, especially in the case of carpeting, which is a sizeable investment.

Most businesses employ janitors or janitorial services to vacuum their carpets after hours daily, and then "master" carpet cleaners to deep-clean them every three months or so. Homemakers also generally vacuum their carpets perhaps several times a week, and then hope to deep-clean every spring or fall, depending on the kind of household traffic, and on their budgets.

It's true that people everywhere try to save money by handling these jobs themselves. However, empathy with the people, and an understanding of this trend, should be neither cause for alarm nor a deterrent to your success in this business.

Most people are just too busy to handle all their do-it-yourself projects. They continually put off until later any chore that requires special equipment. This is especially true with carpet cleaning, because deep down, they're fearful of botching the job. Thus, they're more than willing to pay an expert or a specialist to do this kind of work for them

It doesn't take any special education, skill or experience to operate a professional-type, deep-cleaning carpet cleaner. Yet, from your first job onward, you should project the image of a thoroughly experienced expert in your field. And, we're going to show you how you can get started in this business, and make \$300 or more per working day, with virtually no investment!

The important part of this business - or any other business - is the owner-operator's "sense of marketing" and salesmanship. Make no mistake about it; all businesses succeed through marketing strategies and salesmanship. You won't be selling a product with this business; you'll be selling a service. And the selling of services is often more difficult than product sales.

Your success in this business will be predicated upon the sales effort put forth. Getting off the ground will require a great deal of selling expertise on your part. You'll have to sell yourself AND your services.

Therefore, it will be to your benefit to learn all you can about selling. Then, you should continue to add to your knowledge through an ongoing program of learning. Keeping up to date and being aware of successful selling ideas and methods will add to the total success of any business person.

Even before the acquisition of equipment, you need customers. Your prospects are all the businesses and homes with carpets in your area. Your problem is going to be in reaching these prospects, impressing upon them the benefits of your service, and getting them set up with an appointment for you to do the work.

We have found that the least expensive and most productive method of reaching these people is by way of neighborhood "hand-out" flyers or announcements, delivered door-to-door by Brownies or Cub Scouts, or members of other youth organizations. These flyers are advertisements or announcements of a "Carpet Cleaning Special," printed on 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 sheets of paper that invite the recipients to call you for an appointment.

Study the carpet cleaning service ads in your local newspapers, the yellow pages of your telephone directories, and any similar flyers you may have received or seen. Make a pencil sketch of your own flyer, emphasizing customer benefits and your capabilities of doing the job. Take your ideas to the advertising class at a local college. Explain your project and ask for volunteer help. In most cases, you'll be favorably impressed with the work, and will only have to pay with a copy of the finished flyer for the student's portfolio, and a recommendation or testimonial about his work for you. Even if there should be a charge for the work you have done at the college, it will be a reasonable one.

Contracting with an advertising agency will probably take longer and will cost a significant amount of money. However, you might be able to contact a staff member who does free-lance work on the side. But you should set a specific date for completion of the project, and agree to pay no more than half the total estimated cost until the job is finished, and meets with your approval.

The next step is to take this original of your flyer to a printer, and have printed whatever number of copies you want to start. Most quick print shops will be able to print up to 20,000 copies, and deliver in a reasonable time, with nominal costs. If you decide to start with more than 20,000 copies, you will do better by going to a regular commercial printer. Larger quantities that would take a quick print shop all day can be handled by a commercial print shop in a few hours.

While your flyers are being printed, you should be lining up your delivery people - local Brownie or Cub Scout Troops. No big problem here. Either look up their local headquarters office in your phone book or call a friend or two with children about the right age and ask for the name and phone number of troop leaders. Arrange to pay these scout troops \$10 for each thousand circulars they hand out door-to-door.

One other thing before you start handing out your flyers - be sure that you have someone available to answer the phone and set up appointments for you. It's usually best to have a woman do this; it makes the caller think of your service as an established business. You can pay an answering service to handle these calls for you, but if your wife or a friend is available, that would be even better. It is, however, imperative that a "live voice" answer your phone. People have some strange ideas about answering machines, and most businesses find they do much better not using them.

Your "secretary" should have a set pattern of answering your calls, and an appointment book. Usually, your flyer will advertise a special such as "Your living room carpet deep-cleaned for just \$20. Get all the ground-in dirt and unpleasant odors out. A professional job by experienced master carpet cleaners, and we can do it all for you tomorrow. Give us a call; set up a carpet cleaning appointment with us now; and we'll have your home sparkling clean, ready for company in no time at all!" This special offer should take you no more than an hour in the customer's home, meaning that your secretary can book appointments for you at the rate of one every ninety minutes or less, depending on the travel distance between appointments.

By setting your first appointment for 8:30 in the morning, and working thorough the whole day, allowing 30 minutes between appointments, you'll be able to handle seven appointments per day. At \$20 per call, you will gross \$140 per day. Your secretary should book you solid from 8:30 through 5:30 each day. Naturally, some people may want you to stop by at a

certain time that's already booked. In that case, you set them up for their requested time on an open day. You'll also find that as you gain experience, you can cut down considerably the time it takes you to handle each job, as well as your travel time between jobs, enabling you to book more appointments.

Just as soon as you have job appointments lined up, hurry over to your local carpet cleaner distributor, your local rent-all store, or even some super markets and rent a steam-clean carpet cleaner. Most of the time, you won't have to pay until you return it, but even if you do have to pay at the time you take it, the cost is usually \$25 or less for twenty-four hours. Read the directions and make sure you know how to operate it. Then load it into your car, van or pickup, and set out for your first appointment.

You should bear in mind that carpet cleaning is a type of service business that takes you into the homes of your customers. Therefore, how you look, dress, and handle yourself - particularly in the presence of your customers - will have a direct bearing on the success of your business.

Be clean, and conduct yourself in a business like manner at all times. Dress neatly. In fact, one of the best ways to get off to a fast start is to purchase a working uniform from Sears, Ward's or Penney's. Drop by a "pennant shop" and have them make up a special oval name tag which can be sewn over the left breast pocket. At the same time, have them make up a large oval with the name of your business and your phone number to sew on the back of the uniform. When you hire people to help you with the work, outfit them similarly.

Go out of your way to be polite and friendly with your customers, but refrain from being fresh. Avoid getting involved in extended conversations - if you are to keep on schedule, you won't have time for a lot of talk.

Keep your equipment clean, properly maintained, and operating smoothly. Have your supplies organized and within easy reach. Don't allow yourself to be caught in a position where you have to make excuses because the equipment won't function properly, you can't find what you need, or you suddenly find yourself out of certain supplies.

When working these advertising specials, just concentrate on doing the job and moving on to your next customer. If the customer questions you about the cost to do the other rooms,

give an estimate and set up a tentative appointment, which you should later confirm with a call-back after checking your schedule. Don't try to sell your complete carpet cleaning services on this first call, but do be sure to leave a business card with the name of your company and your phone number.

Your service is the "deep-down shampoo cleaning" of carpeting in your customers' homes or places of business. Always strive to use the best equipment that's available. Later on - possibly in a month or six weeks - you'll want to buy or lease your own equipment. Your business will grow and flourish as a result of your doing a good and complete job every time. It may take you a few minutes longer - especially when you are learning the equipment and establishing a procedure - but in the end this will pay off with satisfied customers; and a group of satisfied customers is the key to your becoming wealthy in this business.

You want your customers to call you again and again to clean their carpets. Being pleased with your work, they'll spread the word about your service for you, free of charge! And this, of course, will generate an almost unlimited amount of ongoing work for your new business.

The average price to the customer to have a 12 by 18 foot wall-to-wall carpet "shampoo cleaned" is about \$50. Your materials to do that size job will cost about \$5.

The typical job involves more than just one room, and the average period of time spent on the typical job is about two hours, with an average billing to the customer of \$75 - materials for each \$75 job cost you about \$10 all of which means that with just five appointments per day, five days per week, your gross income before expenses will be approaching \$2,000 per week.

Most people who set up carpet cleaning businesses manage to gross \$50,000 or more the first year. We've described to you how to get started with virtually no real investment. However, we do advise you to either purchase or lease your own carpet cleaning equipment just as soon as you can possibly afford it.

Several equipment manufacturers have financing plans available. It would be well to check out several of these plans before purchasing your equipment. Even better than the financing plans offered, some of the manufacturers have business start-up programs to help you along the way. They will provide you with a complete carpet cleaning business plan, numerous

advertising materials, a regular newsletter featuring business ideas from all the buyers of their equipment, and low cost supplies.

Before actually starting work in your carpet cleaning business, you should register your business or company name with your county clerk. The cost for this is nominal, and you will receive a registration certificate or card, which you will need to open a bank account in your company name. You should also talk to a few business insurance agents to get complete business insurance against damage to any of your customers' carpets or accidents in their homes. Being able to state "All work fully insured," will greatly add to your business image.

Think seriously about buying or leasing a van for your service calls. A uniform with the name of your company emblazoned on the back, plus a late model van with your company name neatly painted on the side will do just about as much to build your image and your business as a full page advertisement in the Sunday paper.

On the subject of advertising, so long as you don't erect a sign on your front lawn or your roof, proclaiming for all the world to see the fact that you're operating a carpet cleaning business, you won't have any problems operating your business from your home. Sooner or later though, you'll have to buy a City or county business license. So, the sooner you do this and are approved by the licensing agency in your area, the better you're going to feel and the more confidence you'll exude in all your business dealings.

Definitely plan to run a quarter page ad in your local business and telephone directories. You'll really be surprised at the number of calls you get from these ads. At least in the beginning, you should run a regular ad in your newspaper. This should be a display ad, at least 2 columns wide by 4 inches deep, and should appear in your Wednesday and Thursday papers. As you become established, it won't be necessary to run more than an ad every other week in your Wednesday papers and before the holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, when people always want to spruce up their residences.

Radio or television advertising really doesn't pull that well for this kind of business when you compare the costs to the number of jobs you get from it. I would suggest that you contact these media and try for a trade or barter agreement. You clean their carpets on a regular basis,

and they allow you to store up advertising credit to use in the spring and fall when people are really serious about spring cleaning, and Christmas preparations.

It's also recommended that you register as a "probationary member" of your Chamber of Commerce. This will add prestige to your business, and enable you to associate on equal terms with the various other business leaders in your community. Joining and attending civic club meetings, participating in their causes and events, will also result in long-range business income for you.

Something else to keep in mind: Get the word about your being in business out to the people in your area. Get the Chamber of Commerce to mention you in their newsletter; send "blurbs" about your business and service to all your area newspapers, TV and radio stations; arrange to put on an all-day demonstration of your work on the carpeting in the covered mall areas in your city's shopping centers, and hand out brochures to all the people watching; rent a booth and hand out brochures at all the home building, remodeling, and home improvement shows. Do the same thing at your county fair, and hold seminars on the care of fine carpets. The ideas for free publicity and promotion are limitless, so use your imagination and "push" to get your name in the paper and on radio and TV as often as possible.

There's always going to be competition. Some of it will be good for you, and some of it will be bad for you. Accept it as a part of life. Just keep in mind that you're in business because you feel you can do a better job more efficiently; and you can do it with greater satisfaction to your customers than anyone else. Be aware of the competition, but don't worry about it. Just stick to your own business plan, and you'll be okay.

Depending on the population of your area, you should be planning for additional carpet cleaning machines and the hiring of people to do the work for you within three to six months - that is, unless your original motive for a business of your own was to see how fast you could work yourself to death. Assuming that all goes well with you, within a couple of years you should have "hired help" running the business while you enjoy the fruits of all the hard work you put in at the outset.

I personally don't see the need for you to even consider buying a franchised operation. There's just too much real help available for the "independent" to go to the considerable expense

and obligation of a franchise. Starting from scratch, and as an independent, this is most assuredly a low-investment, low-overhead type business - the kind we recommend for anyone and everyone who's determined to make it on his own.

A carpet cleaning business of your own is one of the easiest of all small businesses to start. You'll find the initial start-up costs well within your reach, and the margin of profit most astounding! It's an easy business to operate, and yet one that can be called necessary to today's standard of living. It carries a very high rating on all business evaluation stability charts, and it's a business that will grow rapidly to bring you the monetary rewards you desire.