

Chapter 1

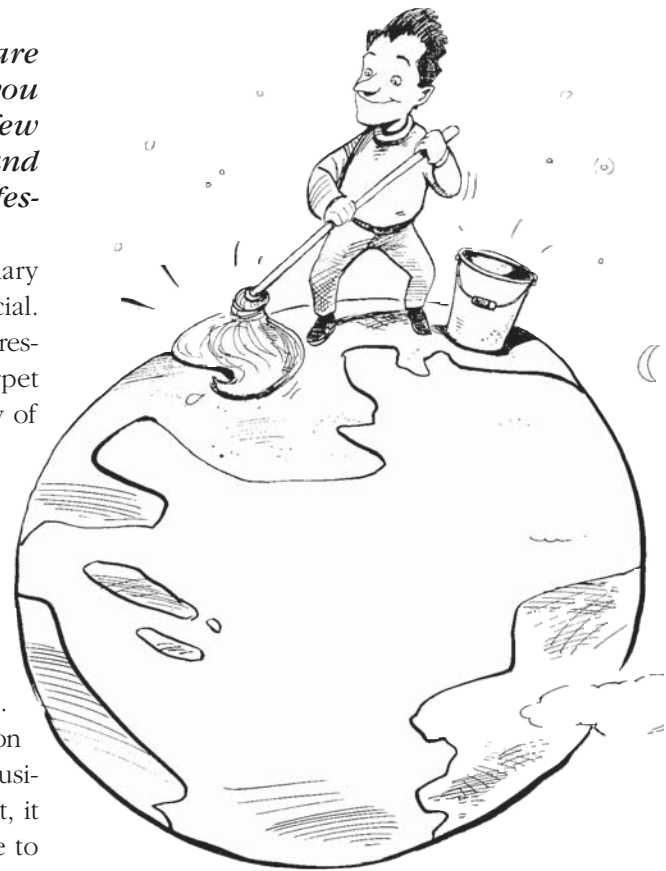
An Introduction To Cleaning Services

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 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 maid 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 is 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—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 get a listing 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.



Second, the demand for cleaning services is tremendous. Plenty of maid service 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 are not 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.

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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 will be a success in a cleaning service business.

The Driving Forces

Shifting demographics and changing lifestyles are driving the surge in residential maid service 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.

"Since 9/11, there has been a shift in our country's values to concentrate more on home, family and making the most of our free time," says Harry Young, president of Molly Maid Inc. "The trend in the residential cleaning industry is tremendous growth. As leisure time continues to shrink, more and more people are searching for solutions to help balance work and their personal lives. The service and convenience we bring to our customers al-



Stat Fact

Independent maid service operators can easily net \$10 to \$20—or more—per hour cleaning homes on a part- or full-time basis.

Stat Fact

There are an estimated 4 million building cleaning workers in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and more than 6 percent of them are self-employed.



lows them the freedom to enjoy life, enabling them to spend their time with the people who matter the most."

The companies that truly thrive will be the ones with a heavy emphasis on quality and personal services. "Every one of my customers is different and special, and I treat them that way," says Wanda Guzman, a maid service operator in Orlando, Florida. "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 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 on an infrequent basis.

"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

Cleaning Service



Bright Idea

Restaurants are a growing 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.

vision. Though technology certainly has an impact on cleaning services, this is not a high-tech business. Nor is there any glitz to it. And there will be times when you'll have as much trouble as Rodney Dangerfield had getting respect.

But the upside is that you can build an extremely profitable business that will generate revenue very quickly. Most cleaning service businesses can be operated on either a part-time 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

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, says Ron Hyatt, vice president of master and international regions for Coverall North America in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He emphasizes the positive results of properly done commercial cleaning, which include providing a safe, healthy indoor environment for people to work and helping people avoid symptoms and illnesses caused by an unhealthy environment. 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, says Hyatt, 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.

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small and do so. If your skills are more administrative 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 maid services offer fairly predictable hours; disaster restoration and cleanup can mean calls at all hours of the day or night.

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.

Smart Tip

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

