

A 'Quick Start' Guide To Get Your Business Off To A Great Start

*and build a firm foundation for the
future too!*

Welcome to a great industry. Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning is a very rewarding business to be in, both financially and for a 'sense of pride' in a job well done. The feedback you'll get from delighted clients when they see you revive their furnishings is very motivating.

This business is all about relationships. The relationship you build with clients will keep them coming back time and time again, and also encourage them to tell their friends and relatives to help you build your business by word of mouth referral.

There are many guru's that will tell you that it costs 8-10 times more to find a new client than to sell something else, or the same service again to an existing client. When you first start out in your new business all your work will be for new clients, but after 12 months you should start to see some of those clients come back again, if not for the same service, for other services you offer. Within three years or so, repeat work and referral work will become the core of your business and if you start to do some of the things in this guide you will put down firm foundations now to ensure that happens.

You don't have to do everything in this guide, but the more you can start to think about implementing the quicker you'll reap the rewards. All of the ideas we suggest have been proven by other carpet cleaners in the real world, from owner operators to multi van operations employing office staff. Whether you want to be an owner operator just working for yourself, or you have a desire to grow a business employing multiple technicians these simple steps help. In fact, many established owner operators who have been using these methods for a few years now do very little advertising other than looking after their existing clients.

Remember, doing some of these things now will pay much larger dividends later, as you build your relationship with your client. They have a synergy effect, so the more you can start doing, the quicker they all start to work together for you.

Some basics...

1. You have to do a great job, AND 'sweep the porch'.
What we mean is, people will only use you again or recommend you if you have done a great job, no amount of marketing will convince someone to use you again if you get the first job wrong. 'Sweeping the porch' just means doing a little more than expected, e.g. freshen up the hallway for free if you've cleaned the Lounge and Dining room, if you've cleaned the suite freshen up the dining chair bases for free. Anything, but do a little more than expected, even if that is just sweeping the leaves away from the front door where you're working. People remember these details.
2. Touchy subject but, personal hygiene is so important.
Cleaning is a physical job and making sure you carry deodorant is so important. Last thing you want is to present Mrs Jones with a lovely clean fresh smelling carpet and you smell worse than the carpet did before you cleaned it. Mrs Jones will notice.
3. Wear workwear uniform, preferably with your logo stitched on it.
Don't wear jeans and t-shirt, wear proper workwear trousers and a smart polo shirt. Remember to carry a spare if its light coloured as after cleaning a filthy suite your shirt may also be filthy.
4. Try to collect an email address for every enquiry.
This will allow you to add clients to an email auto-responder or newsletter list. Even if you don't plan on using an auto-responder or newsletter immediately still try to collect an email now so that when you are ready to start you already have a client list to contact.
Collecting an email address is dead easy, just ask for it. When you provide a quote just ask if you can take their email address to send a confirmation through to them, you'll be surprised how many give you their email straight away. Or, if you're visiting to do a quote, as you confirm the day and time with the client just say "can I take your email and I'll send a confirmation over." Two simple ways to get an email address for future use.
5. Make sure you get a Postcode for clients.
If you're going to do any type of mailings you will need a postcode to qualify for any quantity discount on postage and all online mailing companies need a postcode or they will charge you a premium rate.
6. Try to get a mobile number from clients.
Two reasons, firstly you can use it for marketing at a later date if you wish. More importantly, if you arrive at a client's home and there is nobody in, at least you can still

call the clients mobile to 'remind' them you are due. That way you'll have less 'no shows' to your cleaning appointments.

7. Make sure you have a database to keep your client list on.
As this grows you'll be able to start marketing special offers, reminders and more. Look for one that can grow as your business grows, that way you won't have to learn a new system if you swap systems and you won't risk losing data when switching.

Ideas to... Get Work.

Obviously in the early days you will have to keep finding new clients. These are a few ideas to help...

1. Tell everyone you know that you've started a new business and would appreciate their support. Offer them a big discount on anything they want doing, this will at least get some initial cash flow going, AND give you plenty of experience with 'real' clients too.
2. When you've completed a job and you show the client the work ask them if they'd mind passing your name onto their friends and relatives. Now they have seen the results for themselves they will have the confidence to recommend you to their friends, but only if you suggest it to them. It can be a subtle conversation at the end of the job... "I'm pleased you're delighted with the end result. I've only been trading X weeks/months and most of my work has come from people I've cleaned for telling their friends about me. If I left you a few cards would you mind passing them on to your friends too Mrs Jones?" If one of their friends asked who cleaned their carpet they would probably pass on your name anyway, but this simple statement at the end of the job will plant the seed in their mind to now actively recommend you, rather than wait to be asked.
3. At the end of the job ask the client if you can leave them with a no obligation 'courtesy quote'. Explain that if you can provide a quote for cleaning other areas while you are there today when they are ready for cleaning you will hold the price for 12/24 months. You'll find some people book you to do more work almost straight away, and those that don't book straight away, when they do call you know what the price is and can just book them straight in. If you usually visit to quote you've just saved yourself a trip.
4. After every job do what is commonly called "5 around". Simply have leaflets printed that say you have been working in the area, list your services and benefits and add a call to action like "for your free quote call us now." Then after the job deliver a leaflet to at least one house either side of the one you've cleaned at, and three opposite, hence 5 around. Many people choose to do this before they do the clean. Then if someone calls immediately you can pop in and quote after the job you are working on, saving a return trip. Others do '20 around' or even leaflet the whole street if they have time before the next job, or it's their last job of the day with no other commitments. This is a great way to build your reputation, if people keep seeing your leaflet they start to see you as THE cleaner in the area.

5. Start collecting client testimonials, and use them everywhere. Give every client a brief questionnaire or survey form, they can fill it in while you load your van, or leave a freepost envelope for them to send it back in after. Ask them what they liked most about the service. You'll be surprised what people put on these. Then USE THEM! Add them to your website and keep them updated, add them to quotes you produce for clients, add them to your leaflet. Gurus call it 'Social Proof', i.e., someone else is shouting your praises, it's not just you claiming to be great. Use the phrase "But don't just take our word for it..." then put a few of the testimonials you have received, e.g. Mrs Jones of Royston said..."John did a great job cleaning my suite; it looks like new, highly recommended."

Ideas to... Get More Money.

1. Make sure you tell the client about protection treatments.
Many people had a protector applied when the suite or carpet was new and you can 'refresh' that for them after the cleaning. If they didn't have it protected from new you can apply one now, advising that 'worn' carpet/fabric is less resistant to spills and soil than new, so a protector applied after cleaning 'restores' that resistance. Typically you can charge half the cleaning cost again to apply a protector to carpets, and a little more for upholstery. The extra cost to you for protector is small, and the time taken to apply it is small, this means you make more money from the same client for little extra effort. Some cleaners apply protector to over 70% of carpets they clean, that extra margin adds up over the year. When you quote make sure you offer a clean only and a clean and protect price, you'll be amazed at how many people ask "what's the protector" and that's your opportunity. If they don't ask, explain the benefits of protection, i.e. most spills and stains can be removed with just a damp cloth or mild cleaner, AND more dirt vacuums also stays cleaner longer, would you like me to apply it to your furnishings?
2. Tell the client about ALL the services you offer.
Have a leaflet that lists everything you do, not just your core carpet and upholstery cleaning, your deodorising, anti allergen, etc. If the client doesn't know you offer a service they may just call someone else in ignorance.
3. Offer multiple room discounts, something like 'clean more, save more'.
Tell the client that while you are there cleaning one room a second room would be discounted by x%. The expensive part for you is getting to the house, so while you're there try to clean more items. A popular offer is the 3 for 2 offer, smallest room free, and this works well with the protector treatment, i.e. clean and protect 3 rooms, get third room cleaned and protected free.

Ideas to... Get Repeat Work.

1. On the questionnaire or survey form you use with clients, ask the very important question... "When would you like us to remind you to have the item cleaned again? 6/12/24/36 months? (Delete as applicable)". Many clients will choose something here. If you record in your diary when they have asked to be reminded you can then write to them at that time and say "You asked us to remind you in 24 months to have your items cleaned again, here's your friendly reminder. Call us now on XYZ to book in." The conversion rate on this type of letter has been shown to be huge, simple because it is a letter which just confirms what the client has asked you to do, remind them the items are due for cleaning.
2. Send reminders after 12, 24, 36, 48 and 60 months after the job was done. These letters will become the lifeblood of your business. Make sure you make them personalized, never use Dear valued client, make sure you can mailmerge the name and address details in from your database. Make each letter appealing, and make it appear to be 'normal' to have the item cleaned again now. E.g., the letter to 12 months since should read something like "Can you believe it, it's 12 months since we visited and many of our clients have their furnishings cleaned annually, which is why we are sending this reminder to you now." The letter to 36 months should read "Can you believe it, it's about 3 years since we last visited. Many of our clients have their furnishings cleaned every two to three years, which is why we're sending you this reminder now." You can see both letters make it sound 'normal' to have your furnishings cleaned again now, especially the 36 month one as that is saying every two to three years, effectively it's almost 'overdue' a clean.
3. Working in your area. If you can target sections of your database, it's been proven that emailing existing clients that you are in the area and you will be working there in a few days' time will generate work from them. Use an email which says "Working in your area on Friday, special offer..." then in the email explain you are working in the area and if they want anything doing on Friday there is an offer of X% off. Email is a cheap way to contact your clients and targeting them in this way means you'll reduce your travelling time and costs, so make more money with less stress.