



HOW TO START UP — AND RUN — YOUR OWN ELECTRICAL BUSINESS

A practical guide for
qualified electricians
moving into self-employment

PRACTICAL
GUIDE FOR
QUALIFIED
ELECTRICIANS

— FROM —
TRADE SKILLS
HUB ACADEMY
PUBLICATIONS



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How to Start Up and Run Your Own Electrical Business

A practical guide for qualified electricians moving into self-employment

Trade Skills Hub Academy Publications

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This book is intended as general guidance for qualified, competent electricians considering or starting self-employment. It is not a substitute for professional legal, financial, tax, or insurance advice specific to your circumstances. Regulatory and legal information is believed correct at the time of writing but may change; always check current requirements with the relevant body before relying on them.

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Introduction

If you're reading this book, the chances are you're already a good electrician. You can read a drawing, wire a consumer unit, fault-find with confidence, and sign off your own work. What you may not have done yet is run a business — quoted a job on your own account, chased a late payment, or decided how much to charge for your time. That's what this book is about.

This is not a book that teaches you to be an electrician. It assumes you already are one — qualified, competent, and with real site experience behind you. Chapter 3 sets that assumption out in full, and it's worth reading early if you're at all unsure whether you're ready. Everything that follows is about the business side of the trade: the planning, the pricing, the paperwork, the customers, and the decisions that come with working for yourself rather than for someone else.

Who This Book Is For

- Qualified electricians considering self-employment for the first time.
- Newly self-employed electricians looking for a structured, complete reference as they get established.
- Established sole traders considering growth, or simply wanting to check their business against good practice.

How This Book Is Organised

The book follows the rough order most electricians actually move through: deciding whether self-employment is right for you, planning the business, meeting legal and competent person scheme requirements, equipping yourself properly, pricing your work, finding customers, delivering the work itself, staying safe, managing the business day to day, and — for those who want it — growing beyond a one-person operation. The final part steps back from the practical detail to look at the trade as a long-term career.

You don't have to read it start to finish. Each chapter is written to stand largely on its own, with cross-references where one topic builds on another. If you're already trading, you may want to jump straight to the chapters most relevant to where you are now, and use the rest as a reference to come back to.

What This Book Doesn't Cover

Marketing is covered only briefly here, in Part 6, because a companion title in this range — *How to Market Your Trade Business* — covers it in far more depth than would fit alongside everything else in this book. Where other topics are covered more fully elsewhere in the Trade Skills Hub Academy range, you'll find a pointer in the relevant chapter and a fuller list in Appendix F.

This book also can't replace advice specific to your own circumstances. Tax rules, employment law, competent person scheme requirements, and consumer contract law all

change over time, and all depend on details particular to your business. Where this matters most — insurance, contracts, tax, and legal structure — the book says so plainly and points you toward the right kind of professional to speak to.

A Word Before You Start

Running your own electrical business is genuinely achievable, and thousands of electricians do it successfully every year. It rewards people who treat the business side with the same care they already bring to their electrical work — not because it's complicated, but because it's unfamiliar at first. This book is here to make it familiar.

Part 1: Is Self-Employment Right for You?

PART 1: IS SELF-EMPLOYMENT RIGHT FOR YOU?

Chapter 1: Why Start an Electrical Business?

Every self-employed electrician started in the same place you're in right now: qualified, competent, and wondering whether working for yourself is a step towards a better life or a step towards a much harder one. There's no single right answer. Some electricians thrive the moment they hand in their notice. Others find the reality far tougher than they expected, and a smaller number decide within the first year that employed work suited them better after all. This chapter looks honestly at both sides, so you go into the decision with your eyes open rather than swept along by wishful thinking.

Before You Read On

This book is written for people who are already qualified electricians, or who are close to completing their qualification and gaining the experience needed to work unsupervised.

It does not teach you how to become an electrician. It assumes you can already do the job competently and safely, and shows you how to build a business around that skill.

If you're not yet sure what "qualified" actually means in practice — Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, an NVQ, an ECS card, and enough site experience to work without supervision — turn to Chapter 3, which covers this in full before you go any further.

What follows below is a short summary so you're not left wondering.

Qualified First, Self-Employed Second

It's worth being blunt about this at the very start, because a small number of people skip past it. Setting up an electrical business is not a route into learning the trade — it's a route into running a business once you already have the trade. In the UK, that generally means:

1. A recognised Level 3 electrical qualification (such as an NVQ Level 3 in Electrotechnical Services, or an equivalent apprenticeship-based award).
2. Enough supervised site experience to work safely and competently without someone checking your work.
3. An ECS (Electrotechnical Certification Scheme) card, or equivalent, showing your qualifications and competence can be verified.
4. For anyone planning to certify their own domestic work, the inspection and testing qualifications (such as the 2391 or equivalent) that most competent person schemes expect.

None of this is a formality. Clients, competent person schemes, insurers and, frankly, your own safety all depend on it. If you're reading this book while still partway through your qualifications or your on-site experience, that's absolutely fine — plenty of the planning in

this book (research, costing, marketing) can start well before you go self-employed. Just be realistic about your own timeline, and don't let enthusiasm for being your own boss push you into working unsupervised before you're genuinely ready. Chapter 3 goes into all of this in far more detail, including how to judge for yourself when you're ready to make the jump.

The Benefits of Self-Employment

The appeal is easy to understand, and largely genuine. As your own boss, you decide which jobs to take, which customers to work for, and which to politely turn down. You keep the profit from your own labour rather than a wage set by someone else. Many electricians find that once they're established, their earnings comfortably exceed what they were paid as an employee, sometimes by a significant margin, though this depends heavily on how well the business side is run rather than on electrical skill alone.

There's also flexibility. You can choose to specialise in the work you enjoy most, structure your week around family commitments, and build a business that reflects your own standards rather than someone else's shortcuts. Many self-employed electricians describe a sense of pride in seeing a business grow that simply isn't there when you're one employee among many.

The Challenges Nobody Puts on the Recruitment Poster

The other side of the coin is real, and this book won't pretend otherwise. Self-employment means no guaranteed income when work is quiet, no sick pay, no holiday pay, and no employer picking up the pension contributions. You become responsible for finding customers, quoting accurately, chasing late payments, keeping proper records, and staying on top of tax and insurance — on top of the electrical work itself.

Cash flow is often the first shock. Even a fully booked diary doesn't guarantee money in the bank, because customers don't always pay promptly, and materials often have to be bought before you're paid for the job. Many new business owners underestimate how much time gets eaten up by admin, quoting, and driving between jobs — time that doesn't feel like "real work" but is essential to keeping the business running.

There's also an emotional side to it. As an employee, a quiet week is your employer's problem. As a sole trader, a quiet week is entirely yours, and it's easy to take that personally even when it's simply the nature of self-employed trade work. Chapter 45 looks at cash flow and the emotional ups and downs of running your own business in more detail, but it's worth knowing from page one that this side of things exists.

Potential Earnings and Lifestyle Changes

It's tempting to want a single figure for "what a self-employed electrician earns," but there isn't one honest answer. Earnings depend on your location, your specialism, how efficiently you're priced (covered in Part 5 of this book), how much you invest in finding customers, and simply how many hours you're willing to work. What can be said with confidence is that, once established, self-employed electricians typically have the potential to out-earn an equivalent employed role, because you're being paid for the value of the job rather than a fixed hourly wage. That potential comes with variability that an employed wage doesn't have

— busy months and quiet months, rather than a steady salary landing on the same date each month.

The lifestyle change is often bigger than the financial one. Evenings and weekends may include quoting, invoicing, or replying to enquiries rather than switching off completely. Many electricians find this trade-off worthwhile, particularly once systems are in place to keep admin manageable (Part 9 of this book covers this). Others find they prefer to reserve some of that time and choose to subcontract for another business rather than run their own — which is a perfectly valid choice covered in the next section.

Different Routes Into Business Ownership

There isn't one path into self-employment, and it's worth knowing your options rather than assuming it's all-or-nothing.

5. Going fully self-employed from the outset — registering as a sole trader, finding your own customers, and taking full responsibility for the business from day one.
6. Subcontracting for an established electrical business or contractor while you build your own customer base and reputation on the side, reducing risk while you find your feet.
7. Building up gradually alongside employed work — taking on evening and weekend jobs for friends, family and referrals before making the full-time leap.
8. Taking over or buying into an existing local electrical business, inheriting an established customer base rather than starting from nothing.
9. Buying into a franchise model, which trades some independence for a ready-made brand, support structure and, often, a lead-generation system — an option some electricians consider, though it comes with its own costs and restrictions worth researching thoroughly before committing.

None of these routes is inherently better than another. A cautious, gradual build-up alongside employed work suits some people well; others prefer to commit fully from day one because half-measures leave them without the time or focus to make the business work. Be honest with yourself about which suits your circumstances, your finances, and your appetite for risk.

Common Myths About Working for Yourself

A few beliefs circulate among tradespeople that are worth challenging before you go any further.

10. "I'll be my own boss, so no one tells me what to do." In practice, your customers, the regulations, and your competent person scheme all set plenty of rules — you've simply swapped one set of expectations for another.
11. "Being good at the electrical work is the main thing." Technical competence gets you in the door, but pricing, marketing, and customer service are what keep the business running. Many highly skilled electricians struggle in business, and some average electricians run very profitable ones, because the business skills matter just as much.

12. "I'll earn more straight away." Most new businesses take time to build a steady flow of work. The first six to twelve months are commonly the leanest, even for electricians who go on to do very well.
13. "I can work whatever hours I like." Early on especially, the hours are often longer than employed work, not shorter, because you're doing the electrical work and building the business at the same time.

So, Is It Right for You?

There's no test in this book that can answer that for you, and anyone who claims otherwise is oversimplifying a genuinely personal decision. What this book can do is walk you through every practical stage — planning, legal requirements, pricing, marketing, delivering the work, and growing beyond a one-person operation — so that whichever route you choose, you're making an informed decision rather than a hopeful guess. The next chapter looks at the different types of electrical business you could build, so you can start narrowing down what shape your own business might take.

Key Takeaways

Self-employment can offer better earnings potential, flexibility, and control — but with no guaranteed income, sick pay, or holiday pay.

This book assumes you already hold, or are close to completing, the qualifications and site experience needed to work as a competent, unsupervised electrician — see Chapter 3 if you're not yet certain what that involves.

There are several routes into business ownership, from a full leap to a gradual build-up alongside employed work — none is automatically the right choice for everyone.

Be wary of common myths about self-employment; going in with realistic expectations is one of the best predictors of lasting the course.

Chapter 2: Types of Electrical Businesses

"Electrician" covers a wide range of working lives. A domestic electrician replacing consumer units and chasing sockets has very little in common, day to day, with an industrial electrician maintaining production-line machinery, even though both trained through the same qualifications. Before you plan a business, it's worth being clear about which kind of electrical work you actually want to build it around, because the answer shapes almost everything else in this book — your pricing, your marketing, your equipment, and even the hours you keep.

This chapter runs through the main categories of electrical business — domestic, commercial, industrial, agricultural, maintenance, inspection and testing, renewables, and emergency call-outs. Most self-employed electricians end up specialising in one or two of these rather than trying to be all things to all customers, and there's a good reason for that: each one calls for a different mix of skills, equipment, customer relationships and business approach. As the closing section of this chapter sets out, the field you choose should be led chiefly by the practical experience you've already built up, rather than by which type of work simply sounds most appealing.

Domestic Electrician

The most common route for a self-employed electrician, and often the easiest to get started in. Domestic work covers everything from additional sockets and lighting upgrades to full rewires and consumer unit replacements in people's homes. Customers are individual homeowners and landlords rather than businesses, which means smaller job values but a much larger pool of potential customers, and word-of-mouth referrals travel quickly in a local area.

The trade-off is that domestic customers are often less predictable than commercial clients — jobs get postponed, decisions get second-guessed, and price sensitivity can be higher, particularly for larger jobs like rewires. Part P and the domestic notification requirements (Chapter 8) apply squarely to this category, so a competent person scheme membership is close to essential if you want to self-certify your own work rather than pay for third-party sign-off on every job.

Commercial Electrician

Commercial work covers offices, shops, restaurants, schools and similar premises. Jobs tend to be larger and better paid per visit than typical domestic work, and commercial clients are often less price-sensitive because the cost is a business expense rather than coming out of a household budget. Many commercial clients also offer repeat work — a shop fit-out company or letting agent, for example, can become a steady source of jobs rather than a one-off customer.

The downside is that commercial work often has to fit around a business's opening hours, meaning early mornings, evenings or weekends to avoid disrupting trade. Commercial premises are also more likely to fall under stricter compliance requirements, and building a

reputation in this space usually takes longer than in domestic work, since commercial clients tend to want references and a proven track record before handing over a contract.

Industrial Electrician

Industrial electrical work — factories, warehouses, plant rooms and processing facilities — sits at the more technical end of the trade. It often involves higher voltages, three-phase systems, and machinery control circuits that go well beyond typical domestic or commercial installation work. Rates are often the highest of any category, reflecting both the specialist knowledge required and the consequences of getting it wrong.

This is not usually a starting point for a new self-employed electrician. Most people who move into industrial work have spent years employed in industrial settings first, building the specific experience and contacts this sector rewards. If it's your background, though, it can be a genuinely lucrative niche, often with fewer self-employed competitors than the crowded domestic market.

Maintenance Electrician

Rather than one-off jobs, maintenance electricians work on an ongoing basis for a client — a housing association, a facilities management company, a chain of shops, or a single large commercial site — carrying out planned and reactive electrical maintenance under a contract. This offers something domestic and commercial project work often can't: predictable, recurring income, agreed in advance rather than won job by job.

Landing this kind of contract usually depends on relationships and a proven track record rather than marketing in the conventional sense, and contracts can be competitive to win in the first place. Once secured, though, a maintenance contract can form a stable backbone for a business, with other, more varied work fitted around it.

Inspection and Testing Specialist

Some electricians build a business focused specifically on inspection and testing — periodic inspections, EICRs, and landlord safety certificates — rather than installation work. This has grown as a specialism partly because of increased regulatory demand for periodic testing in the rental sector, and it suits electricians who hold the relevant inspection and testing qualifications (Chapter 3) and enjoy the more diagnostic, less physically demanding side of the trade.

It can be a strong niche precisely because it's narrower — landlords, letting agents and property managers often want a specialist who can turn certificates around reliably and explain findings clearly, rather than a general electrician doing testing as an occasional sideline.

Renewable Energy Installer

Solar PV, battery storage and EV charge point installation have become a significant and growing part of the trade. This category often commands strong margins and taps into customers actively seeking out the work, rather than an electrician having to generate

demand from scratch — enquiries frequently come from people who've already decided they want the installation and are simply choosing an installer.

The specialism does typically require additional training and accreditation on top of core electrical qualifications, and the underlying technology and incentive schemes shift more quickly than traditional electrical work, so staying current matters more here than in most other categories. Chapter 50 looks at expanding into this and other specialist sectors in more detail, for electricians considering it as a later addition to an existing business rather than a starting point.

Emergency Call-Out Services

Some electricians build all or part of a business around emergency and out-of-hours call-outs — total loss of power, tripped circuits that won't reset, and similar urgent faults. Customers in a genuine emergency are typically far less price-sensitive than someone booking routine work weeks in advance, which is reflected in the premium rates this category can command.

The cost is lifestyle. Emergency call-out work means being available at unsociable hours, often at short notice, and it can be physically and mentally tiring to sustain long-term as the sole basis of a business. Many electricians who offer it treat it as one service alongside planned domestic or commercial work, rather than the entire business model, so they can dial the unsociable hours up or down as their circumstances change.

Agricultural Electrician

Farms and other agricultural premises have electrical needs that don't map neatly onto domestic, commercial or industrial work, which is why agricultural electrical work is often treated as its own category. It covers three-phase supplies to barns and outbuildings, grain dryers and other seasonal machinery, milking parlour and livestock building wiring, corrosive and dusty environments that demand suitably rated equipment, and standby generator and power backup systems for premises where a power cut has consequences well beyond inconvenience.

It's a specialism that rewards familiarity with rural life as much as electrical knowledge — farms are often spread out, access can be difficult, and the work is frequently time-critical around the agricultural calendar (a broken-down grain dryer at harvest time won't wait for a convenient appointment slot). Electricians who grew up around farming or who've worked rurally before often find this a natural, less crowded niche; electricians with no rural background at all tend to find it a harder specialism to break into cold.

Choosing Your Focus Based on Your Own Experience

Of everything in this chapter, this is the point worth taking most seriously: which field or fields you choose to work in should be led by the practical experience you've already built up, not simply by which category sounds most appealing or most profitable on paper. The categories above aren't just different markets — they call for genuinely different bodies of hands-on knowledge, and that knowledge is largely what you're selling once you're self-employed.

If your apprenticeship and the years since have been spent almost entirely on domestic rewires and consumer unit changes, that's where your instincts, your speed, and your ability to spot problems before they become expensive are sharpest — and domestic work is the natural, lower-risk place to start a business, whatever else might tempt you. If you've spent several years working for a contractor on factory floors, three-phase machinery and control panels won't be unfamiliar territory, and industrial work may suit you far better than starting again in an unfamiliar domestic market. Time spent on farms or for a rural contractor points naturally towards agricultural work; years spent on shop and office fit-outs point towards commercial.

This matters because self-employment removes the safety net that experience quietly provides when you're employed. As an employed electrician on unfamiliar work, there's usually someone more senior nearby, or at least a phone call away. As a self-employed electrician, a job in a field you don't really know is a job where you're guessing, at the customer's expense and your own risk, with your reputation and your competent person scheme registration on the line if it goes wrong.

None of this means you can never move into a new field — Chapter 50 looks at expanding into new specialisms later in the life of an established business, once you've had the chance to build experience deliberately (working alongside someone established in that field, taking on a handful of smaller jobs in it, or completing focused additional training) rather than learning entirely on a paying customer's premises. But for the business you're setting up now, the honest starting question isn't "which type of work do I like the sound of?" — it's "which type of work do I already know how to do well, without supervision?" The answer to that question should carry more weight than any other factor in this chapter.

As you read through the planning chapters that follow — researching your local market in Chapter 4, then writing a business plan in Chapter 5 — keep this chapter in mind, and keep your own practical background at the centre of the decision. The field or fields you focus on will shape which customers you research, what a realistic business plan looks like, and where you focus your marketing once the business is up and running.

Key Takeaways

Electrical business types range from domestic, commercial, industrial and agricultural work through to maintenance contracts, inspection and testing, renewables, and emergency call-outs.

Each category suits a different mix of skills, equipment, customer relationships and working hours — there's no single "correct" type of electrical business.

Your choice of field should be led by the practical experience you've already built up, not simply by which type of work sounds most appealing — self-employment removes the safety net that supervision provides on unfamiliar work.

Domestic work is the most common and accessible starting point for those without a strong existing specialism; industrial, agricultural and maintenance work usually reward existing experience and relationships built up over time.

Moving into a new field later on is possible, but do it deliberately — through shadowing, smaller trial jobs, or focused training — rather than learning entirely on a paying customer's premises.