

# HOW TO **SET UP** **AND** **RUN YOUR OWN** **SUCCESSFUL** **PROPERTY MAINTENANCE** **BUSINESS**

A COMPLETE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



## START SMART

Build the right foundations



## PRICE PROFITABLY

Simple numbers that work



## WIN BETTER CUSTOMERS

Get work, keep it, get more



## BUILD A BUSINESS THAT LASTS

Systems, cash flow and growth

PRACTICAL  
REALISTIC  
PROFITABLE



TRADE SKILLS HUB ACADEMY PUBLICATIONS

# **How to Set Up and Run Your Own Successful Property Maintenance Business**

*A Complete Step-by-Step Guide*

**Trade Skills Hub Academy Publications**

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How to Set Up and Run Your Own Successful Property Maintenance Business

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# About Trade Skills Hub Academy

Trade Skills Hub Academy publishes practical, step-by-step guides to starting and running the essential trades. Our books are written for the United Kingdom, in plain English, with the numbers left honest — no hype, no get-rich-quick promises, and no assumption that the reader has capital, qualifications or business experience to begin with.

Each guide follows the same philosophy: that a trade business is built from a small number of learnable disciplines — pricing from arithmetic rather than fear, serving customers so well they return and recommend, keeping records that protect and inform, and turning up, week after week, while a reputation compounds. The tools change from trade to trade; the method does not.

This title stands alongside our complete start-up guides to pressure washing, window cleaning, gardening and other trades, and our wider business library for tradespeople covering marketing, tendering for work, and business records. Details of the full range can be found at [www.tradeskillshubacademy.com](http://www.tradeskillshubacademy.com).

# How to Use This Book

This book is arranged in the order you will need it, and it is written to be worked through rather than merely read. Chapters 1 to 3 help you decide — what the trade really involves, which services to offer, and what the law, insurers and good practice require. Chapters 4 to 6 build the foundations: the legal structure, the tools and van, and the pricing arithmetic on which everything else depends. Chapters 7 to 11 win the work, from your first domestic customers through marketing, customer service, letting agents and commercial clients. Chapters 12 to 15 run the business — job management, cash flow, growth and the failures to avoid — and Chapter 16 turns the whole method into a ninety-day launch plan with checklists and first-year targets.

If you are starting completely from scratch, read the book once through, then work Chapter 16's plan with the earlier chapters as reference. If you are already trading, go straight to whichever chapter addresses your current pressure — pricing (Chapter 6), finding better customers (Chapters 7 to 11) or cash flow (Chapter 13) — and read outward from there.

The appendices at the back contain the working documents the chapters refer to: checklists, templates, forms and directories. They are designed to be copied and adapted for your own business.

One suggestion above all: keep a pen with the book. The chapters will repeatedly ask you to write things down — your service list, your overheads, your hourly rate, your targets — because a plan on paper is the difference between a book that was read and a business that was started.

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# Introduction

Walk down any street in Britain and you are walking past work. The gate that drags on the path. The gutter growing grass. The fence leaning into next door's garden. The bathroom sealant gone grey, the back door that needs a shoulder, the bedroom that has needed decorating since the children left. Behind almost every front door in the country is a list — written down or carried in the back of someone's mind — of jobs too small for a builder, too skilled for the householder, and too annoying to ignore forever. This book is about becoming the person who answers that list, and building a proper business out of it.

**Why property maintenance businesses are in demand.** The demand is structural, not seasonal fashion. Britain's housing stock is among the oldest in the world, and old buildings generate repairs the way gardens generate weeds — continuously, in every postcode, in booms and recessions alike. The way we live has multiplied the demand further: millions of households where every adult works and nobody has the daylight hours for maintenance; a generation of homeowners who were never taught the practical crafts; and an ageing population with the will and the means to keep their homes right but not the knees for the ladder. Add the rental revolution — more than four million privately rented households in England alone, every one of them a property its landlord is legally obliged to keep in repair — plus the offices, shops, schools and surgeries that must stay presentable and safe, and you have a market that cannot be automated, imported, downloaded or postponed indefinitely. Meanwhile the supply side has been moving the other way: the trades are ageing faster than they are recruiting, and the single most common complaint a British householder makes about tradespeople is not price or quality but absence — nobody rings back. That gap between relentless demand and unreliable supply is the opportunity this book is built on, because the gap is filled not by genius but by professionalism: answering the phone, turning up, doing tidy work at a fair price, and doing it again next week.

**The opportunities available.** Property maintenance is not one market but several, stacked. At the entry level sits domestic work — the repairs, decorating and improvements of ordinary households — which a new business can begin winning within weeks, largely for free, and which pays on the day. Above it sits the rental sector: landlords, letting agents and property managers whose maintenance never ends and who prize nothing so much as a contractor who answers; two or three of these relationships can fill a diary by themselves. Above that again sits commercial work — offices, shops, industrial units, schools and care settings — where jobs are bigger, contracts are longer, and planned maintenance programmes turn one-off repairs into recurring, forecastable income. A solo operator can build a very good living on the first tier alone; the second and third are how a one-van business becomes secure, and — for

those who want it — how it grows into an operation with staff, contracts and real transferable value. This book covers all three tiers in the order you will meet them.

**Who this book is for.** No prior business experience is assumed anywhere in these pages, and no capital beyond the honest budgets set out in Chapter 5. If you are a tradesperson wanting a business of your own — broader work, better margins and no more waiting on someone else's diary — this book will feel like a map of territory you half know. If you are a career changer, made redundant or simply done with employment, it will show you a trade with modest entry costs, permanent demand and a fair reward for reliability. If you are starting later in life, take particular encouragement: this is a trade that rewards care, patience, honesty and a civil manner over youth and muscle, and some of its most successful operators started in their fifties. And if you are already trading — busy but not profitable, or capable but chaotic — the chapters on pricing, systems and cash flow were written with you specifically in mind. What the book does assume is willingness: to learn the practical skills honestly, to respect the legal boundaries around gas, electrics and safety, and to treat customers the way you would want your own parents treated.

**What you can realistically achieve.** This book will not promise you riches, because it was written to be believed. What the trade reliably gives to people who work competently, price properly and persist is this: a first year that builds the machine — a few hundred completed jobs, a bank of reviews, the first agent relationships, and a business that feeds itself; a second and third year in which a well-run solo operation earns a serious full-time living, with the figures, budgets and pricing arithmetic set out honestly in Chapters 1, 5 and 6; and beyond that, a genuine choice, made from strength rather than necessity — the contented one-van business with a waiting list and a protected day off, or the growing firm of Chapter 14 with staff, contracts and an asset worth selling one day. None of it is quick, and none of it is complicated. The whole method fits in the sixteen chapters that follow: decide, learn, set up legally, equip sensibly, price from arithmetic, win the work, serve people properly, get organised, mind the money, and keep turning up while your reputation compounds.

The buildings never stop needing you. Turn the page, and let's begin.

# Chapter 1 – Understanding the Property

## Maintenance Industry

Every building in Britain is quietly falling apart. Not dramatically, and not all at once — but every day, in every street, gutters are blocking, sealant is failing, fence panels are loosening, hinges are dropping, and paintwork is surrendering to the weather. Property maintenance is the trade that holds the line, and because buildings never stop deteriorating, the work never stops arriving. This opening chapter looks honestly at the industry you are considering joining: what the work actually is, who pays for it, the real advantages and the real difficulties, and whether this business is the right fit for you.

### What Is Property Maintenance?

Property maintenance is the business of keeping buildings functioning, safe, presentable and legally compliant through repairs and routine upkeep. It sits in the broad, busy territory between the specialist trades. A plumber installs a bathroom; a property maintenance business fixes the dripping tap, reseals the shower tray and replaces the toilet seat. A builder constructs an extension; a property maintenance business repairs the fence the digger knocked, makes good the plaster and hangs the new door.

That word — *between* — is the key to the whole trade. Most jobs in a building are too small for the specialist firms to want, too skilled for the average homeowner to attempt, and too urgent to wait for a builder's three-month lead time. A property maintenance business exists to catch everything that falls through that gap: the sticking door, the leaking gutter, the broken gate, the tired bathroom sealant, the room that needs decorating before the new tenant arrives on Friday.

The result is astonishing variety. In a single week you might ease and adjust doors, replace a wash-basin trap, re-felt a shed roof, fit draught excluders, paint a hallway, repair a fence after a storm, hang a television bracket and clear a gutter. No two days repeat themselves, and the skill of the trade lies less in mastery of any single craft than in competence across many, joined to the judgement to know where your competence ends — a subject Chapter 2 treats in detail, because knowing what to decline is one of the marks of a professional.

### Types of Property Maintenance Work

The demand comes from five main directions, and understanding them now will shape decisions you make throughout this book — which services to offer, how to price, and where to market.

**Residential customers** — private homeowners — are where most new businesses begin. The work is everywhere, the customer pays promptly (usually the same day), and

a good reputation in a handful of streets can fill a diary by itself. Homeowners buy trust above all: they are letting you into their home, and your manner, punctuality and tidiness matter as much as the workmanship. Jobs are typically small, from £60 odd-jobs to £500 multi-day visits, and a satisfied homeowner becomes a repeat customer for years, because a house never runs out of jobs.

**Commercial clients** — offices, shops, cafés, workshops and small industrial units — need the same practical skills applied on different terms. The premises must stay open, so work is often scheduled early, late or at weekends; the person instructing you is rarely the person paying; and payment arrives on invoice terms rather than on the day. In exchange, commercial work brings larger jobs, repeat contracts and a level of income stability that domestic work alone rarely offers. Chapter 11 covers this sector fully.

**Letting properties** are, for many maintenance businesses, the engine of the whole operation. England's private rental sector alone runs to more than four million households, every one of them a property that the landlord is legally obliged to keep in repair and rarely willing to maintain personally. Letting agents in particular need reliable contractors the way bakeries need flour: a single high-street agent may manage hundreds of properties, each generating call-outs, safety-related repairs, and end-of-tenancy refresh work. Win the trust of two or three agents and you may never need to advertise again. Chapter 10 is devoted to exactly how.

**Housing associations** and other social landlords maintain enormous property stocks and increasingly contract out responsive repairs to local firms. The work is steady and the payment reliable, but entry usually involves formal procurement — approved contractor lists, insurance minimums, health and safety documentation — which makes this a sector to grow into rather than start with.

**Holiday lets** have multiplied with the short-stay boom, and they are a maintenance business's dream client in one specific respect: urgency. A broken shower in a holiday cottage with guests arriving at three o'clock is not a job that can wait for quotes, and owners — often living far from the property — will pay properly for someone local, reliable and reachable. In tourist areas, a round of holiday-let owners can anchor an entire business.

## Planned vs Reactive Maintenance

Cutting across all five sectors is a distinction the industry itself uses constantly, and you should adopt from day one.

**Reactive maintenance** is repair after failure: the tap now dripping, the fence now down, the lock now jammed. It is urgent, unpredictable and priced accordingly — and it is where every new business starts, because it is what customers ring about.

**Planned maintenance** is upkeep before failure: gutters cleared each autumn, exterior woodwork repainted on a cycle, sealant renewed before it leaks, annual property inspections for landlords who would rather find problems than be found by them. It is scheduled, efficient and predictable — for the customer, who avoids emergencies, and for you, who gains something precious in a trade of unpredictable phone calls: recurring, forecastable income.

The mature shape of a good maintenance business is a base of planned work — service visits, maintenance agreements, seasonal rounds — with reactive work priced profitably on top. Getting there takes time, but every planned arrangement you win makes the diary steadier and the business more valuable, and later chapters return to the theme repeatedly.

## **Advantages of Running a Property Maintenance Business**

The case for this trade is strong, and it is worth stating plainly.

The demand is permanent and local. Buildings deteriorate in booms and recessions alike; indeed recessions often help, as owners repair rather than replace and homeowners improve rather than move. The work cannot be imported, automated or downloaded. It exists in every postcode in the country, including yours.

The cost of entry is modest. If you have accumulated tools over a working life, you may be most of the way there already; even starting from nothing, a capable kit and a sound second-hand van cost a fraction of what most businesses demand — Chapter 5 sets out full budgets.

The variety protects you twice over. It keeps the work interesting in a way that single-trade repetition often is not, and it diversifies your income: a slow month for decorating is a busy month for gutters, and no single customer type can sink you.

Repeat business is built into the trade's nature. A plumber may not see a customer again for years; a maintenance business that performs well becomes *their* maintenance business, called first for everything, recommended to neighbours, and handed the annual jobs without competition.

And the ceiling is yours to choose. This book will show a solo operator how to build a comfortable, respectable full-time living — and Chapters 10, 11 and 14 map the roads beyond it, into agent contracts, commercial work and employed staff, for those who want them.

## **Challenges You Need to Understand**

Honesty now prevents disappointment later, so here are the difficulties, stated as plainly as the advantages.

The trade's low barrier to entry means you will share the market with every van owner who has declared himself a handyman. Some are excellent; many are not; and their botched jobs and no-shows depress customer expectations and prices at the bottom of the market. Your answer — the theme of this entire book — is to refuse to compete there: to look, communicate, and price like a professional business, and let the bargain operators send you their disappointed customers.

The variety that makes the work interesting also makes it demanding. You must be genuinely competent across several disciplines, honest about your limits, and disciplined about staying inside them — because in certain areas, principally gas, and most electrical work beyond the truly minor, the law itself draws the line, and Chapter 3 explains exactly where.

The work is physical. Not brutally so — this is not hod-carrying — but it involves ladders, kneeling, lifting and full days on your feet, and it deserves the same honest self-assessment about fitness that any trade does.

Income, in the early months, is uneven. Reactive work does not arrive on a schedule, invoiced customers do not always pay promptly, and the gap between doing the work and banking the money catches out more new businesses than bad workmanship ever does. Chapter 13 confronts cash flow directly, because managing it is a skill exactly as learnable as hanging a door.

Finally, you will spend more time not on the tools than you expect: quoting, scheduling, ordering, invoicing, chasing, and answering the telephone politely at half past seven. The tradespeople who thrive are those who accept from the outset that they are running a business that does maintenance, not doing maintenance that happens to be a business.

## **Is This Business Right for You?**

Strip away the specifics and this trade asks for a particular combination of qualities. Practical competence across the common building crafts, or the willingness to train it up honestly. A civil, patient manner, because you will spend your days in other people's homes and workplaces, and your reputation will be built as much in kitchens over explanations as on the tools. Self-discipline, because no one else will fill your diary, chase your invoices or make you do the paperwork. Judgement, to price properly, to decline work beyond your competence, and to tell customers the truth. And steadiness, to keep turning up, week after week, while your reputation compounds.

Notice what is *not* on the list: youth, brawn, capital, or any formal qualification for the great majority of the work. This is a trade unusually open to career changers, to tradespeople wanting broader work, and to those starting later in life — and if you have read this far and recognised yourself, the rest of the book is the method.

## **Property Maintenance Business Success Story**

Consider a typical path — a composite of many real ones, offered so you can see the shape of the journey before you start it.

Dave spent twenty-two years as a maintenance man for a retail chain, fixing everything in a dozen stores from door closers to staff-room taps, until a restructure made him redundant at fifty-one. His redundancy payment bought a clean second-hand van, sign-writing, insurance, and the tools he didn't already own — around £7,000 all told — and he printed five hundred leaflets for the streets around his home.

His first month brought eleven small jobs, mostly from neighbours, worth just over £900. He did each one carefully, left each house tidier than he found it, and asked every satisfied customer for a Google review. By month four the reviews were bringing strangers; by month six a local letting agent, let down once too often by her usual contractor, tried him on a leaking gutter and then quietly moved him onto everything. In his second year, with two agents, a holiday-let owner and a street's worth of loyal homeowners, Dave turned over a little under £60,000 working five days a week, took a proper fortnight's holiday, and turned down more work than he accepted.

Nothing in that story is remarkable — no lucky break, no rare talent, no borrowed fortune. It is what this trade reliably gives to people who work competently, behave professionally, price honestly and persist. The remaining chapters of this book exist to show you, step by step, how to do exactly that — beginning, in Chapter 2, with the most consequential decision you will make: which services your business will actually offer.

END OF SAMPLE. NOW BUY THE BOOK!