



The Mobile Detailing Business

Your customers' driveways are your shop floor. High-ticket finishes, monthly maintenance plans, and a trade where craft visibly converts into price.

\$550-1,400

START LEAN

3-7 days

FIRST DOLLAR

65-80%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Detailing is the craft trade of the driveway economy: you bring the shop to the customer, the transformation photographs like magic, and a single ticket runs anywhere from an \$89 maintenance wash to a \$1,500 ceramic coating. It starts on whatever car is parked nearest and scales into maintenance plans that bill monthly. Few businesses convert skill into price this directly, or this visibly.

\$550-1,400

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$3,000-7,500

STANDARD BUILD

3-7 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

65-80%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes (mobile)

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE CRAFTSMAN

THE OPERATOR

THE STORYTELLER

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ 2/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

This is detail work in the literal sense: hours on your feet, pet hair in seat rails, sun on your neck, and a standard that lives in the door jambs nobody else checks. If you cut corners, this trade will expose you in daylight. If making a neglected car look showroom-new sounds like a craft worth mastering, the margins will reward you for years.

Who pays, and why now.

Almost every driveway in America holds a car the owner is quietly embarrassed by, and almost none of those owners have four free hours to fix it. Mobile detailing wins on the second part: you bring the shop to them, the driveway does the work of a storefront, and the finished car sits outside as proof for every neighbor who walks past. The customer is not buying a wash. They are buying the new-car feeling back, delivered while they answer email.

Three forces keep the calendar full. Used-car prices turned people into keepers instead of traders, and keepers protect the asset. The convenience economy trained customers to pay for delivery of everything, services included. And ceramic coatings turned detailing from a \$150 chore into an \$800-1,500 considered purchase, sold to new-car buyers and enthusiasts who want years of protection instead of weeks of shine.

Competition splits into two camps you can beat. The \$8 tunnel wash is not your competitor: it scratches paint and touches nothing inside. The other mobile operators mostly run on Instagram DMs, no insurance, and a no-show rate that does your marketing for you. Answer inquiries fast, show up when booked, photograph everything, and walk the car with the owner before and after: that alone is a top-ten-percent operation in most cities.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Busy professionals	\$150-300 per full detail	The car handled at home or the office, zero errands
Parents and pet owners	\$200-350 interior rescues	Crushed crackers, pet hair, and mystery smells gone
Sellers and lease returns	\$150-300 pre-sale details	Top dollar at sale, no lease-end damage bill
Enthusiasts and new-car buyers	\$600-1,500 correction and coating	Protection measured in years, flawless under lights
Small fleets and dealers	\$80-150 per car at volume	Fast turnaround, consistent results, one invoice

THE MAINTENANCE CYCLE

Every 4-6 weeks

A detailed car re-dirties on a schedule. A \$79-99 monthly maintenance wash, card on file, turns one good detail into an annuity: forty plan members is a four-figure baseline that bills itself before you book a single new job.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

The lean build assumes you use the customer's spigot and outlet, which works for most residential jobs. Upgrades buy independence from the house, not better results. Buy chemicals concentrated, dilute yourself, and your cost per car drops under \$15.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Wet/dry vacuum (5+ HP)	Interior work is half the trade; weak suction doubles your hours	\$90-160
Two-bucket wash setup with grit guards	Mitts, brushes, wheel woolies. The method is also your sales pitch	\$60-110
Chemical starter kit	pH-neutral soap, APC, interior cleaner, glass, tire dressing, iron remover	\$120-200
Microfiber inventory (40+ towels)	Color-coded by task so a wheel towel never touches paint	\$60-100
DA polisher + pads (entry level)	Dual action is forgiving; rotary is not. Start here	\$140-250
General liability insurance (first month)	Must include care, custody and control. See the legal page	\$45-90/mo
LLC + city license (varies by state)	Your liability wall. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks it	\$50-500
Lean total		\$565-1,410 all-in

THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Water tank (50-100 gal) + 12V pump	Frees you from the spigot; apartments, offices, and fleets unlock	\$250-600
Quiet inverter generator (2,000W)	Power anywhere, quiet enough for HOA lots and office parks	\$450-900
Vapor steamer	Sanitizes interiors, lifts grime from vents and seams chemicals miss	\$300-900
Ceramic coating kit + training course	Unlocks the \$800-1,500 ticket; prep skill is the real purchase	\$300-800
Pop-up canopy + lighting	Soap dries into spots on hot panels; shade is quality control	\$150-400
Vehicle branding (magnet or partial wrap)	Every driveway job becomes a neighborhood ad	\$100-600

THE RULE

Do not finance a van build before you have a customer list. The detailing internet is full of \$40,000 rigs doing \$2,000 months. A clean car, a fast reply, and honest photos win the first hundred jobs; let those jobs buy the tank, the generator, and eventually the van.

Clean from day one.

Detailing is lightly licensed but quietly full of traps: the insurance most new operators buy does not cover the one thing most likely to go wrong, and the wash water itself is regulated in a growing number of cities. Set these up before the first paid car.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at irs.gov, open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- City business license + mobile vendor check:** Some cities require an itinerant or mobile vendor permit for driveway work. One call to the city clerk answers it; usually \$50-150 a year.
- GL insurance with care, custody and control:** Standard general liability excludes damage to property in your care: which is the exact car you are working on. Ask for CCC or garagekeepers coverage explicitly. This is the most common uninsured loss in the trade.
- Wash water runoff rules:** Many municipalities bar soapy runoff from storm drains. Capture mats, lawn discharge, or rinseless washing keep you legal; HOAs, office parks, and parking garages will ask how you handle it before they let you work.
- Chemical handling basics:** Label every bottle, carry SDS sheets, never mix wheel acids with alkaline cleaners, and glove up for solvents. Iron remover smells like a crime scene; warn the customer first.
- Property permission in writing:** Apartment complexes and office parks need written OK and often a certificate of insurance naming them. Some HOAs ban mobile washing over water rules: rinseless service is your answer there.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

General liability with care, custody and control is the floor. Add inland marine for your gear once the kit passes ~\$5,000, commercial auto when a vehicle is dedicated to the business, and workers' comp the day you hire. Fleet and office park clients will ask for certificates: having them same-day wins contracts.

WATCH FOR

The walkaround. Every scratch, curb-rashed wheel, and cracked trim piece that existed before you arrived becomes your fault the moment you skip it. Walk the car with the owner, narrate a 60-second video on your phone, and note aged or oxidized paint before any machine touches it. The habit costs two minutes and prevents essentially every dispute this business produces.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

Three doors. Real numbers.

Price by condition, not just size. A sedan full of pet hair takes longer than a clean SUV, and the quote should say so. Anchor with the middle door, inspect before you confirm the number, and keep a hard floor under every visit.

	RECOMMEND	
<p>DOOR ONE</p> <p>The Refresh</p> <p>\$89-129 maintenance detail</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Two-bucket hand wash and dry ◆ Interior vacuum and full wipe-down ◆ Windows in and out, tire shine ◆ Door jambs cleaned (the tell of a real detailer) 	<p>DOOR TWO</p> <p>The Full Detail</p> <p>\$229-299 most-booked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Everything in the Refresh ◆ Clay bar decontamination + machine-applied sealant ◆ Carpets and seats shampooed and extracted ◆ Vents, seams, and trim hand-detailed ◆ 6-month protection, before-and-after photos delivered 	<p>DOOR THREE</p> <p>The Showroom</p> <p>\$599-1,499 premium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Everything in the Full Detail ◆ One-step paint correction under inspection lighting ◆ Ceramic coating with 2-3 year durability ◆ Engine bay and headlight restoration ◆ Priority booking + maintenance plan included for 3 months

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Floor: never roll out for less than \$75; setup, drive time, and water cost the same on a small job.
- Condition surcharges are not optional: pet hair, smoker interiors, and kid-bombed back seats add \$50-150, quoted at inspection, never after.
- Ceramic is a prep business: the bottle costs \$60-120 and the job sells for \$800-1,500. You are charging for correction skill and hours, and the margin is yours because most operators cannot do the prep.
- Dealership volume work pays \$80-150 a car and wants it in 90 minutes. Take it to fill empty weekdays only; never let it eat a retail weekend.

THE UPSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

The maintenance plan. At the reveal, while they are sitting in a car that smells new: \$79-99 a month, card on file, same spot every fourth week. Forty plan members is a \$3,200+ monthly floor that books itself, smooths the weather, and feeds ceramic upgrades all year. This one habit separates detailers with income from detailers with a business.

Names, not strategies.

Your first ten customers are parked within a block of you right now. This trade converts one finished car into the next three jobs faster than any ad budget, because the proof sits in a driveway where everyone can see it.

- 1 Your own car, then your street**
Detail your car to a standard you would photograph, then a neighbor's at a founding rate. Shoot everything: seats, jams, wheels, the dirty extraction water. That folder is your storefront.
- 2 Marketplace car sellers**
People listing cars on Facebook Marketplace are days from a transaction. DM ten of them: a detailed car photographs better and sells for more. They are the easiest yes in the trade.
- 3 Office parks**
Get the property manager's OK, then offer detail-while-they-work service. One lot can hold five customers a day with zero drive time between them.
- 4 Local Facebook groups + Nextdoor**
Post one before-and-after interior rescue with a founding-customer line. Answer every comment within the hour; speed is the whole game on these platforms.
- 5 Parents and pet owners in your circle**
The minivan and the dog-hair SUV are the most grateful customers in detailing, and every school pickup line is full of both. One thrilled parent posts it to the group chat for you.
- 6 One small fleet**
A realtor team, a home-services company, anyone with 4-6 branded vehicles. Offer a monthly fleet day at a volume rate: it anchors your calendar and your invoice.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hey, I'm [name]: I run a mobile detailing service here in [neighborhood]. I did the gray Tahoe two doors down yesterday; here's what the inside looked like before. I'm taking five founding customers this month at \$40 off while I build my local book, and your car never has to leave the driveway. Want me to take a quick look and give you a number right now?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

First ten customers: \$40 off any package, in exchange for a Google review if they are happy and permission to use before-and-after photos. Retire the deal publicly at ten: 'founding rates closed, posted rates up.' Real scarcity converts; permanent discounts just reprice you.

Owned, earned, then paid.

Detailing is one of the most-watched satisfying-content niches on the internet, which means your daily work is also your ad inventory. The engine is transformation proof, a Google profile that answers fast, and a reminder list tuned to the 4-6 week re-dirty cycle.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Google Business Profile	'Mobile detailing near me' is a buyer, not a browser	Claim it day one; post photos weekly; one new review per week minimum
Short-form video (Reels/TikTok/Shorts)	Extraction water and pet-hair removal are algorithm catnip; this niche genuinely goes viral	Film every job's worst 30 seconds; post the rescue, tag the city
Nextdoor + local Facebook	Neighborhood proof travels; one interior rescue post can book a week	Weekly before-and-after + answer every 'anyone detail cars?' thread fast
SMS reminder list	Cars re-dirty in 4-6 weeks; the reminder harvests the cycle	Every customer added at the reveal; automate the week-five nudge
Fleet and office partnerships	One yes books recurring multi-car days with zero drive time	Pitch one property manager and one fleet owner per month, certificate in hand

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- The 60-second interior rescue: pet hair to perfect (the niche's reliable viral format)
- The dirty extraction water shot, every single job (disgusting, hypnotic, books appointments)
- What mobile detailing costs in [your city], honestly, by package
- The two-bucket method: why the gas station wash is scratching your paint
- Ceramic coating: what \$1,200 actually buys, and who should skip it

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the reveal, keys in their hand, while they are staring at their own back seat in disbelief: 'It would mean a lot if you put that feeling in a review: I'll text you the link right now.' Texted link, peak moment, every job. Forty reviews in year one makes you the default choice in your zip code.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one middle-door job actually nets, and what a full solo month looks like in season. These use the Full Detail at \$249 and typical solo costs with concentrated chemicals.

ONE UNIT: ONE FULL DETAIL (\$249)	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 44 DETAILS (JUNE)	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$249	Revenue (mixed packages)	\$9,400
Chemicals + supplies	-\$18	Chemicals, supplies	-\$520
Fuel + water	-\$10	Fuel + water	-\$310
Payment processing (2.9%)	-\$7	Insurance, phone, software	-\$230
Insurance + overhead share	-\$20	Marketing (cards, boosts)	-\$150
Gross profit (3.5 hrs on site)	\$194	Equipment fund (10%)	-\$940
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$52	Pre-tax profit	\$7,250
Yours, per job	\$142	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$1,960
		Owner take-home	\$5,290

BREAK-EVEN

4-6 details

The lean kit plus a month of insurance is recovered inside the first week of real bookings. The constraint in this business has never been capital: it is whether you answer the DM in five minutes or five hours.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- Insurance bound with care-custody-control coverage confirmed
- Lean kit purchased; full detail practiced on your own car
- Google Business Profile claimed; first photos up
- Pricing menu finalized with the \$75 floor written down

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Detail 2-3 founding cars (neighbors, family rates)
- Shoot every job: seats, jambs, wheels, dirty water
- DM 10 Marketplace car sellers with a sell-it-faster offer
- First Nextdoor/Facebook interior-rescue post
- Walkaround video habit locked on every single car

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- Founding offer running; track asks vs books
- First Google reviews requested at the reveal
- Maintenance plan pitched at every key handoff
- One office park or fleet conversation started
- SMS reminder list started: every customer added

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- Raise from founding to posted rates publicly
- Weekly cadence locked: content Mon, money hour Fri
- Quote response time under 2 hours, systematized
- Month-one P&L completed; one lever chosen
- First ceramic upgrade quoted to a happy full-detail customer

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 10+ paid details, 5+ reviews, 2+ maintenance plans on file. Yellow: cars getting detailed but nobody on a plan: fix the reveal pitch, not your buffing technique. Red: under 5 details despite 25+ real asks: your proof or your pricing anchor is off; rerun week two with better photos before spending another dollar on gear.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Skipping the walkaround**
Every pre-existing scratch becomes yours the moment you touch the car without documenting it. Sixty seconds of phone video prevents the only dispute this trade reliably produces.

- ✗ **Pricing by size, ignoring condition**
The \$229 detail that turns out to be a smoker's car with two retrievers is a \$450 job you sold for half price. Inspect, surcharge honestly, then confirm the number.

- ✗ **Correction work before you have earned it**
A rotary in untrained hands burns through clear coat on the first edge, and that mistake is a \$1,500 repaint you buy. Practice on junkyard panels until boring, then sell correction.

- ✗ **The wrapped-van fantasy**
A financed van build with no customer list is the detailing version of a boat anchor. Revenue buys the rig; the rig does not buy revenue.

- ✗ **One-and-done customers**
Without the maintenance plan you restart from zero every month. The plan, the card on file, and the week-five reminder are the actual business; the detailing is the demo.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The maintenance base**
Stack plan members until recurring covers your fixed costs: 80-100 members is a real salary before any one-off bookings. Predictable beats spectacular, every month of the year.

- 2 **The second van**
A trained detailer running your written process in van two doubles capacity. Your job becomes quality checks, quotes, and the calendar: the photos still go through you.

- 3 **The studio graduation**
A rented bay turns weather from a variable into a non-event and unlocks dealer overflow, film, and coating work at controlled humidity. Mobile feeds the studio; the studio raises every ticket.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A part-time interior tech once you are booked a week out. Interiors are the time sink: they vacuum, shampoo, and detail trim while you handle paint, wheels, and final inspection. Two people turn a four-hour full detail into two and a half, which is an extra car every day. The hire is also your systems test: if the process is not written down panel by panel, you own a job, not a company.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

"There is no right age. There is only the decision."



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