



The Window Cleaning Business

A squeegee, a ladder, and margins software companies would envy. Residential pays the big tickets; storefront routes pay you every single week.

\$515-1,450

START LEAN

3-7 days

FIRST DOLLAR

75-90%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Window cleaning is the quiet aristocrat of home services: a few hundred dollars of tools, margins north of eighty percent, and two markets in one. Residential pays \$250-400 a house once or twice a year; storefront routes pay \$25-75 a visit, weekly, forever. The skill takes a weekend to learn and a season to perfect, and clean glass re-sells itself every time the sun comes through it.

\$515-1,450

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$2,500-5,000

STANDARD BUILD

3-7 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

75-90%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes (mobile)

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE CRAFTSMAN

THE OPERATOR

2/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

You will be on ladders, working methodically, repeating the same motion a thousand times to a standard measured in streaks. Heights bother some people: find out early. If precise, repetitive craft sounds meditative rather than mind-numbing, and you can chat with a shop owner while you work, both halves of this trade will suit you well.

Who pays, and why now.

Window cleaning is really two businesses sharing a bucket. Residential pays big tickets once or twice a year: \$250-400 to make a whole house feel brighter, sold easily in spring and before the holidays.

Commercial storefronts pay small tickets forever: \$25-75 a visit, weekly or biweekly, sold once and serviced for years. The residential side pays for your life. The storefront route, compounding quietly underneath it, becomes the asset.

Demand needs no persuasion because dirty glass announces itself every sunny morning. Homeowners buy light, views, and the pre-event sparkle. Shop owners buy the open-for-business look, because fingerprinted glass reads as neglect from across the street. Realtors buy showings that gleam. Builders pay double rates for post-construction cleans, because paint and sticker removal is skilled, risky work that most cleaners refuse to touch.

The competitive field is thin at both ends: franchise outfits chase commercial mid-rises, and casual operators skip the details that generate reviews. The wedge is craft. Screens washed instead of brushed, tracks and sills detailed, hard water spots diagnosed instead of shrugged at, and a signed waiver process for construction glass. A solo operator doing complete work looks like a different species within one season.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Homeowners	\$200-400 per full house	Light, views, and the pre-event or spring sparkle
Storefronts and restaurants	\$25-75 per visit, weekly or biweekly	Glass that says open and cared-for from across the street
Property managers / low-rise offices	\$150-600 per visit	Tenant-facing shine, COI on file, zero coordination effort
Real estate agents	\$150-300 listing preps	Showings and photos that gleam on 48-hour notice
Builders	\$300-800 post-construction	Paint, stickers, and debris gone without scratched glass claims

THE STOREFRONT CYCLE

Every 1-4 weeks

Commercial glass re-soils in days, not months. Twenty storefronts on one walkable strip is a standing-appointment economy: tiny tickets, zero selling after the first yes, and a route that compounds into a sellable asset.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

The lean kit is famously cheap, and professional-grade matters anyway: a \$25 channel with fresh rubber outperforms anything in a big-box aisle. Buy from a window cleaning supplier, not a hardware store, and the whole kit still costs less than one good residential job returns.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Squeegees (two sizes) + spare channels and rubber	Rubber is a consumable: fresh edges are the difference between art and streaks	\$50-90
T-bar mops and scrubber sleeves	One wet, one dry day pair minimum	\$30-60
Bucket-on-a-belt, holsters, towels	Surgical huck towels for detailing edges; microfiber for sills	\$60-120
Glass scrapers + fresh blades	The right tool for debris, and the only one that can ruin a pane; see legal	\$25-50
Extension pole (12-24 ft)	Most two-story exteriors without ever leaving the ground	\$60-150
Ladders (step + extension) if not owned	Buy rated, inspect often, respect always	\$180-350
Solution + slip additives	Dish soap genuinely works; pro glides earn their few dollars	\$15-40
General liability insurance (first month)	Working over landscaping, near glass, on ladders. \$1M policy	\$45-90/mo
LLC + city license (varies by state)	Your liability wall. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks it	\$50-500
Lean total		\$515-1,450 all-in

THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Water-fed pole + pure water system (RO/DI)	Three-story exterior glass with both feet on the ground; spot-free when TDS reads near zero	\$1,200-3,000
Hard water restoration kit	Polishes and pads that unlock \$150-400 add-on tickets nobody else quotes	\$100-250
Route/CRM software with recurring billing	The storefront route only compounds if invoicing runs itself	\$30-80/mo
Ladder rack + vehicle branding	Professional arrival is half the residential sale	\$250-800

THE RULE

Master the squeegee before buying the water-fed system: pure water is a speed tool, not a skill substitute, and customers can tell. Let the first season's residential tickets buy the pole rig, and let the pole rig unlock the three-story houses that pay for everything after.

Clean from day one.

Window cleaning is barely licensed, but it has one famous liability trap involving glass itself and one obvious one involving gravity. Handle both with paper and habit, and this is among the lowest-risk trades there is.

- 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 or county business license:** Usually \$50-150 a year. One call to the city clerk answers it.
- General liability insurance, \$1M:** You work on ladders, over flowerbeds, beside expensive glass. Commercial accounts will ask for a certificate before the first visit: have it ready the same day.
- The tempered glass waiver:** Heat-treated glass often carries microscopic fabricating debris that a scraper can drag into permanent scratches, and it is a manufacturing defect, not your negligence. Industry standard is a signed scratched-glass waiver before any construction clean or paint scrape. No waiver, no scraper. This single document is why post-construction work pays double.
- Set your height ceiling in writing:** Most solo residential operators cap at two to three stories. Above that lives lift rentals, rope access certifications, and a different insurance tier: refer it out until you build that business deliberately. OSHA rules attach the day you hire.
- Commercial agreements in writing:** Frequency, per-visit price, rain policy, and net terms on one page. Storefront routes run for years on a single signature; make it a clean one.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

General liability is the floor. Add equipment coverage once the water-fed system is owned, commercial auto when a vehicle is dedicated, and workers' comp at the first hire: ladder work makes it pricier and more necessary. Property managers will require certificates naming them additionally insured; same-day delivery of one wins routes.

WATCH FOR

The scrape. Razor scrapers are the correct tool for paint, stickers, and construction debris, and also the only tool in your kit that can destroy a \$600 pane in one pass. Wet the glass, use a fresh blade, test a corner, and on any tempered glass get the waiver signed first. Post-construction cleans pay two to three times residential rates precisely because of this risk: price it, paper it, respect it.

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

Three doors. Real numbers.

Count panes in your head, quote per house out loud. Residential anchors on the middle door; storefronts price per visit on a route where density is the entire point. Detail work (screens, tracks, sills) is what separates your quote from the guy with a bucket.

DOOR ONE

The Outside Shine

\$139-189 exterior only

- ◆ All exterior glass, hand-finished edges
- ◆ Screens brushed and re-seated
- ◆ Sills wiped clean
- ◆ The maintenance visit between full cleans

RECOMMEND

DOOR TWO

The Full House

\$269-369 most-booked

- ◆ Every pane, inside and out
- ◆ Screens washed, not just brushed
- ◆ Tracks and sills detailed
- ◆ Hard water spots assessed, treatment quoted
- ◆ 6 or 12 month reminder on file

DOOR THREE

The Estate + Post-Construction

\$449-799 premium

- ◆ Three-story homes, skylights, and high glass
- ◆ Paint, sticker, and debris removal (waiver signed)
- ◆ Hard water restoration included where treatable
- ◆ Photo-documented completion
- ◆ Priority scheduling, twice-yearly plan offered

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Floor: \$125 residential, \$25 per storefront stop; below either, the drive and setup make it a hobby.
- Quote from pane counts (\$6-12 per pane in/out is the working range) but never say 'per pane' to a customer: houses are the unit people buy.
- Storefront pricing only works dense: a \$35 stop fifteen minutes off-route is a \$0 stop. Build the route street by street and decline strays politely.
- Screens and tracks are where reviews come from: never skip them, always mention them in the quote. They are also the cheapest differentiation in the trade.

THE UPSSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

The twice-a-year plan plus the fall gutter add-on. At the reveal: same sparkle in October, 10% off, reminder handled by us. Gutter clearing rides the same ladder on the same visit for \$100-250 more, which doubles fall tickets with zero extra drive time. A 60-home reminder list quietly becomes most of next year's calendar.

Names, not strategies.

Glass is everywhere and most of it is dirty, so your first ten customers are a matter of walking, knocking, and demonstrating. The storefront strip is the fastest proving ground in all of home services: small yes, instant result, weekly forever.

1 One storefront strip, on foot

Pick twenty shops on a walkable street and offer the first clean free, done right now, ten minutes. Shop owners buy what they can watch; three yeses on one street is a route seed.

2 Your own street at golden hour

Low sun makes every dirty window glow. Clean yours, photograph the light pouring in, and knock the five most spotted houses with the picture on your phone.

3 Realtors and stagers

Clean glass is the cheapest staging upgrade that exists, and listings run on 48-hour timelines. Offer the listing-prep rate to three agents.

4 Nextdoor + local Facebook

Post the sunlight shot, not the dirt shot: light through clean glass is the product. Founding-customer line, answer every comment within the hour.

5 One builder or remodeler

Post-construction cleans at double rates, waiver in hand. One site supervisor who trusts you with glass is worth a season of houses.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hi, I'm [name]: I clean the glass for a few shops on this street. First clean's on me, right now, takes me ten minutes, and you can watch. If you like it, I come every other week and it's [price] a visit, one simple invoice a month. Fair enough?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

First ten customers: storefronts get the first clean free with a locked founding rate for six months; houses get \$40 off the Full House for a review and before-and-after photos. Retire both publicly at ten. The free storefront clean costs you ten minutes and converts at a rate paid advertising will never touch.

Owned, earned, then paid.

The product is light, so sell light: the winning content in this trade is sun pouring through glass that disappears. Under that, the machine is a Google profile, a walkable sales route, and a reminder list synced to spring and the holidays.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Google Business Profile	'Window cleaning near me' spikes every spring and pre-holiday week	Claim it day one; sunlight photos weekly; one review per week
The storefront walk	In-person demos close commercial routes faster than any ad ever will	One strip per week, first-clean-free offer, agreement card in pocket
Nextdoor + local Facebook	Neighborhood proof plus seasonal timing books residential in clusters	Weekly sunlight reveal post; answer every 'window cleaner?' thread fast
Realtor, stager, builder partnerships	Deadline glass: listings and post-construction pay premium rates	Quarterly visits with COI, waiver process explained, 48-hour promise
The 6-month reminder list	Spring and fall re-books are the cheapest revenue you will ever earn	Every customer on the list at the reveal; automated nudge at month five

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- The sunlight reveal: light pouring through glass that looks like it is not there
- What window cleaning costs in [your city], by home size, honestly
- Why your windows have white spots no cleaner has fixed (hard water, and what actually works)
- A storefront in four minutes: the morning route time-lapse
- Screens, tracks, sills: the checklist most window cleaners quietly skip

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the reveal, standing inside with the customer looking out: 'If the light in here feels different, would you put that in a review? I'll text you the link.' Reviews that mention tracks, screens, and showing up on time are the exact phrases your next customer is scanning for.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what the most-booked residential job nets, and a month that blends residential tickets with a young storefront route. These use the Full House at \$289 and real solo costs.

ONE UNIT: ONE FULL HOUSE (\$289)	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$289
Supplies (rubber, soap, towels)	-\$8
Fuel	-\$8
Payment processing (2.9%)	-\$8
Insurance + overhead share	-\$18
Gross profit (~3.5 hrs on site)	\$247
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$67
Yours, per house	\$180

A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 24 HOMES + STOREFRONT ROUTE	AMOUNT
Revenue (residential, 24 homes)	\$5,900
Revenue (storefront route)	+\$1,350
Supplies	-\$210
Fuel	-\$260
Insurance, phone, software	-\$230
Marketing (cards, boosts)	-\$140
Pre-tax profit	\$6,410
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$1,730
Owner take-home	\$4,680

BREAK-EVEN

2-4 houses

The entire lean kit costs less than two Full House jobs return. This is the lowest equipment bar on this list, which means the moat was never the tools: it is the craft, the route, and the reminder list you build while everyone else stays casual.

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; certificate saved to phone
- Pro kit ordered from a window cleaning supplier
- Squeegee technique drilled daily on your own glass
- Pane-count pricing sheet finalized with floors

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- First storefront strip walked; first-clean-free demos done
- First 2-3 founding houses cleaned and photographed
- Sunlight reveal shots collected, same angle each time
- Google Business Profile claimed; first photos up
- Scratched-glass waiver template saved and printed

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- Storefront agreements signed; route day established
- Visit 3 realtor or stager offices with listing-prep card
- First reviews requested at the reveal
- 6-month reminder list started: every customer added
- One builder pitched on post-construction (waiver shown)

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- Raise from founding to posted rates publicly
- Route map reviewed: strays declined, density protected
- Fall gutter add-on scripted into every autumn quote
- Month-one P&L completed; one lever chosen
- Twice-yearly plan offered at every residential reveal

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 8+ residential jobs, 5+ storefront agreements on one route day, 4+ reviews. Yellow: residential booking but storefronts stalling: your demo ask is too soft, free first cleans convert when you actually start them on the spot. Red: under 4 paid jobs despite 25+ real asks: drill technique and re-shoot your proof in better light before touching the ad budget.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✕ **Scraping dry, or tempered glass without a waiver**
One confident pass over fabricating debris turns a pane into a permanent scratch and a four-figure claim. Wet glass, fresh blade, test corner, signed waiver: the ritual exists because the lawsuit does.

- ✕ **Skipping screens, tracks, and sills**
The glass gets you paid once; the details get you reviewed and re-booked. Cleaners who skip them are interchangeable, and interchangeable means cheapest wins.

- ✕ **The scattered storefront route**
A \$35 stop fifteen minutes away is a \$0 stop. Routes are built street by street or not at all; decline strays kindly and note them for the day the route expands.

- ✕ **Underpricing storefronts into resentment**
The \$15 stop you grumble about for years was priced in thirty seconds of panic. Price for the visit plus the relationship, and remember you will stand on that sidewalk a hundred times.

- ✕ **Ladder shortcuts**
Overreaching to save one reposition is how this trade's worst month starts. The ladder moves, every time; the season you protect is your own.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The route asset**
Stack storefront agreements until route days outnumber residential days. Dense commercial routes run on autopilot, survive recessions, and sell to other operators for real money when you are done.

- 2 **The second tech**
A trained tech takes the residential calendar while you keep the route (it is relationships) and the quoting. Your checklist plus their hands doubles capacity without touching quality, if the checklist deserves the name.

- 3 **The same-ladder ladder**
Gutters in fall, solar panel cleaning in summer, holiday lights in winter: same customers, same ladder, new invoices in every season. Lifetime value doubles without acquiring a single new household.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A residential tech, trained for two weeks on your pane-by-pane checklist while you keep the storefront route, because the route is relationships and relationships do not delegate early. The hire test is the same as every trade: if your standard only exists in your hands, you own a craft, not yet a company. Write it down until a careful stranger could match your streak-free standard by week two.

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



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