



# The Airbnb Co-Hosting Business

*Run other people's short-term rentals for 15-25% of the revenue, with zero property ownership. The management layer of the STR boom, minus the mortgage.*

\$300-800

START LEAN

30-45 days

FIRST DOLLAR

70-85%

TYPICAL MARGIN

# Is this your business?

Co-hosting is the rare real estate business that requires no real estate: burned-out owners hand you the guest messages, the turnovers, the pricing, and the reviews, and pay you 15-25% of every booking for the privilege. Your capital is a phone, a cleaning team you trust like family, and operational discipline. One well-run property pays a few hundred dollars a month; eight of them pay a salary, on revenue you never had to mortgage.

\$300-800

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$2,000-4,000

STANDARD BUILD

30-45 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

70-85%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, to 8-10 doors

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes, fully

HOME-BASED

## BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE OPERATOR

THE CONNECTOR

2/5 difficulty

### THE HONEST FIT TEST

This is a responsiveness business: guest messages at 10 p.m., a clogged drain on a Saturday check-in, an owner who wants to know why October dipped. If you are organized, calm in small emergencies, and good at making people feel taken care of, it compounds beautifully. If you wanted passive income, this is not that: you are the person the smoke alarm texts.

# Who pays, and why now.

Millions of short-term rentals are owned by people who never intended to run a hospitality business: the couple who kept the condo after upgrading houses, the remote owner two time zones from their mountain cabin, the investor who discovered that 'self-managing' means answering wifi questions at midnight. These owners are not looking for a faceless property-management company taking 30-40%. They want a competent local human, and that gap is exactly the 15-25% co-host fee.

Your ideal client is specific: the burned-out remote owner with one or two listings, decent reviews slipping toward mediocre, and a calendar they have stopped optimizing. They are emotionally done but financially committed. The professional with ten listings already has systems and will grind you on price; the burned-out two-door owner will hand you the keys, thank you, and refer their neighbor by Thanksgiving.

The product you actually sell is revenue lift plus peace, and the lift is measurable. Dynamic pricing tools alone typically raise a manually priced listing's revenue 10-20%, which on a \$4,000-a-month property can cover most of your fee before you have answered a single message. Add faster response times, better photos, and a turnaround team that never misses, and the owner often nets more with you than they did alone, while doing nothing. That is the pitch, and the spreadsheet proves it.

The moat in this business is not software, it is the cleaning team. Turnovers are where five-star reviews live and die, and a reliable, detail-obsessed cleaning crew that treats your standards as law is the single hardest asset to replicate. Co-hosts with a great crew take on more doors with confidence; co-hosts without one are one no-show cleaner away from a one-star review and a lost client. Build that relationship like the business depends on it, because it does.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
<b>Remote owners</b>	15-25% of booking revenue	A trusted local operator so the property stops following them on vacation
<b>Accidental hosts</b>	15-20% of revenue	The inherited condo or old house earning, without learning hospitality
<b>Busy professional owners</b>	20-25% of revenue	Full-service: messaging, turnovers, pricing, maintenance quarterbacking
<b>Small investors (2-4 doors)</b>	15-20% across the portfolio	Revenue lift, clean owner statements, and scale without staff

REVENUE LIFT FROM PRICING ALONE

# 10-20%

Dynamic pricing against a manually set calendar typically lifts a listing's revenue by double digits. On a \$48,000-a-year property, that lift roughly pays your entire co-host fee, which means a well-run handoff can cost the owner close to nothing. Lead every pitch with this math.

# Every dollar, before you spend it.

There is almost nothing to buy: the property, the furniture, and the supplies all belong to the owner. Your startup costs are credibility, software, and the legal paper that defines where your responsibility ends. Spend accordingly.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
<b>LLC + city business license</b>	Your liability wall; you are operating inside someone's largest asset	\$50-500
<b>Co-host agreement template, attorney-reviewed</b>	Scope, fee, expenses, termination, and what you are NOT responsible for. The key document	\$150-400
<b>General liability + E&amp;O insurance (first month)</b>	Covers your operations; the OWNER carries the STR property policy, see legal	\$30-60/mo
<b>Pricing + messaging software</b>	Dynamic pricing and unified inbox tools, often free or cheap under 3 doors	\$0-40/mo
<b>Simple one-page site + owner pitch deck</b>	The revenue-lift math, your services, your face. Owners are trusting a person	\$0-150
<b>First-property setup kit</b>	Lockbox or smart-lock contribution, house manual template, supply checklists	\$50-150
<b>Lean total</b>		<b>\$280-1,300 all-in</b>

THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
<b>Property management software (PMS)</b>	Channel sync, automated messaging, owner statements; the 4+ door backbone	\$30-100/mo
<b>Professional photography per listing</b>	The highest-ROI spend in the whole industry; often billed to the owner	\$150-350/listing
<b>Noise + occupancy monitoring sensors</b>	Party prevention that owners happily approve and sometimes fund	\$60-150/property
<b>Bookkeeping setup for owner statements</b>	Clean monthly statements are a retention tool disguised as accounting	\$20-50/mo

## THE RULE

Charge setup costs to the owner where they belong: photography, smart locks, and sensors improve their asset, not yours. Your own spending stays on software and paper. A co-host who funds capital improvements on properties they do not own has misread whose business is whose.

# Clean from day one.

Co-hosting lives inside two regulatory webs you do not control: the city's short-term-rental rules and the state's property-management licensing line. Neither is hard to navigate, but both punish the co-host who never checked. Verify before you onboard, every property, every time.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at [irs.gov](https://irs.gov), open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- Verify the property's STR permit, FIRST:** Cities increasingly require short-term-rental permits, cap their number, restrict them to primary residences, or ban them outright in certain zones. Confirm the listing's permit status and registration number before you take it on: managing an illegal listing makes its problems your problems. If the city has a cap waitlist, that is the owner's project, not yours.
- Know your state's property-manager licensing line:** This is the critical one. In a number of states, managing rental property for compensation is licensed real estate activity, and the exemptions for co-hosts vary: some states exempt hosting-platform activity, some look at whether you handle funds or sign leases, some have no carve-out at all. Read your state real estate commission's guidance, structure inside the exemption, and get one hour of local attorney time if it is ambiguous. The fine for unlicensed activity is not a rounding error.
- Operate inside platform terms:** Use Airbnb's official co-host role and its co-host payout tools rather than logging into owner accounts as if you were them. Staying inside the platform's structure keeps payouts clean, permissions auditable, and your access revocable, which protects both sides.
- Never hold the money loosely:** The cleanest setup: bookings pay the owner directly via the platform, your fee arrives as a co-host payout or a monthly invoice. If you ever collect rents or hold deposits outside the platform, you may have just become a trust-accounting obligation with a license requirement attached. Avoid the whole category.
- Written co-host agreement, every owner:** Scope of services, fee and what it is calculated on, who approves expenses over a threshold, maintenance authority limits, insurance responsibilities, data access, termination with 30 days' notice. The agreement is also your sales tool: it shows the owner you have done this before.
- Confirm the owner's STR insurance:** The owner needs a true short-term-rental policy (not a homeowner's policy with hope attached) and the platform's host guarantee is not insurance. Make proof of proper coverage a condition of onboarding: their gap becomes your lawsuit when the guest's dog bites someone.

## INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

Your layer is general liability plus professional liability (E&O) for the management decisions themselves: a missed permit renewal, a double booking, a pricing error. The property risk belongs on the owner's STR policy, and keeping that boundary crisp in your agreement and your insurance is what lets you sleep. Add cyber coverage once you hold guest data across multiple platforms.

## WATCH FOR

The licensing line, again, because it moves. A co-host who starts handling off-platform direct bookings, holding deposits, or signing rental agreements can cross from platform-exempt hosting into licensed property management without noticing the day it happened. Re-check the line whenever you add a service, and when in doubt, structure the new service on the owner's side of 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.

Price as a percentage of booking revenue so your incentives and the owner's point the same direction: you only earn more by making them more. The market clusters at 15-25%; where you land depends on how much of the operation you own. Anchor on the middle door.

	RECOMMEND	
<p><b>DOOR ONE</b></p> <p>The Listing Rescue</p> <p>\$500-900 one-time setup</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Full listing audit and rewrite with new photo plan</li> <li>◆ Dynamic pricing configured and calibrated</li> <li>◆ House manual and guest message templates built</li> <li>◆ Permit and insurance checklist run</li> <li>◆ The audition product: it converts to co-hosting</li> </ul>	<p><b>DOOR TWO</b></p> <p>The Co-Host</p> <p>15-20% of booking revenue, most-booked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ All guest messaging, 7 days a week</li> <li>◆ Turnover scheduling with your cleaning team</li> <li>◆ Dynamic pricing management and calendar strategy</li> <li>◆ Review management and guest screening</li> <li>◆ Monthly owner statement</li> </ul>	<p><b>DOOR THREE</b></p> <p>The Full Service</p> <p>25% of booking revenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Everything in The Co-Host</li> <li>◆ Maintenance coordination with vetted vendors</li> <li>◆ Supply restocking and inventory management</li> <li>◆ Twice-yearly property walkthrough with report</li> <li>◆ Owner does nothing but read the statement</li> </ul>

**PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS**

- Percentage of booking revenue, defined in writing: nightly revenue plus cleaning fees collected, before platform fees, or whatever you choose, but defined. Fee disputes are definition disputes.
- Hold a monthly minimum (\$250-400) for low-season or low-volume doors; a property that books twice in February still generated a month of your attention.
- Cleaning is paid by the guest's cleaning fee and goes to the cleaning team, passed through at cost. Marking up cleaning quietly is how co-hosts lose trust loudly.
- Expenses over an agreed threshold (\$100-150) need owner approval; under it, you act and itemize. This single clause prevents 80% of owner friction.
- Annual fee review tied to performance: if you lifted revenue 18% this year, your renewal conversation writes itself.

**THE UPSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT**

The portfolio referral. Owners of one STR know other owners of STRs: the same conferences, the same Facebook groups, the same block. Build the referral ask into your quarterly review ('who else do you know with a listing that deserves this treatment?') and offer a month's fee discount for every onboarded referral. Doors arrive in clusters when the statements look good.

# Names, not strategies.

Your first ten doors belong to owners who are already tired. You are not convincing anyone to start a short-term rental; you are finding the people who started one eighteen months ago and have stopped enjoying it. They are extremely findable.

## 1 Local STR host groups

Every market has host Facebook groups and meetups where owners openly complain about cleaners, guests, and burnout. Be helpfully present for two weeks before pitching anything. The complaints are your lead list.

## 2 The slipping listings

Search your own market as a guest: listings with great bones, dated photos, slow review velocity, and 4.6 ratings drifting downward are burned-out owners in listing form. Find the owner, lead with two specific improvements, and offer the Listing Rescue.

## 3 Real estate agents who sell investment property

Agents closing STR-suitable properties get asked 'and who will manage it?' at every closing. Be their answer. One investor-focused agent can feed you a door a quarter.

## 4 Lenders and STR mortgage brokers

Brokers writing DSCR and vacation-home loans know exactly who just bought and has no management plan. A coffee and a one-pager makes you their value-add.

## 5 Out-of-state owner outreach

County records and listing maps reveal owners with mailing addresses two time zones away. A short, specific letter ('I co-host three properties in [neighborhood]; here is what changed for my owners') outperforms any ad.

## 6 Your own guest network

If you have hosted, cleaned, or even reviewed STRs locally, you have standing. Announce the business everywhere you have a profile; the overlap between 'people who know you' and 'people who own a listing' is never zero.

### THE EXACT ASK

*"Hi [name], I'm [name], I co-host short-term rentals here in [city]. I came across your place on [street/area]: great property, and honestly the listing is underselling it. I run pricing, guest messaging, and turnovers for owners who are done doing this themselves, for a percentage of revenue, and pricing optimization alone usually covers most of my fee. Could I send you a free two-page audit of your listing so you can see exactly what I'd change?"*

### THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

First three owners: 15% instead of your posted 20% locked for six months, plus the Listing Rescue setup free, in exchange for a detailed review and permission to share their before-and-after revenue numbers (anonymized if they prefer). Those before-and-afters become the spreadsheet that closes every owner after them. Retire the founding rate publicly at three.

# Owned, earned, then paid.

Owners hire co-hosts on proof and trust: proof that revenue rises, trust that their asset is safe with you. Your engine is before-and-after numbers, presence in the rooms where hosts gather, and referral partners who meet new owners at the moment of purchase.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
<b>Host groups + STR meetups</b>	Burned-out owners self-identify in public, weekly	Be the genuinely helpful local expert for two weeks before any pitch; answer pricing and permit questions by name
<b>Before-and-after case studies</b>	Revenue lift is the entire pitch, and numbers out-convert adjectives	Publish a one-page case study per property: occupancy, ADR, and revenue, before and after
<b>Investor-focused agents + lenders</b>	They meet owners at the exact moment a management plan is missing	Two coffees a month; leave the one-pager; report back when their referral wins
<b>Google Business Profile</b>	'Airbnb management [city]' searches are owners in pain, comparing fees	Claim it day one; your 15-25% positioning against 30-40% firms is the headline
<b>Direct mail to absentee owners</b>	Out-of-state owners are unreachable by local marketing but very reachable by mail	Twenty specific, personal letters a month to mapped absentee owners; track replies

## FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- What a co-host actually does: a week of my messages, anonymized
- Before and after: how one [city] listing earned 22% more with zero renovation
- The [city] short-term rental permit, explained in plain English
- Five listing photos that are costing you bookings right now
- Owner statement walkthrough: what your manager should be showing you monthly

## THE REVIEW MACHINE

Your reviews live in two places: guest reviews on the listings you run (which sell owners on your operational quality) and owner testimonials on your own profile. Harvest the second at the quarterly review when the statement shows the lift: 'Would you put that in a Google review? Other owners need to hear it from an owner.' Five owner reviews with revenue specifics make you the obvious local choice.

# One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one average property pays you monthly, and what a six-door book looks like as a solo operator. Numbers use a \$3,200-a-month property at a 20% fee; beach and mountain markets run higher with sharper seasonality.

ONE UNIT: ONE PROPERTY, ONE MONTH (20% OF \$3,200)	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 6 DOORS (STEADY SEASON)	AMOUNT
Co-host fee revenue	\$640	Fee revenue (avg \$560/door)	\$3,360
Software share (pricing, PMS)	-\$35	Software (PMS, pricing, sensors)	-\$180
Mileage + supply runs	-\$30	Mileage, supplies, parking	-\$140
Accounting + processing share	-\$15	Phone, insurance, bookkeeping	-\$130
Gross profit (8-12 hrs of attention)	\$560	Marketing (letters, coffees, boosts)	-\$80
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$151	Pre-tax profit	\$2,830
Yours, per door, per month	\$409	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$764
		Owner take-home	\$2,066

BREAK-EVEN

## Door one, month one

The lean launch costs less than your first month's fee on a single average property. The constraint in this business was never capital: it is doors, and doors arrive at the speed of owner trust, which is why the case studies and the cleaning crew matter more than anything money can buy.

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
- State licensing line researched; structure confirmed
- City STR permit rules read and summarized
- Co-host agreement template attorney-reviewed
- Cleaning team interviews started: two candidates minimum

## WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Pitch deck with revenue-lift math finished
- Join 3 host groups; help daily, pitch never (yet)
- Listing audits sent to 5 slipping properties
- Agent and lender coffees booked (2 minimum)
- Pricing and messaging software stack chosen

## WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- First owner signed; permit and insurance verified
- Listing Rescue executed: photos, copy, pricing live
- Cleaning team onboarded to your checklist standard
- Message templates and house manual deployed
- Twenty absentee-owner letters mailed

## WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- First full turnover cycle run without owner involvement
- First owner statement drafted, even mid-month
- Case study one started: baseline numbers recorded
- Founding-rate offer extended to two more prospects
- Month-one P&L done; door-two pipeline reviewed

### DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 1-2 doors signed with permits verified, the cleaning team running your checklist, and a real pipeline of three warm owner conversations. Yellow: lots of owner interest but no signatures: your agreement or fee pitch is creating hesitation; lead with the free audit and the lift math instead. Red: no doors and a silent pipeline after 15+ direct owner approaches: your market may be saturated or capped; check the permit registry before concluding anything about yourself.

# How this business fails, and how it grows.

## THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✕ **Onboarding an illegal listing**  
An unpermitted property's fines, platform delisting, and neighbor war all route through the person operating it: you. Verify the permit before the agreement, and walk away from owners who shrug about it.

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- ✕ **Crossing the licensing line accidentally**  
Holding deposits, signing leases, or running off-platform bookings can turn an exempt co-host into an unlicensed property manager. Know your state's line and add new services only on the right side of it.

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- ✕ **Building on one cleaning crew with no backup**  
Your five-star reviews are one no-show away from collapse if a single cleaner is the whole system. Two vetted crews, a shared checklist, and a same-day backup protocol before you take door three.

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- ✕ **Vague fee definitions**  
Is your 20% on nightly revenue? Cleaning fees? Before or after platform fees? Every undefined term becomes an owner dispute at statement time. Define the base in the agreement, with an example calculation.

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- ✕ **Taking every door offered**  
A bad property with a delusional owner consumes more hours than three good doors pay for. Screen owners as hard as guests: realistic expectations, proper insurance, sound property, or no deal.

## THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **Density to 15-20 doors**  
Stack doors in one tight market with a virtual assistant on messaging and two cleaning crews on turnovers. Same playbook, more statements: at 15 average doors the fee revenue clears six figures annually with you as the operator-owner.

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- 2 **The boutique brand**  
Specialize upward: luxury or design-forward properties at a 25% full-service fee, professional staging and photography, direct-booking websites for your owners. Fewer doors, fatter fees, and owners who never ask about price, only standards.

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- 3 **Become the licensed firm**  
Get the real estate or property-management license your state requires at the next tier, then absorb everything co-hosts must decline: deposits, leases, mid-term stays, owner trust accounts. The license converts your ceiling into a moat against every unlicensed competitor behind you.

### YOUR FIRST HIRE

A guest-messaging virtual assistant covering evenings and weekends, once you pass six to eight doors, trained on your templates with a clear escalation line for anything physical or financial. Messaging is the most systematizable hour of your day and the most punishing to your evenings. If your house manuals and templates are good enough that a VA maintains your response time, you have built a system; if every message still needs you, you have built a very demanding phone.

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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