

# Your Guide to Starting A Portable Restroom Business



## The JohnTalk Promise

Everything you need to know when they need to go. That's our mission. The JohnTalk project is designed to be your go-to resource for all the information you need to start a portable sanitation operation or improve your existing portable restroom business. No matter the format: articles, videos, reports and how-to manuals – if it's important to the portable sanitation industry, we will provide it.

JohnTalk is sponsored by PolyJohn, a family-owned, leading manufacturer of portable toilets and sinks. PolyJohn is sponsoring this project because they are committed to the progress of the portable sanitation industry and the people in it, regardless of whether you are a PolyJohn customer or not.

Bottom line – Portable sanitation is a great industry to be in. The independent editorial team at JohnTalk wants you to have the information you need to thrive.

Brought to you by,



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# Introduction

## Start Here on Your Path to Success in Portable Sanitation

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If you are considering owning your own portable sanitation business, congratulations. It's a smart move. Portable sanitation is an important, thriving industry that is full of opportunity.

Owning and operating your own portable sanitation business can mean a lot:

- You can be successful and financially independent
- You can enjoy being your own boss
- You can provide services that are needed and much appreciated
- You can serve your community
- You can help keep our world clean

The portable sanitation industry boosts your business with great products, great service and great support. In other words, we've got your back! The industry is known for its high standards and commitment.



We've tapped the experience of business professionals to create this startup manual for everyone who is interested in owning a portable sanitation business. With lots of information and advice, it's a helpful first step on your road to a rewarding career.

We're proud to be part of the portable sanitation industry, and we think you will, too. We look forward to being able to say to you –

Welcome, partner!

# 1. Research

Do Your Homework!

## Opportunities

So, you're seriously thinking about starting your own portable sanitation business? We value and appreciate anyone considering this decision. But before you rush out and buy those porta-potties, we urge you to do some homework. The first step to take is to gather lots of information. Find out all you can about the portable sanitation industry. To do a complete job, you should expect to visit locations in person, surf the internet, make phone calls and talk to experts in the industry.

What exactly are you looking for? Opportunity! You want to know before you invest your money, time and effort that you will have a reasonable chance of success.

Once you do your homework, not only will you have more confidence in your decision, you'll also be well-prepared should you "make your move" to portable sanitation.

Experts recommend researching the following aspects of portable sanitation. Although the suggestions may not cover every possible angle, it will give you a well-balanced view of the many things you will need to know and do to start your business.

### **IDENTIFY A POTENTIAL SERVICE AREA**

Defined simply, your "service area" is where your customers are. A service area may be a city or cities, a county, a region, or another geographic place. It's up to you to decide the boundaries.

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## Do Your Homework!



Here's a good piece of advice on service area from the pros: there's no place like home.

In other words, locate your business in the community where you live. This arrangement gives you many advantages. Because you live there, you know many of the local events, hear the local news, are familiar with the roads and know what people like to do on weekends, holidays, in the summer, etc. You have friends, acquaintances and connections. People know you and will recognize you on the job.

Wherever you decide is the place for you, it's important to "set up shop" within your service area. You will physically locate your truck(s) and equipment, and perhaps an office, there. Consider how location will affect travel time and distance. For example:

- How much time and fuel will be spent each day traveling to your service route(s) and back?
- Where is the closest waste treatment center (where you will dispose of waste each day/week)?
- When customers request last-minute items, how quickly will you be able to respond?

Keep it tight! A service area covering about a 30-mile radius is a good start for a small company.

A tight service area equals quicker service and more profit. (If work takes you outside your service area, you can always extend it. Some operators charge higher rates the further out they travel.)

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

### EVALUATE POTENTIAL CUSTOMER SEGMENTS

Who will your customers be? Who uses portable sanitation?

The most common customer groups or segments are:

- Construction and Industry
- Special Events: festivals, fairs, weddings, parties
- Government
- Agriculture

Here are some “must-do” ways to pinpoint your potential customers.



#### See for yourself

You will find some of the most valuable information first-hand, by hopping in your vehicle and taking a spin around your potential service area.

#### Visit these places:

- Construction sites (don't forget your hard hat)
- Parks and fairgrounds
- Locations where outdoor weddings are often held
- Farms and agricultural facilities
- Concrete plants and gravel yards

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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- Nurseries
- Waste treatment centers
- Schools and universities

Check your local newspaper events calendar, Facebook events or local travel guides to see what is happening in your area. Attend the events. Talk to the people in charge about their portable sanitation needs. Are they satisfied with their current service? What do they like or dislike?

### **Surf the internet**

The internet has a wealth of information that can be used to identify customers. Many cities have a web page or site that allows you to search for construction and special event permits. The website [dodgeprojects.construction.com](http://dodgeprojects.construction.com) helps you find construction projects and building plans in your area. Another major website, [www.thebluebook.com](http://www.thebluebook.com), lists construction projects by state. It also lists local, state and regional general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers and manufacturers.

PointsMap®, on the International Festivals and Events Association website ([www.ifea.com](http://www.ifea.com)), displays locations and information for festivals, events, vendors, suppliers, event planners, universities, parks and recreation from all over the world.

### **Make the call**

Call companies, businesses, groups and organizations that you don't visit in person about their portable sanitation needs. Connecting with these local customer groups may also help you in the future to form partnerships with them:

- Construction companies
- Event planners
- Party rental businesses



# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

- Local organizations and non-profit groups
- Wedding venues and wedding shows
- Running associations
- Governments
  - Municipal, county, state, and federal government entities can be good customers. They generally take bids on projects, so you have opportunities to compete for business.
- Industry
  - If you are located in an area with heavy industry and manufacturing, such as steel mills and refineries.



## **ASSESS THE LEVEL OF DEMAND**

There is always a need for portable sanitation. Try to get a “feel” for how much demand there is in your service area.

Keep in mind that demand can change for many reasons, two of which are the economy and the weather. For example, while rentals will continue for many construction projects even in the winter, you can expect rentals to slack off for special events and weddings from late autumn through winter.

Perhaps the best opportunity to estimate the level of demand is to visit the “dump” site (waste treatment site) or sites that service your area. Speak to the plant operator and drivers. They can tell you how busy they are – or not.

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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### IDENTIFY COMPETITORS

Find out who your competitors are, and get to know as much as you can about them. You have many sources of information.

While you've been checking out potential customers, you will see your competitors' products on-site. Make a list of portable sanitation companies that you come across. Look at the condition of the porta-potties. Do they look new and clean or old and battered? Do the toilets have "service records" in them? Are they being cleaned consistently? Do they have hand sanitizer?

Find their ads in the Yellow Pages, local newspapers and on local radio stations.

As you will read later, a website is a must-have in portable sanitation. Go online and find the websites of local portable sanitation businesses, such as the ones you may have seen while driving through your service area. See what products and services they offer and what their service area is.

Look for reviews of your competitors on business review websites such as Yelp, Angie's List, the Better Business Bureau, Google Reviews and Home Advisor. Your competitors may also have a Facebook page.

While we often think of the competition as teams to beat, it will be in your best interest to develop relationships with your competitors. Most

*"Look for reviews of your competitors on business review websites such as Yelp, Angie's List, the Better Business Bureau, Google Reviews and Home Advisor. Your competitors may also have a Facebook page."*

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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are hard-working people like yourself, and there are times when “friendly competition” can pay off. For example, if they receive an order that's too big for them alone, they may outsource some work to you or vice versa.

### **CALL OUT THE SWOT TEAM**

There are many ways you can gain or lose business.

Analyze the market by using a business planning activity called a SWOT analysis, which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

SWOT is very helpful, and it's simple. Make four lists:

#### **1. A list of strengths**

These are the positives that help you keep current business and win future business. Examples include knowledge or experience, strong customer relationships and the quality of your equipment. Strengths separate your business from the competition.

Experts suggest one strength to consider: if you do start your own business, how do you plan to set yourself apart from your competition? Fast service? The cleanest units? Extra toilet paper? Think of some ways you may gain an edge and get a quicker start in the business.

Here are a few strengths as a portable sanitation business owner might see them:

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## Do Your Homework!

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*"My friend works at the local Parks and Recreation department, so I know all the events they are putting on."*

*"I used to work in construction. I can talk to my old boss about supplying units on his job sites."*

*"I want my business colors to be purple and yellow. No one else in my area has those unit colors."*

### 2. A list of weaknesses

These are the negatives that may hurt your ability to win future business. They might include the lack of a specific product or service, poor employee skills or having a smaller budget than competitors.

For example:

*"I don't have a lot of money to start. I'll need to go after smaller jobs until I can get more units to compete."*

*"The truck I'm looking to buy is a little older."*

*"I haven't perfected how to optimize routes."*

*"We don't have a reputation yet."*

### 3. A list of opportunities

These are the positive factors outside your company that you could use to your advantage to improve sales. Examples include competitors going out of business, an expansion of your market or new markets opening up and growing customer demand.

*"My competition is developing a bad reputation for not cleaning their units well enough. I've heard people say that they would pay twice as much if they got a unit that was actually clean."*

*"When I worked in construction, the units the competition used were small. If I can find a roomier version, that would be big!"*

*"People tell me they can't reach the competition. I must be easily available."*

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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### 4. A list of threats

These are the negatives outside your company that might happen and prevent your company from making sales. Examples might include an unanticipated decrease in customers, unexpected new competitors that are experienced or well-financed, an economic downturn and sudden price increases, such as in fuel prices.

*"If the market goes down again and construction goes down as a result, I would lose a lot of regular business."*

*"Bad weather will mean fewer events."*

Once you start your business, you should review your SWOT every 6 months or so.

## DECIDE IF YOU COULD ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS IN THAT AREA



Weigh the pros and cons of all you have learned. Do they add up to an opportunity that you can build a business and a career on? Think long-term commitment.

## Educate Yourself About the Business

What is the hands-on experience of portable sanitation actually like? Owner-operators will usually tell you it's busy and satisfying, physical but not extreme. It's an active, outdoor career.

One important advantage you'll discover about the demands of the job is that products have been manufactured with you in mind. By listening to the pros on the "front line" of portable sanitation, products have been masterfully designed to make it as convenient as possible to transport, set up and service.

Here is an introduction to the day-to-day activities, covering:

- Equipment
- Regulations
- Physical and time demands

We promise that once you join the portable sanitation industry, you will learn something new every day!

### EQUIPMENT

Like a craftsman who knows his tools, the more you know about the products and equipment used in portable sanitation, the better your business will be.

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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When you know all the features and advantages, you can offer better service by matching products to customers' needs. You can spot potential problems and find the right answers more quickly.

There are hundreds of products in the portable sanitation market. We can put most of them into these categories:

- Restrooms
- Hand sanitizers
- Sinks
- Tanks
- Trailers
- Vacuum trucks
- Supplies

### **RESTROOMS**

You've used them on many occasions. You've heard them called porta-potties, porta-loos, porta-johns or even porta-janes. Let's take a closer look at the single most important product – the restroom or portable toilet. In the industry, we generally refer to them as “units.”

Portable toilets are molded out of polyethylene, the most common type of plastic. They come in many colors and can weigh anywhere from about 150 pounds to nearly 400 pounds for wheelchair-accessible units.

Well-made portable toilets are designed to feature these qualities:

- Lightweight
- Compact

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- Sturdy design
- Tough construction
- User-friendly for the customer, with a comfortable, roomy interior, good ventilation and an anti-slip floor
- User-friendly for you, with easy set-up and maintenance

Portable toilets have many extra features that can be added, such as:

- Hand cleanser and foam dispenser
- Sink
- Paper towel dispenser
- Extra tissue rolls
- Shelving
- Mirror
- Solar lighting
- Recirculating flush and fresh flush

In typical units, the toilet seat sits above the open-faced, self-contained waste tank. The tanks vary in size from 30 to 60 gallons. However, there are some higher-end models and features that can be added to conceal the waste and add flushing capabilities. Liquid chemicals and water are added to the waste tank to break down waste.

### **HAND SANITIZERS**

Many sites with portable restrooms simply use a liquid or foam hand cleanser. Dispensers are attached to units or stands.

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### **SINKS**

A popular alternative to hand sanitizer is a handwashing sink.

Sinks are made in many varieties for any situation. Some models are made to be installed inside the porta-john, while other sinks are located outside. They can be for a single user, or by 2 or 4 people. Water is supplied and contained by tanks inside the sink, which must be refilled and emptied. However, some models can be connected to a fresh water source for an unlimited supply. In addition, health codes may require heated water. The good news – there are models of heated portable sinks that meet this requirement.

### **TANKS**

For larger jobs or in remote areas, such as construction sites and rest stops, separate tanks are used for bulk waste storage. They can also be used to hold fresh water. Holding tank capacity is usually from about 150 to 300 gallons. Some pros install “kits” onto mobile office trailers to provide customers with an RV-style toilet (running water/flushable toilet)



### **TRAILERS**

There are two basic uses for trailers in portable sanitation. The first type is specifically designed to securely hold and haul units to the site. These trailers have a broad range in capacity. Some can carry 1 unit, whereas others can carry 20 units!

The second use of trailers is as custom-designed, luxury restrooms. These restrooms offer the comfort of indoor bathrooms with amenities such as porcelain toilets, running water, showers, heating, air conditioning, lighting and wood finishing. Luxury trailers are usually available in designs of 1 to 10 stalls.

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### VACUUM TRUCKS

You will often hear vacuum trucks referred to as “pumper trucks.” They are designed and built for servicing portable restrooms with mounted tanks for waste removal and fresh water supply, as well as many other features. Tanks on these trucks can hold several hundred gallons of waste and water.

### SUPPLIES

Restroom and sink supplies include hand sanitizers, hand soap, toilet paper, urinal screens and deodorizers and cleaning and disinfecting supplies.

There are no set numbers of portable restrooms needed to open a portable sanitation business. Many owner-operators have started part-time with 10 to 12 units. Others decide based on the number of units their trailers can carry (such as 20 or 28) so they can maximize their freight costs. A reasonable start is 30 to 50 units.

Most operators start with one pumper truck and grow from there. If you plan to work in a large metropolitan area, a larger capacity tank (800-1000 gallons) is a smart choice. A smaller area can likely be serviced with a smaller tank (400-500 gallons).

Used restrooms, trucks and truck accessories are always available and are a less expensive choice than buying new. The JohnTalk Classifieds page ([www.johntalk.com/classified](http://www.johntalk.com/classified)) is an excellent source of used equipment. Pumper Magazine ([www.pumper.com](http://www.pumper.com)), PRO Monthly ([www.promonthly.com](http://www.promonthly.com)) and Craigslist, as well as Facebook pages dedicated to portable sanitation, are other sources.



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The downside of buying used is the condition of the units. They tend to show wear and tear. If your goal is to make your business stand out by providing the most appealing, cleanest restrooms, used probably isn't the best choice. Buying new also offers the advantages of a warranty and establishing a relationship with the manufacturer.

You might also want to look into leasing equipment. Portable sanitation manufacturers can provide you with a list of their preferred leasing vendors.

Adding accessories or other products can help you get a jump on the competition. Hand sanitizer is an inexpensive add-on. Handwashing stations and one or two handicap-accessible restrooms may be a wise investment as well.

## **REGULATIONS**

The benefits of portable sanitation are obvious – it is an essential service to store, remove, transport and dispose of waste in a safe, sanitary manner that protects public health and the environment. Because of their importance, these processes are guided by state and federal regulations to ensure they are done properly.

Regulations vary by state. Most involve the transport and disposal of waste (often called “dumping”) at wastewater treatment plants (“dump” sites). There are usually permits or licenses needed to haul waste. But there can be regulations for many other aspects, such as requiring operators to attend a certification class or have a certain number of educational hours each year. Your truck will need a DOT number and may need a state-sanctioned environmental agency number as well. And because you will be involved in work environments such as construction sites, there may be OSHA and EPA regulations to follow.

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Also very important – some wastewater treatment plants have different requirements and regulations on acceptable chemical and PH levels in the waste.

When you don't follow the rules, you can be fined and even shut down. Knowing and following regulations not only protects your customers, the public and the environment, it's essential to keeping your business running smoothly.

Check the government website of the state where your business will be located for up-to-date and accurate information on regulations and contact information for questions. A valuable source of additional information is Portable Sanitation Association International, or PSIA ([www.psai.org](http://www.psai.org)). When you become a member of PSIA, you have access to:

- ANSI Standards (American National Standards Institute)
- OSHA Standards (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)
- EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and the Office of Wastewater Management (OWM)
- DOT regulations (U.S. Department of Transportation)

## **PHYSICAL AND TIME DEMANDS**

Most of the time, portable sanitation is a one-man or one-woman job. One person can load and unload units, clean the units, and dump waste at the dump site. If a site is clear and easily accessible, setting up one toilet at a site can be done in three 3 minutes.

The actual removal of waste and cleaning of a portable restroom is fairly simple. Using a hose attached to a vacuum, you pump out the waste. Then, you fill the tank with 5 gallons of fresh water, and add chemical "blue." You spray the inside of the porta-john



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and use a cleaning solution to wipe it down. Refill the supplies, such as toilet paper and hand sanitizer. The entire process takes about 4 to 6 minutes per unit.

An easy way to gain a better understanding of operators in action is to watch portable sanitation videos posted on YouTube.

Here is how one of our operators described the daily routine of a successful portable sanitation operation:

The daily schedule depends on the service area and how many toilets to clean. Generally, each unit in the field should be cleaned once a week. Try to be consistent, cleaning a unit on the same day each week.

A rule of thumb on scheduling is to plan on about 10 to 15 minutes to travel from one site to the next on the route/schedule. This may increase if you are in a more rural area. It is helpful to divide your service area into zones and cover one zone each day of the week.

Once the company is established and growing, you can expect to have 30 stops on a route per day (larger companies often have upwards of 50 stops). This makes for a 10-hour day if you take 5 minutes to clean a unit and 15 minutes transit time. Of course, time may vary.

While you are at the sites, take the opportunity to talk to the person in charge, such as the job foreman, when they are there. Friendly service will help grow your reputation, relationships and business.

Throughout the day, you may receive calls that require additional services or deliveries. While driving from site to site, keep your eyes open for new developments or projects. These jobs are the best to target, as they are already on your route!

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!



At the end of the day, or when you are nearest to the dump site, check your waste tank to see if you need to discharge.

It is best practice to get your truck ready for the next day before the current day is over. Refill the water supply, toilet paper, chemicals, fuel, etc., and load any units required for deliveries. Restocking or “prepping” the truck can take about 20 to 40 minutes.

Once you're prepped and ready, if an emergency arises, you can respond quickly. And even if you don't have a delivery, it can pay off to have an extra unit on your truck. You may be able to add an additional unit to a current rental, deliver to a new prospect, or use it to swap out a unit that tipped over.

Finally, if weekly cleanings can be done in 3 days, then do them on Tuesday through Thursday. Fridays and Mondays can become great opportunities to provide restrooms for weekend events. Special event rentals can be very lucrative, but they also may require you to be cleaning the units at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday morning before the event, or removing the units Sunday morning before the streets open.

# 1. Research

## Do Your Homework!

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### **FIND A BUSINESS MENTOR**

What's the best way to learn about portable sanitation? Get a teacher!

You can continue your education by teaming with a business mentor. An ideal mentor is a person with experience in portable sanitation who can offer real-world advice and who has valuable connections in the industry. A mentor can share his or her knowledge to help you avoid pitfalls and steer you toward success. Your mentor will “show you the ropes.”

The manufacturers of portable sanitation products are good sources to help you identify and connect with a mentor in your area. Often, professionals who work for these companies are willing to mentor a new business owner.

Also, check Facebook industry groups that concentrate on portable sanitation.

PSAI holds annual conventions that are excellent occasions to meet and network with other portable sanitation professionals.

The SCORE Association, in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), offers a “Find a Mentor” program at [www.score.org/find-mentor](http://www.score.org/find-mentor).

*“The manufacturers of portable sanitation products are good sources to help you identify and connect with a mentor in your area. Often, professionals who work for these companies are willing to mentor a new business owner.”*

## Decide If the Business is For You

Do you feel you are up to the physical demands of the work? (Climbing in and out of a truck, scrubbing toilets, wrapping hoses, driving from site to site, maneuvering the truck, loading, unloading and moving units.)

Do you enjoy (or at least tolerate) working outdoors, in all kinds of weather?

Are you ready to give a full day's work every day?

Are you ready to learn every day?

Are you ready to take charge and be the boss?

Does everything you know so far make you want to jump in and get started?

Then you are certainly a good candidate to own your own portable sanitation business.

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

Money Matters and Legal Obligations

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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Up until now, you've been learning about portable sanitation. This section is the turning point from thinking to taking action. When you make the commitment to getting a loan, licenses and insurance, you have essentially started your business.

## Financing – Put Your Money Where Your Dream Is

You might know it as “seed money.” It's the money you will need to get your business up and running.

It boils down to two important questions:

1. How much money do I need?
2. Where do I get it?

The questions are easy, but the answers will take a little work!

*“When my loan was approved, that’s when my goal of owning my own portable sanitation business became a reality. It was exciting, and made me focus even more on making it a success.”*

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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#### **A JUMP START**

We've seen many startups jump right into the portable sanitation business by getting a loan from their bank, credit union or other small finance company.

We can't tell you the exact dollar amount required to start a business because there is no single amount. Each business owner has different plans and different goals for his or her business.

As one example, a recent ad offered a used pumper truck for about \$15,000. Combine that deal with a set of toilets and supplies for about \$5,000 to \$8,000, and that's a reasonable amount for an enthusiastic beginner to become an owner-operator by putting up some savings and getting a loan.

#### **THE LOAN PROCESS**

However, the loan process can be complicated. It's more difficult for a startup to get a loan than an established business.

The SBA offers a more comprehensive approach to help you decide how much money you will need and how to find it. The three basic steps are:

1. Estimate your startup costs
2. Find a lender
3. Prepare your loan proposal



## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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#### **1. Estimate your startup costs**

A lender will want to see a realistic estimate of the cost of doing business for the first few months. An in-depth way to calculate your startup costs is to consider both one-time and ongoing costs.

Some expenses will be one-time costs, such as paying for your business sign or the cost of registering your business. Once you've paid them, you won't pay again.

Ongoing expenses can be fixed or variable. Fixed expenses are almost always the same, such as utilities and insurance. Variable expenses are usually different each time. Examples are chemicals and fuel costs, which can go up or down depending on how busy you are.

As a beginner, you may not know all the expenses you will have in your first few months. This is where your business mentor can help you.

#### **2. Find a lender**

Some businesspersons are fortunate to have enough savings and assets to start their company. Others are able to borrow the funds they need from family, friends and business associates. These sources of borrowing may be very helpful and should be seriously considered.

However, as mentioned above, most businesspersons finance their startup by going to a bank and taking out a loan. You will be borrowing money that must be repaid with interest (a fee the bank charges to use their money).

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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You may want to explore other options besides your own bank or credit union. You will get good advice at your local SBA District Office. They can advise you about community banks, national banks, credit unions and commercial finance companies.

The SBA has loan programs for persons who want to start a business but can't get a loan on reasonable terms. SBA can also give good advice about loans and how to apply for them. Some state and local economic development agencies and nonprofit organizations provide loans to small business owners who may not qualify for traditional commercial loans.

If you are a veteran or a woman, you can see what special programs are available through your local OVBC and WBC.

### 3. Prepare your loan proposal

When you apply for a loan, you have to provide a lot of personal and financial information to the lender, so they can make a sound decision. This is known as preparing a loan proposal.

The following are some common components of a small business loan proposal:

- Executive summary
  - Give a brief description of yourself, your portable sanitation startup and how the loan will be used to help the company succeed. Think of your executive summary as a professional introduction to your proposal.
- Loan application form
  - As you fill out the basic application form, be prepared to answer questions including:
    - How much money you need
    - How you will use the money

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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- How you will repay the loan
  - What you will do if your business is unable to repay the loan
  - Personal background (such as previous addresses, other names, criminal record, education, etc.)
- 
- Your resume

- Business plan
  - A business plan describes your business and how it will operate to achieve your goals. It covers aspects of the business such as products and services, operations, management and organization, startup expenses, a financial plan and marketing. Besides being an important part of the loan application, a business plan will help you think through every part of your company.
  - SCORE offers a template for startup businesses that will guide you step-by-step through the process of writing a business plan, at [www.score.org/resource/business-plan-template-startup-business](http://www.score.org/resource/business-plan-template-startup-business).



- Personal Credit Report
  - You want to have good credit. Before you apply for a loan, get your personal credit report from one of the credit bureaus – Equifax ([www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)), Experian ([www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)) or TransUnion ([www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)). Personal credit reports may contain errors or be out of date, so make sure all the information is correct.

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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- Income Tax Returns
  - Usually, personal and business income tax returns for the previous 3 years.
- Personal financial statement
  - A balance sheet that measures your net worth by listing personal assets and debts.
- Collateral
  - Collateral includes personal and business assets that can be sold if the money you make from your business is not enough to repay the loan. Every loan requires some collateral. If you don't have collateral, you'll need a co-signer who has collateral.
  - Examples of collateral are a house, truck, furniture, stocks and bonds and Certificate of Deposit (CD). Items that are not collateral include a car, office equipment, jewelry, mutual funds and Individual Retirement Account (IRA).
- Legal Documents
  - Depending on a loan's specific requirements, your lender may require you to submit one or more legal documents, such as business licenses and registrations.
  - Take the time to prepare your loan request to the best of your ability. Have your business mentor or a trusted business associate review your proposal. When you meet with your lender, be professional in your appearance and presentation.

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When you are approved for a loan to start your business, it should be a real confidence-builder. By giving you the money you asked for, the lender is telling you that they think you have what it takes to make your business a success!

However, if you are turned down for a loan, don't let it discourage you. Talk to your lender and ask why. Use that information to make a better proposal next time.

## Time to License Up!



Before your first customer calls, your portable sanitation company must be licensed by the state in which your business is located. A business license is a legal obligation, but it's also good marketing. A license tells your customers that you are a professional who respects and follows the rules.

Having your license is a requirement if you want to become an accredited business with the Better Business Bureau.

If you don't take the time to license your business or renew your license, you can be fined or have tax problems. Your business can even be closed.

Every state has its own rules and regulations concerning licenses. For example, the state of Indiana notes that it has more than 400 different

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

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licenses, permits, certifications and other permissions to choose from. If your service area covers more than one state, you must be licensed separately in each. You may also have to get licenses or permits from counties or cities.

Licensing sounds complicated, but each state gives you all the information you need on their website, including contacts. Licenses aren't expensive, and it's money well-spent. You can reach each state's business license office through the SBA at [www.sba.gov/starting-business/business-licenses-permits/state-licenses-permits](https://www.sba.gov/starting-business/business-licenses-permits/state-licenses-permits). These state sites will also help you with general business permits, licenses and registrations that are required by your county or city.

Your vehicle(s) may need a USDOT Number (U.S. Department of Transportation). Many states require it. For more information, visit the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) site at [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/do-i-need-usdot-number](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/do-i-need-usdot-number).

In addition to state requirements, federal rules concerning the gross vehicle weight (GVW) could require you to have a commercial driver's license (CDL), and other parts of your truck could require you to have specific "endorsements" on your CDL. Furthermore, USDOT requires vehicles with a GVW of 10,000+ pounds to undergo an annual inspection.

## Insuring Your Business Success

Insurance is the hard hat, safety glasses and work boots for your business... only much bigger.

Imagine if you owned a portable sanitation business and these incidents happened:

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

### Money Matters and Legal Obligations

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- You're driving down the highway with a trailer full of restrooms. One of the units breaks loose and falls onto the road, causing a chain reaction accident with multiple injuries.
- A person has just used a restroom. Stepping outside, he slips on a puddle of water that was not cleaned up after the restroom was serviced and hurts himself.

In fact, these accidents have actually happened on several occasions and resulted in multi-million-dollar insurance settlements against the business owners!

The lesson is, you have to have insurance. It's your protection against all the worst things that can and do go wrong while operating your business. If you want to get a loan for your business, your lender will check to make sure you have insurance. If you have employees, it can cover the loss of income – and that can help you keep good workers. Insurance not only protects, it gives you peace of mind.

Compared to many other business costs, insurance is relatively inexpensive. Having insurance just makes good sense.

*"When I first wanted to insure my pumper truck, I didn't know I had to tell my agent that I had equipment attached. But since he knew portable sanitation, he asked me about attachments. If he didn't ask, my \$25,000 pump and tank wouldn't have been insured!"*

## 2. Financing, Licensing and Insurance

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#### **FIND AN INSURANCE AGENT**

Your agent for home and auto insurance is probably not the best choice to obtain insurance for your business. First, many agencies don't even offer commercial insurance. Second, insurance for portable sanitation carries risks that a regular insurance agent might not be familiar with. In fact, as a new owner, you might not even realize some of your own insurance needs. What you need is an insurance company or agent who knows and insures portable sanitation companies.

Look for experience. Look for an agent who can show you what you need.

There are companies that specialize in insurance for portable sanitation companies, and they can be found by doing a web search. However, these companies usually handle larger businesses, not small startups. Talk to your business mentor about agents. Contact product manufacturers. Or ask other portable sanitation owners (on Facebook, for example).

#### **INSURANCE NEEDS**

The two most important types of insurance you should consider for your business are general liability insurance and commercial auto insurance.

A general liability policy covers legal problems due to accidents, bodily injuries, property damage, medical expenses, libel, slander, negligence, etc.

Commercial auto insurance covers your company vehicles for the financial costs of accidents, including property damage,

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personal injury, medical bills and the like. According to one portable insurance expert, insuring your vehicles is the most important insurance need, because that's where most of the claims originate.

You will want to discuss the different types of insurance with your agent.

Also, talk to your agent about how much insurance you will need. One insurance expert advises getting a policy worth a minimum of \$1 million, noting that "one million dollars isn't as much as it used to be." One claim can easily be that much!



It's strongly advised to get insurance from the moment you start your business. Don't wait a month or a year, thinking you can take a chance and save money. This is a poor business decision for two reasons. First, all it takes is a single incident at any time to wipe out your business. Second, if you decide at a later date to get insurance, the insurance company will see that you were trying to "cut corners." You may get the policy, but the premiums will be much more expensive because the company will consider you a risky client.

# 3. Develop a Business Plan

Get Into the Routine

## 3. Develop a Business Plan

### Get Into the Routine

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As you gain customers and grow your company, your business day will fill up with more chores and responsibilities. Being busy is what you want... but you have to be well-organized to handle it.

The goal is to manage your time, your service route and your cash flow so they become advantages rather than problems.

Your management skills will improve as you gain experience. You'll have bad days when it seems like nothing goes right! But you'll learn from your mistakes. You'll also discover that the different parts of your business work together. For example, a well-planned route gives you extra time to take care of other important matters, such as preparing for the following day or contacting potential new customers, and saves on fuel costs, which improves your finances.

A professionally run portable sanitation company makes happy customers!

## Route Planning: Become a Router Extraordinaire

As a portable sanitation owner, you will spend most of your business day on your service route, so its importance can't be underestimated. It will have an impact on your business every single day. In practice, it will probably take you longer at the beginning to complete your route as you learn the ropes. Once your route is established and is working for you, you should get to know it like an old friend.

One experienced pro offers the following five tips to create a well-planned route that will serve your customers and take you on a trip to success. You might also be interested in searching online for route planning software programs. Most companies today don't utilize computerized route planning software yet, but with new and evolving technologies there could be something that works for you.

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### **1. Be efficient**

Plan your route to have as many services per driven mile as possible. Keep routes tight. You will save time and fuel, increase productivity and profitability and eliminate unnecessary wear and tear on your equipment.

Efficiency also means thinking ahead. Be prepared and plan for emergencies or extra business by carrying an extra unit or two on your truck. A quick response in these situations (since you won't have to go back to your yard to pick up a spare) is a great way to attract and keep satisfied customers.

But don't try to be more efficient by cutting corners. Always meet your customers' expectations. A few weeks of poor service can cost your business greatly.

Time is everything. An efficient route gives you more time in your day for other aspects of your business, such as making extra deliveries, sprucing up your units or catching up on billing and paperwork. It can even help you get home in time to make it to your son or daughter's soccer game!

### **2. Let demographics and geography help decide your routes**

Draw your routes based on where and how your customers are grouped. In cities, stops are usually closer together. Rural areas tend to be more spread out. Try using natural boundaries like highways and rivers to map the efficient route.

### **3. Divide your route into sections that are serviced on the same days of the week**

As you gain customers, you may eventually have so many that you can't handle all of them in one day. You will need to divide them into two (or more) routes that you service on separate days.

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Using the first two points above, let efficiency and geography guide you in making the new routes. For example, you might have “central city Monday” or “westside Wednesday.” By being consistent and having an organized routine, your customers will know what to expect, and you will have a starting point to help schedule new business.

### 4. Become familiar with traffic patterns and construction areas

Be like a traffic reporter in a helicopter and take a bird's-eye view. Check traffic reports for delays. Avoid the worst roads for rush-hour traffic. Especially in summer, know where all the road construction projects are. Then you can decide the best place to be at the right time of day. Remember, you won't make money staring out the windshield.

### 5. Know your limits

Make the most of your route by considering total miles, number of stops and number of toilets and sinks. Plan for about 5 minutes per toilet. But remember, you can only service so many units in a day. Don't spread yourself too thin by trying to be everywhere at once. Set boundaries, and don't go past them.





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# Waste Disposal: Understand the Dumping Process

Become familiar with the waste disposal process (dumping). It is a process you will be doing a few times each week.

"Dump sites" or "waste disposal sites" are formally called wastewater treatment plants. You can find the ones near you by doing a Google Maps search (<https://maps.google.com>). Under Search Google Maps, type in "wastewater treatment plants near me" or "wastewater treatment plants near \_\_\_" (a nearby city or area).

Then, contact the sites for more information. Often, there will be a few steps before you can start dumping. You may have to get a permit and take a safety class, and probably have a vehicle inspection to verify your tank size. You'll also probably purchase disposal tickets in advance.

Rates vary, but a typical current rate for waste disposal is about 8 cents per gallon. Some plants offer volume discounts. When choosing a disposal site, consider location and convenience as well as price. You may prefer a site despite its higher rate because it's closer or there's less "red tape" involved, making the process quicker and less expensive overall.

Almost every truck/tank has a "sight bubble," also called a "sight glass," to see the tank level. When the tank is full, it's time to dump. The process isn't especially difficult or messy, but of course, wear gloves and safety glasses.

Here's a simple description of dumping. Each truck has a 3" or 4" dump valve (intake valves are generally 2"). Take off the camlock cap, and hook up the hose (the dump site may or may not supply the hose). Put the other end of the hose into the designated area (usually a trough, tanker or automated/controlled system), open valve and let gravity do its job. You can vent the tank as it empties

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by opening the intake valve when the waste is below that level. To speed up the process, you can turn on your vacuum pump to “blow/pressure” and it will shoot out the waste.

Gravity feed dumping a 1000-gallon truck will take about 5 minutes. Generally, the entire process of filling out paperwork and dumping should take about 15 minutes. It may be longer if there are trucks in line ahead of you.

Finally, keep an eye on the time the dump sites are open. Some will stay open later than others or have weekend hours. Another service is emergency after-hours access, although this may cost you an extra fee.

## Service Scheduling

Scheduling the units for cleaning isn't difficult. You should quickly get the hang of it.

A good rule of thumb is to begin by putting customers on a scheduled cleaning once a week. For special events that run for more than one day, clean each unit at the end of each day.

If a long-term customer isn't using the unit much, you may recommend (or they may ask for) service every other week. You might offer a small discount when a customer reduces service.

On the other hand, some sites have such high usage that they will need to be cleaned twice or three times a week. Some pros

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have even needed to clean a unit as much twice a day, 7 days a week!

When you have to increase the cleaning schedule, charge accordingly. Figure your added expenses in mileage, time, disposal fees and also “opportunity cost.” This is the money you may have been making doing something else if you weren’t busy with the extra service.

If the current number of restrooms on a site are becoming full and dirty very quickly, a typical first response by many foremen is to increase the service level (aka, twice a week cleaning). As a knowledgeable professional, you should structure your pricing to encourage the rental of more restrooms instead of making two trips to the site each week. Understand that some sites may not have room for the extra units, or the person in charge may be set on extra cleanings. Be accommodating to their requests, but make sure you are fairly compensated!

Customers may have special requests, such as servicing their units on a particular day or time. You should always try to meet their needs if they are reasonable – but charge accordingly.

Whatever your schedules are, always remember – service with a smile!



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### Prices and Billing

It's the million-dollar question – how much should I charge my customers?

There are so many things that help a professional decide on the prices he or she will charge – your inventory, your route and your financial goals to name a few – that we can't give you a definite answer, but we can point you in the right direction.

This is a topic you definitely need to discuss with your business mentor, especially if your mentor is familiar with your service area and knows the distances you will travel, the groupings of your customers, the cost of fuel in your area and your competition.



To also give you a general sense of prices in your area, ask your friends or business associates if they have recently rented a portable toilet or filled out a “request for quote” form from a local company for an event. Ask any friends in construction about their costs for long-term rental.

#### **OPTIONS HELP DETERMINE PRICING**

Customers like having choices. Give them a range of product options and prices. Most of the industry divides rentals into two categories:

- Special Events
- Construction/monthly

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The Special Event options might include:

- Standard units
- Standard units with sinks
- Deluxe units (sink and recirculating flush toilet)
- Handicap-accessible units
- ADA-compliant units
- Sinks
- Hand sanitizing stands

Construction/monthly rentals usually offer fewer options:

- Standard units
- Handicap-accessible units
- Sinks



Accessories can bring in extra income. Lights are a common extra charge for special events. At a work site, hand sanitizer is a popular extra to offer.

Estimates vary greatly by region, area and economy, but here are some ballpark rental rates for a single day or weekend event and long-term rental:

- Standard unit: \$100
- Handicap-accessible unit: \$175 to \$250
- Deluxe unit: \$225
- Construction sites: \$75 to \$100 per month

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### **DON'T FORGET DISCOUNTS**

The numbers above are examples of standard prices you might charge, but volume discounts are common, especially for special events. A discount can be an advantage for yourself as well as your customer. If you have room on your truck for one more unit, the cost of delivering two units is about the same as one, so you can offer a discount (perhaps 10% per unit) and still come out ahead.

As you can also see from the above samples, the prices are different for construction rental. A long-term commitment is steady cash flow from a regular customer, so monthly rentals reflect this ongoing relationship.

### **EMERGENCY!**

Your service is built into the price, but emergencies are another matter. Your fast response to an emergency same-day delivery is worth the extra cost for a customer. A same-day fee of about \$200 is common.

### **BILLING YOUR CUSTOMERS**

For special events and weekend rentals, plan on asking for payment in full before delivery. If you don't collect upfront, especially from a one-time user, you have no leverage to collect payment once the event is over. Over time, you may be able to make exceptions for repeat customers.

Our experts in construction advise that most long-term rentals are usually advance billed in four-week cycles (billed for the next four weeks). Some companies will ask to be billed for the previous month. Although we say one month, it really makes financial sense to actually bill every 28 days. The extra days add up to where you can bill 13 times in the year instead of 12.

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Too many things can change on the job to charge for longer periods. Often, the project schedule may change, or more units might be needed. You can invoice the “extra occurrences” as they happen. Your flexibility in meeting their needs will be appreciated.

### **PREPARE A SERVICE AGREEMENT**

You can conduct business with just a handshake, but we strongly advise against it. Use a service agreement instead.

A service agreement is basically a contract between you and your customer that describes the terms and conditions for the use of your professional services. It's the foundation of a solid business relationship because it protects you and your customer equally. It covers your responsibilities as the “lessor” and your customer's responsibilities as the “lessee.”

You can find numerous samples on the internet which you can modify to fit your needs as a portable sanitation owner. Talk to your business mentor, or discuss with other owners on a social media site like Facebook. You may want to consult with a business attorney for professional legal guidance.

Here is a sample service agreement from PSAl which you can download: <http://psai.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Sample-Rental-Contract2.pdf>

### **PAYMENT METHODS**

When you start collecting payment for your services, you will have to balance the needs of your customers with your own.

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Offering different forms of payment demonstrates professionalism, and you want to make it as easy as possible for your customers to pay. So, you might consider accepting cash, checks, credit cards, online payment, even mobile payment. But few people keep large amounts of cash on hand, checks bounce and credit cards charge processing fees. In other words, each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

For an overview, read the “Managing Business Finances and Accounting” information available through the Small Business Administration at [www.sba.gov/managing-business/running-business/managing-business-finances-accounting](http://www.sba.gov/managing-business/running-business/managing-business-finances-accounting). It covers accepting cash, checks, credit cards, online payment and more.

The best place to start is your bank.

Since you are setting up your own business, you must have a business checking account to deposit checks made out to your company. If you want to accept credit cards, you must have a merchant account, in addition to your business account. A merchant account allows your customers' credit card payments to be transferred to your bank account. Ask your business banker about processing requirements and equipment.

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Making payments online through sites such as PayPal or using a mobile phone to pay are growing in popularity. You'll probably want to put off getting involved with these types of payments at this early stage of your business.

Your business mentor should also be able to give you more guidance. Other sources of information are SCORE, Women's Business Centers (WBC), Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC), and your local Chamber of Commerce.

### **DON'T GO LOW**

A final word of advice. Some beginners think they will quickly grow their business by undercutting the prices of all their competitors. Being the low-cost leader is not good for your business, and it's not the strategy the industry needs. When price is considered above everything else, it starts a "race to the bottom," where service and overall quality suffer. Fairness and good service are the hallmarks that best serve your customers, yourself and everyone in portable sanitation.

## Milestones On Your Road to Success

Your business is a long-term commitment, so you should think and plan long-term as well. Although you will be very busy getting started, you should also take the time to look to the future of your business.

Make a list of milestones that you think are important to your business, and estimate when you hope to achieve them. Milestones are one-time events that show you your business is moving in the right direction. They will give you concrete goals to aim for, to keep you inspired and guide you in how to best use your resources to achieve success.

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[Entrepreneur.com](#) suggests that it will take about 6 months for you to have a good understanding of your company, your customers, your competitors and your advantages over the competition. You're still working out the kinks! As you learn, you may want to adjust your milestone estimates.

Here are some basic, but key, milestones to look forward to:

- Launching your website
  - In a study by SCORE, owners of small businesses said starting their own website was the most important technology milestone they achieved. It should also be one of your first.
- Repeat customers
  - Customer loyalty is a key to a successful company. The SCORE study says that getting their first repeat customer was the number one milestone for most small businesses.
- Turning a profit
  - There is no single timetable for when an owner-operator begins to make a profit. It depends on how much you've initially invested in your business, the costs of running the business and the amount of money you make from your business.
  - You can estimate your breakeven point and when your business will be able to cover all its expenses and begin to make a profit.

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- Add your one-time startup costs, fixed costs (overhead) and variable costs. Portable sanitation costs primarily include:

- Truck
- Equipment (units, power washer, buckets, gloves, hoses, etc.)
- Supplies (chemicals, toilet paper, sanitizer, etc.)
- Rent (if you are renting a shop or land for your business)
- Waste disposal fees
- Fuel and maintenance
- Insurance
- Utilities
- Advertising and marketing



- Determine how much it costs to run your business per month. Then estimate the money you make (revenue) from each unit every month. When your revenue equals all your business costs, you have reached your breakeven point.
- After you begin steadily earning a profit, you can then set milestones based on increasing your revenue.
- Expanding your business
  - Buying additional units, buying a pumper truck with increased capacity, renting a larger facility to store your inventory and increasing your marketing budget are just a few examples of expansion.
  - An expansion milestone you might target is owning 100 units. Let's assume that of those 100 units, you are

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renting about 75 to 85 at one time and servicing 20 to 30 per day. That's probably the most you can handle with your one-man, one-truck business. Your next expansion milestone might be to hire your first employee to help handle the load. Further down the road, you can plan on reaching still higher numbers of units. How about 1000?

- Hiring employees
  - Taking the leap from owner to employer is a big step, with many more responsibilities. Here is a brief overview from the Small Business Association:

[www.sba.gov/starting-business/hire-retain-employees/hire-your-first-employee](http://www.sba.gov/starting-business/hire-retain-employees/hire-your-first-employee).

Ask your business mentor what milestones he or she set, when he or she reached those milestones, if the milestones were reached on schedule, and if not, what delayed them. You can also ask other operators on social media sites such as Facebook.

Within 3 to 5 years, according to [Entrepreneur.com](http://Entrepreneur.com), you should be running an efficient company. But don't get lazy or take things for granted. It's the time to continually improve and set more milestones for continued growth and improvement. It's a time to look forward to!

*"Within 3 to 5 years, according to Entrepreneur.com, you should be running an efficient company. But don't get lazy or take things for granted. It's the time to continually improve and set more milestones for continued growth and improvement. It's a time to look forward to!"*

# 4. Obtaining Equipment and Supplies

Your Products are Your Business



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### Your Products are Your Business

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## Where to Get Products

There are two basic parts to your business – your products and your service. Your customers will judge the quality of your business by them.

Your inventory will be one of the largest financial investments you will make, so you want products and vehicles you can depend on, that are durable, easy to use and work with and appealing to your customers.

Fortunately, there are many choices. All the major industry suppliers offer excellent products, each with different features and strong points.

### **BUYING/LEASING NEW**

We recommend that you “test drive” the products, equipment and accessories by going to the websites of the major manufacturers and learning about their products. Compare features, service, parts and warranties.

An excellent way to compare products in person is by attending the WWETT Show (Water and Wastewater, Equipment, Treatment and Transport), the world's largest annual tradeshow for wastewater and environmental services professionals. About 600 companies exhibit their products at WWETT. For more information, go to [www.wwettshow.com/en/home.html](http://www.wwettshow.com/en/home.html).

Don't hesitate to contact the manufacturers if you have additional questions or want to request a quote. Many will even welcome a personal visit to their facilities.

## 4. Obtaining Equipment and Supplies

### Your Products are Your Business

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Manufacturers also post informational videos on YouTube. You can see how the products are made, assembled and much more.

The manufacturers will be able to help you find a preferred dealer in your area. Talk to the dealer about leasing options if that is your choice. You can also check the internet for other dealers in your vicinity.

The following are the major manufacturers of the three product categories. There are others if you are interested in researching further.



# 4. Obtaining Equipment and Supplies

## Your Products are Your Business

### PORTABLE TOILETS AND ACCESSORIES

#### PORTABLE TOILETS

PolyJohn

[www.polyjohn.com](http://www.polyjohn.com)

5 Peaks

[www.fivepeaks.net](http://www.fivepeaks.net)

Armal

[www.armal.biz](http://www.armal.biz)

PolyPortables

[www.polyportables.com](http://www.polyportables.com)

Sansom Industries

[www.sansomindustries.com](http://www.sansomindustries.com)

Satellite Industries

[www.satelliteindustries.com](http://www.satelliteindustries.com)

TSF Company, Inc.

[www.tuff-jon.com](http://www.tuff-jon.com)

#### TRUCKS

Amthor International Tank Trucks

[amthorinternational.com](http://amthorinternational.com)

Best Enterprises, Inc.

[www.bestenterprises.net](http://www.bestenterprises.net)

Crescent Tank

[www.crescenttank.com](http://www.crescenttank.com)

FlowMark

[flowmark.com](http://flowmark.com)

KeeVac Industries, Inc.

[www.keevac.com](http://www.keevac.com)

Pik Rite, Inc.

[www.PikRite.com](http://www.PikRite.com)

Satellite Industries

[www.satelliteindustries.com](http://www.satelliteindustries.com)

#### CHEMICALS

PolyJohn

[www.polyjohn.com/products/supplies/cooper-s-own/](http://www.polyjohn.com/products/supplies/cooper-s-own/)

5 Peaks

[www.fivepeaks.net](http://www.fivepeaks.net)

Armal

[www.armal.biz](http://www.armal.biz)

cpacex

[www.cpacex.com](http://www.cpacex.com)

J & J Chemical

[www.jjchem.com](http://www.jjchem.com)

PolyPortables

[www.polyportables.com](http://www.polyportables.com)

Safe-T-Fresh

[www.safetfresh.com](http://www.safetfresh.com)

Surco Portable Sanitation Products

[www.surco.com](http://www.surco.com)

Walex

[www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)

### BUYING USED

Pumper Magazine ([www.pumper.com](http://www.pumper.com)), PRO Monthly ([www.promonthly.com](http://www.promonthly.com)) and [www.pumpertrader.com](http://www.pumpertrader.com) are go-to sources of used equipment, as are Facebook and Craigslist. You will find sales ranging from individual units to an entire portable sanitation business. Some manufacturers sell used equipment or new equipment at reduced prices. Look for sellers near you.

# 5. Marketing Your Business

Put Your Name Out There! Tell Everyone How Great You Are!

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Put Your Name Out There! Tell Everyone How Great You Are!

Have you ever heard of someone who made all the arrangements for a fantastic party but forgot to send the invitations? That's just a hint of what happens when you own a portable sanitation business and don't market it.

Marketing is an invitation. The goal is to get your potential customers to:

- Know who you are
- Know what you do
- Know why they should hire you instead of another portable sanitation company



The pros recommend that to really take advantage of the power of marketing to keep your phone ringing, you should create a yearly marketing plan and spend 10 percent of your revenue per year on marketing.

There are many, many ways to market your business. The key is finding the right combination of tactics. When starting from scratch, the basic elements of marketing that should be part of your plan are:

- Your branding: company name, logo and tagline
- Your advertising: units, vehicle signage, business cards, ads, mailings and email, social media, etc.
- Your website

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### Your Branding

Who doesn't know famous brands like McDonald's, Apple, Ford, Walmart and Nike?

Just like them, your company has a brand. Your brand is what you do and the way you do it. It's your image. "Branding" is telling your customers about yourself.

The two most necessary parts of your brand that the public will see are your company name and your logo. They should make an impression.

#### **COMPANY NAME**

Branding begins with the name of your company. The name you choose is important. It will represent you for a long time, so think carefully!

Look on the web for examples. You'll see that many companies take a similar approach. The most popular company names may include the owner's name (Pat's Portables, Singleton's Sanitation Service), a service quality that you want to emphasize (quick, reliable, comfortable, clean, spotless), the area you are serving (Lewisville Porta-johns, Northern Idaho Sanitation) or even a humorous reference to using the bathroom (see next page). A bit of imagination can make your name stand out. Ask your family, friends and business mentor for their opinions.

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Names of actual portable toilet companies:

- Happy Can Portable Toilets
- Best Seat In The House
- ASAP Port-A-Pots
- Johnny On The Spot
- Royal Throne
- Tanks Alot
- Oui Oui Enterprises
- Willy Make It?
- Doodie Calls
- A King's Throne



### COMPANY LOGO

A logo is a symbol or design that identifies the company and appears on its products.

Here are logo examples of local portable sanitation businesses like yours:



Division of Tillet Plumbing Inc.

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Do you see the three most important parts of the logo in each example? They are the company name, phone number and web address. Make sure your logo contains all three.

Unless you are a professional artist, we don't recommend trying to design your own logo, business cards, signs or other branding. A professional graphic artist or graphics company will be able to turn your ideas into a clear, sharp design. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce to find the help you will need. Some online printing companies also offer economical logo design.

The first example above also has a tagline ("Ahead with class"). A tagline is a slogan or a very short description of your business. If you want to create a tagline for your business, keep it short and memorable. Keep in mind some of the most famous taglines, such as "Just Do It," "BMW: The Ultimate Driving Machine" and "The Few. The Proud. The Marines."

## Your Advertising

Advertising is something you do all the time in different ways. Ads and other marketing materials are meant to be seen by the public (your potential customers) to create awareness about your business. Awareness is how business relationships begin.

Advertising can be as simple as an ad, business cards, stickers on your porta-johns and signs on your truck. When you put all of the parts together, it has a "snowball" effect – the longer and more often you use advertising and marketing, the more familiar you become to your audience.

As we look at some of the most important and effective advertising and marketing tools, you will also be thinking about where to get your advertising done.

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Whatever kinds of advertising you choose, you have many options to have the work done with your budget in mind. The graphic artist that designed your logo can also help you design ads. Your local office supply store or online printing companies can produce most of the printed needs, such as business cards, decals and brochures. Your Chamber of Commerce will help you find local companies for larger or more complex marketing needs, such as vehicle graphics. You will also find online companies that offer these services. Ask the companies you work with if they offer a small business startup package. Shop around!

### YOUR UNITS

Your portable sanitation business has one of the best advantages in advertising – the units themselves. Every unit should have a decal or sticker with your logo prominently displayed. It's free advertising at every site in your service area! Search the internet (try "portable sanitation decals") for companies that specialize in this type of decal.



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### **YOUR VEHICLES**

Your logo on your truck and other vehicles is like a portable billboard that travels throughout your service area. The advertising on your vehicle becomes more effective when people see it on a regular basis because they will realize your company is a steady, reliable performer.

Owner-operators like to get creative with the graphics on their vehicles. One business had a big sign on the trailer all summer that said, "We're going to a Party." It was definitely noticed, and he heard comments from hundreds of people!

### **BUSINESS CARDS**

The benefit of business cards is that they are personal. Your business card is like a handshake or a face-to-face meeting. Even in the world of smartphones, they can make a difference in winning and keeping customers. The key to using business cards is to give them out as often as possible. Always have them on hand – it shows that you are prepared. When you send a bill or a letter as part of your business, include a card.

You may also want business envelopes and stationery with your logo to match your business cards.

### **ADS**

You should have a basic ad that you can place in the Yellow Pages (and online Yellow Pages), construction newsletters, real estate guides, Chamber of Commerce newsletters and "Services for Hire" classifieds.



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The most effective ads can be very simple. Along with your logo (name, phone, website), you can list your services and advantages, perhaps add a photo. You can create a slightly different ad to target a specific audience, like the construction market or event and wedding planners.

When placing ads, think ahead. For example, special event planners might start reserving portable sanitation units eight months or so in advance of their busy season.

### MAILINGS AND EMAILS

When you mail some marketing information to a current or potential customer, it is called direct mail marketing or advertising. Today, direct mail also includes email. It's another helpful resource to maintain a line of communication with your market.

As your business grows, you should create a mailing list of every customer you serve or have served, or every potential customer, and stay in touch with them on a regular basis. You can let them know, for example, that you have added to your service capabilities or are offering a special promotion. When you send any business-related



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email, you can add your logo to your "electronic signature."

You might even consider using an email marketing service such as Constant Contact, GetResponse or MailChimp.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

If you are web savvy, look into using social media sites for small business owners. You can create a company page on Facebook Business and LinkedIn, use YouTube for Business or get a free business listing on Google My Business.

You may not personally like social media, but it's very important in today's marketplace. It's one of the main tools for your company to get noticed by people searching the internet. Having a social media page does more than just let you post events, blogs and information to your customers. It can also help you get ranked higher by search engines.

### **YOU!**

You can be your own best advertising and marketing. Join your local Chamber of Commerce, service clubs and business organizations. Offer your services to charitable organizations.

There are many other marketing tools you can use, such as brochures, flyers and giveaways. Keep track of your marketing efforts and invest more in what works and less in what doesn't. Continue to experiment with new ideas. The most important question to ask a new customer is, "How did you hear about us?" Keep track of the answers, and see what paid off.

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### Your Website

Yes, you need a website!

Your website is 24/7 marketing for your business. When people see your company name on your truck or unit or see your ad, they will go to your website for more information. It shows customers that you are a reputable business with the services and equipment to do the job right – and the more a customer knows about you, the more you stand out from the competition in their minds.

It will put you on the same level as other portable sanitation companies that have websites and give you an advantage over those that don't.

A simple website with perhaps two or three pages is all you need. It will provide basic information about your company, your services, your equipment and your contact information. You can provide a brief history and show photos. The second page could focus on construction services, and the third could be for special events and parties.

It's easier than ever to create your own website. You don't need a lot of computer experience, and it doesn't cost a lot. It can make a big impact. It's well worth the time and money you put into it.



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Before you start, check out some of your competitors' websites or any small portable sanitation company website for ideas.

If you feel comfortable with your computer skills, you can go to a build-it-yourself site such as Squarespace, Weebly or Wix. Otherwise, ask your Chamber of Commerce for local web designers.

Before you can start building your home on the web, you'll need a web address for it, which is called a domain name. For example, ours is [www.johntalk.com](http://www.johntalk.com). If your company name is Sam's Superior Sanitation, its address might be [www.samssuperiorsanitation.com](http://www.samssuperiorsanitation.com).

Your designer or the build-it-yourself site you work with can help you register your domain name, or you can register it yourself on websites like [GoDaddy.com](http://GoDaddy.com). Site registration usually costs less than \$50 a year.

You'll also want to be able to make small changes to your website as your business grows. Ask your website designer to show you how to make minor changes, or else you will probably be charged whenever a change is needed.

Finally, your website should include a "call to action." This is a simple request to get your customer to act, such as "Call us today!" or "Call us first!" or "Contact us for more information on how we can serve you."

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