

THE 360 BUYER'S GUIDE TO

Better Cleaning Services

*Things That Anybody Buying Cleaning Services
Needs to Know Before Going to Market*



Created by



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OFFICE CLEANING SERVICES INTRODUCTION

Just imagine what the typical office building would look like without professional cleaning services. There would be trash piling up, dirty bathrooms, and rugs that need vacuuming so badly you wouldn't even want to walk on them. So choosing the right cleaning company for your particular situation is more important than you may have realized. Should it be one of those giant national chains or a smaller-sized company with strong ties to a specific region? The purpose of this booklet is to share information so you can make the most informed decision when choosing your next cleaning service.



COMMON COMMERCIAL CLEANING SERVICES



THE BASICS

Different companies offer different services, but almost all of them perform the most common day-to-day janitorial duties such as:

- Dusting
- Restroom cleaning
- Trash removal
- Restocking paper and soap products
- Glass cleaning
- Vacuuming and moping floors

Cleaning companies perform any number of these services depending on your business' needs. If you have a smaller facility with only 30 employees, you may only need trash taken out a couple of times per week and with an occasional vacuuming. Larger facilities that have a higher number of employees, clients, and visitors frequenting their company will probably need a daily cleaning that can keep pace with their more demanding needs. Some facilities may also require day porters and day staff. These are companies that value a clean, professional appearance and want to appeal to both internal and external clients. Because every company has a different culture, a different budget and uses their facility slightly different, you are the one that knows yours needs best. For example, you might choose multiple cleanings per day including day porters cleaning throughout the workday and the standard cleaning crew working at night.

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Most cleaning services will be able to clean any type of commercial facility. However, certain industries - especially healthcare - have specialized cleaning requirements. If relevant, make sure the cleaning company is well trained on how to clean your environment (e.g. biohazardous materials such as bodily fluids) before awarding any contracts.

SPECIAL SERVICES




In addition to basic day-to-day cleaning, many commercial cleaning services can provide special tasks. Special services run the gamut from the labor intensive like stripping and waxing tile floors to those that prolong the life of expensive office furniture.

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Special services may take several hours and even days, depending on the size and complexity of the project. They include:

- Washing exterior windows
- Dusting ceilings and light fixtures
- Pressure washing outside of building
- Painting
- Lighting Maintenance
- General Building Maintenance Services
- Emergency Clean-up
- Carpet extracting Grouting tiles

It's always a good idea to set up these services well in advance to give the cleaners enough time to get the job done without disrupting work areas or employees. You should also note that some cleaning companies require that you have a contract for regular cleaning services before they will perform these



TIP

CONTRACT REVIEW

PROBLEM: Many companies try to trap customers with confusing and sometimes misleading contracts. This is especially true with franchise companies. They may have a clause that you can only cancel the current franchisee but the franchisor has the right to continue to bring in other franchisee companies. This process can sometimes take six months before you can fire the company, and as you know, in business wasted time means wasted money.

SOLUTION: Never agree to more than a 30 day cancellation period. If a cleaning company is that good let them prove it by trapping you with good service so you don't want to cancel.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

CHOOSING CLEANING COMPANIES

When choosing a cleaning service, sometimes a company's initial thinking is "the bigger the better." After all, if a company can boast of having branches coast to coast, they must be the best choice, right? In fact, this is not necessarily true at all. It turns out that size isn't what truly matters. Having a company that hires competent, well-trained staff is far more important.



One of the advantages of large cleaning companies is that they usually have more technologically advanced equipment. For a small office building, a cleaning company that uses basic equipment and supplies may be all that is required, but

the value of using good equipment should never be underestimated. It can often lead to improved health and a better working environment. For example, older and simpler vacuum cleaners merely throw the dust back into the air, while vacuums with advanced filtration (HEPA) systems eliminate it entirely. Remember, it is the small particles that you *can't* see that lurk about inside of a building and can damage people's lungs.

Moreover, some of the smaller "mom and pop" cleaning services don't approach the business with the scientific approach that well-established mid and large sized companies do. It may just be someone who lost their job and decided to go into the cleaning business to make ends meet. There's nothing wrong with that, but a company that has been in the business for many years will be far more likely to understand and adhere to standards of professionalism and excellence that newcomers and smaller players will never come close to providing.

FROM "MOM AND POP" TO BIG OLD DINOSAURS

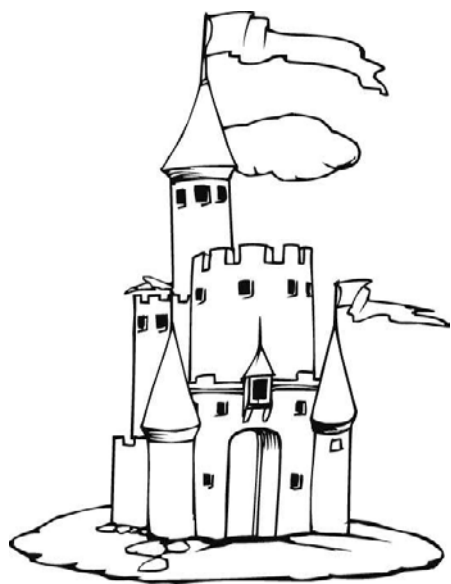
Mom and Pop Cleaning Services – These are generally small operators with less than 50 employees. Typically they are OK for smaller buildings, and can handle basic cleaning tasks well enough. However, because of their built-in limitations, they often are not positioned well to respond to emergencies and unexpected changes of circumstances. They also may struggle with keeping up on regulatory changes in their industry.



Mid-sized, Locally based Cleaning Services – These are companies that use modern, sophisticated equipment, and have sufficient employees to satisfy the cleaning needs of even large facilities, including maintenance and fast response times when there are problems. They usually have earned a good reputation within a specific locale and are able to provide clients with attentive service. In most situations they will give you the attention of a small company with the same resources of the large national companies. Because of their size, they are more adaptable when it comes to implementing the newest trends in their industry.



Large National and Regional Cleaning Services – This would include major players such as ABM, Eures, Harvard, Varsity and a handful of others. These giants of the industry (sometimes referred to as big old dinosaurs) offer some obvious advantages since, because of their size, they are able to handle even the biggest accounts, including mammoth facilities and just about any special need. The drawback, however, is that if you are not one of their larger accounts (and some are well over \$1,000,000 per year) you may not be considered a high priority.



Franchise Cleaning Services – There are many of these in business today, such as Jani-King and Coverall. Typically these are small companies that may have the appearance of being “big” because of their association with the franchise. But the franchisor usually only trains the franchisee, and not the employees. Moreover, much of the money that the franchisee earns goes directly towards paying royalty fees to the franchisor, which drives the franchisee’s costs up. This squanders financial resources that the franchisee could (and should) be spending on clients.

BEFORE YOU START TO SHOP

The bottom line is, before speaking with any cleaning company, first you want to address some pertinent questions. What type of cleaning do you need done? Does your building have any needs that are out of the ordinary? How many days per week will you require service? The answers to these and other important questions will help you to determine what kind of cleaning service you should consider engaging.

RELIABILITY AND REPUTATION

You should always carefully look into the cleaning company’s reputation in your community. How long have they been in business? Do their references check out? If they are any good they will give you at least five solid references. Phone some of their current clients and find out about their customer experience. You will often find that the **mid-size, locally owned companies have proven themselves time and again as being both reliable and affordable**. Still, the best advice is to put in the time to do all the necessary due diligence, just as you would with any other important business decision.

INSURANCE

Insurance is never important until something gets lost, stolen, or broken. Hopefully, good luck finds you and you enjoy a long and prosperous relationship with all your vendors never having to deal with an insurance loss. However, when it does happen, you don't want to have that sinking feeling of not knowing if and what type of insurance your cleaning company had. So here are 4 basis types of coverage to look for:



TYPES OF INSURANCE

- **General Liability Insurance** helps protect your assets by providing a first line of defense against a variety of claims for alleged negligence or wrongdoing by your Cleaning Company. Your cleaning company should have a minimum of \$1,000,000 of general liability insurance.
- **Workers Compensation Insurance** covers a job-related accident that injures, disables, or kills an employee. Regardless of who was at fault, Workers Compensation insurance will compensate them, or their heirs, for their loss. This coverage is a form of “social insurance” designed to provide benefits to injured workers as quickly as possible, without drawn-out litigation. Workers Comp Insurance covers employees at your place of business, and during business-related travel (for example, a cleaning person driving to your facility). *Please be sure to verify that their coverage is at least \$1,000,000 on the insurance certificate.*

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- **Umbrella Policies** cover all losses in excess over General Liability, Workers Compensation and Auto Liability Insurance. Businesses of any size are increasingly vulnerable to multi-million-dollar court decisions. If the actions of your cleaning company resulted in a single, unforeseen event that left your company facing a catastrophic financial judgment, a Commercial Umbrella Liability (Excess Liability) insurance policy could save the day — and keep you in business. This policy takes over where coverage under the other Liability policies stops, paying large judgments and providing legal defense costs. Think of it as providing a layer of “rainy day” protection.
 - *For instance, if your cleaning company has \$1 million in General Liability coverage and you have a claim settlement resulting from their work for \$2.5 million, their Commercial Umbrella would pick up the additional \$1.5 million, plus legal expenses.*



You should demand at least \$5,000,000 of Umbrella Coverage on their insurance certificate.

- Automobile Liability Insurance protects people and property from accidents that occur involving your cleaning company's auto fleet. Because they drive vehicles to and on your premises they need this type of coverage. In today's litigious world, your cleaning company's employees getting behind the wheel can all too easily put your business at risk. Because you don't oversee the way they operate company their vehicles, or how other drivers will behave, requiring them to have a Commercial Auto Insurance Policy can help protect the assets of your company and provide peace of mind.

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PRECAUTIONS TO MAKE SURE YOU GET THE RIGHT CLEANING COMPANY

5 Steps to getting the right Cleaning Company:

1. Check their insurance and bonding - proof that the cleaning service put money into escrow as protection against failing to deliver their services or damaging any of your property.
2. Don't hesitate to ask for proof of background checks and results of drug tests they require of their employees. It is your right to feel confident about who has access to and is working in your building after hours.
3. Make sure that there is a live person available in case you have questions or concerns about your cleaning services. The last thing you want is to always be talking only to a machine!
4. Be very careful when it comes to contracts. Make sure that everything you want (and nothing that you *don't* want) is clearly spelled out in writing.
5. Above all, make sure to get information on the cleaning company's quality of work, customer service practices, and reliability. Hiring the wrong cleaning company can kill your budget if property is lost, stolen or damaged.



Get an up-to-date Proof of Insurance or an Insurance Certificate.

An authentic Insurance Certificate meets the following criterion:

- It has an expiration date.
- Will list your company's name.
- Will list the BSC's name as the insured.
- List the insured limits.

Make sure that it is mailed or transmitted electronically directly from the insurance carrier. You don't want to find out after a major loss that any information on the Insurance Certificate was altered.

ILLEGAL WORKERS

Some of these precautions may seem obvious – but other pitfalls are not quite so readily apparent. Take, for example, the whole phenomenon of cleaning companies that try to cut corners by hiring illegal workers. Hiring a cleaning company can cost you more than you ever bargained for if you fail to do your homework first. If they are hiring illegal workers trying to cut costs, don't be lured in by the artificially low price. Not only are they breaking the law, but when they get caught it could have far-reaching consequences for you and your company. Both financially and in terms of reputation, this short-sighted attempt to save a few dollars can spell disaster for a business.





So, what exactly is an “illegal worker”? Yes, there are millions of people in the United States illegally, or without proper documentation, and we hear about this issue all of the time because it is a political football and heavily covered by the media. But the definition also includes workers who are intentionally (in most cases) misclassified as “independent contractors” when they are in fact employees.

Unfortunately, this practice has become widespread in the United States. In fact, a University of Missouri study demonstrated that there was a steep incline of 55% in misclassifications between 2001-2006. Why? For many unscrupulous contractors, they realize that they can save themselves 40% by not having to pay taxes, Social Security and worker’s compensation. That gives them an edge over legitimate contractors that play by the rules and classify employees as employees. But it is unfair to both the workers and to the companies that these contractors provide services for throughout the country.

The federal government’s crackdown on illegal workers – and those contractors and companies that hire them – is intense and ongoing. In late November of 2011, for example, police in Detroit arrested a manager at Grigg Box Company on criminal charges of knowingly accepting false documentation in the course of hiring 35 workers. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of up to ten years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. Talk about crime doesn’t pay!

TIP: How can you protect yourself from a potentially hiring an illegal worker?

Make sure any contractors you use are using the Federal Government’s E-Verify service that helps assure they only use legal workers. You can go to <http://www.numbersusa.org/everify> see if they are signed up for the system

FULL DISCLOSURE PRICING



Every cleaning company really only has one thing to sell: their labor. So if the price appears to be too good to be true, run in the opposite direction. In this industry, like all others, you get exactly what you pay for.

For example, when trying to sell you their services, if a cleaning company tells you that they can do it for half the price of what you've been paying, you need to ask them: how? Does that mean they will be working half as many hours on your building? In other words, if you're switching companies because you are dissatisfied with your current service, how can a different company do a better job for half the fee? If they are a reputable cleaning service, they should be willing to let you know how your money will be spent and how their employees will be compensated. When you think about it, a cleaning service is a trustee of your cleaning budget, so it is your right to know how the money that you pay will be spent on your behalf. They should be willing to show you that their employees are paid what the company says they are paid, and that they use the equipment that they say they will use when cleaning your building.

This is important because, unfortunately, there are those in the cleaning industry who will not hesitate to “cut corners” or even break the law if they believe this will give them an unfair advantage over their competitors. Asking the right questions, however, will give you the assurance and peace of mind that you are contracting with a trustworthy and reliable professional cleaning company.

But there is much more than just price to consider. You have to also be a good fit with your cleaning services company, and the contract must be written in such a way that you are able to withdraw from it without penalty if you are unhappy with the job done. Otherwise, you could still end up owing the money due on the contract even after you've canceled it.

COMMERCIAL CLEANING TIPS

In the end it is all about their employees. So you like the sales person that came out to pitch you on why their company is the best? That's great, but in the end it's not about the salesman, four color glossy brochures, big websites, bright blue vacuum cleaners, or the next environmentally perfect miracle cleaner. What really



matter are the people that a cleaning company brings into your facility at night, when you may not be there, to clean. So here are some questions you might consider asking to find out what type of employees they hire:

1. What if any employee recognition programs do you have?
2. Where do you find good employees?
3. What type of prescreening do you perform before hiring employees?
4. Do you have a documented training program?
5. What type of benefits do you provide your employees?
6. What does your company do to promote safety?

You can never ask too many questions regarding how a cleaning company interacts with their employees. Cleaning companies are about their ability to recruit and retain people. Those companies that are passionate about people are the ones that will be the most capable of cleaning your building. So ask yourself while you're interviewing cleaning companies, "Are you excited about your people?"

ABOUT STATHAKIS:

Stathakis is a cleaning company that:



- Gives businesses healthy work environments.
- Shows businesses metrics to measure cleaning performance.
- Helps businesses adjust for their facility's changing needs.
- Provides business with one stop Building Service solutions.

Based in Trenton, Michigan, Stathakis can be found at Stathakis.com

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