

YES, YOU CAN MAKE MONEY AS AN INDEPENDENT MOBILE RV TECHNICIAN

The RV Technician Association of America

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Introduction

Following the recessions of 2001, 2009 and 2020, one thing was certain: Regardless of what you did for a living, your job was not safe. It never really is. Your job could come to an end at any moment through no fault of your own.

That's why you need a business that you alone control so you can't be fired, laid off or stuck in a dead-end job. That way, if anything happens to your primary job, the biggest impact on your life will be deciding how to celebrate this new direction.

A side business is a wonderful way to grow a secondary income without putting everything on the line to jump right into launching a full-time business. It's about having options and giving you more control over the direction of your life. After all, who cares more about you and your family than you do?

Here are some other benefits of having a side business:

- More money for savings or your retirement account.
- More money to pay off bills so you can enter retirement totally debt free.
- More time to enjoy the things you want to do when you want to do them.
- More money for fun!

This booklet explores the option to start a business diagnosing and repairing recreation vehicles (RVs).

If you have good attention to detail, a nose for troubleshooting, an interest in all things mechanical and a desire to provide a valuable service to grateful people, then this business might be for you. With some training and hands-on experience, you can likely repair the majority of problems most RV owners will experience with their rigs.

You are not confined to a physical shop that you must rent, insure by the month and staff during business hours. Nor do you need special licenses, other than a standard business license.

As a mobile RV service technician, you take your shop to your customers. By doing so, you save them a lot of time driving to a repair facility and leaving their RVs for weeks at a time, only to pick them up again. Most of the repairs you do can be done the same day – many in less than a few hours.

As you read this booklet, I am convinced you will see the potential of owning a mobile RV service business. I, along with the rest of the staff at the National RV Training Academy and the RV Technician Association of America, stand ready to help get you started the right way in a very lucrative business, whether you opt to do it full- or part-time.

You've been thinking about "doing something." Perhaps you've been praying for an answer to a financial challenge. Maybe you're just tired of going through the motions at a dead-end job and you're looking for something that really ignites your spirit to give you hope for a better future.

Whatever your motivation may be for investigating this business, we'll open the door for you. Then, when you're ready, we'll help you take the next steps to turn this idea into reality. So, buckle up, this could be an amazing adventure!

TERRY "COOPER" COOPER
President
RV Technician Association of America

The Need for Mobile RV Technicians

RVs are wonderful vehicles for providing housing when people are traveling. They have kitchens, living areas, bedrooms and, most importantly, bathrooms. They provide all the modern conveniences of a home away from home.

But they break – and break often!

That should come as no surprise considering RVs endure hurricane-force winds combined with earthquake-like bumps, twists and turns whenever they are on the road. Anything that goes wrong with a house and car will almost certainly go wrong with an RV.

Almost every RV owner maintains a steady list of problems that need to be addressed at some point. The biggest challenge is finding a way to get them fixed.

Overwhelming demand

The service centers at RV dealerships are overwhelmed with demand. First, they must ensure all new and used RVs offered for sale are ready to be delivered to buyers. With record demand for RVs, the service side of an RV dealership is swamped just by providing support services to the sales department.

RVs must be inspected upon delivery from the factory. It takes about four days from the moment a chassis is placed on the assembly line until the finished RV rolls out the other end. While some manufacturers have rigorous quality control checks, others aren't as diligent. Undoubtedly, something will be missed in the construction process.

Frequently, substitutions are made on the spot if the supply of components runs out while the RV is being built. Or, worse, an item is not installed at all and a note is made to "fix it at the end." But, the repair is sometimes overlooked before the RV is rushed to a dealership's sales lot.

That's why dealership technicians often boast they are the final 20 feet of the assembly line. Those technicians are responsible for catching and fixing problems overlooked at the manufacturing plant. Once customers buy an RV, they don't like to wait long before they can use their investment. Nor do RV dealers like delays that interfere with completing a sale and delivery.

So a dealership technician's first priority is to evaluate RVs upon arrival, spruce them enough to put them on the sales floor, then fix them up some more before the RV is actually delivered to a customer.

Warranty service

Dealership technicians are required to perform warranty work to fix problems not resolved by the manufacturer or dealer before the unit was sold. Whether it is a new or used RV, the buyer will always compile a punch list of problems needing repair after just the first time the RV is used. It never fails.

While a pre-delivery inspection generally catches bigger problems with the RV, the new owner will discover several more issues when the RV is put to use.

Very little ticks off a new owner more than dreaming for years about buying an RV, then finally scraping up enough money to acquire one, only to have it break on the first or second time out, and having to wait weeks to get their unit repaired.

It tends to generate some rather negative word-of-mouth advertising for the dealership and the manufacturer. So, dealership technicians work expeditiously to complete warranty repairs in a timely manner.

Too many customers

Existing customers are the third group of people who tend to occupy a dealership technician's time. The dealer wants to keep his customers very happy in hopes they will trade in their RVs to buy newer units at a later date. So when existing customers have a problem, they move to the front of the line for getting RVs fixed – right behind new buyers and warranty work.

But, even then, it can take up to 13 weeks just to get a service appointment during peak times of the camping season. That takes a big bite out of a family's summer plans. If a customer takes an RV out on Memorial Day weekend, he or she certainly doesn't want to wait until Labor Day to be able to use the RV again. Even waiting four to six weeks for an appointment during a short summer season is not a good situation.

That means there are very few repair options for customers who can't get service appointments at the dealership which sold them the RV. It's also difficult to get appointments when traveling away from their home area. For example, a family from Michigan that encounters a problem during a trip to Yellowstone will have a very difficult time getting anything fixed until they return home.

Dealership service departments are overwhelmed with demand and, sadly, they can't keep up. It's rare to see an RV dealership expanding its number of service bays. Despite steadily-rising RV sales, the number of available service bays has remained constant for many years.

The RV Industry Association estimates there are more than 11.2 million RV owning households in America as of 2021. There are less than 1,000 professional full-time RV dealerships. Doing simple math shows that there is one RV dealership for every 11,000 RV owners.

However, there is such an industry-wide shortage of trained or even uncertified technicians that most dealerships couldn't hire more if they wanted to.

Low pay

Once hired, RV dealership technicians don't often make a lot of money until they have several years of experience under their belts. That's likely because they learn on-the-job. A new technician will be taught how to resolve one issue, and then be assigned problems of that type until he or she masters the skill and can move on to something more challenging.

According to OwlGuru.com, most new dealership technicians make \$12 to \$15 per hour, or just over \$30,000 per year. That's hardly enough to support a single person, let alone a family. The website noted RV service technicians with little to no experience tend to make between \$25,670 and \$31,320 while the more experienced ones can earn over \$48,280 per year..

In fact, the top 10% of RV service technicians make \$58,750 per year, which is about \$28 per hour. Those are often technicians with 10 years of experience or more.

What's even sadder is that dealerships bill customers an average of \$150 per hour to have RVs fixed – or \$122 per hour more than the highest-paid technicians.

Frustrating experience

For consumers, getting an RV fixed is an exercise in frustration. As mentioned earlier, it can take weeks just to get an appointment. If they are lucky enough to score an appointment, the customers must stow all their belongings in order to drive the RV to a dealership.

It is unlikely that the problems will be fixed while the customer waits, which means that someone has to accompany the customer to the dealership just to take the RV driver home. When the repair is done, the driver must get back to the dealership to pick up the RV and drive it back home or to a storage lot.

The situation is even worse for full-time RVers. The RV is their home and if they can't stay in the RV while it is being repaired, they must incur the expense of finding a hotel and moving all their essential belongings out of the RV. They also have to disconnect from all utilities, bring in the slideout rooms and raise the levelers before moving the RV.

In short, taking an RV to a dealership is a real inconvenience. That's why many RV owners are turning to mobile RV service technicians to fix problems on location, whether it is at a campground, storage unit or the owner's home.

Mobile technicians to the rescue

Consumers will generally pay the same amount of money to have a mobile technician come to their location to repair an RV as they would pay at a dealership. In fact, to avoid the hassle of taking an RV to a dealership, consumers are often willing to pay a service fee for the convenience of an on-site repair.

A trained and certified RV mobile service technician can show up, quickly diagnose the problem, complete the repair – or repairs – and move on without inconveniencing an RV owner in any way.

- Air conditioner stops working? The technician replaces the capacitor on site.
- Water pump stops working? A new one can be installed in minutes.
- Furnace doesn't light? Blowing out the LP gas line often does the trick.
- No power to the RV? Sometimes it takes longer to diagnose the problem than it does to replace the faulty component.

The bottom line is there is rarely a need for an RV to go into a shop for repairs to be completed. Removing a slideout or completing extensive roof repairs are examples of issues where an RV dealership would need to fix the unit. Consequently, many RV owners see mobile service technicians as real heroes and worth the cost of an on-site visit.

Types of technicians

There are three types of RV technicians based on the amount of training and experience they have acquired.

Registered RV technicians are capable of doing basic maintenance which many RV owners don't want to do themselves. So, those owners are willing to pay someone to do the work for them to ensure it is done properly. Registered RV technicians can also evaluate simple systems to ensure they are work as intended. For example, they are familiar with the three types of power onboard every RV:

- 120-volt AC system – Electricity used to operate appliances, lights, televisions, etc., whenever the RV is plugged into a power pole.
- 12-volt DC home system – This includes things that run off a bank of batteries to provide creature comforts, like lights, even when the RV isn't plugged in.
- 12-volt DC auto system – These items operate off a standard automotive battery, like leveling jacks, and a motorhome's engine.

Registered RV technicians also have a basic understanding of propane systems used to deliver fuel to the oven, furnace and an absorption refrigerator.

Certified RV service technicians have extra training and really know how to evaluate the inner workings of a recreation vehicle. In fact, they can fix nearly 80 percent of problems most RVers encounter with their motorhomes and travel trailers. They have additional training to understand:

- RV heat pumps and air conditioners
- RV exterior systems
- RV absorption refrigerators
- RV water heaters and furnaces
- RV generators
- RV solar systems

With the added knowledge, certified mobile service technicians can fix just about anything that goes wrong with an RV. There are still some major repairs which will require hydraulic lifts, such as the ability to remove slideout rooms, or a place to store an RV out of the elements while replacing its roof or sidewall. However, certified mobile technicians should be able to correct other problems right on site.

Master certified RV service technicians have years of experience and are often tasked with overseeing certified and registered techs. You'll often see master certified technicians at RV dealerships where they oversee an entire service department.

To attain that credential, certified technicians have to complete continuing education courses, put in five years of work and pass a test.

Testing and credentials

The RV Technician Association of America (RVTAA) is one of two certification entities working within the RV industry. Its primary focus is to support independent mobile service technicians, although many of its members also work at RV dealerships. The association provides assistance to individuals seeking to get jobs in the RV industry.

The RV Dealers Association (RVDA), working in cooperation with the RV Industry Association (RVIA), has also developed a certification program to train and test technicians already working at dealerships. Most of its training takes place online or at larger RV dealerships and is generally available only to RVDA and RVIA members.

To attain RVTAA certification, all training takes place at the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA) in Athens, Texas. With a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on labs, students learn the principles of RV repair, but also enhance that knowledge through instructor-guided hands-on exercises. The personalized training provides practical, real-world experience in diagnosing problems and fixing them correctly the first time. The technicians also gain experience working with a variety of component brands.

After completing the RV Fundamentals class, all students can take a test to get credentialed as an RVTAA Registered Technician. With an additional four weeks of advanced training, students can take another test to become RVTAA Certified Technicians. By completing continuing education classes and accumulating five years of on-the-job experience, students can take a different test to become RVTAA Master Certified Technicians.

Is this a full- or part-time business?

The beauty of launching a mobile RV service business is that you can put in as much time as you would like, based on your availability.

So, if you have a full-time job and can only do repairs on your days off, it is still possible to enjoy a very good income.

Later in this booklet, you'll discover how much money you can make doing just one or two repairs per week. For many families, an extra \$500 per month can buy a lot of breathing room in making ends meet. By doing mobile RV services, you can make even more than that on just a part-time basis.

If your situation allows you to jump right into the opportunity on a full-time basis, you'll discover you can make more than \$100,000 in your first year.

People who are fortunate enough to have a full-time job with flexible hours, like firefighters who work 24 hours on and have two or three days off, will find a mobile RV service business fits nicely into that schedule, too.

As with any business, your potential is determined by your desire to be in business, and the amount of effort you put in to making it succeed.

Benefits of a mobile RV service business

Men and women of all ages are taking training and starting mobile RV service businesses around the nation for several reasons:

- Low point of entry – You can be fully certified, acquire all the tools you need, and register your business with government entities for less than \$15,000.
- Completely portable – You can run the business out of your RV or a sticks-and-bricks home wherever you want to live. All you need is a telephone, tablet, laptop computer and printer.
- A high-margin service – Other than travel, marketing and annual membership fees, there are few expenses to offset the income earned from performing mobile RV services.
- Tax benefits – The U.S. Tax Code is set up to reward people who participate in the free enterprise system. With a job, you earn money and pay taxes on the top line. Not so with a small business. You can deduct things like a cell phone, computer, vehicle mileage and even

home office space to reduce the amount of your taxable income. We'll have more on that in a later chapter.

- Unregulated business – Some businesses are so heavily-regulated by government entities that the owner can't blow his nose without submitting a report. A mobile RV service business has no special regulations outside of those applying to all businesses, like having a tax ID number.
- Set your own hours – When you work is a matter between you and your clients. If you don't want to get up at 6 a.m. on a Saturday to complete a repair, then nobody will force you to do so, although you might lose the client.
- Work with whomever you want – As a business owner, you get to choose who to serve. If you get "bad vibes" after talking with a prospective client, nobody is going to force you to accept the job.
- Cash business – You complete a repair and are paid on the spot. Some mobile repair technicians are willing to perform warranty work for customers, which means they can wait up to 150 days for reimbursement from RV manufacturers. But other technicians require customers to pay for the repair up front and seek reimbursement from manufacturers on their own.
- Limited inventory – You don't have to maintain a storeroom full of supplies or shelves of products to sell to customers. Most mobile RV service technicians do maintain an inventory of the most commonly-used RV parts just to be able to provide same-day service to customers. In those instances where special parts are needed, they can be ordered directly from the supplier or a distributor in the quantity required.
- No staff needed – One of the biggest advantages to being a mobile RV technician is that you don't need to hire, train and supervise other people. Employing others opens the door to insane amounts of regulation, government reporting and added costs beyond the wage you would pay.
- Excellent family business – Many technicians work with their spouses or adult children when repairing RVs. One person fixes RVs while the other sets appointments and orders replacement parts. Older children can be helpful in expediting repairs when it would be handy to have extra help, such as replacing an awning.
- No cold calling – You will always want to market your company and the services it provides. But, you don't have to call people out of the blue to offer RV repairs. People who need their RVs fixed are usually desperately look for you. RVTAA will send out notices about people who contact the association looking for technicians, but it is always up to you whether to reach out to those people who are eager to hire someone.

There are few business opportunities that allow people to make as good an income, on their own schedule, working with people they chose, with limited expenses and excellent tax advantages as a mobile RV service business.

The Market for Mobile RV services

By now, you should see why mobile RV services are necessary and how owning a business providing those services is a viable money-making opportunity. But, is there enough demand to warrant your investment of time, money and sweat equity?

Let's look at some of the numbers.

New RV market

According to the RV Industry Association (RVIA), the industry has been surging in recent years, even before COVID-19 shook up the business world. Significant numbers of new RVs were built over the past five years:

2022 = 493,268

2021 = 600,240

2020 = 430,412

2019 = 406,070

2018 = 483,672

2017 = 504,599

2016 = 430,691

In addition, nearly 3,925 park model RVs (tiny fixed-based homes) were built in 2019 with another 4,213 constructed in 2020.

That's more than 7,800 new RVs being built every week, or 1,100 per day. Each one of the new RVs will have problems. Experienced RVers know people should never buy new RVs because they'll spend the next two years shuttling their vehicles back and forth to the dealership to fix a plethora of problems.

Used RV market

The used RV market is even bigger, although nobody can point to a specific number of vehicles sold each year because there is no centralized reporting authority. However, we can make an educated guess.

A company called Statistical Surveys does collect information on RV registrations from state agencies, when allowed. While the firm can't get data from all the states, over the years it has developed a process to estimate numbers in a way that has proven to be very reliable.

According to Statistical Surveys, the number of used RVs sold in the United States over the past four years were:

2023 = 400,579 (through July)

2022 = 853,937

2021 = 950,436

2020 = 781,682

2019 = 729,747

In 2019, there were almost 2,000 used RVs sold in America every day. By 2022, that number had climbed to 2,340.

By adding just 2,000 used RVs sold to the 1,100 brand new units being built daily, that means there are more than 3,000 recreation vehicles every day that will require some type of repair just to prepare them for sale or to fix issues discovered by the new owners.

For years, RVIA claimed there were 9 million RV-owning households in America. Thanks to COVID, that jumped to 11.2 million in 2021. However, that number rarely fluctuates even with more than 400,000 new RVs being built each year. Why is that?

The units fall apart or burn up to the tune of nearly half a million RVs per year. Perhaps that number would not be nearly as high if there were enough trained, competent RV technicians available to meet consumer demand.

The bottom line is there are a lot of RVs made and resold each year in the United States. Whether new or used, the buyers will eventually need repairs on their motorhomes, fifth wheels or travel trailers.

Just imagine 11 million RV owners looking for repairs, but less than 1,000 dealerships capable of providing the service. But, it's even worse than that. Many of the dealerships only have a few service bays, which is barely enough for them to process RVs arriving from factories or to prep RVs for delivery to new buyers.

If trained and certified technicians were available, the RV industry could absorb 10,000 of them immediately. The opportunities for making money by providing mobile RV service are without limit and will likely remain that way for many years. Your income is limited only by the amount of time you wish to invest in building your business. In a later chapter, you will see how to market your business without spending a lot of money.

Competition among technicians

The RV Technician Association of America (RVTAA) provides certification credentials to people performing mobile RV service throughout the United States. Yes, there are some independent technicians offering their services. But without the certification, they lack the marketing advantages and credibility afforded to RVTAA Certified Technicians.

According to the National RV Training Academy, approximately 50 new technicians are added to the ranks every two months. Some of them are performing repairs full time, while others are looking for part-time income.

That may seem like a lot, but when there are more than 7,000 new RVs being built every week, the market is pretty much wide open for entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

RVTAA maintains a map showing the location of trained mobile service technicians in North America. There are trained technicians working at RV dealerships, but when exploring a business to provide mobile service, it's important to evaluate the number of independent RV technicians in a market area.

As expected, larger metropolitan regions tend to draw more technicians than rural parts of a state. Your market area will be defined by how far you are willing to travel to complete a repair.

To evaluate your own market area, do an internet search to count the number of:

- RV dealers in a 25-, 50- and 100-mile radius. That helps you gauge demand for new and used recreation vehicles being sold in that area.
- RV repair centers and mobile service technicians within the same radius. This helps gauge the level of interest in RVing in your market.
- RV technicians in your area. You might have to look up similar terms, like “rv technicians near me” and “rv repair services.” You can ignore RV dealers appearing in the results.
- Motorhomes and travel trailers registered in your state. Most motor vehicle departments make that data available annually, if not each month. If RVs are being registered, that means they are being used and, if they are being used, they are going to require repair.
- RV storage facilities. If people aren’t actively using RVs, they’ll store them. If they store them too often or for too long, they’ll eventually wind up selling them rather than continue to incur monthly costs of ownership.

That should help you gauge the size of the RV repair market in your area – or in any area, if you’re looking to relocate. But, remember, you determine your market size by how far you are willing to travel to make a repair.

What Does Mobile RV Service Involve?

Repairing an RV isn't too complicated once you've been trained to properly diagnose and repair one. Let's look at the typical steps involved in providing mobile repair service.

Step 1 – Set the appointment

A potential customer will often call or send an email to report a problem or request some type of routine maintenance be performed, such as winterizing an RV before it goes into storage. Some technicians accept all incoming calls all the time, even when they are working on another unit, while other techs simply allow customers to leave a message.

Some techs employ their spouse or a friend to answer calls or respond to emails for them. Regardless of who responds to the request, an appointment must be made and that involves getting the customer's name, address, phone number and a brief description of the type of service which may be needed. It also includes noting the equipment brand, age or a specific model number.

That way you can ensure parts are on hand to complete a repair the same day of the appointment. Occasionally, you may find it helpful to speak to a customer directly to ask specific questions in order to get a better idea of what might be needed in terms of parts, tools or specific technical knowledge.

Step 2 – Confirm the appointment

To ensure an RV owner will be on site when you arrive, a phone call or email reminder may help. Whether the appointment is confirmed the day before or a few hours before is based on your preference. You'll want to confirm the appointment so you don't drive to the site only to discover the RV owner forgot, had the wrong time or is away from home.

RVTAA recommends making confirmations by email to ensure that a thorough record is retained.

Step 3 – Diagnose the problem

If called to fix a specific problem, you will want to effectively diagnose the situation before attempting a repair. It's important to not just take a customer's word that prior maintenance had been performed, rather you should actively verify that's really the case. To do this, you will test all the necessary components and, when necessary, consult with service manuals to zero in on the problem.

Good diagnosis is what separates professionals from amateurs who just try different solutions until they stumble upon one that works. A good diagnosis also saves you a lot of time. When there are five potential reasons causing a problem, and you can legitimately rule out four of them, then fixing the issue will be much easier.

Having good diagnostic tools is essential. You'll want to invest in professional-grade testing equipment and reliable tools. For example, you won't want to unscrew something with a pliers. Professional tools enable you to work faster and move on to the next job, which allows you to make more money over the course of a day, especially when billing people at the industry's book rate for a repair.

Step 4 – Make the repair

Once you know what is needed to correct a problem or perform maintenance, then you simply go about making it happen. That may involve removing and replacing a problem part, resealing a crack or rip, fixing a hole, or lubricating a joint or another mechanism.

When replacing parts, some states require technicians to return old parts to customers.

Step 5 – Verify the repair

The last thing you want to do is make a return visit, often at your own expense, to address a problem everyone thought had been fixed. So, before leaving, make sure the equipment is working as it should, and that the customer can get it to work the same way.

It's important that both you and the customer agree the water is running again, the air conditioner is blowing cold air, the power comes on, the stove top ignites, the furnace heats, the refrigerator is cooling, etc. By having customers verify a problem is resolved, you don't get into situations where a client can later say, "I thought you said the problem was fixed."

Step 6 – Prepare an invoice

As a business, it is essential that you maintain proper records of every transaction with a customer. There are several advantages to preparing invoices for every repair job.

First, it establishes you as a professional business owner. Fly-by-night technicians and amateurs may agree to fix a problem for cash under the table, but issuing an invoice indicates you are serious about your business as well as the desire to document each transaction. You can still accept cash as a form of payment, but you should still make a record of the sale.

Second, you can avoid "imperial entanglements," to quote a line from Star Wars. Verifiable income and expenses help at tax time, but also makes a business legitimate in the government's eyes. It also works to secure legal protections small business owners enjoy. If you are ever sued for some reason, having written records conveys a sense of professionalism and provides you with additional protection against a customer suggesting everything was based on a verbal agreement.

Third, if you ever need to get a loan for any reason, the bank may ask you to verify income. Some lenders go to the extreme of requiring self-employed borrowers to submit stacks of invoices over a period of time and even matching those invoices to bank deposits. This proves that you have a regular source of income to repay the loan.

Most small business accounting software programs prepare professional-looking invoices directly from a laptop or mobile app that can either be printed out or emailed directly to a customer.

Fourth, an invoice provides a record of work having been done and on what date. For example, when was the house battery replaced on an RV? The owner knows the work was done, but won't likely remember the date. With all the different jobs you will complete, you likely won't be able to remember specifics of each transaction. Federal law requires business owners to keep all financial records for at least three years from the date income taxes are filed.

Step 7 – Accept payment

Yes! It's time to make the register ring, so to speak. You have a choice of leaving an invoice and hoping the customer pays it within a certain number of days, or installing a piece of equipment on a smartphone

or tablet to scan a customer's credit card on the spot. Most technicians get payment immediately after service work is completed.

The transaction is charged to a customer's credit card and the funds deposited directly into your bank account anywhere from 24 hours to five days later, depending upon the credit card processing service you use.

The processing company will deduct a modest fee of less than 5% in order to accept a credit card, but the remaining amount is automatically forwarded to your account.

Step 8 – Ask for a review

In addition to thanking a customer for trusting you to work on his or her RV, if the experience was mutually positive, be sure to ask the customer to leave a review of the service provided either on Google, Yelp or another preferred site.

This helps you get even more business in the future. Most people are happy to help promote your company when asked to leave a review.

Step 9 – Reorder parts

One of the major benefits to hiring mobile RV technicians is the ability to get problems fixed the same day. That requires technicians to have parts available to complete the repair.

After making an initial investment to acquire common RV parts, maintaining an adequate supply of those parts is easy to do. Simply reorder a replacement as soon as the original part was used.

Some accounting software programs can generate reports showing all parts billed that day. Replacing them is as easy as calling a supplier or going online to submit an order. Many technicians routinely do this at the end of every business day.

Income Potential

So, how much money can really be made by providing mobile RV service services?

People are accustomed to seeing business claims where they can make \$10,000 a month just by stuffing envelopes at home or making \$100,000 working only four hours a week. Few people actually believe that, and those who do are often disappointed.

There is an old proverb that proclaims, “When a man with experience meets a man with money, the man with money gets the experience, and the man with experience gets the money.”

RVTAA’s goal is not to extract money from people, but to help you start a successful business of your own. So, the association is not going to promote overly-inflated income numbers just to sell training courses and memberships. Rather, the goal is to provide you with a reasonable expectation as to what people can make as mobile service technicians.

When you are willing to put in the necessary work, and follow examples set by others who have already traveled the same path, you can enjoy the fruit of your labor. Being an RV technician will require work, sometimes difficult work. But it is possible to make a very good living.

With that in mind, let’s explore the income potential of starting a mobile RV service business.

While you can set your prices at whatever levels you want, there are two common pricing models that technicians generally use in setting fees for services they provide.

Model 1 – Flat rate

This model sets prices at an hourly rate for all repair services and applies that rate to every repair based on the **estimated** amount of time it should take to complete the job.

The RV Dealers Association (RVDA) publishes a Service Management Guide which provides more than 100 pages of average work times for most functions RV technicians perform. It also includes checklists to help estimate the amount of time needed to complete a repair.

So, if the guide indicates it should take 1.25 hours to replace a water pump, and you set your service fees at \$100 per hour, then you know to bill a customer \$125 for the repair plus any needed parts and an on-site service charge. That fee remains constant whether it takes 1.5 hours to do the work or if you can complete the work in less than an hour.

This is the easiest way to estimate repair costs, and one that is generally preferred by RV owners because they know in advance what the final cost will be. It works best for billing a specific repair, such as when a customer simply needs a water pump to be replaced.

It also helps in estimating repair costs because you can look up the price of a part, then check to see how long it should take to install it. By multiplying the time required by your hourly rate, and adding the cost of the part, you should be able to give a customer an accurate estimate.

Model 2 – Hourly rate

This model sets prices at an hourly rate for all repair services and applies that rate to every repair based on the **actual** amount of time it takes to complete the job.

If a problem will require a lot of diagnostic time, this method may be more profitable. For example, if there is a faulty electrical connection somewhere in the RV, you may have to test multiple wires and components in order to zero in on the one item needing to be repaired. The book may say it should take 10 minutes to replace the part, but it may overlook the 90 minutes needed to test all wires first.

If a customer needs multiple items repaired, you may prefer to bill a straight hourly rate knowing that you can often complete multiple repairs at the same time.

For example, if you are going to replace a battery and install a device to allow it to be trickle charged whenever the RV is plugged into shore power, many of the steps indicated in the RVDA Service Management Guide factor in the same times. You will need to disconnect the battery for both jobs, but there is no need to bill the customer twice for one action.

RV owners don't generally like the hourly-rate method because it can lead to surprises when the final bill is presented. They much prefer knowing how much a repair job will cost or at least have a viable range as to what those costs will be.

Add-on services

In addition to evaluating an RV itself, you can make additional money by offering add-on services. Here are just a few optional revenue sources:

Trip charge – This fee is applied to every repair and simply covers the time and mileage needed to drive to a repair site. Think about it this way. If you bill clients at \$100 per hour, you will have downtime while traveling to the next job. If a trip charge is \$50, then that is the minimum amount you will make for the service appointment if all that is required is flipping a circuit breaker or pressing a button to reset a ground fault protection circuit in order to get things working again. Trip charge fees range anywhere from \$49 to \$150 per visit.

Fluid analysis – This is like getting blood tested when you go in for a physical examination. It offers insight into what's really going on inside the RV's engine, transmission and radiator, as well as the onboard generator. A fluid analysis looks at the complex and expensive driveline and power generation components from the inside. It's a whole new level of diagnostics.

You use a special tool to withdraw vials of oil, radiator fluid and transmission fluid. On fifth wheels and motorhomes, samples are taken from the generator, too. Occasionally, samples from tow vehicles are evaluated as well.

Then you send samples to a private laboratory where a series of microscopic tests are performed. For example:

- Oil analysis measures additive levels, wear metals, contaminants (such as water, internal coolant or fuel leaks), soot levels, viscosity, oxidation and nitration. The oil is checked for viscosity loss (thinned out oil) and thermal breakdown (too much heat). It also checks for signs of fuel and coolant mixing, which is caused by faulty injectors or leaking head gaskets. It looks for the presence of nitration, which may indicate improper fuel/air mixtures.
- Coolant analysis measures glycol content, additive levels, freeze point, boiling point, total hardness and dissolved solid levels (mineral content).

- Transmission analysis looks for signs of metal in the fluid, which could indicate a problem when shifting. If there is copper in the fluid, it may indicate a gasket has started to disintegrate.

A fluid analysis will not likely result in you making the repair because it often requires specialized equipment. Yet, the information is nice for RV owners to know so they can plan for major repairs or routine maintenance. Why go to the expense of changing the oil, coolant or transmission fluid if an analysis shows it still has plenty of useful life in it?

Technicians typically charge \$75 for each type of fluid to be inspected, and bundle all five types of RV and generator fluids for \$250.

RV orientations – Once buyers purchase an RV, they need to know how to use it. Many times, dealers will overwhelm buyers with an encyclopedia of information when they pick up an RV, most of which will be forgotten before they drive off the lot. The dealer “walk-through” presentations are rarely recorded and generally last only 30- to 60-minutes.

Technicians have found a lucrative add-on service of conducting detailed orientations to explain how to use a specific RV. It’s one thing for an RV dealer to describe how to dump the holding tanks, but an entirely different matter to have someone standing next to buyers as they connect a sewer hose and flush tanks by themselves.

Showing someone how to lower and raise levelers is helpful, but not nearly as helpful as teaching the nuances that come through experience to know for sure that an RV is level.

These orientations can be conducted at a buyer’s home before their first trip, or you can meet at a local campground and help them set up camp for the first time. Recording the orientations is encouraged so buyers can reference the material when needed.

Some technicians charge by the hour (usually \$50), while others set a flat rate of \$99 to \$199 based on the estimated time.

Dealer repairs – Some RV dealers are so overwhelmed with work that, upon occasion, they will hire mobile service technicians to come to their service centers to repair a customer’s RV. This is especially true if you specialize in a specific type of repair, such as hydraulic levelers. It may be cheaper and faster to bring you in to fix the problem than for a dealership technician to fumble through an unfamiliar repair.

Flipping RVs – You may find a niche in buying used RVs that need work, fixing them up and selling them for a profit. You can buy RVs directly from owners looking to sell their units, or at wholesale auctions. You will need a business license to attend an RV auction.

Bottom line profitability

So, what can you expect to make as a mobile RV service technician?

According to a report submitted by the National RV Training Academy to the Texas Workforce Commission, the average rate for graduates of the program who work as self-employed technicians is \$105 per hour, with a range between \$75 to \$125 per hour. For purposes of comparison, let’s use \$100 per hour for repair services, or factor that fee into flat-rate estimates.

- If you work four hours on a weekend, you should make at least \$400.

- If you work 20 hours a week, you should make \$9,100 per month.
- If you work 40 hours a week without ever taking time off, you would generate \$208,000 a year.

It is no exaggeration that a mobile technician of average skills, working full-time by themselves should easily generate \$100,000 per year, probably higher. It all depends upon how productive you are – and training improves that – as well as the number of customers you want to serve each day.

In addition to the hourly rate for diagnostic and repair services, mobile RV technicians can also make money from the sale of parts. You have the ability to determine the markup added to the cost of those parts. You buy them at wholesale price from a distributor and mark them up anywhere between 40% and 100%, depending upon the part.

Big ticket items, like air conditioners or refrigerators would generally have a lower markup, but other components, such as circuit boards and motors, could be marked up more. That's what RV dealers do all the time.

A self-employed technician ties up his own money to buy parts, especially if the supplier has minimum order policies in place, just to store them on his truck. You should be compensated for investing your own money in order to have a part available when a customer needs it. Consider the mark up to be a convenience fee because an RV owner could order the part himself, wait for it to be delivered and then get it installed.

Leon Booth's experience

Leon Booth has operated Booth RV, a mobile RV service business, in the Midland, Texas, since 2018. He said the problem many new technicians make is complicating the launch of their businesses by waiting for everything to be "perfect." They are too hung up on projecting a certain image when, in reality, as long as the technician knows what he or she is doing, customers will give the tech cash or a credit card after fixing any problems.

When he started, Leon didn't have a logo, professionally-printed business cards or invoices. Nor did he have a work truck with his company's name written on it. He used his own F450 cab and chassis with a fifth wheel hitch on the back, but that made it hard to carry a ladder on the truck.

Still, he used that vehicle to travel from job to job, wrote invoices by hand, and just jotted down his name and number to give to people who may need his services. Yet, he built a solid business as satisfied customers recommended him to other RVer users.

Eventually, Leon had a local artist create a logo which he used to get business cards printed. He also ordered large magnetic signs from VistaPrint to put on his truck doors to advertise his company. He printed up some tri-fold brochures describing the business, his level of expertise and the types of services that Booth RV can provide. He left those brochures in campgrounds and with local RV dealers.

Leon had been in business for two years before he paid \$3,500 in cash to acquire a used Toyota Tacoma work truck from a vehicle wholesaler. He still has that truck today, although he now uses three utility trucks with compartment doors on the outside when making service calls.

He said mobile service technicians should not limit themselves to thinking they can only make a certain amount of money. Demand is so high for mobile repair services that technicians are truly limited in their earning ability only by how often they want to work and by what they charge.

When demand got too much for Leon to handle himself, he hired one of his sons, and then another son a few years later. In 2018, after one of his sons moved to Wisconsin, he hired his daughter-in-law to answer the phone, schedule calls, order parts, do bookkeeping, and deal with warranty companies as well as manufacturers. Later, he hired another technician he knew for more than 35 years. All of them are trained, certified technicians earning a very good living today.

Anthony Montelongo's experience

Anthony Montelongo, a technician working in northern Georgia, owns Certified RV Solutions and charges an hourly rate of \$150 plus a trip fee of \$1.50 per mile, or a minimum of \$50. The trip fee is charged even if he is serving another customer in the same RV park. He also charges a shop fee of 3% of the total invoice to cover routine supplies such as connectors, screws, tapes and lubricants.

If it's an emergency, his after-hours rate is \$200 per hour with a minimum trip charge of \$100.

Anthony said a technician who works part-time and puts in minimal effort to build a business should easily be able to make \$30,000 a year. He feels revenue of \$100,000 annually is achievable by making an effort to market the business to local campgrounds, and paying for some internet advertising. Anthony said technicians can earn even more by being honest and treating people right.

He also invested more money into building his website with search engine optimization in mind so that his company should top of list of results for anyone seeking RV repairs in northern Georgia – without Anthony having to pay extra money for advertising.

Chris Travaglino's experience

Chris Travaglino knows the challenge of finding service on the road very well. He and his wife, Kimberly, founded Fulltime Families. For almost 10 years, they lived in a fifth wheel with their four children.

With no formal training, Chris would often try to diagnose and repair problems with his rig, and those belonging to other RVers. When his kids entered their teens and they desired a more stable life, the Travaglinos opted to sell their business and look for a new opportunity.

That's when Chris decided to take courses at the National RV Training Academy. He was one of the first graduates of that program to complete all five weeks of advanced training. He graduated in December 2018 and launched Travel Tech RV.

He had no idea how quickly his business would develop. But, less than a year later, Chris was earning more than six figures as a mobile technician.

Getting a business license took Chris all of 30 days to complete the application process. With a license in hand, he set up an LLC to give it more structure, legal protection and professionalism. Chris' wife oversees the back-office administration. She handles bookwork, pays the bills and ensures the company remains in compliance with various state agencies. Because he is directly involved with customers, Chris processes invoices directly onsite.

When Chris first set up shop near Miami, he had very little history in the community. However, with a budget of \$20 per day for Google ads, he started getting calls. Repeat business and referrals soon began to increase and, he wasn't as reliant upon Google ads as he first was when first starting out.

It took about seven days to get one customer, but once the ball started rolling, he was soon responding to 10 calls a week. When the weather turns cold in the north and snowbirds migrate to south Florida, referrals from the 15 campgrounds on the east side of the Florida peninsula rise dramatically since there were only four mobile technicians handling jobs within a 90-minute radius at that time.

Eventually, the Travaglinos desired a change. So, they moved their business to North Carolina and started over. Following the same tactics he used to build a business in Florida, Chris soon had as much service work as he desired in their new state.

Ron Denny's experience

After 25 years in the fire service, Ron Denny started a mobile RV repair business near Sacramento, Calif., but demand quickly overwhelmed him.

Since then, he has opted to specialize in appliance repair by tackling 12-volt and 120-volt systems. That generally covers water heaters, furnaces, air conditioners and refrigerators. He also fixes hydraulic and electric leveling systems, plus he can make slideout adjustments.

Even by limiting the scope of repair work he performs, Ron has maintained a consistent workload. In fact, specializing offers a big advantage in that he can complete jobs more quickly. That enables him to make more money by serving more people in the same amount of time.

Ron can be booked out 14 to 21 days without even trying. That's why he began limiting what he does in order to maintain a high level of service.

Ron promotes his business through his own website; however, he gets a substantial number of referrals through his relationship with local RV parts stores. Repeat business accounts for most of the work he performs.

By specializing, Ron also secures referrals from local RV dealerships, who will contract with him to alleviate the workload for their own service departments. Many times, dealerships will call Ron after an RV was sold and moved to a different location. The unit is still covered under warranty, but the customer really doesn't want to bring the RV back to a dealership. So, the dealership's service manager pays Ron to do the work on site to keep their customer happy.

For all of the technicians mentioned above, certification has proven to be gold – literally. Attaining certification opened doors to work at any RV dealership, and gives mobile technicians tremendous credibility for performing RV repairs.

Business Expenses

The income you make as a mobile RV technician is nice, but that must be offset by some expenses. Every business has expenses, and this opportunity is no different. Let's look at some common expenses you may incur in the normal course of doing business.

Estimated start-up expenses

Let's assume you are starting out with nothing but a dream to be in business for yourself, and an idea to make money by fixing RVs. Here is an estimate of what you'll need to acquire before you accept your first client. The estimated prices are current as of September 2023.

Education – The first essential expense is formal training to learn how to be a technician, what tools to use to diagnose a problem, and how to complete a repair. Because certification gives you much more credibility, we'll look at costs to attain that credential. You will need to complete five weeks of intensive, hands-on courses at the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA). Costs associated with that include:

- Tuition, registration, booklets, supplies and exam fees to complete the RV service technician program = \$1,893
- Tuition, registration, booklets, supplies and exam fees to complete the advanced RV service technician program = \$9,042

First-year membership in the RV Technician Association of America is included in the above fees (a \$299 value).

You can always find current rates for NRVTA courses and fees by visiting www.nrvta.com and clicking on Programs, then Course Catalog.

Training-related expenses – In addition to education costs, there will be some training-related expenses associated with getting your certification. They include:

- Tools for proper diagnosing and repair = \$1,500-\$1,900
- Lodging for five weeks = Ranging from \$252 to \$402 per week for an RV site. Cabins are available, too, ranging from \$570 to \$900 per week. Call the Texan RV Park at 903-677-3326 for current rate information.
- Food budget for five weeks at \$25 per day = \$875
- Transportation to get to Athens, Texas, will vary based on preferred mode of travel and distance to get to the NRVTA campus. Our estimates range from \$500 to drive, and \$2,500 to fly into Dallas and rent a car.
- Optional small business home-study course = \$997

Current prices for RV sites and cabins at The Texan RV Park can be found by visiting www.texanrvpark.com and clicking on Rates.

Business license – This is a cost imposed by a local government to give you permission to operate a business within their jurisdiction. You will need to check with your local, county and state agencies to see what fees, if any, they will charge to get a license.

For example, Arizona does not have a statewide requirement for business licenses, but some local municipalities impose license fees. The City of Phoenix requires no license, but the nearby City of Surprise charges \$168 for the first year and \$84 annually to renew it.

Tax Identification Number – Most states require business to pay sales tax on transactions; however, some states impose taxes only on products sold, rather than services rendered. Wisconsin requires \$20 to acquire a business tax number.

Fortunately, the Internal Revenue Service imposes no fees on business owners to get a federal Employer Identification Number (EIN), which is required to pay annual income taxes to various states.

Business insurance – All smart business owners purchase insurance to cover them in case something goes wrong while providing services. Insurance rates will vary upon location and the amount of coverage you will require. Fortunately, you can shop around to get the best rates for the following coverages:

- a. Personal property damage – If you break something on a client's RV.
- b. Personal liability coverage – If someone trips over a cord, ladder or tool you set out.
- c. Professional liability coverage – Protects against any faulty repairs that may cause additional damage to a customer's RV. This type of coverage often provides legal defense against frivolous lawsuits.
- d. General liability – Provides coverage when you're on someone else's property. This is great insurance to have when performing repairs at a campground, storage lot or the RV owner's home. It is also required if you exhibit at a RV show.
- e. Errors and omissions – If you fix an RV and forget to include something important that would normally be included in a repair of that type.
- f. Personal vehicle insurance – You will want to let your insurance company know you are using your personal truck or car for business-related travel. That way, if you are involved in an accident on the way to or from a repair job, you do not want the insurance company to disallow coverage because the firm was unaware you were using the vehicle for business use.
- g. Umbrella liability – This coverage gives you additional protection for anything else that may go wrong. It is generally very affordable and offers protection up to \$1 million.

Fortunately, RVTAA has a group insurance policy through the Miller-Monroe-Farrell Insurance Agency that offers \$1 million in liability coverage with deductibles ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 (depending upon the state). It covers certified RV technicians against any negligence, such as breaking something on a client's RV or if the customer is somehow injured during the repair process.

Because it is a group policy, rates are significantly lower than if you sought coverage on your own. In fact, as of January 2021, the policy is available for \$750 per year.

Having insurance is a good marketing tool, too. The ability to tell prospective clients that you are a certified and insured RV technician conveys a great deal of confidence in your professionalism.

Corporate registration – It is highly recommended that technicians form a separate corporation or limited liability company (LLC). Not only does this prove you are serious about owning a business, having a separate entity conveys additional liability protection and opens the door to some tremendous tax benefits as well.

Costs will vary by state. Texas charges \$300 to register an LLC, while Florida charges \$125. Filing an LLC is generally an easy process that most people can comfortably do on their own within a few minutes.

However, if you want to hire an attorney, that will add to the cost. Some law firms offer packages to business owners to create and file any necessary paperwork. NRVTA works closely with the Kohler law firm, and their lawyers can file required business forms for any state. You can get more information at www.kkoslawyers.com.

Business phone – Many RV technicians use their cell phones as a business phone. It's an inexpensive option, but it may be worth it to have a dedicated virtual business line.

GoDaddy offers such an option for \$13 per month, as of 2023, and you can set office hours so the phone doesn't ring all day or night long. It redirects callers to voicemail after hours. With a separate phone number for business, you don't have to worry about posting your personal cell phone number on the internet for the entire world to discover.

GoDaddy's Conversations feature has voicemail included and will automatically convert that message to an email and send it to you. You can select a local telephone number, too.

Business website – You will want to have a presence on the internet because it gives you more credibility and allows clients to learn about your company 24 hours a day.

You can hire a professional web designer to create a website for you, or you can use a plug-and-play template offered by many website hosts. All you do is fill in the blanks with information and photos.

Do not use a free website, like those offered by WordPress or Squarespace. That reeks of unprofessionalism because the domain is tied to those companies. You always want full control of your business name and website so that it can't be accidentally or intentionally shut off.

A website for a mobile RV service technician is not that complicated; however, you will incur these costs:

- Domain registration (your website name that starts with www) = \$15
- Website hosting (where your site lives on the internet) = \$180 to \$400 annually
- Template (many are free, but you can buy one at ThemeForest) = \$60

Logo – Once you create your business name and set up a website, you'll want to spread the word you're doing repairs. A logo is a great way to convey what you do in a picture, not just words.

Some logos simply use a pre-existing drawing or other graphic element, while others are professionally designed exclusively for your company. If you need a designer, websites like fiver.com and freelancer.com can connect you to qualified people around the world.

Just be careful that you don't use another company's logo as your own. Some unscrupulous designers have been known to copy another company's logo, change the color and call it an "original." Using another firm's logo is an invitation to an expensive lawsuit or an embarrassing cease-and-desist letter.

Business cards – A professional business card remains one of the most cost-effective ways to promote a mobile RV service business. They can be dropped off at campgrounds, dealerships and RV storage lots, or affixed to community billboards in places like grocery stores.

With firms like Print Runner, you can get 1,500 business cards printed and shipped within 10 days for less than \$80. The company has a do-it-yourself design tool to create the cards, or you could offer the person who created your logo a little more money to design a unique business card for you, too. Find out more at www.printrunner.com.

Financial software – Keeping track of money coming in and going out is an essential part of operating a viable mobile RV service business. Because you have some parts inventory to maintain, a simple accounting program like Quicken may not be adequate to track all your income and expenses.

QuickBooks is a popular accounting software that gives business owners the ability to generate invoices and maintain inventory. It is now web-based, which is helpful for mobile technicians. However, some people find it difficult to use and set up. It typically costs \$90 per month, but the company occasionally offers specials for first-time customers. It may be beneficial to have an accountant or bookkeeper perform the initial set-up to ensure the program works properly.

A workaround to the complexity of professional accounting software is to set up a free account at Square or Stripe. Both allow you to create and electronically send invoices as well as accept payments by credit card. Generally, you will pay a 2.9% fee when the payment is submitted plus a 35-cent transaction fee. That fee is automatically deducted and the balance deposited directly into your checking account.

The downfall to this solution is that it will not maintain an inventory of parts. So, all parts costs will need to be entered manually when preparing an invoice.

Tablet computer – Many technicians use a laptop or desktop computer to manage their businesses, but rely on tablets when completing repairs because they are easy to use and not too heavy or cumbersome.

Tablets are also less expensive to replace than a laptop, and prices keep falling. You can get a brand name tablet for less than \$400. The best thing for technicians is that tablets have cameras included, which helps capture pictures and videos of items you've repaired.

Just be sure the device has access to the internet so data can be easily uploaded and backed up. Some technicians like using 8-inch screens, while others prefer 10-inch screens for better visibility.

One important tip – the device with the most internal memory wins the day for storing images and videos. You will never regret having too much memory. At \$25 for a 1 terabyte SD card, it's one of the cheapest investments you'll make.

Cloud storage – It is very important that you securely back up all your business data, contacts, notes and photos. Technology has improved to make it almost seamless to make backup copies of any type of data.

Yes, companies like Apple, Microsoft and Google offer free storage, but it's a better idea to pay for that storage. A paid storage service generally offers much more space, which allows you to store your notes, business reports and photos indefinitely without worrying about running out of room.

Dropbox is a favorite of business owners for its ease of use and annual cost of \$120 per year for 2 terabytes of data (2,000 gigabytes). Plus, it can be used across a variety of devices. For \$16.58 per month, you get 3 terabytes of storage and can automatically add watermarks (nearly opaque copies of your logo or business name) to any document or photograph uploaded to Dropbox. For more information, visit www.dropbox.com.

Marketing and advertising – As a new business, you will want to ensure people know about you and the services you provide. With advertising, there really is no limit to what you can spend. There are thousands of options available to small business owners, but the effectiveness of each option is questionable. For example, is spending \$100 for an ad to appear in the local high school yearbook a good investment to promote your business, or is it a feel-good transaction to support a cause you like?

You can pay a professional web developer a few thousand dollars to build a website that helps your business appear at the top of search results so that you don't have to spend much more money on actual advertising. Or you can identify a few key opportunities, like Google or Facebook ads, and set a monthly limit as to how much you want to spend. Of course, the more you pay, the more often your ads appear.

Many mobile RV technicians take advantage of Google's free business listings. By creating a profile, the business appears in internet and map searches for keywords like "rv repairs near me." However, it is difficult to change business locations, thus making Google business listings a less-viable option for technicians who travel to different areas in their own RVs.

You can also print up some brochures or produce a video about you and your company. But, you should spend something to promote your business and the minimum recommended amount is \$50 per month.

Startup cost summary

Here is a summary of the start-up costs you can expect to incur when launching an mobile RV service business:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Low End</u>	<u>High End</u>
Education	\$10,935	\$10,935
Training-related expenses	\$4,135	\$10,772
Business license	\$0	\$200
Tax ID number	\$0	\$200
Business insurance	\$750	\$2,000
Corporate registration	\$150	\$1,500
Business phone	\$0	\$120
Website	\$200	\$1,000
Logo	\$25	\$500
Business cards	\$15	\$50
Financial software	\$85	\$840
Tablet computer	\$100	\$700
Cloud Storage	\$0	\$120
Marketing & advertising	<u>\$600</u>	<u>\$5,000</u>
TOTAL	\$16,995	\$33,937

Do you need a trademark?

As a new business, do you really need to go to the expense and hassle of securing a trademark for your company name and/or logo? That's debatable.

Trademarks and tradenames offer a higher degree of protection over not registering the name and design. However, it often comes down to cost.

You will pay \$350 to file a trademark application with the federal government – if you do all the work yourself. Hiring a lawyer adds significantly to that cost.

The problem with trademarks is that you must constantly defend them to maintain control of the name or mark. So, if you hear of someone using your business name to do similar work, then you have to contact that firm to explain you own the trademark or tradename and insist they stop using it.

If the firm doesn't listen, then you need to go to court to enforce the mark. The government will not do the enforcement on your behalf. Going to court to enforce a trademark can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Annual expenses

Some of the start-up expenses are repeated annually, but often at lower costs. However, in creating your business plan and projecting your profitability in subsequent years, consider these annual costs. The estimated costs are using 2023 figures.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Low End</u>	<u>High End</u>
Training ¹	\$500	\$1,000
Business license	\$0	\$200
Tax ID number	\$0	\$200
RVTAA membership	\$299	\$299
Business insurance	\$750	\$2,000
LLC annual fee ²	\$0	\$500
Business phone	\$0	\$120
Website	\$50	\$250
Financial software	\$30	\$840
Marketing & advertising ³	\$1,000	\$5,000
Accounting ⁴	\$80	\$1,600
Cloud storage	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$120</u>
TOTAL	\$2,709	\$12,379

¹To maintain your credentials as a professional RVTAA Certified RV Technician, you will need to complete 24 hours of continuing education credits starting in your third year as a technician. The classes are offered by various RV manufacturers, suppliers and the National RV Training Academy. Some are free, but most charge a small enrollment fee.

²The fee to maintain an LLC will depend upon the state where the business is located.

³ This would include costs for technical support to maintain your website, pay-per-click advertising, more business cards, replacement uniforms, brochures, magnets, traditional advertising, stipends for referrals, etc.

⁴ Even if you're comfortable doing your own taxes, you'll likely need to buy some type of tax preparation software. The high-end cost would cover hiring a professional accountant.

Tax Benefits

The American free enterprise system works to reward people who take risks in starting their own businesses to serve others. It is one of the hallmarks that truly makes America the “Land of Opportunity.”

The entire tax code is centered around rewarding entrepreneurs, rather than people who simply work for others. Whether that is fair or not is a matter for another discussion. However, it is true and as a self-employed business owner, you can really benefit from tax laws that help fuel the economy and provide incentives for people to work for themselves.

One of the primary benefits to being self-employed is the ability to deduct expenses from your top-line income which reduces the amount of taxes you pay on the bottom line. People working for others don't get that advantage; however, people who own the businesses which employ them certainly do.

You are strongly encouraged to consult with a tax professional to see whether these deductions apply to you in your state.

Let's explore some of the items that you can deduct from your income to reduce the amount of taxes you will pay on whatever you earn. Here are some common tax deductions for self-employed people:

Home office

In order to be in business, you need a place to conduct business. Yes, RV repairs are done on site, but you still need an office where you make plans, communicate with potential customers, store business records or inventory, and manage the day-to-day operations.

You don't have to rent an office or retail property. A mobile RV service business can be run from a single desk. However, that desk is located in a room and, as a result, that becomes your office.

When you use that space exclusively for business, tax laws in America allow you to deduct costs to have that workspace. Your “office” may be a 50-square-foot room in a 1,200-square-foot house (or 40 square feet of a 400-square-foot RV). For simplicity's sake, let's say your office occupies 8% of the total space in your home.

That means you can deduct 8% of the cost for your electricity, water, sewer, property taxes, property insurance, natural gas or solar energy, garbage pickup, mortgage interest and home depreciation.

You can also deduct all costs associated with maintaining that small corner of your house. For example, if you paint your office, you can deduct the whole cost of sprucing up the room.

Caution: Home office deductions are closely monitored by the Internal Revenue Service because a lot of unscrupulous people have tried to take advantage of this deduction. If you keep good records, and use that space exclusively for business (not storing your kids' old clothing), then you'll be fine claiming this often-overlooked deduction. Consult with a tax professional on how you can take full advantage of the home office deduction.

Telephone

Your customers need to get in touch with you, and you'll need to confirm appointments. So, you can deduct part of the cost to have a cell phone. If half of the time you spend on the phone involves your business, you can deduct half the cost of having the phone.

That includes the cost to acquire the phone itself and the monthly service charges assessed by the phone company.

If you have a separate phone just for business, then you can deduct 100% of the cost for that phone and monthly service. Even if you sign up for a second line that routes all business calls to your cell phone, all of the charges related to the extra line can be deducted.

Internet

The same is true for internet service needed to maintain your website, exchange emails with customers, prospects or suppliers, store backup data or to effectively manage business records.

No, you can't deduct time spent watching movies for pleasure, but if you spend \$100 per month on internet service, and you spend 25% of your time online for business, then you can deduct 25% of the cost of that monthly fee.

Equipment and tools

Because you need a computer or tablet to manage your business, the cost to buy, insure and maintain that equipment is deductible. You can also include costs for a printer, copier or scanner.

To be fair, if you use your computer 50% of the time for business and the rest to "surf the web," you should only deduct half the cost to buy the machine. However, many technicians have a separate tablet or laptop exclusively for use when performing repairs and 100% of that cost is deductible.

All of the cost to acquire or replace tools needed for your mobile RV service business can be deducted. That includes ladders, flashlights, pressure gauges, a creeper to get under vehicles, etc. If you buy a separate camera to take pictures or videos, add that to the list, too.

Supplies and software

Items you buy to run your business, like pens, clipboards, paper, bookends, a book shelf, storage containers, file folders, etc., can be deducted.

That includes software you need to run your business, such as an accounting program, time management app, contact management system (when you get really big), and recurring costs for online storage, like Dropbox.

Be sure to deduct supplies you use in the course of providing service to your clients, such as fluid analysis kits.

Good accounting software will allow you to enter the cost of parts as you acquire them as well as the price you charged customers for those parts. The system will be able to show how much income you derived from the sale of RV parts and what the total expenses were to acquire those parts. The difference is profit, which you must include when preparing taxes.

Promotional materials

Business cards aren't the only thing you can deduct. You can also include brochures, flyers, postcards, magnets and thank you notes.

This includes advertising, too. So, the money you spend for online banners and search engine listings count as business expenses. Some technicians create signs that sit on the ground promoting their services while they are completing a repair. You never know who might pass by and need a repair or know of someone else who does.

Don't overlook your website. Deduct the costs to get the site designed and monthly fees to host it as well as the technical support charges you'll eventually incur to fix whatever breaks. Some technicians pay a specialist to set up the website so it is search engine optimized (SEO). That way, their website rises to the top of search engine results, and lowers their cost of advertising.

You can even deduct embroidered shirts and hats with your company's name and logo on them, if you wear them as a uniform. You can't do that for clothes you buy to work for someone else!

It's possible to get magnetic signs made for your car or work truck that display your business name, phone number and website. Some technicians even have their cars specially wrapped or painted to create a mobile billboard promoting their companies. All of it is deductible.

Gifts

Did a former client recommend your company to someone looking for a repair? That \$10 Starbucks gift card you sent them in appreciation is tax deductible. So is the \$20 you paid for a few boxes of donuts for the staff at a local campground who refer customers to you, or hire you to perform repairs on their rental RVs.

Postage and shipping

Any costs incurred to send letters or packages in the course of your business should be added to the list of deductible expenses. It would apply to thank you notes and holiday greeting cards.

This also includes the cost to rent a post office box for your business. Some technicians do this to prevent people from knowing where they live so people can't just show up for a needed repair.

Training and education

Everything from the RV Fundamentals Class and advanced technical courses can be deducted. That includes all tuition, books and test-taking fees. The deduction also applies to any continuing education classes you must take to maintain your certifications.

Any live or online course you take that improves your business is tax-deductible, too. Want to take a small business management class at a local community college? It's deductible. So is an online class to learn how to improve search engine optimization, time management or create better Facebook ads.

Costs to buy books, CDs, videos and audiobooks can be deducted as well, if the materials are in some way related to running, growing or marketing your business. If you think reading a business magazine will help improve your skills, the subscription can be deducted, too.

Memberships

Many technicians would automatically deduct annual fees to belong to the RV Technician Association of America, but this deduction also applies to the cost to join a discount shopping organization, like Costco.

You could even deduct costs to join the local chamber of commerce or a community service organization, like the Rotary Club, if your business is a member.

Bank charges

Any monthly service fees you incur to have a bank account for business can be deducted. It would also include costs to buy checks or get money orders. Any fees you pay to process credit cards are deductible as well.

Interest expense

When you paid for training or purchased tools, did you put that on a credit card? If so, any interest you paid on those charges can be deducted. In fact, interest incurred for any business expense is deductible.

Professional services

Whenever you need to hire an accountant, technical support guru, lawyer, marketing specialist or even when consulting with another technician, the entire cost associated with using those professional services can be deducted.

Taxes

Did you know you can deduct taxes from your taxes? It's one of the many advantages to owning a business.

This includes any business-related taxes paid to the federal, state or local government.

Licenses

Do you need a local business license or are required to pay annual fees to keep your LLC in good graces with government entities? Then, by all means, deduct that cost, too.

Travel

When it comes to deducting costs for a business vehicle, you have several options. Check with an accountant as to whether it is better for you to take a standard mileage deduction or to write off the full cost of owning that vehicle.

Some RV technicians use a car to shuttle between service appointments, so using the standard per mile deduction works better for them. Other techs enhance a work truck with all the tools they may need, like a ladder, jacks and extension cords, plus any parts required to complete repairs. Since the truck isn't likely to be used for anything other than fixing RVs, the entire cost to own, use and maintain that vehicle can be deducted.

Most RV technicians simply keep track of their mileage to and from jobs as well as any business-related mileage, like travel to the post office or bank. It really is simple to do and the federal government is rather generous in your ability to deduct 65.5 cents for every mile driven, as of 2023.

The standard deduction is supposed to help you cover the costs to fill the vehicle with gas, pay for tires and oil changes, complete major repairs and cover depreciation. You'll be surprised how that adds up to a nice deduction every year.

Not only do you get to deduct the mileage cost, it creates tax-free income for you, too. For example, if you drive 500 miles per month for work, or 6,000 miles per year, you will be able to deduct \$3,930 from your taxes for use of your personal vehicle for business.

Although your business incurs the expense, it can reimburse you for that cost, too. So, when your business reimburses you that 65.5 cents per mile, it doesn't count as true "income." Therefore, you can pay yourself \$3,930 per year without paying taxes on it.

Even airfare and hotels are deductible to get to training or to attend an annual convention of RV technicians.

When travel is required for business, and it is not reasonable to expect you to return home for a meal, then the cost of food can be deducted, too. Even though you can only deduct 50 percent of the cost, it's still better than nothing!

Tax benefits aren't magical. You'll never get rich from tax deductions alone.

Even though something is tax deductible, you still need to spend YOUR money in order to deduct it from your taxes. In a best-case scenario, you will only be able to reduce the amount you pay in taxes by 37%, which is the highest tax bracket as of 2023.

That means for every dollar you spend and deduct; it will only reduce the amount you pay in taxes by 37 cents. Still, it's better to be self-employed and take advantage of a plethora of tax deductions to share your business costs with the government than it is to be working for someone else without access to those benefits.

Consult with a tax professional for specific guidance on what you can do to reduce your tax liability.

If you'd like more help on understanding how to manage business expenses and what can or cannot be deducted, consider enrolling in the Small Biz RVer course offered by Workamper News and the National RV Training Academy. It is a comprehensive resource for starting and managing a small business the right way. You can find more information at www.smallbizrver.com.

Don't forget to deduct the cost of that training!

Risks with RV Repairs

Every business faces risks of some type. So, what are the risks technicians face? Here are a few:

Breaking a client's RV

Because you are climbing on top of and crawling around inside someone's recreation vehicle, it is possible to damage the unit. An RV inspector evaluating a brand new RV was walking around inside the unit wearing only his socks when he put his foot through a poorly-constructed floor. Not only is that embarrassing, but it can be costly, too.

Damage can also occur if you don't know how to operate the components being tested and repaired, or don't understand how to properly take apart whatever you must remove in order to verify operation and the dates something was manufactured.

If you do not know how to properly operate something, you should try to learn how to do so before the repair. In the worst-case scenario, you may be able to ask the RV owner to demonstrate its operation or describe how it is supposed to work.

As RVs become more complicated, many times owners appreciate being involved in the repair process so that technicians don't accidentally create additional problems for them.

In the event of a mishap, you should have liability insurance that will help cover the cost to replace a damaged part, if that expense is too high to cover out-of-pocket.

Falling from the roof

It is very important to watch where you are whenever climbing on an RV roof. It is possible to get distracted and trip over a component attached to the roof, like a vent. One technician did fall from a roof years ago when he was walking backward and stepped off the RV.

If a technician uses common sense, practices good safety protocols and remains aware of his or her surroundings, it is unlikely that a problem will ever occur.

While some people are afraid to climb onto an RV roof, it's probably climbing down that spooks them the most. You can avoid that by using a selfie stick to take pictures and videos of the roof from a ladder without actually climbing on top. Some technicians fly drones overhead to take images of the roof and installed components.

However, using drones, selfie sticks and ladders to evaluate a roof's condition does not allow you to physically determine if there are any soft spots on the roof, and it is impossible to make repairs to roof-mounted components without actually being on top. Yet, it is possible reduce the amount of time you spend on a roof.

Errors and omissions

Mistakes happen. It's part of life and no business or job is immune. RV technicians are paid to diagnose and repair components. But, what if something is missed during the process – something that turns out to be costly to fix later?

Technicians who are concerned about missing an item, saying something wrong, giving inaccurate advice or fixing the wrong thing, can purchase errors and omissions insurance. It's common coverage for businesses, so it should not cost a lot to get that piece-of-mind.

During NRVTA's advanced training classes, time is set aside to help students learn how to avoid risky situations. The instructors describe potential scenarios and how to properly contend with them. That, in itself, will give you a better level of comfort as you start a business and interact with clients.

Yet, with errors and omissions insurance, you can enjoy piece-of-mind in knowing that if something really important is overlooked, it won't break you financially.

Losing tools

This is a common problem when fixing an RV. Technicians open cabinets, cupboards, drawers and compartments. They also look in, on, under and around various components. Invariably, they will leave a tool behind somewhere.

Most technicians set a budget each year just to replace lost tools.

You can minimize your risk by setting up a "check-out" system where you write down the tools as you remove them from your toolbox or vehicle, and check them back in whenever they are returned.

While there are risks associated with being an RV technician, they are quite minimal and should not dissuade you from pursuing this business opportunity.

Ethical Considerations

The RV Technician Association of America (RVTAA) Code of Ethics establishes and governs professional behavior expected of all members, and establishes consequences for any member who does not adhere to the code.

As a fundamental principle, RVTAA adheres to and holds its members to the highest standard for quality of workmanship and integrity in all dealings with customers, dealerships, suppliers, manufacturers and other supporters in the RV industry.

RVTAA is committed to overseeing educational standards and credentialing RV technicians across America. The continued success of RVTAA is dependent upon its different levels of credentialing, continued education learning programs, mentorships and coaching made available to RV technicians at all levels.

To do so, the association established the RVTAA Code of Ethics to govern member actions and behavior. The nine points include:

Code of Ethics Number One

RV technicians will continually strive to produce quality workmanship that they will be proud to put their name on.

Code of Ethics Number Two

RV technicians will only utilize those materials and equipment that have been approved by National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) Code 1192 and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) for RV usage. Safety of all parties is paramount.

Code of Ethics Number Three

RV technicians will recommend to an RV owner only the work and parts they believe will be necessary for an RV.

Code of Ethics Number Four

RV technicians will respect a customer's RV as if it were their own. An RV and its contents are the customer's property and are to be protected while in the technician's possession. Drinking, smoking or use of tobacco products are prohibited inside or around a customer's RV.

Code of Ethics Number Five

RV technicians will take every opportunity to continually improve their technical knowledge, business skills and ability to relate to people. Technicians are dedicated to lifelong learning.

Code of Ethics Number Six

RV technicians will strive to help develop new and current technicians through mentorship and coaching.

Code of Ethics Number Seven

RV technicians will attempt to correct any honest mistake made by the factory, suppliers, vendors or other technicians, without damaging the reputation of that person or business.

Code of Ethics Number Eight

RV technicians will conduct themselves with integrity and honesty to increase public respect for all RVTAA Registered, Certified and Master Certified RV Technicians.

Code of Ethics Number Nine

RV technicians will make every effort to maintain and improve the professional practice and integrity of the RV Technician Association of America membership. Any willful violations of NFPA 1192 and ANSI codes shall be reported to the RVTAA for review and possible disciplinary actions.

It's all about integrity

The whole point of establishing a code of ethics in the first place is to ensure that RV technicians can operate their businesses on level playing fields without one bad actor destroying a market for others.

Certification is an important credential to have. It elevates a technician's professionalism and gives RV owners confidence in the repair process.

Unethical businesses threaten the integrity of the entire RV industry. In this era, when disgruntled people can express their dissatisfaction to thousands of others on social media, it is truly important that technicians operate their businesses above board in an open, honest and ethical manner.

Getting Customers

As a mobile RV technician, the first step to getting customers is to define your primary market area. That can be a city, county, region of a state or even a multi-state zone. As an independent business owner, you can determine your own market area based on how far you want to travel to perform a repair.

Chapter Two also includes tips for determining your market area. Once you determine your market area, then you can go about promoting your company to potential customers. Let's look at some cost-effective ways to build awareness of your services. Prices shown were current as of September 2023.

Turn your vehicle into a billboard

One of the best ways to build awareness is by putting professional signs on your car or truck. You'd be surprised at how much attention it gets as people scurry around to run errands. Companies like VistaPrint can design and print two door magnets for less than \$80.

If you have a truck or van that you use to perform repairs, you can wrap the whole vehicle in an advertisement for less than \$2,500.

Reach out to RV dealers

Some dealers see mobile technicians as thwarting their effort to make money by doing RV repairs. But, it's worth a visit to the dealership to introduce yourself to the service manager and drop off a few business cards.

Talking with the manager is a good opportunity to promote your ability to benefit the company by helping them out during periods of unexpected demand or to provide specialized services. Most RV dealerships do not perform on-site repair work. So, when a situation arises where the firm needs mobile service, and you've proven yourself to be worth the work, the dealership may refer their customer to you or contract with you on their own.

Check out RV storage centers

Visit local RV storage centers to see if you could post a flyer or leave a few business cards in a conspicuous place. You can buy plastic business card stands at any office supply store. Perhaps the RV is in storage because there is something wrong with it. Or, even more likely, the owners discovered a problem on their last trip and need it repaired before they venture out again.

Storage centers are often the site of many quick and simple RV repairs, so getting to know the staff there will certainly help build a source for future referrals.

Conduct a campground seminar

Campgrounds may allow you to make a free presentation to people staying there. Check with the campground manager to see if you can use a building or pavilion to lead a 30-minute presentation about a simple do-it-yourself repair followed by a question-and-answer session.

When some RVers hear about all the steps it takes to complete what you consider to be a simple repair, such as winterization or lubricating slideout mechanisms, they quickly realize it would likely be easier to hire you to do the job for them.

On-site sandwich boards

When completing a repair, set out A-framed sandwich boards promoting your services so people driving or walking by will be able to see what you're doing. Remember, RV owners are always looking for something to be fixed, so you might as well let them know you're in business.

Placing a board near the RV being repaired also serves as a warning sign, especially if the RV is parked on the street. Although they typically cost more, you can get boards in different colors than the standard white, such as an attention-getting orange.

Many discount printers, like Staples and Build-A-Sign, sell sandwich boards with custom messages for less than \$200 each.

Encourage referrals

There are few better ways to get new business than by referrals from satisfied customers. Why not offer those clients a gift card or even a cash stipend for recommending your services to people they know who then hire you?

When the repair is completed, it's a good gesture to drop a thank you note to your customer along with a few business cards and a small token of your appreciation. The gifts are tax deductible.

Join online community groups

Facebook is a good resource for promoting local business for free, if you do it as part of a community group. Search for groups in your area and ask to join. If you're already a resident, you should have no problem being admitted.

Just be sure you aren't spamming people with messages about your company and its services. A welcome message telling people who you are and what you do for a living is generally allowed. Follow page guidelines and make sure your Facebook profile shows that you are a trained and certified RV technician.

Then, whenever you see people talking about buying RVs, chime in with some practical advice. If anything is wrong with their RV, many folks will turn to Facebook for advice before they contact an RV dealership's service department. If the group's rules allow, you might be able to post interesting stories about a recent repair. For example, "I fixed an RV today that had a wasp's nest in one of the compartments."

Frequently post to your Facebook account

There are no restrictions to what you can post on your personal Facebook account. So, feel free to describe interesting repairs you complete.

You can also post regular messages to your followers reminding them of the importance to complete annual maintenance on an RV. Chances are very good that someone you know is aware of someone else who is looking to get an RV repaired.

Remember, the whole point of social media is to be social. Too much spam, and people will wind up blocking you – and you won't even know it.

Hint: Before you use Facebook to promote your business, it would be a very good idea to scrub your account of any political posts or anything else that could be considered controversial. Yes, you have the right to free speech, but with Americans divided nearly 50-50 on just about every issue, you may not want to risk offending half of your potential customers right out of the gate.

Use community bulletin boards

Okay, this isn't likely to bring in a hoard of potential customers, but it does help build awareness of your company and the services you provide. Best of all, it costs virtually nothing to take advantage of the opportunity.

Many retail stores and restaurants have community bulletin boards where local people can post just about anything. It can be as small as a business card, or as large as an 8.5x11-inch flyer. Half-sheet flyers are good attention-getters in that they are big enough to display more information, yet small enough that it's not likely to be taken down to make room for someone else's more recent information.

Join a local civic group

Whether it is Rotary Club, Lions Club, the Moose Lodge, Elks Club or Kiwanis, these types of groups are excellent sources of potential business. Many of the members are small business owners themselves or upper-level managers, which means each of them is connected to a larger group of people.

Working side-by-side on a community service project is a great way to get to know these influential leaders who can, in turn, open doors for you.

Most groups have weekly or monthly meetings, which are excellent ways to network. Some clubs allow members to deliver short presentations about their businesses and the services they provide. You never know who you'll meet who needs something fixed on their RV or would like advice on what to look for when buying a recreation vehicle.

Participate in RV shows

Every fall, and especially each spring, RV shows pop up in communities all over America. Some are put on by RV dealerships, while some are set up by associations. Either way, they attract scores of people who already own RVs or are in the market to buy one.

Booths at these events can be pricey, especially if buyers are attracted from a very wide area. However, perhaps there is an opportunity to partner with an RV inspector or other mobile RV technicians to share the cost of a booth or registration.

Prepare some flyers and have plenty of business cards on hand to pass out. In fact, leave them on the table. Some folks don't like the idea of talking to people for fear they will be caught up in a sales pitch. They would rather grab a business card and, if they decide they need something fixed, call you later. Yet, some people will make repair appointments right at the show.

Put out a bowl with some candies to give people an incentive to stop at the booth. Mini Tootsie Rolls are always a crowd favorite, as are mint-flavored Lifesavers. After all, people are going to be talking to others, and they'll enjoy having fresh breath. Also, people love giveaways, such as bags, stickers and water bottles.

Check with the show organizers to see if you could make an educational presentation at the event. You won't be allowed to turn it into a commercial for your business, but you will be allowed to mention your company and how people can get in touch with you.

Keep the subject matter focused on something repair-related, whether it is annual maintenance or common RV problems. Because RV maintenance is a hot topic, some sessions can attract hundreds of people. Whether it's a dozen people or 200, these presentations instantly convey that you are an important, educated and trusted professional.

Most booths come with nothing more than a draped eight-foot table, and you'd have to rent other furniture, like chairs, for exorbitant prices. Depending on the venue, you may be allowed to bring in your own furniture, but you won't likely be allowed to serve food or drinks without buying them at greatly-inflated prices from the convention center.

Whether the show is at an RV dealership or a larger venue, you will want a professional looking background. You can get rolled vinyl displays or retractable banners for about \$150 each from larger office supply stores or VistaPrint. The key is to have banners professionally designed. Luckily, most firms which print those displays will offer affordable design services, too.

Advertising

There is an old business adage that says it costs money to make money, and advertising is one of those necessary costs. That's especially true for a service business, like mobile RV services, when it is hard for people to find a technician at the exact moment help is needed.

You are also at a disadvantage for not having a retail space that people can drive by on a regular basis. As a result, your message must be constantly or frequently displayed so that it is readily visible to people when they start shopping for the services you offer.

However, a big problem with advertising is that you can spend enormous amounts of money with little practical return on the investment. There is no shortage of companies willing to sell advertising to business owners.

Traditional advertising outlets include television, radio, billboards, newspapers, magazines, direct mail, bulk mail and weekly shoppers.

There are hundreds of non-traditional outlets selling ads for things like school plays, sports leagues, community events, charitable functions, restaurant menus, church bulletins, etc.

Opportunities for promotion exploded with the internet's arrival. Now there are more than 1.1 billion unique websites in the world with a new one being added every three seconds, according to Forbes.

So, how do you promote your company in a loud, chaotic sea of voices all clamoring for people's attention and business? You can pretty much ignore most traditional media sources due to their extraordinary costs. But there are still a few viable options.

Newspapers

While newspapers appear to be a dying venue almost everywhere, they are still an appreciated resource in small towns. The big cities focus on big city news, so people living in suburban areas still rely on local newspapers for news and information about their communities.

For that reason, advertising in a local, small-town newspaper still makes sense. So, if there are a lot of RV owners in your area, this may be an option.

Display advertising, those bigger ads on news and feature pages, can be pricey. However, classified ads are still affordable. In fact, most local newspapers are part of a regional cooperative that will offer one price for a classified ad to appear in multiple publications. Be sure to insist that ads appear in the RV sections, and not the section offering a variety of services.

Direct mail

Direct mail is regaining popularity because it can be personalized and it's harder to ignore. Unlike a spam email that can be deleted without opening the message, with direct mail, chances are good the recipient will at least glance at the content on the way to a recycle bin.

Communicating with current customers and prospects remains an effective promotional tool. However, that list is compiled over time, which does not make it a viable option for a new business owner.

NEVER buy a mailing list. Regardless of the seller's claim, the lists are often full of errors and people's names wind up on them without their knowledge or permission. That makes the lists useless when considering the expense of printing items and paying for postage.

There is one type of direct mail which may be beneficial for mobile RV technicians. Those are the envelopes that arrive each month with a few dozen unrelated flyers or coupons in them. Valpak has offered this service for years.

The reason this option may work is that people who own an RV may retain that flyer until they need something fixed. It's also likely that someone who opens the envelope will know someone else who owns an RV, and may pass the flyer on to a potential customer.

You might offer to split the cost of this type of advertising with an RV inspector. They flyers are two-sided, so there is plenty of space to promote services offered by both businesses.

Online advertising

The bulk of all advertising currently takes place online. In fact, Google, Amazon and Facebook now account for 61 percent off all money spent on online advertising, according to Axios. It's a very popular opportunity because:

- It's fast – You can create an ad and have it working for you in a few minutes. You don't have to worry about someone else's deadline or delivery schedule.
- It's efficient – Your ads can be targeted directly toward people who are most likely to need your services. For example, rather than spend money on a newspaper ad that reaches 10,000 people, of which a few dozen may need an RV repaired, online ads let you zero in on people of a specific age range, sex, location or income level who already own an RV based on their search histories. Companies like Google and Facebook also know what people are interested in, and will ensure that ads pertaining to those interests are seen more often.
- It's cost-effective – Most of the time, you pay only when someone clicks on the ad, but some venues are starting to charge an "impression fee" to simply show the ad to people. Even if you paid \$1 per click (it is often much less than that), and it cost you \$100 to reach a hundred active RV owners, chances are high that you'll get some type of response to the advertisement.

A problem occurs with online advertising if you're not careful in tightly defining the types of people you want to view your ad. It would take longer to burn a \$100 bill in an ash tray than it would for you to spend \$100 "promoting" social media posts, or just displaying ads to everyone online.

Major online advertising platforms, like Facebook and Google, have developed tools to help you target your ads to the right people. You log into your account, and its artificial intelligence robots guide you through the steps to create a headline, add pictures, and include text in the right places. But, you'll still have to know what words to use when creating a headline and text.

It requires some thought on your part to ensure the people you want to see your ads actually get to view them before you spend all your budget and the platform doesn't allow additional ads to be displayed until you fork over more money.

That all boils down to keyword selection. Yes, you could tell platforms to display your ad whenever anyone looks for RV repairs, and you'll wind up displaying your ads in all four corners of the country even though you're located near St. Louis.

It's much better to tell platforms to display your ad only if the person likely to view it meets these criteria:

- Age 45-65 – The sweet spot for RV owners.
- Male – This is tricky. Research shows that most ideas to get an RV generate with husbands, but no purchase takes place without the support of a wife.
- Professional – Less likely to be familiar with the mechanics of an RV, and more likely to need someone to fix the unit for him.
- Lives within 80 miles of a specific area, like where you are located, so you can easily serve that client.
- Income above \$50,000 – More likely to afford regular maintenance on an RV.
- Likes outdoor activities and travel – An RV would fit in nicely in that lifestyle.
- Married – A spouse may REALLY want a problem fixed or to have some type of component installed to improve the family's RV lifestyle.

By entering as many keywords and identifiers as you can, you are very likely to reach the type of customer you'd like to bump into on the street – someone who is in the market at exactly that moment for the repair services you offer.

Putting limitations on ads doesn't mean you're not going to connect with a 40-year-old blue-collar worker who makes \$45,000 a year and is unmarried. You will certainly have customers like that. But, if you're fishing for clients, you want your pond stocked with more of the type of fish you want to catch.

One of the other great advantages to online advertising is that you can try multiple messages relatively quickly to see which ones attract the most inquiries. Then, you can direct the platforms to display the best-working ads more often, and you can quickly discontinue any ads that don't make the phone ring.

Call a professional

It's not rocket science to formulate effective online advertisements so that you reach only people you intend to target, but it often seems the two fields are related.

There are a lot of professionals you can hire to help target your advertising for the greatest effectiveness. The first consultation is usually free, and you only pay for what you need going forward.

Look for a company that truly understands the RV inspection and repair business, and ensure that its staff knows how to get messages directly in front of those customers. The bottom line is that there are lots of opportunities to promote your business. The challenge will be to discover what messages resonate with buyers in your area.

Your website

Many technicians enjoy tremendous success by using what's called "search engine optimization" to insert key words and phrases onto their webpages.

Search engines, like Firefox, Google, Bing and Duck Duck Go, routinely deploy electronic robots, or “bots.” Their job is to constantly scan websites in order to catalog the content so it knows what pages to suggest to people when they’re search for something.

Tapping into this requires more science than luck. It requires modifications to webpages themselves to ensure key words and phrases people are searching for actually appear on your website.

If your mobile repair business is located near Portland, Maine, you will want the phrases “RV repairs” and “Portland, Maine” to appear prominently on your home page. You don’t want people from Portland, Oregon, or the two dozen other American cities by that name, to accidentally call you just because you do RV repairs in “Portland.”

This requires website developers to think like consumers by imaging how they would search for your company. Using the above example, people could enter either of these into a search bar:

- Professional RV repairs near me
- Experienced RV technician in central Maine
- Get my RV repaired in Portland Maine
- Affordable qualified RV technician
- Certified RV technician in New England
- Trained RV technician in Maine

When search engine optimization is done right, you really don’t need to do any other promotion to get the phone to ring. It’s for that reason that some RV technicians are willing to invest \$5,000 or more in designing their sites to take advantage of search engine optimization.

Encourage reviews

People put a lot of weight and credibility into online reviews. Encourage your satisfied clients to leave reviews on Google, Facebook, Yelp and other sites. That does require you to establish specific pages about your business on those sites so that people can a place to leave reviews.

Most of the time, creating a business page is free. But, its content is often added to search engine results. The more positive reviews you receive, the better because it improves the order in which your site is listed among search results.

Building the right website and ensuring that it is optimized for higher search results is essential. RVTAA can recommend people who understand the mobile RV service business and have built successful websites for other technicians.

Getting Trained

As of late 2023, there are only four places in America where RV technicians can get trained to make repairs. Only one of those schools specializes in teaching mobile RV technicians, as well as helping them start successful small businesses of their own. That's the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA) in Athens, Texas.

The facility is certified and licensed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), a state agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers in Texas. It is the only TWC-approved educational facility in America for RV owners, technicians and inspectors.

Attaining certification was an arduous process that required a complete evaluation and enhancement of all NRVTA training programs, as well as on-site inspections of the facilities. Regular reports must be submitted to the state proving NRVTA continues to meet Texas requirements for career colleges.

Not only does certification give NRVTA's programs considerable credibility, it signals the programs are on par with education students receive at other licensed Texas training centers.

Terry and Evada Cooper founded the academy in 2018 after conducting similar training programs all over the nation for many years as the RV Mobile Academy.

Today, courses are taught in The Big Red School House, a 20,000-square-foot facility on the 37-acre NRVTA campus. The building encompasses six climate-controlled classrooms and three drive-in service bays that allow RVs to be set up for students to study. An overhead observation area lets students see what takes place on an RV's roof without everyone climbing onboard.

What makes NRVTA unique is that it is adjacent to The Texan RV Park, a 112-site campground that also features six cabins and six park model homes. Students can stay directly on-site while taking training, and mingle with other students at night and on weekends.

The best part about being connected to a campground is that RV technicians are exposed to dozens of different RVs, which helps them better understand how systems may differ from one brand to another.

Not only does the academy train RV technicians, it is also one of a handful of professional education centers where RV owners can get basic training on how to fix many common problems with their recreation vehicles. NRVTA also trains professional RV inspectors.

The academy is staffed with a team of instructors who lead students through an RV Fundamentals class as well as seven different week-long advanced training courses.

RV Fundamentals

Whether students wish to become certified RV technicians or RV inspectors – or just want to learn how to fix their own RVs – everyone takes the same RV Fundamentals class.

This week-long course is a combination of in-depth, live classroom instruction and hands-on labs. Students meet eight hours a day from Monday through Friday. Many hands-on labs are scheduled so students can take apart equipment and use tools to test components and diagnose problems.

In this class, people learn about the major systems onboard an RV, how they work and what can go wrong.

The first two days address the three electrical systems onboard an RV: house 12-volt, chassis 12-volt and house 120-volt AC power. Technicians learn how to use a volt ohm meter to troubleshoot the systems and are taught to calculate electrical loads or consumption rates for any circuit.

Day Three zeros in on propane and water systems. Students learn correct procedures to test for gas leaks and to document results. They also learn about the two sewer and two fresh water systems onboard every RV as well as how to ensure various components are operating correctly.

Classes on Day Four center on common issues that can occur with RV air conditioners and absorption refrigerators commonly found in recreation vehicles. Technicians learn basic troubleshooting procedures and the location of various test points to ensure those components work properly.

The last day of class addresses water heaters, furnaces and RV exterior systems, like slideouts, roofs and levelers. Technicians learn how the components are designed to work as well as how to troubleshoot potential problems.

In 2023, tuition for the RV Fundamentals Course is \$1,644, plus \$150 for booklets and supplies, which includes a workbook used in class.

Advanced RV Technician Training

A series of advanced courses are offered immediately following the RV Fundamentals class so students can complete all their training quickly.

Each advanced training class offers five days of intensive, specialized classroom instruction combined with hands-on experiences to complete assignments under the guidance of an experienced instructor.

Here is a summary of all the advanced classes offered by NRVTA that apply specifically to mobile RV service technicians:

- RV air conditioners and heat pumps – Students learn advanced assessment, diagnostic and troubleshooting skills about operation of Dometic, Coleman and Houghton brands as well as various models. Students learn to identify thermostats and temperature controls as well as how to utilize wiring diagrams, identify various test points for low voltage controls, and study 120-volt AC power voltages.
- RV exterior systems – Students study the operations of electric and hydraulic slideouts as well as leveling systems. The skills involve identifying different materials and construction techniques used for roofs or sidewalls, as well as the components involved with running gear, such as axles, suspension and tires.
- RV absorption refrigerators – Students learn about the operation of propane and electrical circuits on Dometic and Norcold branded RV absorption refrigerators. They also learn how to identify various temperature controls used to maintain cooling in the freezer and refrigerator compartments. Students learn to read wiring diagrams for current models and troubleshoot 12-volt DC and 120-volt AC test points on circuit boards along with the propane function of this type of refrigeration.

- RV water heaters and furnaces – Students learn about the operation of Suburban, Dometic and Atwood water heaters and furnaces. They learn to read circuit flow charts and wiring diagrams, test key points on water heaters and furnaces, identify burner sequence of firing operation, proper working of a 120-volt AC heating element, and various types of thermostats.

The above classes are required to gain credentials as an Certified RV Technician with the RV Technician Association of America. There are three other advanced-level courses offered to give students even more training in these high-interest subjects:

- RV Generators – Students improve their understanding and skills involving generator operations. They also learn how to select, install, operate and maintain portable and on-board generators, as well as how to isolate and repair problems with those systems.
- Solar Power – Students learn advanced assessment, diagnostic and troubleshooting skills of solar power as it relates to RV operations. Students learn how to select, install, operate and maintain solar energy components as well as how to isolate problems and repair solar equipment.

For more information about enrolling in classes at the National RV Training Academy, visit www.nrvta.com, email info@nrvta.com or call (903) 386-0444 to speak with a student advisor.

What's the Next Step?

If you are convinced a mobile RV service business is a viable option for you, then let's launch you into a successful business, whether you opt to complete repairs part time or make it a full-time career. Here are the first twelve first steps you need to take.

1. Schedule training

Visit the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA) website at www.nrvta.com and look for the Our Programs page. It will show you the dates of upcoming RV Fundamentals classes. Pick an in-person class that fits your schedule so you can take advantage of the invaluable hands-on labs. All the advanced courses follow one after another as soon as the RV Fundamentals class ends.

You should allocate five weeks to complete all the essential classes and pass the test to become an RV Technician of America (RVTAA) Certified Technician.

You can talk to a student advisor about any enrollment questions you may have by calling NRVTA at (903) 386-0444.

After you have registered for training courses, be sure to secure your lodging options by calling The Texan RV Park at (903) 677-3326. There are RV sites available as well as cabins and park model homes.

NRVTA will provide you with a current list of tools needed to complete training. You will need to bring those tools with you when you arrive on campus because there is no on-site store selling tools.

2. Think of a business name

It can be as simple as Wilson's Mobile RV service or something that pertains to your market area, like Four Lakes Mobile RV Service. If you feel creative, dream up something really unique that people are likely to remember.

However, for best search engine optimization, your business name should suggest the types of services you provide. For example, Rick's Repairs isn't likely to rank as high as Rick's Mobile RV Service in online search results.

If you are planning to do only mobile RV services without having a fixed service center people can visit, NRVTA recommends you ensure the word "mobile" appears in your business name or is prominently displayed in any advertising. Just the presence of that word will give you an edge when people are looking to have their RVs repaired on-site.

Before you get too excited about your proposed business name, do a quick Google search to see if a similar business is already operating with the same name. Many states maintain a registry of business names that have already been incorporated. It's usually maintained by the secretary of state's office, and you should check that database to make sure you're not copying another company name.

If there is a similarly-named RV service company already operating somewhere, but it's several states away, it probably won't matter, unless that firm has secured a trademark for its company name. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office allows you to conduct free searches at www.uspto.gov.

3. Acquire a domain name

You're going to need a website, so make sure that domain name is available at an affordable price. Squatters – people who buy a bunch of domain names and wait to sell them at hyper-inflated prices – may want thousands of dollars for the domain you were hoping to get. Don't play that game unless you have your heart set on a specific name.

To see if your domain name is available, visit www.namecheap.com or any other domain register, like Epik, GoDaddy, or DreamHost. Look for a search function right on the home page to “register a domain name.” Just enter in your desired business name as one word. The shorter the better!

So, if your official business name is Madison Mobile RV Services, see if www.mmrvs.com is available. Most people use their cell phones to look up websites and it's much easier to thumb in five to 10 characters than it is to enter 20 or more.

In the past, .com domains were considered business gold while .org applied to charities. But, that's no longer the case. There are hundreds of different extensions offered today. You could even get a .pro or .tech domain. So, if a squatter is demanding \$5,000 for the .com domain, perhaps the .biz or .us option is available for far less money.

Ideally, you want to spend less than \$20 to secure a domain name. But, once you buy it, it's yours forever as long as you renew it each year for less than \$20.

While some domain registers give you the option of paying an annual fee to ensure your domain ownership information remains private, other companies provide it for free. If you're really concerned about privacy, then pay the money.

Remember, your contact information is probably going to be available on your website anyway, so you really don't need to invest the money now on domain privacy. You can always add it later if you think you're getting spam calls or emails.

Without the privacy feature in place, as soon as you register a domain, you will start to get email messages from folks all over the world, primarily India, offering to help you build a website, improve search engine optimization (SEO) or ensure your site appears No. 1 in Google. Don't respond. Many of the emails are robots and once you respond, then the spam really pours in.

4. Set up an email address

When you register your domain name, the registrar will likely offer you an opportunity to add an email plan to the package. This is a good investment and it is relatively affordable. Start small and pay for an essentials plan, which costs about \$6 per month in 2023. You can easily upgrade later if you find you need more oomph in your email capability.

It is recommended that you pay for an email account rather than rely upon free services, such as Gmail or Yahoo. It adds a layer of professionalism to your business to have your own email address.

5. Decide on a phone number

Now is the time to decide whether to use your personal cell phone number to conduct business, or to secure a separate number just for your business.

Before making that decision, you can check out virtual phone numbers available through companies like GoDaddy's SmartLine, RingCentral or Zoom. You do not need a toll-free number. When is the last time you paid for a long-distance call?

When setting up service, look for a phone number in the area code where your business will be headquartered. If you're a full-time RVer, then enter an area code for your domicile state. The service will often display a list of available telephone numbers in that area.

If you find one you like, then snatch it quickly! You will receive instructions on how to set up your cell phone to receive business calls during certain hours and how to record a voicemail message.

6. Set up a website

Today, there are a number of website services that enable you to create a decent-looking website with relatively little effort. GoDaddy, Wix and SquareSpace all offer affordable and easy-to-use templates for creating great websites. The systems will walk you through steps to add pictures and text to customize the website to your business needs.

When you're just starting out, you're only providing information and encouraging people to contact you to set up an appointment. You're not selling inventory online, so you don't have to worry about creating an expensive "shopping cart" experience.

If you're really uncomfortable setting up a basic website by yourself, you can probably hire a high school or college student to do it for you for the price of a few movies or pizzas. However, if you'd like a really top-notch website, then look for a web developer to create a custom site for you.

You can find a developer online and it's worth the extra money to work with someone in the United States or Canada. Not only is it easier to communicate with U.S.-based developers, they work during the same times you do. Overseas developers can be in a different time zone 12 hours earlier or later, and that just creates unnecessary logistical challenges.

Besides, if you ever need to take legal action against another company, you stand a much better chance of getting the case resolved in your favor if you and the developer are both located in the United States.

If you use a freelance service like fiver.com or freelance.com, you will be expected to pay for the entire cost of the project up front. However the funds are held in escrow until you give permission for the money to be released. Companies like those also have established procedures to protect the designer and client from being taken advantage of in a transaction.

7. Get an Employer Identification Number (EIN)

If you plan to hire an attorney to set up your company, he or she will likely do this for you, but check to be sure.

It's very easy to get a federal EIN by visiting www.irs.gov and search for EIN. It will lead you to the right page to apply online. Just fill in the required information and submit it to the IRS.

Your EIN number will be displayed on the screen. Be sure to print several copies and store them in a secure location. The IRS no longer mails EIN numbers to business owners, and you will need that number for EVERY federal and most state tax forms you ever fill out.

Once you have the federal EIN number, check to see if your state requires a separate ID number for your business. Most states mercifully allow you to use your federal EIN to file state forms, but some will insist on a separate number – and they'll charge you a fee to get it.

8. Incorporate your business

Now you will have to decide whether to bring in a law firm or if you're comfortable registering a business by yourself. Each state's requirements are different, so be sure to check for those in your area.

Technically, you do not need to "incorporate" your company. You can be a sole proprietor and still operate a legal business. Incorporation or forming a limited liability company (LLC) will offer a greater degree of legal protection than being a sole proprietor. For example, if you're ever sued, customers would have to file action against your LLC and not you personally. That puts only the business assets at risk rather than your home, IRA and other personal assets.

RVTAA recommends you seek the help of a lawyer when creating your legal business entity. If you're unable to use a lawyer, visit the Small Business Administration for resources. The website can be found at www.sba.gov.

Once you get to the right website for your state, you'll find forms and instructions for officially setting up your company. There will be a filing fee, but don't worry, the state will tell you what that's going to be before you submit the registration.

If you'd rather not fuss with the hassle of trying to figure out a government bureaucracy, the RVTAA has a special arrangement with the law firm of Kyler, Kohler, Ostermiller and Sorenson to set up your legal entity.

Mark Kohler is one of the senior partners and he's also a certified public accountant. His firm has set up thousands of companies and provided legal or tax advice to many small businesses connected to the RV industry. Mark has been a frequent guest speaker at the Workamper Rendezvous and was instrumental in establishing the Small Business RVer School with Workamper News.

You can hire one of their lawyers to set up your company in any state for \$1,195 plus whatever the state's filing fee may be. Or, you may be able to save money by using one of the firm's paralegals, rather than an actual lawyer, to set up your company.

You can find more information at www.kkoslawyers.com.

9. Get a business license

Some communities require businesses to have a license in order to operate legally within their jurisdictions.

Check with your local county and city governments to see what, if any, requirements and fees are associated with establishing a business within their borders. Sometimes you will need a state, county and city license.

To find the right department, start with the mayor's or county executive's office.

10. Create a logo

After you've ensured your company is on everyone's radar as a legitimate business, now it's time to have some fun. Designing a logo is a way to inject fun and color into your business venture. A logo is as simple as using a picture or design. It does not have to be unique, although that helps.

By using companies like Fiver, you can get a professional logo designed for less than \$75. Be sure to hire a reputable designer. You don't want to hire someone who simply copies another company's unique logo and adds your name to the design. That's an invitation to all sorts of legal trouble.

11. Order business cards and shirts

Once you are trained to be a certified RV technician, have legally established your business, and your website is up and running, then it's time to start promoting your company. Business cards are the essential basic marketing tool.

Go to a local print shop or office supply store, like Staples, to order some cards. PrintRunner.com is another popular place to get professional-looking cards printed quickly and affordably.

Now might be a good time to take a copy of your logo to a local embroidery shop and create some business shirts to wear when completing repairs or when meeting with people. You'll have to pay a set-up fee to "digitize" the logo. But after that, it should cost less than \$10 to apply the logo to whatever shirt you select.

The embroiderer can probably help you select quality, professional-looking shirts, too, and order them for you from their suppliers at prices often lower than what you would pay at a retail store. However, many companies allow you to bring in your own shirts to be embroidered, too.

If you're in a northern climate, long-sleeve shirts would be good since you'll be outdoors much of the time. For that reason, short-sleeve is probably the best option for working outdoors in southern states.

Desert Sun Embroidery works with businesses throughout the country to embroider shirts, hats, jackets and other clothing. More information is available at www.desertsunembroidery.com.

12. Set up accounts with parts distributors

You will need to set up accounts with several national and regional wholesale aftermarket distributors to create a pipeline for replacement parts. Arrow, Camco, Meyer Distribution, NTP and Valterra are the largest parts suppliers serving the RV industry. There are several regional distributors that limit service to just a few states, but you can order just about any product you need from one of the national firms.

Some companies established minimum order thresholds to weed out backyard mechanics. Some minimum orders can be as high as \$5,000 for an initial order, although reorder minimums aren't nearly as high. You will also need to have a sales tax number in order to qualify for a business account.

Some component suppliers, like Dometic, will generally allow mobile RV techs to provide warranty service as long as they have an established business account.

It's also a good idea to establish a relationship with the parts manager at your local RV dealership. Many times, the dealership will sell you a part on-hand, but at a higher price than you can order through an aftermarket distributor. Still, you can recover the cost from your customer and provide same-day service, which they truly appreciate.

To find obsolete parts for older RVs, eBay has been an effective source for mobile RV technicians. You don't need a special business account to use Ebay, but it may take several days for parts to arrive. Most of the regional and national wholesale distributors offer next-day delivery.

Many mobile RV technicians also use Amazon to search for parts. In fact, some of the larger warehouse distributors and even the component suppliers make their parts available on Amazon. Depending upon your location, it may be possible to get same day or overnight delivery by working with Amazon.

13. Spread the word

After completing advanced technician training, buying tools, earning credentials as an RVTAA Certified RV Technician, creating a pipeline for replacement parts and setting up your business, it's time to tell the world you're ready to provide the service people are looking for a professional to provide.

While wearing your professional-looking uniform shirt, grab a stack of business cards or brochures and make some initial contacts. By planting those seeds and delivering world-class service to all your clients, you will soon reap a harvest of business.

Give out business cards to friends and family, and ask them to pass the cards on to people who might be able to use your services. Stop into campgrounds and RV dealerships within your market area and introduce yourself. Begin engaging people on social media.

Chapter 10 provides some low-cost ideas for spreading the word and attracting customers.

Congratulations! You are finally a professional RVTAA Certified RV Technician and your own boss in a business of your own.

If you treat your business like a business in a consistent and professional manner, you'll be on your way to a new life as a successful entrepreneur!

Frequently Asked Questions

The RV Technician Association of America (RVTAA) compiled a list of frequently asked questions the association receives from technicians and people who are considering launching a mobile RV service business. If you have additional questions, feel free to contact RVTAA by email at info@nrvia.org.

Q. Do I need employees?

Most technicians who complete training are singles and couples, and opt to go into business by themselves or with a spouse. They seem to understand that taking on an employee greatly adds to the risk and expenses associated with their business.

An employee will never take the same care or responsibility for your business like you do as the owner. Employees are not necessary because most repairs can be completed by the technician alone or with the help of a spouse or older child who may be “employed” by the business.

Yes, you can complete more repairs with the help of paid employees. However, you will have to crunch the numbers to see if the costs and liability associated with hiring additional workers still makes it profitable for your business.

Don't forget, with employees, you will not only pay an hourly wage, you will need to pay unemployment insurance and the employer's portion of the Social Security tax. Some states mandate health insurance coverage and mandatory time off as well.

Q. Can my family help?

This is a great business model for a husband and wife to work together, especially if both are certified RV technicians. But even if both people aren't actively involved in fixing RVs, one can be involved in completing repairs while the other can oversee the business side of the operation by scheduling appointments, ordering parts and maintaining the books.

Q. Is there an age limit to becoming an RV technician?

RVTAA has member technicians who are in their late teens to early 70s. Depending on an individual's health and mobility, there really is no age limit to working as an RV technician. However, it is a physical job that requires technicians climb ladders, crawl around the RV, kneel and squat to complete repairs. As long as you can handle the physical aspects of the job, then nothing should stop you from embracing this opportunity.

Q. Can I retake a training class?

The National RV Training Academy has an audit policy which states that previous students may repeat a completed class for 50% of the class tuition and the booklets and supply fee along with the full registration cost.

Graduates leave with their course workbooks from each class, and have online access to additional class materials for a full year following their course completion date.

NRVTA does allow spouses to sit in on the small business portion of classes that take place each morning before tech training begins. This helps technicians recall important information later. But spouses cannot attain their own certification without paying the full price for training.

Q. Why is certification important?

RVTA certification shows potential clients that technicians have gone through a formal training process so they are capable of doing the best job possible for customers. Because RVTA membership requires 24 continuing education credits each year to maintain certification, this ensures certified technicians remain qualified to perform tasks necessary to repair any equipment found on RVs.

The continuing education requirement ensures technicians remain up-to-date regarding rapidly-changing technology installed on modern recreation vehicles.

As a service to certified technicians, NRVTA provides regular updates and resources pertaining to industry recalls and other problems techs have uncovered during the course of their work.

Q. Do you offer payment plans for training?

Yes, NRVTA does allow students to make regular payments to cover costs to attend classes later. However, all fees must be paid before the course begins.

If you have an RV, there are limited opportunities for a work-study program in cooperation with The Texan RV Park. Students can work more hours than the minimum required to receive a free RV site and bank those earnings as credits, instead of receiving cash. Credits can be applied to future training.

While it is best to complete all courses as quickly as possible while material is fresh in your mind, there is no reason why you couldn't spread training over several years by attending courses one week at a time.

Students can always use credit cards to pay for training and extend payments as long as necessary.

NRVTA also has some options for third-party financial resources. An NRVTA student advisor can help determine the best options for any situation. Feel free to call (903) 386-0444 to speak with an advisor during normal business hours.

Q. Can I use veterans benefits to pay for training?

Yes. NRVTA was approved by the Texas Veterans Commission for VA educational benefits to train veterans and other eligible persons for approved programs and courses required for those programs. That benefit is available to veterans living in any state, not just Texas.

VA Educational Benefits includes the Post-9/11 GI Bill®, the Montgomery GI Bill® and other educational assistance programs. In addition to possible funding to attend NRVTA's training programs, qualified applicants may also receive assistance for on-the-job training and career counseling.

GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by the VA is available at www.benefits.va.gov/gibill.

Q. Do you offer help setting up a business?

During the RV Fundamentals course, students have an option to sit in on a business-oriented class each morning. The presenter speaks in general terms about starting an RV-related business, whether as a mobile service technician or an RV inspector.

The next step for those students who really want additional help, is to enroll in the Workamper News Small Business RVer School. It is a 90-day online program to assist technicians with launching a successful business. There is more information about that program in Chapter Fifteen.

The RV Technician Association of America

The RV Technician Association of America (RVTAA) was established in 2021 to increase awareness of the need for trained and certified RV technicians.

The association works to enhance the professionalism of certified technicians, and to support technicians working in the field, either as employees of RV service centers or in businesses of their own.

RVTAA's mission is to set and promote standards for RV technicians and to provide educational programs needed to achieve excellence in the profession. The association strives to support the needs of members and the RV industry as a whole.

RVTAA's goal is to develop a nationwide network of certified professional RV technicians across North America who have completed a standardized testing and certification process to ensure consumers receive quality diagnosis and repair by true professionals.

The association helps to ensure the success of its members by granting them professional accreditation, which sets them apart from amateur technicians. Members enjoy several benefits, such as:

- A free online community of technicians who can offer tips and ideas as well as answer questions or offer advice.
- Free promotion of a member's business on the RVTAA website.
- Regular notification of people looking for technicians in a member's market area. However, it is a member's responsibility to follow through to contact customers and book the business.
- Business-building advice to help technicians grow their firms and promote their services.
- An annual online training event for RV technicians and RV inspectors to earn substantial continuing education credits.
- Access to technical and business operation assistance 24 hours a day.
- A video library showing how to fine-tune the repair process or identify often overlooked areas to aid in diagnosing and fixing RVs and their components.
- Opportunities for collaboration with RVTAA partners seeking technicians for large-scale operations.
- The ability to use RVTAA's logo to promote a repair business on signs, gear, business cards and websites.

Levels of certification

There are three levels of certification offered through RVTAA. The credentials affirm the person has completed necessary technician training and passed a certification exam. It also ensures RV owners that the technician is fully-qualified to perform thorough RV diagnostic and repair procedures. The levels of certification include:

RVTAA Registered RV Service Technician

This credential is achieved by attending a weeklong RV Fundamentals training course at the National RV Training Academy (NRVTA). Classes cover basic technical knowledge and skills needed to build, test, inspect, repair, service and maintain recreational vehicles and their systems, as well as interior and exterior components.

This includes instruction about braking, hydraulic and towing systems; electrical systems; propane systems; propane and electric appliances; carpentry; plumbing; welding; and structural frames.

The program is focused on helping people attain entry-level skills required for technicians new to the RV industry as well as those who perform pre-delivery inspections (PDI).

Once students acquire necessary knowledge and skills, they are eligible to take the RVTAA Registered RV Service Technician exam in order to join the ranks of professional technicians.

RVTAA Certified RV Service Technician

This credential is achieved by attending five weeks of training at NRVTA. Classes advance a student's skills in the areas of propane, electrical, plumbing, fire and life safety, weight knowledge and other technical skills as outlined by the RV Service Training Council.

The advanced RV technician curriculum combines classroom instruction with comprehensive hands-on troubleshooting skills pertaining to various RV systems.

Once students acquire advanced knowledge and skills, they are eligible to take the RVTAA Certified RV Service Technician exam and join an elite group of professional technicians.

RVTAA Master Certified RV Service Technician

Once RVTAA Certified RV Service Technicians achieve proficiency in the areas of RV propane, electrical, plumbing, fire and life safety, and weight knowledge, then they can advance their careers even further by earning the association's highest credential.

It is attained by attending an additional two weeks of training at NRVTA. The master technician curriculum provides a comprehensive focus on all aspects relative to RV living, troubleshooting and reconstruction of RV systems. In addition, students learn essential theory about mentoring and teaching the next generation of RV technicians and inspectors.

Master RV technician training could lead to being promoted to service manager, parts advisor, shop foreman, vice president of operations, service underwriter, or master service technician instructor.

Once students have worked three years as an RVTAA Certified RV Service Technician and completed the two-week advanced course, then they are eligible to take the RVTAA Master Certified RV Service Technician exam. People who hold that credential belong to an exclusive group of professionals who have advanced to the highest levels of their career.

Cost to maintain RVTAA certification

The first year's membership is paid through the costs for advanced training at the National RV Training Academy.

Membership is renewed each year for \$299. However, technicians must also complete tech work, maintain membership requirements, and accumulate 24 continuing education units (CEU) of additional training annually.

For more information on becoming an RVTAA member, visit www.rvtaa.org or email info@rvtaa.org.

Small Business RVer School

Since 1987, Workamper News is a publication that has helped connect full-time RVers with short-term full- and part-time jobs throughout North America.

Around 2010, the publication expanded its services to help small business owners start, launch and maintain successful businesses they can operate anywhere from their recreation vehicles. As more people started businesses, they were asking for more assistance in helping their dreams become a reality.

In 2020, Workamper News launched the Small Business RVer School for entrepreneurs on the move. Its goal was to help RVers develop a system to make money, save on taxes and avoid stress while enjoying the benefits of being their own boss.

By helping them get started on the right foot with the right business tools, the school assists these “campreneurs” in developing a plan for personal success and financial freedom.

This community of like-minded people ensures that mobile small business owners don’t have to navigate the journey by themselves. With the Small Business RVer School, entrepreneurs are aligned with tools they need to build their businesses and strengthen their soft skills to maintain momentum.

Self-paced training is provided by Steve Anderson, the former president and director of possibilities for Workamper International. The Small Business RVer School incorporates practical business instruction with the best personal practices developed by the late Zig Ziglar, a legendary motivational speaker and success guru.

Tuition includes the following materials that will be shipped to you or made available online:

- *Eight Steps to Start & Grow Your Business*, a program developed by attorney and certified public accountant Mark J. Kohler. It includes a printed copy and access to an online interactive suite, which is a \$99 value.
- Online access to the Kohler Tax & Legal Library, a \$399 value.
- The *DISC Advantage Personality Profile Assessment* and course, a \$99 value.
- The *Ziglar Performance Planner* and course, a \$49 value.
- The *Ziglar Goal Setting and Achievement* course, a \$69 value.
- The *Ziglar Building the Best You* course, a \$69 value.
- Twelve monthly live webinar-style question-and-answer sessions with Mark Kohler, a \$399 value.

The Small Business RVer School features more than 40 recorded videos on topics such as:

- Starting with Why – Your motivation for being in business.
- Three plans for developing a small business.

- Establishing a strategic plan to accomplish your 10-year vision.
- Creating a successful business plan.
- Choosing the best business entity for your company.
- Controlling start-up, fixed and variable costs.
- Determining your break-even point.
- Bookkeeping basics and setting up various accounts.
- Creating an affordable marketing plan.
- Taking advantage of legal tax deductions.
- Paying yourself, family members and sub-contractors the right way.

The cost to enroll in the online Small Business RVer School is \$997, and you retain lifetime access to course materials.

So, put your passion into action and take the necessary first steps toward complete personal and financial independence.

“You are what you are and where you are because of what has gone into your mind.
You can change what you are and where you are by changing what goes into your mind.”

- Zig Ziglar

Don't Wait – Start Your Business Today

A few years ago, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported there were 9.6 million self-employed individuals in 2016, and that number was expected to rise to 10.3 million by 2026.

However, the agency could not have been further off in its estimate, if it tried.

By July of 2019, the agency reported there were 16 million self-employed Americans. Following the COVID-fueled recession of 2020, that number jumped to 44 million, according to Gallup.

In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics noted the No. 1 source for growth in new companies and corresponding jobs will be personal care and services. Mobile RV services are certainly providing an important service to people who enjoy the RV lifestyle.

Whenever you take steps to control your own destiny, you are always better off in the long-term by working for yourself than you would be working for someone else.

Don't be held back by fear because you were designed for more!

Take the first step into a new life as a self-employed RV technician. Your only regret will be that you didn't start it a year ago.