

Yes, You Can Make Money as a Certified RV Inspector

The National RV Inspectors Association

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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 inspecting recreation vehicles (RVs).

If you have good attention to detail and a desire to provide a valuable service to grateful people, then this business might be for you. You don't need a lot of technical skill or even knowledge, just a desire to help others feel more comfortable about a major purchase.

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 you read this booklet, I am convinced you will see the potential of owning an RV inspection business. I, along with the rest of the staff at the National RV Training Academy and the National RV Inspectors Association, 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
National RV Inspectors Association

The need for RV inspectors

If you have ever purchased a home, chances are very good that you had it inspected before you finalized the loan documents. It's the same in the marine industry. You may have had a marine survey prior to purchasing a boat. You may have also done the same thing when buying a used car by asking a mechanic you trust to check it over for potential problems.

RV inspectors perform similar services. Inspectors aren't going to advise people as to whether or not they should buy a particular RV. Their job is to check it over from top to bottom, inside and out in order to identify issues with the unit, whether it is a pop-up camper, travel trailer, fifth wheel or motorhome.

There is a common misconception that only fully-trained and certified RV technicians are knowledgeable enough to inspect a recreation vehicle. That is not true at all.

It does not take a rocket scientist to see a stain on the ceiling to know there is water coming in from somewhere. Nor does it take a lot of skill to ensure the appliances work, water comes on, the outlets deliver electricity, and there aren't any holes in the roof.

Yes, inspectors need some technical skills. They need to use a tool to check tire and water pressure, as well as use a manometer to test pressure in propane lines – all of which are easy to learn how to use. Inspectors also learn how to extract fluid from a motorhome or generator to send to a lab for analysis.

However, they do not need to identify the source of a water leak, the reason why the television doesn't come on or determine why the refrigerator temperature doesn't get lower than 50 degrees. All the inspector does is discover the problem and report results.

Having RVs inspected by qualified third-parties is a relatively new benefit available to buyers.

In the past, people have paid RV dealers to do inspections. However, their service departments are often weeks behind in fixing all the RVs needing repair. If a dealer does an inspection, it won't be nearly as thorough as one performed by an independent third-party.

Buyers may also wonder if the dealership is noting a deficiency just so its service department can profit from having the problem fixed.

Inspectors certified by the National RV Inspectors Association (NRVIA) are prohibited through the association's code of ethics from making any repairs for problems discovered during the evaluation. That gives more credibility to the final report because there is no motivation for inspectors to suggest unnecessary repairs.

Trained inspectors

Inspectors trained and certified by NRVIA are capable of evaluating any recreation vehicle. They are looking at all systems to ensure proper function. Inspectors 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 if 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.

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

The inspectors have extra training to understand how to evaluate the inner workings of a recreation vehicle. They are shown how to conduct a top-to-bottom inspection and prepare detailed reports. Inspectors also learn to collect samples for fluid analysis on motorhomes and generators.

People who complete this training must take a written exam and submit two actual inspections, one of a travel trailer and the other of a motorhome. After passing those requirements, students can attain official certification. In fact, NRVIA Certified RV Inspectors often command higher prices for their evaluations.

They are hired by buyers to complete a thorough analysis of an RV they’re thinking of purchasing. Inspectors can also be hired by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to inspect RVs being purchased by the federal government to serve as emergency homes following natural disasters.

Sometimes inspectors are hired by insurance companies and financial institutions to conduct an evaluation before extending coverage or loaning money to the RV owner.

Why is an inspection important?

People would never buy a home without first having it inspected. It should reason they’d never buy a home on wheels without an inspection as well. In fact, it’s probably even more important for someone to have an RV evaluated before buying it.

RVs shake, rattle and roll down highways at speeds up to 70 mph. A tropical storm is considered a hurricane when its wind speeds reach 75 mph. As a result, things on an RV WILL break – and often.

Demand is so high for RVs that the units are often completely built in just four business days. While some manufacturers have rigorous quality control checks, others aren’t as diligent. Dealers give the RVs a cursory review when they arrive on the lots just to make sure they are ready for display.

A thorough RV inspection is essential to protect buyers from purchasing a lemon and, more importantly, from incurring a lot of expense by needing a litany of items repaired after they take delivery of the unit. Even if post-sale repairs are covered by warranty, it can often take months to get an RV back from the service department. Yet, the buyer must continue to make monthly payments and, of course, doesn’t get to enjoy using the RV.

An inspection will uncover major and minor problems during the evaluation. With that list in hand, buyers are in a much better position to:

- Negotiate a lower price on the RV. In fact, many times the savings more than covers the cost of having the unit inspected.
- Ensure broken items are repaired or replaced before accepting delivery of the unit. You’d be surprised how quickly problems can be repaired by an RV dealer if a delay impedes the sale of the RV.
- Have a better understanding of how much additional investment will be needed to completely address all the problems uncovered during an inspection.

- Prioritize repairs. A leaking roof takes precedence over a leaky faucet. An owner might live with a temperamental drawer that doesn't always close properly, but not a refrigerator door that swings open during travel.

It is infinitely better to have an RV evaluated by a trained, professional inspector than it would be for the buyer to look over the RV himself – even with years of RVing experience.

An inspection is critical for anyone just entering the RV lifestyle. Someone new to the RV industry often doesn't even know what questions to ask about an RV, let alone know what to look for to ensure the vehicle is okay to use. RV manufacturers put a lot of bling inside their units, and that can distract buyers so they don't see potential problems with essential components and structures.

Finally, a thorough, well-documented inspection prevents an RV buyer from being taken advantage of by an unscrupulous seller. The NRVIA has received reports of buyers purchasing an RV and driving it away only to discover one of the televisions was missing, or an upgraded component was replaced with a cheaper alternative.

But, because the buyer had the RV inspected, he or she had proof of its pre-sale condition. Inspections work to keep sellers honest.

Some sellers are even beginning to recognize the benefit of having an RV inspected before listing a unit for sale. Not only does an inspection give sellers a list of major problems to resolve before listing their RV, they can also share the inspection report with buyers and explain what work was done to correct any deficiencies discovered.

Banks, insurance companies and firms offering extended warranties have also discovered the advantages of having an RV inspected before agreeing to provide coverage. Think about it:

- Wholesale lenders helping dealers buy RVs to resell want to make sure a vehicle being held on paper as collateral is the same unit sitting on a dealer's lot. Before loaning money to a dealer to buy a used RV, financial institutions also want to make sure the unit is in good enough condition to be resold.
- Extended warranty companies are on the hook for three to seven years to cover any major problem with an RV. Those companies would certainly like to know if there is any evidence of pre-existing conditions that could cost them a lot of money to fix a year or two later.
- Before extending coverage on a new or used RV, insurance companies would be very interested in knowing whether the propane system is safe, the refrigerator isn't likely to catch on fire, and all the carbon monoxide or smoke detectors work.

All the above firms want to know if the vehicle identification number (VIN) on a loan document or insurance policy is the same number on the RV in question. Inspections are a win-win just for buyers, but other parties, too.

Is this a full- or part-time business?

The beauty of launching an RV inspection business is that you can put in as much time as you would like, based on your available time.

So, if you have a full-time job and can only do inspections 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 two inspections per month. For many families, an extra \$500 per month can buy a lot of breathing room in making ends meet. By doing inspections, you can make even more money than that on a part-time basis.

If your situation allows you to jump into the opportunity full-time, you'll discover you can make several thousand dollars a week.

Jill Andrew, the owner of Indy RV Inspection, became a certified inspector in June 2020 and completed six paid evaluations in her first month.

"Within a few months, I was making so much doing inspections that I was able to leave my full-time job," she explained. "I can make more in a few days doing inspections than I could make in a whole month working for someone else."

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

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

Benefits of an RV inspection business

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

- Low point of entry – You can be fully certified, acquire all the tools you need, and register the business with government entities for less than \$8,000.
- 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 phone, laptop and tablet computer.
- A high-margin service – Other than travel, marketing and annual membership fees, there are few expenses to offset the income earned from performing RV inspections.
- 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 a home office 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. An RV inspection business has no special regulations outside of those applying to all businesses, such as having a tax ID number.
- Set your own hours – When you work is between you and your clients. If you don't want to get up at 6 a.m. on a Saturday to do an inspection, then nobody will force you to do so, although you might lose a client.
- Work with whomever you want – As a business owner, you get to choose the people you want 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 conduct an inspection and are paid on the spot.

- No inventory – You don't have to maintain a storeroom full of supplies or even a truck full of spare parts. Most inspectors keep a few fluid analysis kits on hand for when they evaluate a motorhome, but the cost is under \$45 per kit.
- No staff needed – One of the biggest advantages to being an RV inspector 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 any wages you would pay.
- Excellent family business – Many inspectors work with their spouses or adult children when evaluating RVs. One checks the interior components while the other reviews the RV's exterior. Both people are often certified RV inspectors, although NRVIA standards require only the person signing the report to be certified. NRVIA strongly discourages inspectors from taking young children with them when evaluating an RV. Kids can be cute ambassadors for your business, but tremendously distracting. You certainly don't want a child to break something on an RV or at the seller's location.
- 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 them inspections. People who need inspections look for you either through an online search or via the NRVIA's inspector locator map at www.nrvia.org/locate. NRVIA will also send out notices to members on behalf of people who contact the association looking for inspectors. However, it is always up to you whether to reach out to those people who are eager to hire someone.

There are few opportunities similar to an RV inspection business which allow people to make as good an income, on their own schedule, by working with people they chose, while incurring limited expenses and excellent tax advantages.

The Market for RV Inspections

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

Let's look at some of the numbers.

New RVs built

According to the RV Industry Association (RVIA), the RV industry has been surging in recent years, even before COVID-19 shook up the business world. The industry reported significant numbers of new RVs being built during recent years:

2022 = 493,268

2021 = 600,240

2020 = 430,412

2019 = 406,070

2018 = 483,672

2017 = 504,599

2016 = 430,691

Each one of the new RVs should go through some type of inspection. Dealers may use inspectors to conduct an initial delivery inspection before making an RV available to customers. Buyers, on the other hand, would hire an NRVIA Certified RV Inspector to thoroughly review an RV they want to purchase.

That's usually more than 8,349 new RVs needing to be inspected every week, or nearly 1,200 per day.

Used RVs sold

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.

Statistical Surveys is a company that collects data about RV registrations from state agencies, which make the information available to third-parties. While the firm can't get data from every state, over the years it has developed a process to estimate numbers in a very reliable way.

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 has claimed there are 9 million RV-owning households in America. Thanks to COVID, that number jumped to 11.2 million in 2021. However, that number rarely fluctuates even with 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 – proving the need for having an RV inspected before buying it.

RVIA also made plenty of data available regarding the size of the market by state. You can access it for free at www.rvia.org/reports-trends. The RVs Move America report was compiled in 2022, but it can still give you an idea as to how popular RVing is in the state you'd like to do business.

As of September 2023, RV Trader's website (www.rvtrader.com) offered more than 58,000 used RVs for sale. It's competitor, RVT.com, listed 31,800. Spring is often a hot time for families to buy RVs and so is fall when snowbirds generally start looking to make a purchase.

Those numbers don't include RVs advertised through Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist and local sources, like newspapers and community bulletin boards.

As of September 2023, there are a few Facebook groups devoted to buying and selling used RVs:

- RV Classifieds boasts 37,000 members
- Class C RVs for Sale has 199,000 members
- RV & Camping Exchange has 71,000 members
- Campers Buy/Sell/Trade lists 58,000 members

The bottom line is there are a lot of RVs sold each year in the United States. Whether used or new, the buyers would benefit greatly by having their motorhome, fifth wheel or travel trailer inspected before signing a contract.

Because so many RVs are sold online, they attract a lot of out-of-state buyers. It is very difficult for a long-distance buyer to assess the true value of an RV by simply looking at pictures and reading descriptions posted by sellers.

Many out-of-state buyers have discovered the convenience of paying a local inspector to evaluate the RV before incurring costs to fly or drive to the seller's location.

It is much less expensive to hire an inspector to give a buyer peace-of-mind about moving forward with the purchase than it is to go directly to the seller's location. By getting an RV inspected before signing a contract, many buyers are so confident of an RV's condition that they can finalize a deal and drive or tow their new unit back home – enjoying their first vacation along the way.

Competition among inspectors

The NRVIA is the only credentialing source to certify people performing RV inspections in the United States. Yes, there are some independent inspectors offering their services. But, without the certification, they lack the marketing advantages and credibility available to NRVIA Certified Inspectors.

Knowing that, there were more than 500 certified members of NRVA in January 2021. Approximately 25 new inspectors are added to the ranks every two months. Some of them are doing inspections full time, while others are looking for part-time income.

That may seem like a lot, but when there are 3,000 RVs that should be inspected every day of the week, the market is pretty much wide open for entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

Florida is one of the biggest states for RV sales in America. As of August 2020, there were approximately six full-time RV inspectors in Florida, and most of them were located in the central part of the state. During winter months, that number can balloon to two dozen. However, increased RV sales and the presence of snowbirds during those months create even more demand for inspection services.

Yet, the rest of the state only has one or two inspectors running businesses in major markets.

NRVA maintains a map at www.nrvia.com which shows where its members are currently located. From that map, you can get an idea as to how many inspectors are in a specific market area at the moment. Keep in mind that because some inspectors are full-time RVers themselves, there are more inspectors in southern states during the winter months.

As expected, larger metropolitan areas tend to draw more inspectors than rural parts of a state. Your market area will be defined by how far you're willing to travel to complete an inspection.

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.
- RV repair centers and mobile service technicians within the same radius. Sometimes desperate buyers will turn to a mobile technician to give an RV a quick evaluation. It also helps gauge the level of interest in RVing in your market.
- RV inspectors in your area. You might have to look up similar terms, like "rv inspectors" and "rv inspection 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, they must be purchased first and each one represents an inspection opportunity.
- 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 inspection 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 complete an inspection.

What Does an Inspection Involve?

If you've ever had a home inspected, it is almost criminal how quickly inspectors complete the jobs – and how much is overlooked.

That's not the case with evaluations performed by people who are NRVIA Certified RV Inspectors. These are thorough, top-to-bottom and inside-to-out inspections of the RV as well as every component in it.

NRVIA members have access to a third-party software system which guides them through every step of the inspection process to ensure nothing is missed. The software is preloaded with an itemized checklist of hundreds of tasks that must be completed to ensure a thorough inspection is performed.

Many inspectors use a tablet computer to check off items as they are reviewed, and to insert comments or photos next to those items. The software compiles a final report and merges comments and photos into the proper areas so buyers can easily find and understand the results.

Without giving away all the trade secrets, here is an overview of some items evaluated during an RV inspection:

Life Safety

- Do the motorhome seatbelts work as expected?
- Can the exit windows be opened?
- Are the carbon monoxide and smoke detectors working properly?
- Is there an electrical issue that could create a "hot skin" condition?
- Are there any leaks in propane lines?

Exterior

- Are there any holes or tears in the roof membrane that could allow water to enter the RV?
- Are there any bubbles in the sidewalls indicating a delamination process has begun?
- Are the compartments clean, and do the doors latch properly?
- Do the levelers go up and down as expected?
- Do the slideouts go in and out?

Appliances

- Does every burner on the stove light up?
- Does the refrigerator cool to a temperature of 34 degrees?
- Does the freezer cool to a temperature of 10 degrees?
- Does the microwave heat water?
- Do the televisions turn on?

Interior

- Does every outlet plug deliver electricity?
- Do the doors and drawers open, close and latch properly?
- Do all the light switches work?
- Are there any rips or holes in the furniture?
- Is there any evidence of water getting inside the RV?

Major systems

- Does the propane line maintain proper pressure?
- Is the power cord in good condition with no frays?
- Does the water pump deliver adequate flow and pressure?
- Are all the batteries charged?
- Does the generator turn on and deliver appropriate current?

Tires

- Once properly inflated, are there any slow leaks?
- Is the manufactured date of tires still within the acceptable range?
- Are there signs of excessive wear?

Bathroom

- Does the toilet flush?
- Are the tank-level indicators accurate?
- Does hot and cold water come out of the shower?

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning

- Does the furnace deliver heat?
- Does the air conditioner blow cool air?
- Do the vents open when fans are on?

On motorhomes, inspectors also collect samples of engine oil, radiator fluid and transmission fluid. A fluid analysis is also performed for onboard generators found on motorhomes and towable RVs.

The items above represent about one-tenth of the things evaluated on a typical RV inspection.

How long does an inspection take?

The length of time will vary on the size of the RV and its complexity. For example, it will take significantly more time to evaluate a 45-foot diesel motorhome with five slideouts than it would to inspect a 20-foot travel trailer with no slideouts.

It will also depend upon the levels of service you opt to provide. Will you just offer a standard inspection of key components? Then you might invest two to three hours evaluating the RV. Will you offer an enhanced inspection and review every inch of the unit and all its components? Then you could spend seven or eight hours to do it the right way.

What makes RV inspections so valuable are the comments and photographs provided in the final report. However, capturing images adds to the length of time it takes to complete an evaluation.

It is not uncommon to include more than 100 photos in the report, and larger motorhomes or RVs with discernable problems may feature hundreds of images. That means each photo has to be taken, uploaded and inserted into the report.

NRVIA highly recommends that inspectors maintain backup copies of all photos and notes for at least three years in the event someone has questions later.

You also need to factor in time to review the report with customers. Although some inspectors opt to meet with clients personally to go over key findings, many inspectors simply email the report and then call the client or meet with them on a platform, like Zoom, to discuss results.

You should never just send the report and hope clients can figure it out on their own.

Inspecting an RV isn't difficult work, but it can require a lot of time and energy. Most inspectors will only schedule one job per day to ensure they have enough time to thoroughly evaluate an RV, complete the report and review results with a client.

Some inspectors may have an opportunity to complete more evaluations on a long day, but attempting to do more than one is discouraged. That recommendation is for your sanity and to be sure your report is deliverable on the same day an inspection took place, or the day after.

The need for photos

There is an old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. When it comes to RV inspections, a few pictures can speak volumes about the condition of a unit at that point in time.

NRVIA strongly encourages inspectors to take lots of pictures of each rig they evaluate. That should include images of the RV from every angle, as well as every component on the roof.

Every room should be photographed too, along with every appliance. It is beneficial to snap photos of test results, too. For example:

- Do the stove burners work? Show a picture with blue flame coming out of each burner.
- Does the refrigerator actually cool down? Show an image of the thermometer inside the RV.
- Does the water just dribble out of the shower? A video will easily convey that information.
- Does the generator sputter when turned on? A video will indicate the equipment needs service.

Photos not only help tell the story of an RV's condition, but they also work to protect you and the buyer.

That way, if a buyer picks up a unit that has been inspected, but later discovers something is broken, ripped, torn or missing, a photograph serves as proof that was not always the case. Nobody can accuse you of having missed checking an item and documenting a problem, especially with photographic evidence.

If a service center claims a repair was done on the RV after an inspection, then the buyer can look at photos from the final report to verify it was really completed. But, if the problem appears to be the same after service work was performed as it was at the time an inspection photo was taken, then the RV owner has more reason to question the repair.

There have been reports of some components being swapped out for lesser-quality equipment between the time an inspection takes place and the buyer picks up an RV. Photographs tell that story very well.

The good news is that you don't need expensive photo or video equipment. The quality of images captured on today's cell phones will suffice. You will just need to develop a system to identify and sort the photos by assignment.

The final report

You've finished the inspection and ensured that all items on the checklist were evaluated. You took good notes of your findings and backed them up with photos and videos. Now it's time to compile that information into a useful, easy-to-understand report.

That's where the HomeGauge software will save you hours of time.

Because you entered information and photos while doing the inspection, the software already knows where that data is located. It works its magic and prepares a detailed report.

All you need to do is make sure the report formatted properly and deliver it to the client. Many inspectors simply email reports to buyers and leave it up to them to print the report, if desired.

The report is broken down into these key categories:

- Life safety issues – Problems that, if not addressed, could cause injury or death.
- Major issues – Indications of potentially-expensive problems or things that need attention relatively quickly.
- Minor issues – Problems that need to be addressed by a qualified RV service technician at some point, but not necessarily anytime soon.
- Comments – This is where extensive notes appear documenting each item you evaluated during the inspection.

By keeping the data together, it makes it super easy for clients to understand results. As you review the report with clients, you should draw their attention to problem areas.

Remember, it's not your job to advise a client that an RV is a good purchase to make. Your job is to convey its true condition. The buyer must ultimately decide whether an RV is worth the asking price.

However, to help buyers reach that conclusion, you can point out trouble areas. For example, if there were stains on the ceiling or mold in a basement compartment, you should alert the buyer because it suggests water is getting in somehow, someday.

It is not your job to say the leak is coming from a specific place, nor do you have to explain what needs to be done to fix it. By simply shining a spotlight on a potential problem, you give your client information to make an informed decision to proceed with the purchase or simply walk away.

Depending upon the RV, a final report can be as large as 100 pages. That can be information overload for a buyer, especially if he or she has not had any experience owning an RV in the past.

NRIVA recommends reviewing the report with a client on the phone or in person, but also making yourself available for a follow-up conversation once a client has had time to digest the information and prepare additional questions.

That's it. From the moment you arrive wherever the RV is located until you deliver the final report, you are likely to invest between six to 12 hours of time.

"On the average, we probably put in an eight- to 10-hour day from when we arrive on site for the inspection until we review the finished report with a customer," said Al Pearce, with A&L Inspection.

For someone new to the field, it takes Jill Andrew four to eight hours to review an RV and work up a report. "Just looking at the roof can take an hour of crawling on my hands and knees looking for any tears or penetration," she explained. "I literally look at every single thing on the camper to make sure it works."

An important question still remains. Is it time well spent so that you can really make money inspecting RVs? We'll answer that in the next chapter.

Income Potential

So, how much money can really be made by doing inspections?

People are accustomed to seeing business claims suggesting they can make \$10,000 a month just by stuffing envelopes or making \$100,000 working just four hours a week. Few people believe that and those who fall for the bait are often seriously disappointed.

There is an old proverb that proclaims, “A fool and his money are soon parted.” There’s also the old saying, “There is a sucker born every minute.”

NRVIA’s goal is not to extract money from people just for the sake of selling a membership. Rather, the association’s purpose is to help entrepreneurs start successful businesses of their own.

Most people have been invited into some type of network marketing business at some point during their lives. Yes, it’s true people can make a very good living in those businesses, but only if they are willing to do the work.

However, if all they do is build networks of people hoping to make money off of work performed by others they recruit, it will never be a long-term success. If those business owners don’t buy or use their own products, but only recruit a bunch of people who also don’t buy or use the products either, then the network will eventually collapse.

But, when people are willing to put in the necessary work, and follow examples set by others who have already traveled the same path, amazing things can happen.

With that in mind, let’s explore the income potential of starting an RV inspection business.

Four pricing models

While business owners can set their prices at whatever levels they want, there are four common pricing models that inspectors generally use in setting fees for the services they provide.

Model 1 - One set price

Some inspectors will set one flat-rate price for an inspection regardless of the type of RV being evaluated or how long it is expected to take. For example, they may market their services as “Get a premium inspection for any RV for just \$895.”

Model 2 - Good, Better, Best

Some inspectors set three tiers of service. The goal here is to give customers a level of service they can afford while having various components reviewed at a price point which makes them comfortable.

For example, a basic inspection might be limited to evaluating life safety issues and major components, while the mid-level package may evaluate all components, and a premium package is a true top-to-bottom, inside-and-out review of the RV’s condition.

Model 3 - Type of RV

This model bases pricing on the time it would typically take to perform an inspection. As was mentioned before, it would take far less time to evaluate a 14-foot pop-up trailer than it would a 45-foot motorhome with five slideouts.

Model 4 - Hybrid approach

Some inspectors combine elements of Model 2 with those of Model 3 to create a hybrid pricing plan that offers various levels of service based on the type of RV. Perhaps they have two tiers of inspections for travel trailers and three for motorhomes.

Examples (prices current as of 2021)

- Lisa and Jason Carletti, from My RV Inspection, charge \$350 for a smaller travel trailer and \$1,000 for a motorhome.
- Geoff Baker, with Inspect RV, charges a flat-rate of \$495 for towables, Class B and Class C motorhomes. That rises to \$595 for two-axle Class A motorhomes and Class C super diesels. Inspecting a three-axle motorhome will cost \$645.
- Bryan Carbonnell, with Tech-Reational Vehicle Services, offers two levels of service. A life-safety inspection focuses on the RV's safety elements while a comprehensive evaluation is a thorough inspection of the RV interior, exterior and all components. For a life-safety inspection, he charges \$325 for a towable or truck camper and \$379 for a motorhome of any type. For a comprehensive inspection, he charges \$545 for towables and \$645 for motorhomes. (These are U.S. equivalents because his company is based part-time in Canada)
- John Gaver looks for what he calls "major show stoppers" right away during the inspection process. If he uncovers something he thinks might end the likelihood of proceeding with a purchase, he sends photos in a text message to the client, and follows up with a phone call. If the client tells him to go home, he doesn't charge his full inspection fee of \$699 for towables and \$799 for motorhomes. Rather, he charges them \$100 per hour for his actual time spent (a minimum of two hours) plus any mileage fees over 50 miles.

Add-on services

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

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. 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.

A technician uses 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, if the tow vehicle is included in the RV purchase, samples from it are evaluated as well.

The samples are sent 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 or 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 even 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 the gasket has started to disintegrate.

By adding a complete fluid analysis to the inspection report, you can significantly reduce your client's risks of buying RVs facing expensive engine, transmission or generator problems. It can also save them money up front. Why go to the major expense of changing the oil, coolant or transmission fluid if the analysis shows it still has plenty of useful life in it?

Inspectors typically charge \$75 for each type of fluid to be inspected, and bundle all five types of RV and generator fluids for \$350. Pricing varies from inspector to inspector and can be set at what you feel comfortable charging.

RV orientations

Once a buyer purchases an RV, he or she needs to know how to use it. Many times, dealers will overwhelm buyers with an encyclopedia of information when they pick up the unit, most of which will be forgotten before they drive off the lot. The dealer "walk-through" presentations are rarely recorded and generally last 30- to 60-minutes.

Inspectors have found a lucrative add-on service of conducting detailed one-on-one orientations to explain how to use a specific RV. It's one thing for an RV dealer to explain how to dump the holding tanks, but an entirely different matter to have someone standing next to the buyer as he or she connects a sewer hose and flushes tanks.

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

These orientations can be conducted at the buyer's home before their first trip, or the inspectors meet buyers at a local campground where he or she can also help them set up camp for the first time.

Recording the orientations is encouraged so buyers can reference the material frequently.

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

Dealer inspections

Some RV inspectors have developed relationships with local dealerships to conduct basic inspections when an RV arrives on the dealer's lot. These inspections determine what items need to be repaired before the unit is offered for sale.

Other dealers hire inspectors to perform what is known as a pre-delivery inspection (PDI), which ensures that the RV is ready to be delivered to the buyer. All the components are checked to ensure they work properly.

Sometimes, dealers will hire inspectors to conduct a walk-through presentation with customers.

The benefit to dealers is that they hire knowledgeable people to do the work without having to pull a technician away from his or her duties to do the task. The pay for most technicians is based per repair, not per hour.

So, to pull a tech off the job to do a PDI or walk-through is a waste of time for both the technician and the dealership. Technician time can be billed at up to \$150 per hour to do repairs. So, if a dealer can hire an inspector to do the work for \$50, it is money well spent.

FEMA inspections

Through its relationship with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), NRVIA is often called in to perform RV inspections on units used as temporary housing following disasters.

After a hurricane, flood, wildfire, tornado, explosion or any other disaster, FEMA is tasked with providing emergency housing. RVs make the ideal emergency homes because they are portable and offer the essentials of a bathroom, kitchen and bedroom.

The last thing the agency wants to do is put a family that just lost everything into a temporary home that doesn't work. It adds unnecessary stress to the situation, and makes the agency look inept.

Because RVs are readily available, FEMA will purchase hundreds of them from dealers and manufacturers. The units are transported to a staging area near the disaster zone.

FEMA contracts with NRVIA to inspect the RVs before they are turned over to disaster victims. In turn, NRVIA subcontracts with individual inspectors to crank out basic evaluations of the RVs and make lists of items that need to be repaired immediately.

The amount of compensation is based on the number of inspections that must be provided during a certain period of time. However, following recent hurricanes, inspectors have made \$3,000 per week for several months to evaluate the emergency shelters.

This type of income is unreliable due to the timing of disasters and FEMA's needs for emergency housing. Inspectors should not expect that this add-on income is regularly available. But, when it is, NRVIA alerts its members about the opportunity and those inspectors who have the ability to travel to a staging site for an extended period of time will be invited to join the effort.

Pass-on expenses

As a general rule, RV inspectors factor local mileage into the rates they charge. Most inspections include mileage to jobs within a 50-mile radius of the inspector's location. Again, inspectors can decide for themselves when to charge for mileage and at what rate.

However, when a job is out of the inspector's primary market area, it is not uncommon for them to recover travel and overnight costs.

For example, if an inspector resides in Indiana, but someone really needs an RV evaluated in Wisconsin that weekend, the inspector may factor in travel time, mileage and even hotel costs and meals when pricing the service.

Demand for inspections is increasing all the time. But the lack of certified inspectors does create opportunities for desperate buyers to hire people from out-of-area, and they are willing to pay the additional expenses.

After all, when the buyer is about to spend \$150,000 on a new motorhome, it is often well worth an additional few hundred dollars to get it inspected quickly by a professional.

Possible inspection income scenarios

So, what can you expect to make as an RV inspector?

