
THE JUNK REMOVAL STARTUP GUIDE

From Zero to Your First Truck — A Step-by-Step Launch Plan

Part of The Junk Removal Playbook

THE JUNK REMOVAL PLAYBOOK

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Part 0: The Junk Removal Startup Guide

Everything You Need to Do Before You Can Run the Business

This is the guide that should exist before anything else in this playbook. The operations manual covers how to run a junk removal company. This guide covers how to start one. If you already have a truck on the road and customers in the queue, skip ahead. If you're still staring at a blank LLC application and wondering where to begin, you're in the right place.

Ted Bullard — Junk Raider, Charlotte NC

Chapter 0.1: Is This Business Right for You?

Let's skip the motivational opener and get straight to the question you actually need answered before you spend a dime: is junk removal a good fit for you specifically?

The Physical Reality

This is a physically demanding job. Every single day, you will lift furniture, appliances, construction debris, and bags of garbage that no one else wants to touch. You will do this in July heat and January cold. You will carry 80-pound dressers down narrow staircases. You will drag mattresses through doorways. You will load and unload a full truck multiple times a day.

If you have a bad back, bad knees, or a general aversion to physical labor — this is not the business for you. Not because you can't eventually hire people to do the heavy lifting, but because in Year 1, you ARE the crew. The owner is on the truck, doing the work.

A realistic day looks like this: you wake up at 6 AM, arrive at your first job by 8, spend 2 hours loading 800 pounds of debris from a basement, drive to the dump, unload, drive to your next job, repeat. You get home at 5 PM physically exhausted. Then you answer quote requests and invoice until 8 PM.

That's the job. If that sounds fine to you, read on.

The Financial Reality

Junk removal is not a get-rich-quick scheme, but it is genuinely one of the highest-margin home service businesses you can start. You don't need a specialized skill, you don't need a degree, and the barrier to entry is relatively low.

Here's what the numbers actually look like:

- **Gross margins:** 40–50% on revenue (after disposal fees and labor)
- **Net margins for a well-run solo operation:** 25–35%
- **Year 1 realistic revenue (1 person, part-time ramp):** \$60,000–\$120,000
- **Year 1 realistic revenue (full-time, aggressive marketing):** \$120,000–\$200,000
- **1 truck, fully optimized:** \$200,000–\$400,000/year

The business takes 6–12 months to build real momentum. Your first month will be slow. Your third month will be better. By month six, if you've executed the marketing correctly, you'll start to feel like a real business.

Do not quit your day job until you're doing at least \$8,000–\$10,000/month in junk removal revenue. That's the threshold where the business can sustain itself and start paying you something real.

Personality Fit

The owners who succeed in junk removal share these traits:

High tolerance for uncomfortable situations. You are going into hoarder houses, cluttered garages, and filthy job sites. You will smell things you wish you hadn't. You will see things you can't unsee. If you're easily grossed out, either get over it fast or find a different business.

Sales comfort. Every quote you give is a sales conversation. The customer is comparing you to 3 other companies. Your ability to build instant trust, explain your value, and close the job on-site directly determines your revenue. You don't need to be a slick salesperson — you need to be straightforward, confident, and good at making people feel like they've hired the right crew.

Customer service orientation. This business runs on reviews. One bad review can cost you 10 jobs. You need to be the kind of person who genuinely cares whether the customer is satisfied — not because it's a rule, but because your reputation is your marketing.

Self-motivation. No boss, no schedule, no accountability except the one you create. The people who thrive are disciplined. The people who struggle are waiting for someone to tell them what to do next.

The Time Commitment

Be honest with yourself: Year 1 is a 60–70 hour/week commitment. Here's how that breaks down:

- Jobs and driving: 30–40 hours/week
- Marketing, quotes, and follow-up: 10–15 hours/week
- Admin (invoicing, bookkeeping, scheduling): 5–8 hours/week
- Prospecting (cold outreach, networking): 5–10 hours/week

That load drops significantly once you hire your first employee and can delegate the truck hours. But until then, it's on you.

PRO TIP: The first 90 days are the hardest. Push through them. Most failed junk removal businesses folded in the first three months because the owner got discouraged before the marketing flywheel started spinning. Commit to 6 months before you evaluate whether it's working.

Chapter 0.2: Startup Budget & Funding

The most common question from people considering this business: "How much do I need to start?"

Here's the honest answer: you can start scrappily for around \$20,000–\$30,000, or you can start fully equipped for \$50,000–\$80,000. The difference isn't about success probability — it's about how fast you can scale and how professional you look on Day 1.

Startup Cost Breakdown

Vehicle (Your Biggest Decision)

Your truck is your business. It's also your biggest expense and your most visible marketing asset. Here are your three real options:

Box Truck (16–20 ft)

- Used: \$18,000–\$40,000
- What you get: Ford F-650, International 4300, Hino 268 — 12–16 cubic yards of capacity
- Best for: Full-time operators, high-volume jobs, professional image
- Downside: Higher acquisition cost, potential CDL requirement depending on GVWR, harder to park in tight neighborhoods

Cargo Van

- Used: \$10,000–\$25,000
- What you get: Ford Transit, Ram ProMaster, Mercedes Sprinter
- Best for: Solo operators starting part-time, apartment and condo work, urban markets
- Downside: Limited capacity (3–4 cubic yards), multiple dump runs per day, not as impressive to commercial clients

Dump Trailer (pulled by your pickup)

- New: \$8,000–\$16,000 (trailer only — you need a truck that can pull it)
- What you get: 14 ft tandem axle dump trailer, 14,000–16,000 lb GVWR
- Best for: If you already own a $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton or 1-ton pickup truck
- Downside: Harder to park, slow to maneuver, lower capacity than a box truck, and you still need a pickup strong enough to haul it

PRO TIP: The recommended first vehicle for most markets is a used 16–20 ft box truck in the \$18,000–\$30,000 range. It holds 10–14 cubic yards, looks professional, has the capacity to handle full-house cleanouts, and doesn't require a CDL (as long as GVWR is under 26,001 lbs — most 16–20 ft box trucks fall in the 19,500–26,000 lb range). A 1-ton cargo van or dump trailer works as a budget start, but you'll hit capacity limitations fast on large residential jobs.

Insurance

You cannot legally operate without this. Budget it correctly from Day 1.

- **General Liability:** \$1,200–\$2,500/year for a 1-truck operation
- **Commercial Auto:** \$1,800–\$3,500/year (varies heavily by state, driving record, and vehicle value)
- **Workers' Compensation:** Not needed until you hire employees; roughly \$1,500–\$3,000/year per employee when you do
- **Tools & Equipment / Inland Marine:** \$150–\$400/year (covers equipment theft and damage)

Total insurance for a solo 1-truck operation: \$3,000–\$6,000/year

Equipment

You need the basics before your first job:

Item	Cost
Heavy-duty appliance dolly	\$150–\$350
2-wheel hand truck	\$100–\$200
4-wheel furniture dolly (2x)	\$100–\$200
Moving blankets / furniture pads	\$80–\$150
Ratchet straps (8–10)	\$80–\$150
Work gloves (multiple pairs)	\$30–\$60
Safety glasses	\$20–\$40
Steel-toe work boots	\$100–\$180
PPE (dust masks, nitrile gloves)	\$50–\$100
Basic tool kit (crowbar, bolt cutters, drill)	\$200–\$400

Item	Cost
Tarps (2–3 heavy duty)	\$60–\$120
Broom, dustpan, shop vac	\$100–\$200

Equipment total: \$1,100–\$2,150

Software & Tech Stack

- **Housecall Pro or Jobber** (field service management): \$49–\$129/month
- **GoHighLevel** (CRM, automated review requests, missed-call text-back): \$97/month (Starter plan)
- **Google Workspace** (professional email, calendar, Drive): \$7–\$14/user/month
- **QuickBooks Online** (bookkeeping): \$35–\$75/month; or Wave (free)
- **Canva Pro** (marketing graphics): \$15/month

Monthly software total: \$200–\$340/month (\$2,400–\$4,000/year)

Marketing Initial Setup

- **Truck wrap (full):** \$3,000–\$5,500 for a box truck; \$2,500–\$4,500 for a cargo van
- **Magnetic signs (to start before wrap):** \$200–\$400 for a set
- **Website (DIY via Wix/Squarespace):** \$150–\$300/year; or have it built for \$1,000–\$2,500
- **Google Ads initial setup (first month):** \$500–\$1,000 budget to start
- **Business cards:** \$50–\$100
- **Door hangers (500):** \$150–\$300
- **Uniforms / branded shirts (3–4):** \$150–\$300

Marketing initial setup total: \$4,200–\$9,600

Business Formation

- **LLC filing fee:** \$50–\$500 depending on state (NC is \$125; CA is \$70 filing + \$800/year minimum franchise tax — one of the most expensive)
- **Registered agent service** (if not using your home address): \$50–\$150/year
- **EIN registration:** Free via IRS.gov
- **Business bank account:** Free at most credit unions and online banks (Relay, Bluevine, Chase Business)
- **Operating agreement (DIY template):** Free; attorney-drafted: \$300–\$800

Business formation total: \$200–\$1,500

The Two Budgets

Category	Bare Minimum	Fully Equipped
Vehicle	\$12,000 (cargo van)	\$30,000 (box truck)
Insurance (year 1)	\$3,000	\$5,500
Equipment	\$1,200	\$2,500
Software (year 1)	\$2,400	\$3,600
Marketing setup	\$2,500	\$8,500
Business formation	\$300	\$1,000
Working capital (3 months)	\$6,000	\$15,000
TOTAL	~\$27,400	~\$66,600

WARNING: The "bare minimum" budget will get you started, but it puts you under financial pressure immediately. Running low on working capital in Month 2 — when the business is still building momentum — is how most startups fail. If you have the option, aim for \$35,000–\$45,000 in available capital before you launch.

Funding Options

Personal savings — The cleanest option. No interest, no payments, no investors to answer to. If you have the cash, use it.

SBA Microloans — Loans up to \$50,000 through SBA-designated nonprofit lenders. Average loan is around \$13,000. Interest rates run 6–9% APR with terms up to 6 years. Good for filling gaps, not ideal as your primary funding source. Apply at [SBA.gov](https://www.sba.gov).

Equipment financing — Many commercial truck dealers and specialty lenders will finance a used truck purchase. The truck serves as collateral, which makes qualification easier even for newer businesses. Expect 8–15% interest rates depending on credit; terms of 36–72 months.

Business credit cards — For software, equipment, and marketing expenses, a 0% intro APR business credit card (12–18 months) can preserve cash flow in your early months. Use it for planned expenses you know you can pay back, not as a fallback.

Friends and family — Works only if expectations are clearly documented. Write a simple promissory note with repayment terms even if it's an informal arrangement.

Chapter 0.3: Business Formation & Legal Setup

LLC vs. S-Corp: Which One and When

Most people starting a junk removal business should form an **LLC (Limited Liability Company)** first. Here's why:

An LLC gives you liability protection (your personal assets are separate from business liabilities), pass-through taxation (business income flows to your personal return), and minimal ongoing compliance requirements. It's the right structure for a startup.

An **S-Corp election** makes sense once your net profit hits roughly \$40,000–\$60,000/year. At that point, the S-Corp structure lets you split your income between W-2 salary and shareholder distributions. You only pay FICA self-employment taxes on the salary portion, not the distributions — which can save you \$5,000–\$12,000/year in taxes depending on your profit level.

The short version: start as an LLC, talk to a CPA when your net income approaches \$40K, and let them run the numbers.

Forming Your LLC: The Basic Steps

- 1. Choose your business name.** Search your state's Secretary of State website to confirm availability. Also search the USPTO trademark database and secure your .com domain before you file.
- 2. File Articles of Organization** with your state's Secretary of State office. In North Carolina, this costs \$125 and can be done online at sosnc.gov. Other states range from \$50 (Kentucky, Colorado) to \$500 (Massachusetts). Most states process in 1–3 business days online.
- 3. Get your EIN** (Employer Identification Number) from the IRS. Go to [IRS.gov](https://irs.gov), search "apply for EIN," and complete the online application. It takes about 5 minutes and you receive your EIN immediately. It's free. You need this before you can open a business bank account.
- 4. Draft an Operating Agreement.** This is an internal document that outlines ownership percentages, how decisions are made, and what happens if an owner wants to exit. Even as a single-member LLC, have one — it reinforces the legal separation between you and your business.
- 5. Open a dedicated business bank account.** Never commingle personal and business money. This is both a legal protection (it maintains the LLC "corporate veil") and a practical necessity for clean bookkeeping. Good options: Relay (no fees, excellent for small business), Bluevine (earns interest on balances), Chase Business Complete (good if you want a physical branch).
- 6. Register for a DBA if needed.** If your LLC is filed as "Bullard Hauling LLC" but you operate as "Junk Raider," you may need to file a DBA (Doing Business As) or trade name registration with your county or state. Costs \$10–\$100.

Business Address

You have three options:

- **Home address** — Fine when you're starting. Creates privacy concerns (your address is public record on the LLC filing).
- **Registered agent service** — Services like Northwest Registered Agent, Incfile, or ZenBusiness charge \$50–\$150/year to receive official documents on your behalf.
- **Virtual mailbox / commercial mailbox** — A physical street address at a UPS Store or similar runs \$10–\$50/month and looks more professional than a home address.

Chapter 0.4: Insurance Requirements

Don't cut corners here. One uninsured incident — a truck backing into a customer's car, a worker dropping an appliance on a hardwood floor, an injury on a job site — can wipe out everything you've built. Insurance is the cost of doing business in this industry.

What You Need

General Liability Insurance

- Minimum: \$1M per occurrence / \$2M aggregate
- Covers: Property damage you cause, bodily injury to third parties, completed operations
- Annual cost: \$1,100–\$2,500 for a 1-truck solo operation
- Note: Many commercial clients (property managers, storage facilities, GCs) will require a certificate of insurance (COI) listing them as additional insured before they'll hire you. Your GL policy makes this possible.

Commercial Auto Insurance

- Required the moment you use any vehicle for business purposes
- Covers: Liability, collision, comprehensive for your business vehicles
- Annual cost: \$1,800–\$3,500 for 1 truck
- Important: Your personal auto policy does NOT cover your truck when it's being used for business. This is not optional — it's illegal to operate uninsured.

Workers' Compensation

- Required in most states once you have 1–3 employees (the threshold varies by state — check your state's workers' comp rules)
- Covers: Medical bills and lost wages when an employee is injured on the job
- Annual cost: Roughly 8–15% of covered payroll for junk removal (it's a higher-risk trade classification)
- If you have 1 employee making \$40,000/year, budget \$3,200–\$6,000/year for workers' comp

Tools & Equipment / Inland Marine

- Covers your equipment if it's stolen from your truck or damaged on a job
- Annual cost: \$150–\$400
- Low cost, worth having

Commercial Umbrella / Excess Liability

- A \$1M umbrella policy provides coverage above and beyond your GL and auto limits
- Annual cost: \$500–\$1,500
- Recommended once you have employees or are working commercial contracts

Annual total for a solo 1-truck operation: \$3,000–\$6,500 **Annual total once you add your first employee:** \$7,000–\$13,000

Where to Get Insurance

- **Next Insurance** (nextinsurance.com) — Best for getting a quick online quote. GL and commercial auto packages designed specifically for home service businesses. Fast, digital, no agents required.
- **Simply Business** — Marketplace that shops multiple carriers. Good for comparing options.
- **NBIS (National Business Insurance Services)** — Specialty commercial truck and hauler insurance. Worth a quote once you have a truck on the road.
- **Local independent insurance agents** — Don't overlook these. A local agent who understands your business and can advocate for you at claims time is worth the relationship. Ask other contractors who they use.

PRO TIP: Get your GL and commercial auto bound on the same day you purchase your first vehicle. Some states require proof of commercial auto insurance before they'll register a commercial vehicle. Don't show up at the DMV without it.

Chapter 0.5: Licensing & Permits

The licensing landscape for junk removal is more fragmented than most industries — requirements vary significantly by state, county, and even city. Here's what's universal versus what's local.

Always Required (No Matter Where You Are)

Business License — Almost every city and county requires you to register your business locally. This is separate from your state LLC filing. Costs range from \$20 to \$500/year. You'll find this at your city or county clerk's office, or on your local government's website. Budget \$50–\$150.

EIN from the IRS — Already covered in Chapter 0.3. Required. Free.

Sales Tax Registration — If your state taxes services (many don't, but some do — check your state's Department of Revenue), you'll need to collect and remit sales tax on your services. In states like North Carolina, junk removal services are generally not subject to sales tax, but disposal fees may be. Get your state DOR to clarify this in writing.

Depends on Your State

Waste Hauler Permit — Some states require a specific permit to transport and dispose of solid waste. States that commonly require this include California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. If you're in one of these states, contact your state's environmental agency or Department of Environmental Quality. Operating without a required permit can result in fines.

Contractor's License / Demolition License — If you offer demolition services (shed teardowns, deck removal, interior demo), some states require a contractor's license. Georgia, Florida, and Virginia are examples where this applies if you're hiring subcontractors. Check your state's contractor licensing board.

Vehicle & DOT Requirements

DOT Number — Required for commercial vehicles operating in interstate commerce OR with a GVWR of 10,001 lbs or more. Since most junk removal box trucks are well over 10,001 lbs GVWR, you likely need a DOT number. Register at the FMCSA portal (safer.fmcsa.dot.gov) — it's free.

Commercial Driver's License (CDL) — Required for vehicles with a GVWR of 26,001 lbs or more. Most 16–20 ft box trucks used in junk removal fall between 19,500–26,000 lbs GVWR and do NOT require a CDL. However, if you're buying a truck in the 26,000+ lb range (some Hino 268s, larger International 4300s), you will need a Class B CDL. Verify the GVWR on any truck you consider before purchasing.

WARNING: Many sellers on Facebook Marketplace and auction sites will tell you a truck "doesn't need a CDL." Verify the GVWR on the door jamb sticker yourself. Don't take anyone's word for it.

What You Can't Haul

Understanding hazardous waste restrictions is not optional — violating EPA regulations can result in federal fines.

You CANNOT haul or dispose of:

- Asbestos-containing materials (tiles, insulation, pipe wrap in older homes)
- Refrigerants (freon from AC units, refrigerators — must be recovered by EPA-certified technician)
- Household hazardous waste: paint, pesticides, solvents, motor oil, batteries (most have specific county drop-off programs)

- Electronic waste (e-waste) in states with e-waste disposal laws
- Medical waste / sharps
- Radioactive materials

When you encounter these items on a job, explain to the customer that they require special disposal, provide them with local resources (county hazmat disposal days, appliance retailers who take refrigerants), and move on to the items you can haul. Never be pressured into taking hazmat to save a job — the liability and legal exposure aren't worth it.

Chapter 0.6: Buying or Leasing Your First Truck

Your truck is your most important asset, your most visible advertisement, and your biggest variable cost. Get this decision right.

The Honest Comparison

Vehicle Type	Pros	Cons	Best For
16–20 ft Box Truck	Maximum capacity, professional appearance, enclosed (weather-proof), handles any job	Higher acquisition cost, trickier to park, may need CDL at upper GVWR	Most operators — this is the recommendation
Cargo Van	Lower cost, easy to park, no CDL, lower operating costs	Very limited capacity (3–4 cu yd), multiple dump runs per day, limited commercial appeal	Part-time starts, urban/dense markets, estates and apartments
Dump Trailer	Cheap to acquire if you have a truck, easy to load/unload, durable	Need a capable tow vehicle, slow on maneuverability, harder to park, looks less polished	Rural markets, operators who already own a heavy-duty pickup

The Recommended First Truck

A **16–20 ft box truck in the 19,500–26,000 lb GVWR range** is the right call for the majority of markets. Specific models to look at:

- **Ford F-650 with box body:** Reliable diesel, widely serviced, strong resale. Used 2018–2022 units with 100,000–180,000 miles run \$22,000–\$40,000.
- **International 4300:** Workhorse medium-duty. Used examples sell for \$25,000–\$38,000 with 150,000–250,000 miles. Get the DT466 engine — it runs forever.
- **Hino 268:** Japanese reliability, excellent fuel economy for the class. Used 2015–2020 units run \$28,000–\$42,000.
- **Isuzu NPR/NQR:** Smaller end of the spectrum (14,500–19,500 lb GVWR), easier to drive, no CDL required. Used: \$18,000–\$32,000. Good option if you're nervous about driving a larger truck.

New vs. Used

Buy used. Always buy used for your first truck. Here's why:

1. **Depreciation:** A new medium-duty box truck costs \$70,000–\$100,000. You can buy a perfectly functional used truck with 3–4 years of life left for \$20,000–\$35,000.
2. **Risk tolerance:** You will scrape a curb, scratch the box, maybe back into something in Year 1. Do that in a \$25,000 used truck, not a \$90,000 new one.
3. **Cash preservation:** Keeping \$50,000 in the bank instead of in a truck payment lets you run Google Ads, hire help, and weather slow months.

Where to Buy

- **Commercial Truck Trader** (commercialtrucktrader.com) — Best aggregator for used commercial trucks. Filter by model, mileage, and state.
- **Ryder Used Trucks** (ryder.com/used-trucks) — Fleet vehicles, typically well-maintained, all have service records. Good quality, slightly higher prices.
- **Facebook Marketplace** — Used by small fleets and individuals offloading trucks. Prices are negotiable. More risk — no service history, seller may not disclose issues. Always get a PPI (pre-purchase inspection).
- **IronPlanet / Ritchie Bros. Auctions** — Online heavy equipment and truck auctions. Can find great deals, but "as-is" means as-is. Know what you're looking at before bidding.
- **Local commercial truck dealers** — Freightliner, International, Hino dealers often have used inventory. They can usually offer in-house financing.

What to Inspect Before You Buy

Never buy a used box truck without checking:

- **Frame** — Get underneath and look for cracks, heavy rust, or previous repair welds
- **Box floor** — Rotten floors are expensive to repair. Stand in the box, jump lightly, listen and feel
- **Hydraulic lift gate** — Cycle it fully loaded. Leaky hydraulics = \$800–\$2,500 repair
- **Engine:** Check for white smoke (coolant) or blue smoke (oil) on startup

- **Transmission:** Drive it and feel for slipping, hesitation, harsh shifts
- **Service records:** Ask for them. Trucks with documented oil change history are worth a premium
- **Mileage vs. engine hours:** A truck with 200,000 miles but 8,000 engine hours may be fine. One with 120,000 miles and 15,000 hours is a red flag (stop-and-go city driving)

Spend \$150–\$200 on a pre-purchase inspection (PPI) from a commercial truck mechanic before you close on any private sale. It's the best money you'll spend in this process.

Lease vs. Buy

For most startups: **buy, don't lease.** Commercial truck leases have mileage limits, wear-and-tear penalties, and ongoing payment obligations regardless of how slow your business gets. Owning the truck outright means you can weather a slow month without a lease payment hanging over you. If cash is very tight and you need to preserve capital, equipment financing on a used truck at \$500–\$700/month is generally a better structure than leasing.

Signage: Magnetic vs. Wrap

Magnetic signs (\$200–\$400) are your Day 1 solution. Get them on the truck before your first job. They're not as professional as a wrap, but they're better than a blank truck.

Full wrap (\$3,000–\$5,500 for a box truck) is a marketing expense that pays for itself quickly. A wrapped truck driving through neighborhoods generates calls. Budget for it in your first 90 days.

Chapter 0.7: Setting Up Your Tech Stack (Step-by-Step)

Your tech stack has two goals: make it easy for customers to book and pay, and make it easy for you to manage jobs without drowning in paperwork.

Housecall Pro or Jobber: Your Central Hub

Both tools do essentially the same things: scheduling, dispatching, invoicing, online booking, and customer management. **Housecall Pro** is slightly stronger on marketing automation; **Jobber** is more affordable for small teams.

For a solo operator or 1–3 truck operation, either works. The Starter/Basic plan at \$49/month is enough to start.

Setup steps:

1. Create your account, enter business info
2. Add your services: "Junk Removal – Minimum Load," "Junk Removal – Quarter Truck," "Junk Removal – Half Truck," "Junk Removal – Full Truck," "Appliance Removal," "Furniture Removal," "Yard Debris Removal," "Demolition – Shed," "Demolition – Deck"
3. Set pricing tiers for each service (you'll refine these after your first 20 jobs)

4. Enable online booking and add the booking link to your website and Google Business Profile
5. Set up payment processing — both platforms integrate with Stripe and accept card payments in the field
6. Turn on automated appointment reminders (24 hours before, 1 hour before)

Google Business Profile: Your Most Important Free Marketing Tool

This is where 60–70% of your early customers will find you. Optimizing your GBP is the highest-ROI task in your first month.

Setup steps:

1. Go to business.google.com and claim or create your listing
2. Set your **primary category to "Junk Removal Service"** — this is critical. Secondary categories: "Waste Management Service," "Debris Removal Service," "Furniture Removal Service"
3. Add your service area (don't add a physical address if you're home-based — use service area mode)
4. Add your phone number, website, and booking link
5. Upload 15–20 high-quality photos: your truck, your crew (if you have one), job site before/after shots
6. Enable the messaging feature so customers can text you directly from your profile
7. Write a compelling business description using keywords like "junk removal," your city name, "same-day service," "free estimates"
8. Add your services and pricing tiers (GBP allows you to list service categories and descriptions)

PRO TIP: The #1 way to rank higher in Google local search is reviews. Build a system for asking every customer for a review the day of the job. A direct link to your GBP review page (get it from your GBP dashboard) sent via text message works better than any other method. Aim for 5 reviews in your first month. 25 reviews in your first 3 months.

GoHighLevel: CRM + Automation

GoHighLevel at \$97/month (Starter plan) handles your CRM, lead follow-up, and automated review requests. For a junk removal business, the three highest-value automations to set up are:

1. **Missed-call text-back:** When a call goes unanswered, an automated text goes out immediately saying something like "Hi! This is [Business Name] — sorry we missed your call. What can we help you remove? Reply here or call us back at [number]." This alone recaptures 20–30% of missed leads.
2. **Review request sequence:** 2 hours after a job is marked complete, an automated text goes to the customer: "Thanks for choosing [Business Name]! If we did a great job, would you take 30

seconds to leave us a Google review? [direct link]" Implement this on Day 1.

3. Lead pipeline: Set up a simple pipeline — New Lead → Quote Sent → Booked → Completed → Review Requested. Seeing every lead move through stages helps you spot where you're losing customers.

Google Workspace: Professional Email

A @gmail.com address reads as unpromotional to commercial clients. Set up Google Workspace at \$7/user/month. You get you@yourbusiness.com, Google Calendar for scheduling, Google Drive for storing job photos and contracts, and Google Meet for calls.

Setup takes 20 minutes: go to workspace.google.com, follow the domain verification steps (you'll need to add a DNS record to your domain registrar), create your email address, done.

QuickBooks Online or Wave: Bookkeeping From Day 1

Don't let bookkeeping pile up. Connect your business bank account on Day 1 and categorize transactions weekly.

Wave (wave.com) is free and adequate for a solo operator in Year 1. It handles invoicing, expense tracking, and basic P&L reporting.

QuickBooks Online at \$35–\$75/month is worth upgrading to once you're above \$10,000/month in revenue. It integrates with Housecall Pro/Jobber and gives your accountant better tools to work with.

Basic chart of accounts for junk removal:

- Revenue: Junk Removal Services, Demolition Services, Recycling/Donation Revenue
- COGS: Disposal Fees, Labor (crew costs)
- Expenses: Fuel, Vehicle Maintenance, Insurance, Marketing, Software, Equipment, Office Supplies

Canva: Marketing Templates

Free Canva is sufficient at start. Create:

- A Facebook post template for before/after jobs
- A quote/estimate template
- A door hanger design
- A business card layout
- An Instagram story template for promotions

Use consistent brand colors, your logo, and your phone number on everything.

Chapter 0.8: Your First 30/60/90 Days

This is not a "vision board" exercise. This is a week-by-week action plan. Execute it.

Week 1–2: Foundation

Day 1–3:

- File your LLC with your state Secretary of State
- Apply for your EIN at IRS.gov (takes 5 minutes)
- Open your business bank account at Relay, Bluevine, or a local credit union
- Reserve your .com domain and set up Google Workspace email

Day 4–7:

- Contact 3–5 insurance companies for GL and commercial auto quotes (Next Insurance, Simply Business, NBIS, and at least one local agent)
- Bind your coverage — don't delay this; you can't work without it
- Begin truck search: Commercial Truck Trader, Ryder Used, Facebook Marketplace

Week 2:

- Finalize your truck purchase or commit to a vehicle
- File for your local business license
- Set up Housecall Pro or Jobber account
- Create your Google Business Profile
- Order magnetic door signs (\$200–\$400) for immediate use

Week 3–4: Setup

- **Get the truck insured and registered** as a commercial vehicle
- **Order equipment:** Dollies, straps, PPE — have everything before your first job
- **Order uniforms:** 3–4 branded shirts minimum. Branded polos or T-shirts from a local screen printer run \$15–\$25/shirt.
- **Set up GoHighLevel:** Configure the missed-call text-back and review request automation on Day 1 of your setup
- **Build your website or landing page:** A basic one-page site with your services, service area, phone number, and booking link is sufficient to start. Squarespace or Wix templates can be live in a day.
- **Set pricing:** Use your market research and the pricing framework in the Operations Manual to set your price tiers

Month 2: Launch

Marketing launch targets:

- Post on your personal Facebook and Instagram announcing your new business. Be specific: "I'm launching Junk Raider, a junk removal company serving Charlotte and surrounding areas. First 10 customers get 15% off. Call/text me at [number]."
- Post on Nextdoor in 3–5 nearby neighborhoods. Introduce yourself, offer a promotion, include your booking link. Respond to every inquiry personally.
- List your services on Craigslist under "Services → Household." Post 3x per week.
- Join local Facebook groups (neighborhood groups, buy/sell groups) and introduce your service
- Start Google Ads at \$20–\$30/day with tightly targeted keywords ("junk removal [your city]," "junk hauling [your city]," "furniture removal near me," "appliance removal [your city]")
- Begin cold outreach to 5 property management companies per week — a simple email or drop-in with a business card and rate sheet

Month 2 goal: 2–3 jobs per week, \$4,000–\$6,000 total revenue for the month

Month 3: Growth

By the end of Month 3, you should have 20+ jobs under your belt, a handful of reviews, and a sense of where your business is strongest.

- Analyze your first 20+ jobs: Which jobs were most profitable? What type of customers are repeat-friendly? What's your average ticket?
- Raise your Google Ads budget to \$40–\$60/day if the conversion cost per job is under \$100–\$150
- Launch an aggressive review campaign — text every customer you haven't already asked
- Formalize your property manager outreach. Make a list of 50 property management companies in your market and work through it systematically
- Reach out to 10 realtors per week with a personal note and a simple offer: "I work with a lot of agents helping their clients clear out properties before listing or after closing. Happy to give your clients priority scheduling and a referral discount."
- Start an estate sale company partnership — call the top 3–5 estate sale companies in your market, introduce yourself, and offer to be their preferred junk hauler after each sale

Month 3 goal: 1 job per day average, \$8,000–\$12,000 in revenue

WARNING: Do not ramp Google Ads too fast before you have your operations dialed in. Spending \$100/day on ads when you can't answer the phone, can't show up on time, and don't have a review request system in place is burning money. Get your operations tight first, then pour fuel on the fire.

Chapter 0.9: Your First 10 Customers

Here's where most startup guides get vague. Not this one. Here are 10 specific channels, how to use each one, and what to say.

1. Friends and Family Text or call everyone you know. Be direct: "Hey, I just launched a junk removal company. If you or anyone you know needs anything hauled away, I'd love the job and I'll give you a great deal. Please spread the word." Don't be embarrassed — this is legitimate marketing. Your first 3–5 jobs will almost certainly come from this circle.

2. Personal Social Media Post on your personal Facebook, Instagram, and NextDoor with a photo of your truck and a direct offer. Make it easy to share. Follow up with every comment or direct message within 10 minutes.

3. Nextdoor This platform is gold for junk removal because it's hyper-local. Create a free business account. Post in neighborhoods where you want to work. Sample post: "Hi neighbors! I just launched [Business Name], a junk removal service based right here in [neighborhood]. We haul away furniture, appliances, yard debris, construction waste — you name it. Same-day service available. Text or call [number] or book online at [link]. First 5 jobs in [neighborhood] get 10% off!"

Respond to every post where someone asks about decluttering, moving, or home renovation.

4. Facebook Marketplace: The Free Item Pickup Play People list items as "free" on Facebook Marketplace because they can't get rid of them. Message them: "I can pick this up today for free — I run a junk removal service and can take the whole item." Show up, be professional, and hand them a card. Even if you can't monetize the free item, you're building a relationship and proving your reliability. Many of these free-item pickups turn into paying jobs when they see how easy it is.

5. Craigslist Services Section Post in the "Services → Household" section. Your headline: "SAME DAY Junk Removal – Furniture, Appliances, Cleanouts – [Your City]." Keep the copy brief and include your phone number. Repost every 2–3 days to stay near the top. Budget: free.

6. Local Facebook Groups Join every neighborhood Facebook group and local buy/sell group in your service area. Introduce your service in each one (check group rules first). Respond to posts where people are giving away furniture, doing cleanouts, or asking for contractor recommendations.

7. Google Ads Your highest-quality lead source once it's dialed in, but it takes time to optimize. Start with exact match and phrase match keywords: "junk removal [city]," "junk hauling [city]," "furniture removal [city]," "appliance removal [city]," "estate cleanout [city]." Set a geographic radius. Exclude irrelevant search terms. Budget \$20–\$30/day to start. Track calls and conversions, not just clicks.

8. Door Hangers in Target Neighborhoods Print 500 door hangers (\$150–\$300) and hang them in neighborhoods with older homes, active real estate transactions, and a demographic that has stuff to get rid of. Neighborhoods going through turnover (older homeowners downsizing, estates being settled) are your best targets. Door hangers have a 1–3% response rate, so 500 hangers might generate 5–15 calls.

9. Property Manager Cold Outreach Property managers deal with tenant turnover constantly. When tenants leave furniture and junk behind, the manager needs it gone fast. This is bread-and-butter junk

removal work, and it becomes recurring revenue once you establish the relationship.

Build a list of 50 property management companies in your market from Google, Yelp, and local apartment listing sites. Email or call 10 per week. Your pitch: "I work with property managers throughout [city] to handle tenant cleanouts, furniture removal, and bulk trash situations quickly. I'm available same-day in most cases, and I'll give you consistent pricing and a reliable COI. Can I take 5 minutes to tell you how I work?"

10. Realtor Partnerships Realtors represent buyers and sellers who are constantly moving stuff. Sellers need to stage or clear homes before listing. Buyers inherit junk when they close. A realtor who trusts you will send you 2–4 jobs per month consistently.

Call or email 10 realtors per week. Your pitch: "I work with a lot of agents in [city] helping their clients with cleanouts and junk removal before listings and after closings. I offer priority scheduling and can provide references. Would you be open to connecting?" Follow up with a handwritten card and a small branded gift (a \$5 Starbucks card goes further than you think).

Chapter 0.10: Scaling from 1 Truck to 5 Trucks

Most of this playbook covers running your operation at scale. This chapter is specifically about the transition points — when to add resources, what breaks, and what to do about it.

When to Hire Your First Employee

The trigger: when you're consistently turning away work, booking 4–5 days out, and your revenue is above \$12,000–\$15,000/month.

At that point, hiring a helper at \$15–\$18/hour means you can take more jobs per day (instead of working solo and having to cut capacity). Your goal isn't to sit in a truck with a passenger — it's to eventually get off the truck entirely. But your first hire just allows you to take more jobs, not get off the truck.

Before you hire:

- Have workers' compensation insurance in place
- Have a written job description
- Run a background check (use a service like Checkr, ~\$25/check)
- Have a simple written onboarding process so they know how you work

When to Add Truck #2

The trigger: you're consistently booking 5+ days out, turning away same-day work, and your revenue has been above \$18,000–\$20,000/month for 2–3 consecutive months.

Truck #2 means:

- A second vehicle (\$18,000–\$35,000)
- A second driver (at minimum a reliable employee who can operate independently)
- A second insurance policy addition
- Increased complexity in scheduling

Before adding Truck #2, make sure your backend can handle it: you need dispatching software that works (Housecall Pro and Jobber both handle multi-truck dispatch), a reliable crew lead who can run a truck independently, and a financial cushion to cover the increased overhead during slow weeks.

Revenue Milestones by Stage

Stage	Setup	Annual Revenue Target
Solo, 1 truck	Owner on truck, no employees	\$100,000–\$200,000
1 truck, 1 helper	Owner on truck + helper	\$150,000–\$300,000
2 trucks, 2 crews	Owner off truck, managing + sales	\$350,000–\$600,000
3 trucks, 3 crews	Owner in full management	\$550,000–\$900,000
4–5 trucks, scaled	Dispatcher, ops manager, bookkeeper	\$900,000–\$1,500,000

These are real, achievable numbers for a well-run operation in a metro market. They're not guarantees — they require aggressive marketing, excellent operations, and disciplined financials.

How Your Role Changes as You Scale

Stage 1 (1 truck, solo): You ARE the business. You pick up the phone, do the job, invoice the customer, run the marketing. Everything goes through you.

Stage 2 (1 truck, 1 helper): You're still on the truck but now you're managing someone. The skill set shifts from "just execute" to "train and lead." Start systems here — documented processes for how jobs are run, how the truck is packed, how customers are treated. Build this now even though it feels premature.

Stage 3 (2 trucks): You should be getting off the truck at this stage. If you're still doing the physical work, you've hired a helper but not a replacement. The goal is to hire a truck captain who can run Truck 1 independently, freeing you to run Truck 2 (or better, to focus entirely on sales, marketing, and commercial accounts).

Stage 4 (3+ trucks): You're now a business owner, not a junk remover. Your job is: hiring and keeping good people, managing the P&L, developing commercial accounts, and ensuring quality across all jobs. You need a dispatcher (or solid scheduling software) before you add your third truck.

When to Add Key Positions

Role	Add When	Rough Cost
Part-time helper	\$12K–\$15K/mo revenue	\$15–\$18/hr
Full-time crew lead	\$18K–\$22K/mo revenue	\$18–\$22/hr
Dispatcher/scheduler	2+ trucks, 10+ jobs/day	\$35,000–\$50,000/yr
Bookkeeper (part-time)	\$25K–\$30K/mo revenue	\$500–\$1,500/mo
Operations manager	3+ trucks	\$50,000–\$75,000/yr

Key Metrics to Track at Every Stage

Weekly:

- Revenue
- Jobs completed
- Average ticket price
- Number of reviews received this week
- Google Ads spend vs. revenue generated

Monthly:

- Total revenue
- Disposal cost % (should be 15–25% of revenue)
- Labor cost % (should be 20–30% including owner's draw)
- Marketing cost % (should be 8–15%)
- Net margin (target 20–30% at maturity)
- Truck utilization (hours worked / hours available)

Quarterly:

- Review request conversion rate (reviews received / jobs completed) — target 20–40%
- Customer acquisition cost by channel
- Recurring commercial account revenue vs. one-time residential

Common Scaling Mistakes

Hiring too fast without systems. You need documented processes before you hire, not after. If your second crew doesn't know how to price a job, handle a difficult customer, or load a truck efficiently,

you've created problems, not solutions.

Adding a truck before the first truck is full. Many operators add Truck #2 when they think they need it, not when they can consistently prove it. If Truck #1 isn't generating \$15,000–\$20,000+/month consistently, adding a second truck just doubles your overhead without doubling your revenue.

Underpricing to stay busy. When you're slow, it's tempting to drop prices to fill the schedule. Don't. It trains your market to expect lower prices, attracts the wrong customer profile, and kills your margins. Stay busy by marketing harder, not pricing lower.

Not tracking numbers. The owners who scale successfully are obsessed with their numbers. Revenue per job, cost per job, Google Ads cost per conversion, review velocity — these metrics tell you exactly what to fix. The ones who don't track numbers make decisions by gut feel and usually get it wrong.

Neglecting commercial accounts. Residential is great, but commercial clients (property managers, GCs, storage facilities, apartment complexes) are where the consistent, predictable revenue lives. Push into commercial as soon as your operations are stable enough to deliver reliably.

PRO TIP: The biggest mental shift in scaling is moving from "doing the work" to "building the business that does the work." Every system you document, every process you standardize, every hire you train properly is an investment in your own freedom. The operators who stay on the truck forever build a job, not a business.

Quick-Reference Startup Checklist

Use this as your master checklist before your first job.

Legal & Financial

- LLC filed with Secretary of State
- EIN obtained from IRS.gov
- Business bank account open
- Operating agreement drafted
- Local business license obtained
- Sales tax registration (if applicable in your state)
- DBA / trade name registration (if operating under a different name)

Insurance

- General liability insurance bound (\$1M/\$2M minimum)
- Commercial auto insurance bound (covers your business vehicle)
- Tools & equipment coverage (optional but recommended)

Vehicle & Equipment

- Truck purchased and registered as commercial vehicle
- DOT number obtained (if GVWR > 10,001 lbs)
- Waste hauler permit obtained (if required in your state)
- All equipment purchased: dollies, straps, PPE, tools
- Uniforms ordered with business name/logo
- Magnetic signs or wrap installed on truck

Tech Stack

- Housecall Pro or Jobber account set up
- Google Business Profile claimed and optimized
- GoHighLevel configured (missed-call text-back, review automation)
- Google Workspace email active (you@yourbusiness.com)
- Basic website or landing page live
- QuickBooks or Wave set up with bank account connected

Marketing

- Service list and pricing finalized
- Google Ads account created (not running yet)
- Business cards ordered
- Google Ads campaign created and reviewed
- Personal social media announcement ready to post

Operations

- Dump site / transfer station identified and account established
- Donation drop-off locations mapped (Habitat ReStore, Goodwill, etc.)
- Pricing floor calculated (your cost per cubic yard minimum)
- First job booked

This guide is Part 0 of the Junk Removal Playbook. The Operations Manual that follows covers the day-to-day systems for running the business you've just built. Don't skip setup. The operators who build correctly from the start are the ones who scale fastest.

— Ted Bullard, Junk Raider | Charlotte, NC