



CleanerPlanner

The Buyer's Guide to window cleaning software solutions

The answers to the essential questions you must ask before selecting a software solution for operating and managing your window cleaning business

Introduction

Why a buyer's guide to window cleaning software solutions?

The burgeoning business software industry has attracted many with experience from deep inside specific trades to apply their knowledge. As a consequence, there is a Line-of-Business (LoB) application for practically any type of commercial enterprise you can think of and probably for some you wouldn't even imagine!

The trend for LoB software is a result of the fact that it transforms efficiency and makes it much easier to manage a business. This becomes increasingly apparent in larger firms.

Inevitably, the window cleaning trade now finds itself with a number of options from which to choose. However, not all software applications are created equal. There are a number of variables which determine how good a software solution really is.

Ease of use, good design, automation of routine admin, mobile app functionality, security and support are all critical areas where a software application needs to perform well if it is to truly transform efficiency.

It stands to reason that newer applications are more up to date, more refined and have features more relevant to the way the window cleaning industry works today. By comparison, the older applications used by some firms may seem crude. Others may still be using a manual process with spreadsheets

If you're thinking about using a window cleaning LoB application for the first time, or moving your firm on from an older, legacy application like George or WCP, there are a number of considerations. It's important to identify what's really important for your business so that you make the right choice. Making a bad decision can be a costly mistake.

Here we provide the answers to ten Frequently Asked Questions that help you to truly identify whether a window cleaning software solution is actually any good.

FAQ1. Do I really need software to run my window cleaning business?

What a great question to kick off with! A good way to look at this is to consider your personal goals, and where you see your business going. For many this is related to your age.

For 'digital natives' of the Millennial generation, born from the 1980s up to around 2000 that have grown up with 'consumerised' digital technology, choosing to use software to run a business is likely to be something of a no-brainer.

If you're a Millennial reading this, you are serious-minded and it's likely your personal ambitions mean that you are in this business for the long term. You want your firm to flourish and you can probably already see many of the advantages of using software. (But don't put this guide down just yet, there's an awful lot more in here you might not know, so please read on!)

At the other end of the age spectrum, you might be at the trailing edge of the Baby Boomers, or early Generation X, and close to achieving all you want from your business and looking forward to retiring sometime in the next 15 years or so. If you've gotten by without software for all this time, why should you need it now?

Well, if you are marking time until you get out, the right software ensures you maximise the profit from your final years in the trade. Most importantly, it provides the accounting transparency, the 'due diligence' that shows potential buyers the true value, helping you to maximise income from the sale of your business.

FAQ2. What is software automation and why does it matter?

Software automation is a way of eliminating time consuming repetitive manual tasks. Typically in a business context, it gets rid of tasks related to administration and processing paper-based forms.

In a window cleaning business, software automation gets rid of the need to do things such as manually updating master spreadsheets or systems with details of cleans, the production of invoices and statements of accounts, and tracking payments.

Software automation enables your window cleaning business to focus on tasks that make you money and vastly reduces the need to do the low level and boring stuff!

FAQ3. How do I get my customer information into the software without typing it in?

Firstly you need to get hold of your data. You may be able to get your data 'out of' older software like George by downloading it as spreadsheets. However, others may make it difficult by 'locking' customers in to try to prevent you leaving. If you don't use older, so-called 'legacy' applications like George, perhaps you keep your data in your own Excel spreadsheets?

To make sure you can get your customer information into the software quickly and easily, check whether the system you are considering moving over to supports the bulk upload of data.

A good window cleaning software service provider is likely to offer support to help you upload data correctly, and may be able to advise or assist if you find that you are using a system that restricts your freedom of choice through the use of unethical practices which lock you in.

The best software companies should go beyond the basics of merely providing an online application in the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) business model. They should be complete solution providers with very a close focus on customers and high standards of customer care.

FAQ4. How can software organise rounds better than an experienced person?

When you have been organising rounds for years, it may be difficult to see a better way of doing it. After all, you are properly acquainted with your operatives, your customers and the geography of the local area.

It's advisable to consider the benefits of software which provides a 'Route Optimisation' feature, and takes the hard work out of organising rounds. This should let you put each round in optimal job order at the click of a button. However, the best software should still allow you to make changes to the 'computer generated' route.

If you want to alter the job order of a round based on your experience, you should be able to customise it the way you want. Generally speaking, the best solution should help window cleaning businesses to quickly organise every day and it needs to be flexible enough to easily support any customisation required to cleans or rounds.

FAQ5. Can I be sure of getting help if I get into a muddle with the software or if things go wrong?

Some owners of window cleaning firms might worry they won't be able to understand software and get into a muddle, or make mistakes which causes a shed load of problems.

The best software solutions are designed to be really easy to use. User Experience (UX) design is the practice of making the Graphical User Interface (GUI or 'Gooley') that people interact with as easy to understand and 'fool-proof' as possible. Layout and colours are important elements. Pop-up balloons when hovering over icons or fields are widely used to provide instructions to guide users.

A good 'onboarding' process helps to make sure new customers get up to speed with software quickly and to gain confidence and competence in using it. Well thought out tutorial and FAQ webpages, and blogs and 'How to...' videos make learning new things really simple and can always be referenced if you forget how to do something.

If you get really stuck, it's worth making sure you can get help directly from the support team. Language and culture can throw up barriers and create misunderstandings, so it may well be worth considering selecting software that is supported by native English speakers based in a territory where English is the first language.

The best window cleaning software solution providers should offer support for any 'business critical' event – that is any situation which affects your ability to operate your business – 24/7.

FAQ6. Can software track transactions and help stop revenue being lost when payments fall through the cracks?

Cash and cheque payments tend to create something of a nuisance. They have to be manually recorded and can get lost. When you track and issue receipts manually, there's always the potential to get in a muddle. Then there's the special trip to bank them... Tch, Tch! It can all be a bit of a bother.

The best window cleaning software solution for your window cleaning business should integrate electronic payments to enable tracking. A Direct Debit payment system like GoCardless, which lets your business take payment when it is required and not on a fixed date each month, makes it easy to eliminate cash and cheque handling, to track transactions and prevent the revenue loss that happens when payments fall through the cracks.

FAQ7. How does software help me grow my window cleaning business? How can a mobile window cleaning app help my business?

There are a few points worth considering here. Firstly, with all your business information at your fingertips you get to quickly see the key financials, the figures that show you where you are making or losing money.

You can identify unprofitable rounds (or operatives!) and calculate overall P&L and outgoings. This level of financial oversight helps you to plan more effectively and to take important decisions on the development of your business based on facts and not guesswork.

Secondly, as an overall effect, the best software should improve efficiency to give you back time to develop more business, perhaps as much as 20 man hours per week. You can get back time to do more cleans and to chase higher margin business, such as more profitable commercial contracts.

Finally, it's worth emphasising that good software demonstrates efficiency, tightens processes, sharpens up business practice and lets you present yourself on paper more professionally, things that are bound to impress potential contract customers.

FAQ8. How can a mobile window cleaning app help my business?

Mobile window cleaning apps store your information in a secure cloud, a network of internet data centres which are physically and electronically protected to a standard on par with Fort Knox. (Well, maybe not quite that tough, but pretty tough!)

A complete window cleaning business software solution should include free mobile apps for your Apple iOS or Google Android smartphones or tablets to let you and your operators access your company's information in the cloud and see it in a worksheet format.

Now there's an annoying thing about mobile technology... perhaps you've noticed! Sometimes there just isn't coverage where you are, especially if you are in a rural district. The government have told the mobile telcos to sort it out and it is getting better but it can be patchy.

So, it's a good idea to check that any mobile app you are considering doesn't need an uninterrupted 3/4G connection. If a worksheet on a mobile relies on a strong 3/4G signal and it can't get one, you might get held up from doing the next job.

You might not like the idea of others being able to see all of your financials. To avoid this worry, make sure you look for a system where operatives, and if you have them, admin staff, can't see everything. They should only be able to see the data that you want them to see. The worksheet needs to show the job information for each round, let operatives tick them off and record details and payment collections.

With a good solution, once the operative has completed the round, the owner or an administrator should be able to review the worksheet to make sure all the data is in order and all cash payments are accounted for before it is submitted to the system. Once submitted, an application with good automation should update all customer account balances and next due dates automatically.

FAQ9. Is my data and business safe using window cleaning software in the cloud?

There's an old school of thought that suggests keeping all your business information on your laptop or PC means it is safe. It's on your computer on your desk at home. The dog's on guard duty and as long as you take regular back-ups every day, you should be OK. If only...

When your computer goes bang, quite frequently the data goes pop too. You need to get a rapid repair or a new machine pronto and install all the software and get the back-up loaded. Assuming you've been good and backed up every day without fail, it's only going to cost you time and some hassle.

But if you haven't been good and it's been weeks or months since the last back-up...

The best window cleaning software for your business is likely to be run from the cloud on high availability systems that are fault tolerant. This means the software is guaranteed to be online and available more than 99.9% of the time. In real terms, that equates to being offline for less than 1 hour in every year.

With a good cloud-based window cleaning software solution, the worst case scenario is you lose your Internet connection. If that happens, simply connect using mobile data over 3/4G through a smartphone, or head to the nearest free Wi-Fi hotspot.

These days, data security is a huge concern to everyone. Cybercriminals, fraudsters and hackers seem to be able to break into just about any system. However, the reality is that they are very good at identifying companies with weak IT security and concentrate on attacking those.

To get maximum reassurance about the safety of your data and your business, it is well worth checking the cloud data centre arrangements of any software you are considering. The best window cleaning software solutions are likely to be run from data centres secured to ISO 27001, the internationally recognised standard for information security.

FAQ10. How do I give my accountant the cash book when it's time for end of year?

Typically, accountants want to see the cash book. When it's time to report to the Revenue and Companies House and do those nasty VAT and tax calculations, you can bet they'll be reluctant to use your window cleaning software.

To avoid those despairing end-of-year accounting headaches, think about choosing a good window cleaning software solution that lets you download your cash book and other relevant data as raw spread sheets so your accountancy firm can put it through their chosen accounting and audit systems.



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About CleanerPlanner

Designed, built and continually improved for window cleaning businesses

CleanerPlanner was initially designed as a bespoke product especially for a single window cleaning business.

Through research and input from the wider industry gained by joining internet forums, the software was refined to both improve its existing and to include more features. This now makes it suitable for the vast majority of window cleaning businesses.

Built and maintained by a team intricately acquainted and experienced with the specific needs of the trade and the way it works, you could say we speak 'window cleaner' and we understand the window cleaning business.

CleanerPlanner is the expert in applying digital technology to power more efficient and profitable window cleaning businesses and we are totally committed to fully supporting the aims of our customers, whatever they are, because your success is our success.

Get a free trial of CleanerPlanner today:
www.cleanerplanner.com