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# GO

## GUTTER OPPORTUNITIES

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# Cleaning and maintenance

Customers set up on regular schedule by Gutter Guys

By Mark Ward Sr.

Most gutter companies start as installers and then branch into gutter cleaning and repair. But by taking a reverse approach, partners Alex Goliszewski and Kevin Rogalski of Gutter Guys LLC in Stamford, Conn., have built a thriving business that boasts more than 3,000 active customers and supports 15 employees and up to 15 subcontractors.

The two men began in 1989 as landscapers and figured that cleaning gutters might be an add-on service. But when passing out neighborhood fliers started generating hundreds of calls, and as their gutter cleaning service experienced annual growth rates of more than 100 percent, “by 1997 we decided to stop landscaping and just clean gutters exclusively,” says Goliszewski. And while cleaning is still the mainstay of his business today, Gutter Guys has also developed gutter repair and installation as profit centers in their own right.

“We started with fliers and by doing direct mail in targeted neighborhoods,” Goliszewski explains, “and we made sure those neighborhoods were within driving distance, since we wanted to spend our time doing jobs rather than traveling.” By late autumn, Gutter Guys would receive 400 or 500 phone calls,



and perhaps that many again in the late spring. The two partners realized they were onto something, but that the key to building a real gutter cleaning business “would be to convert one-time jobs into regular customers,” says Goliszewski.

The answer was to offer a scheduled gutter cleaning service. “So when we mailed out invoices for cleaning jobs,” Goliszewski relates, “we also enclose a proposal to put the customer on a regular cleaning program.” Toward that end, Gutter Guys has evolved four levels of service. The highest level is four cleanings per year (spring, late summer, early fall, late fall), followed by three times (early summer, early fall, late fall), and two times (either early summer and late fall, or twice in the fall).

Their tactic has helped Gutter Guys achieve an enviable conversion rate, as some 30 percent of one-time jobs are converted into regular accounts. “And then once we get a regular customer,”

adds Goliszewski, “we’ve got a very good retention rate, which we achieve through good service and good communication. Even giving our customers a refrigerator magnet is a help because, once you capture someone as a customer, from then on you want to keep them out of the yellow pages!”

## Cleaning criteria

The number of yearly cleanings a gutter system may require “depends on the surroundings of your home,” explains Goliszewski. “For example, do you have trees with blossoms? Or pollen strings, leaves, pine needles, seeds, acorns, sticks, and other debris?” Three or four yearly cleanings is generally recommended, though homeowners “might need even more frequent gutter cleaning service depending on your geographic area and fluctuating weather patterns.” Seasonal cleanings also are intended to meet different seasonal needs:



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**Early summer** cleanings (between late May and end of June) rid gutters of accumulated winter debris. “In addition, some of the tender tree foliage is blown off the trees along with blossoms and pollen strings,” states Goliszewski, “which because of their consistency will clog your gutters, causing them to hold water and providing a breeding ground for mosquitoes.”

In **mid to late summer** (August and September), although leaves are still firmly attached to trees, a gutter cleaning can deal with leaves and debris that may have accumulated due to summer thunderstorms, strong winds, or drought. Then in the **early fall** (late October through end of November) leaves can quickly accumulate in gutters and must be cleared. By **late fall** (late November to the end of January) most leaves are off the trees, so “gutter cleaning is a balancing act of waiting for most leaves to be off the trees and not waiting too long so that all gutters freeze solid with the ice and debris,” notes Goliszewski.

Goliszewski reports that three or four gutter cleanings per year are his company’s most popular levels of service. The minimum charge is \$75 per cleaning, while the maximum can be several hundred dollars if a gutter is particular difficult to clean or is inaccessible, if Gutter Guys’ crews must work on the roof or work around landscaping, or if the gutter is clogged with a large volume of leaves, debris, and compacted sludge.

Crews not only clean gutters but also

check downspouts and then clean up and remove any debris that may have fallen onto the house or yard. “The average price we get for a cleaning is between \$90 and \$180,” Goliszewski says. “About half of our customers trust us to charge them the appropriate amount within that range, while other customers want an estimate.”

Because the company’s home base in Stamford lies within the greater New York metropolitan area, Gutter Guys covers a densely populated region. Goliszewski has a customer base of 10,000 names, of which he says about one-third are active customers and 1,500

are on regular cleaning schedules.

To handle that volume, especially in the late fall and late spring when Gutter Guys receives the most calls for cleaning jobs, Goliszewski can outsource the work. “Depending on the time of year,” he explains, “we’ll hire between eight and 15 subs. They get paid on a commission basis — and they don’t get paid for call-backs. So our subcontractors have an incentive to do quality work.” The arrangement also permits Gutter Guys to ramp up its workforce on a seasonal basis, without keeping large numbers of permanent employees on the year-round payroll.



## Repairs and installations

Cleaning gutters likewise gives the company's crews a chance to check out customers' gutter systems. "When we clean the gutters," Goliszewski notes, "we also provide customers with a free gutter evaluation." If repairs are needed, they can often be performed on the spot or may be scheduled for later.

"Most new gutters are installed today with hidden hangers," Goliszewski points out, "but most gutters still in existence were hung with spikes and ferrules. So the biggest repair problem is when the gutter, especially if it's full and hasn't been kept clean, pulls away from the house. That can also let moisture onto the fascia board and cause warping and rotting. We fix that by replacing the spikes and ferrules with hidden hangers."

Preventing damage to gutters, then, "is all about maintenance," continues Goliszewski. "Customers often realize that two cleanings a year might not cut it, and are willing to increase their cleaning schedules in order to keep their gutter systems from being damaged."

Goliszewski acknowledges that tiger striping can occur on some gutters and his crews will, if requested, clean the outside of a gutter as well as the inside. "But cleaning the outside of a gutter isn't something we do as often," he

reports. "Usually, if a house is painted or has siding, then people will periodically have their homes power-washed and clean off the outside of their gutters at the same time."

If a customer's gutter system needs to be replaced rather than merely repaired, Gutter Guys can do that, too. Two of the

company's crews are devoted to doing gutter installation on homes, churches, offices, and condominiums. "If we've been cleaning someone's gutters for five or 10 years, and then the time comes when new gutters are needed," Goliszewski points out, "then who do you think they're going to call?"

