

10 Simple Steps to Starting Your Own Inflatable Business

We've compiled this simple 10-step guide to help you set-up, operate and grow your own profitable inflatable business. So let's get started!

1. Start with research
2. Set up and organize your business
3. Purchase your inflatables
4. Plan your daily operations with a process and business forms
5. Hire professional help when needed
6. Set up a database to keep track of customers
7. Advertise your services
8. Take orders & payments
9. Deliver your inflatables
10. Tell everyone you're in business!

1. Start With Research

Your first step is to do some research on the competition. This will give you a good idea about how much money you can make and how many other people like you are offering a similar service. If you have a phone book, that's a great place to start. The categories to look under include "Party Supplies" or "Party Planning." You should also do a Google search with your location and the category. For example, if you lived in Azusa, you would put the following terms into Google to search: "Azusa Party Supplies" or "Azusa Jumpers."

Gather as much information about the companies in your area that are renting inflatables. Either visit their website or call them on the phone number listed. Try to answer these questions:

1. How many companies are listed?
2. How large are their ads?
3. What types of products do they offer? (Jumpers, slides, obstacle courses, play zones, etc.)
4. How much do they charge, and is it the same for Saturday, Sunday and weekdays? Is a deposit required?
5. What payment methods do they accept? Are they able to take credit cards or checks?
6. What hours do they work, and which time slots do they offer (2 hours, 4 hours, 6 hours)? How early do they deliver, and how late do they pick up?
7. What other items do they offer (cotton candy, snow-cones, tables and chairs, balloons, etc.)?
8. In which areas do they deliver? Do they deliver to parks?
9. Are they insured?
10. Do they have anything available for the upcoming weekend?
11. Do they leave a company attendant?

Your goal is to get as much information as possible about all of the existing businesses in your area, so that you can determine how you can best fit into the market. Understanding how others are operating will give you ideas about how to set up your business structure, pricing, etc. Ideally you want to find something these other companies are not doing (or not doing well) that you might be able to do better!

2. Set Up Your Business

There are many decisions to make on how to set up your business. The following is a checklist of issues that need to be addressed in order to start a business.

a. Choose your company name

When deciding on a name, pick something unique! You want something fun, colorful and upbeat that will be easily remembered by customers. Many customers like to incorporate their own names in the title for example: Jenny's Jumpers, Smith's Inflatables, or Mike's Moon-walks. Another idea is to use names from children's fairy tales or nursery rhymes like, Bo Peep's Bouncers, Jumping Jack's or Tom Thumb's Tumbler. Stay away from trademarked or licensed names.

Consider your choice carefully. Settle on something you are happy with and won't change. If you do change your name, it can be confusing to customers or they might think that a name change implies that you have changed your services or raised your prices. If they are returning to you, they want the reassurance that you're still offering the same reliable service and the same great units.

b. Establishing a place of operation

The best place to store your inflatables is your garage, because there is no additional overhead, and you can spend your money on growing your business instead of on paying rent. You might be able to write off part of your home expenses as long as they are business related. Check with your accountant to see which expenses apply.

If you live in an apartment or in an area with a homeowners association you might need to rent a storage facility. A storage unit is less expensive than a warehouse and requires no additional overhead such as electricity, water, gas, etc. Check with the storage rental companies in your area regarding their time restrictions. You might need to negotiate the hours in order to accommodate your weekend schedule. Storage companies are generally very flexible.

c. Getting a business license

You will need to purchase a business license for rental equipment. City halls or town halls are the usual locations to purchase a business license. Normally it costs around \$45.00 - \$65.00 per year for a standard business license, but it varies from city to city. Look in your blue or government pages under the listing business licenses. You can also go online and search your city name and business license. Most city websites will have detailed instructions on how to obtain a business license.

The type of license you get depends on the type of business you will set up. If you are opening the business on your own or with your spouse, you are considered a sole proprietor. If you plan to have a partner (who is not your spouse) then your

business is a partnership. Make sure to indicate which type of business (sole proprietorship or partnership) on your business license application.

d. Insurance

Liability insurance requirements vary by city and state. Additional insureds may be required by larger companies, schools or parks. What this means is that they have a copy of your policy listing their name as an additional insured, on your policy. Insurance companies will either charge for this service in one flat fee or per addition, it depends on the carrier. Ask in advance about the charges for adding additional insureds. You will need from 3-10 additional insureds per year, and as your business grows so will that number. The best place to start looking for insurance is your local insurance broker; however, there are many national insurance brokers that handle inflatables insurance. You can search online for a local broker and ask for rates.

e. How many inflatable units should you start with?

A good amount of inflatables to start with is 2 to 4 units. One person can easily handle that number, and it's enough to keep you busy when you start. When deciding how many units to purchase initially it would be good to first look at what you are planning to use to deliver. A small pickup (Ford Ranger or a Chevy S-10) can easily accommodate 3 jumps at one time. A large truck (Ford F-150 or a Chevrolet half ton) can accommodate 5 jumps at a time. While a smaller truck can return to reload, a larger truck when full will keep you busy all day. (Units aren't necessarily only rented once per day; if the times are well slotted they can be rented up to three times per day.) If necessary, a trailer will accommodate many more, depending on the size trailer. A good rule of thumb is to only schedule one delivery per hour or one pickup per hour, even though it is sometimes possible to do more. It takes a minimum of 10 minutes to set up a jump if it's clean and the location is easy to get to. It takes a minimum of 20 minutes to clean a jump, deflate it and get it into the back of your pickup.

f. Determine how much to charge

When determining what to charge many questions will be answered by the initial research you did in step 1 when planning your business. The going rate is determined by what the local market will bear. As the owner of the business, the pricing will be set up and determined by you. However, it is wise to offer the customer several different price points. For example, if you have licensed equipment you might want to charge extra for the use of that specialty unit. Some customers will want the most expensive unit that you have to offer.

g. Determining chargeable and free delivery areas

Determining the parameters of your delivery area is depends on how densely populated your area is and how far you're willing to drive. Most of your day will be

- windshield time. First look at the map of your area and figure out how far you can go in any direction from your business location in twenty minutes. If it takes longer than twenty minutes to get there then add an additional \$20 to \$100 dollars for delivery. (If there are areas of the community that you feel are unpleasant you may want to remove them from your delivery zone immediately.) The best way to determine delivery charges is to find out what is currently being charged by your competitors.
- h. Setting up business bank accounts
Finding good bank rates requires time on the phone. Try at least 4 banks to find the best rates, paying particular attention to monthly fees and any minimums they require. Credit unions offer very good rates, but not all credit unions handle business accounts. If you belong to a credit union, call them first.
 - i. Determine what type of payment you will accept
Many inflatable businesses start off taking only cash. Most start off taking checks and cash. Accepting credit cards is an expense, but makes it very convenient for the customer. Accepting credit card payments will cost you a percentage of your sale—typically 2-4%. Exactly how much of a percentage is determined by several variables, including the rate given to you by the payment processing service. If you decide that you want to accept credit cards, call around for merchant services. Pay close attention to the monthly fees and remember that fees are negotiable.
 - j. Set up phone services
You can easily change your home number to a business line just by calling the phone company. The advantage of doing this is that even if you don't purchase an ad you will still be listed in the yellow pages under the business category heading, usually "Party Supplies." Having a business line will cost you around \$10 extra a month, but the first rental that you book will more than cover the cost. You might consider adding an additional phone line to your home to accommodate your business calls. Answering your phones yourself is preferred since you can respond to any questions the customer might have and schedule their party immediately. If you intend to use your home phone, instruct family members to answer with the company name. For example, have them say, "Hello this is Susan with 'Susan's Jumps', how can I help you?" Cell phones have become an industry norm and keep you mobile. You can use your cell number for your business line and list it in the yellow pages.
 - k. Contact your local parks
Parties are often held in the city and county parks. Requirements for setup in parks can be obtained through the recreation and parks department in your community.



Contact your local parks department and ask them the following questions:

1. Do they allow inflatables?
2. Are there any size restrictions on inflatables?
3. Do the parks require you to add them as an additional insured?
4. Do they have electrical outlets and can they be used for inflatables?
5. What are their hours of operation?
6. Can they provide you with maps of the parks?

If your local parks do allow inflatables and have electrical outlets for the customers use, you need inform the customer that the blower requires a dedicated outlet. If they intend to plug in anything with a heating element to the outlet where your blower is plugged in it could blow the circuit. If the customer requires additional power suggest they rent a generator.

f. Purchase additional equipment needed

The following is a list of equipment you will need in addition to your inflatables.

1. Truck (or vehicle with tow bar and trailer)
2. Heavy duty hand truck with fenders (1 per truck)
3. 5 pound sledge hammer (1 per truck)
4. Sand bags (4 per inflatable)
5. 100 ft. heavy duty extension cords with reels (1 per blower)
6. Legal size metal notebook (1 per truck)
7. Hand held vacuum 1.5 hp with 20 ft cord & power strip (1 per truck)
8. Clean rags
9. Diluted cleaner (approximately 1cup per gallon of water)

3. Purchase Your Inflatables

You need first to decide how much you have to invest when buying your inflatables to rent. Starting with 2-4 inflatables is a good place to start, but make sure to invest in your marketing strategies as well.

Some customers opt to use credit cards to buy their first inflatables to rent. While the down side is that you are using credit, the up side is that you can begin making money right away on your investments. If you intend to use credit cards make sure your rates are reasonable.

If you intend to finance through a leasing company, expect to pay the same rates as you would with a credit card. When starting in inflatable rental company, the leasing company will be looking at your personal credit, since your business has no credit history. On the up side the loan is completely tax deductible and some leasing companies can offer very competitive insurance rates which include replacement value of your jumpers. Leasing doesn't tie up your revolving credit line. Many financing options allow you to defer payments for three months or more. This allows you to start building up your business and making money before any payments are due.

i2k Inflatables is the best place to buy your inflatable units. Here's what i2k offers:

1. 15+ years of experience in the inflatable rental business
2. Unique start-up packages to take the struggle out of starting your own business at no extra charge.
3. Free consulting and help desk support for any questions you may have along the way (Monday – Friday from 8:00am-5:00pm PST)
4. Sample rental contracts, tools, forms, etc...to get you started faster and making money sooner!
5. Only the finest heavy duty materials used to manufacture your units
6. Double & quadruple-stitched double reinforced construction
7. Nylon thread & netting
8. State-of-the-art full color digital printing
9. Many fun and popular styles to choose from
10. 2-year seam-to-seam warranty
11. Business card holder sewn onto every unit
12. Emergency and safety exits
13. Safety instructions printed on unit
14. Ground tarp

4. Organize the day-to-day operations of your business

Running an inflatable business is not complicated, but having a process in place to manage orders and schedule deliveries makes it much easier. Here is a sample process that anyone can utilize to manage daily operations. Sample forms are included as well. Forms are an important component when running a business. They structure your conversations and keep you focused. Your process should go something like this.

1. Take the call and review your reservation book or calendar. The customer will initially call you for pricing and availability. Check your rental book to see what you have available.
2. Reserve the inflatable and fill out an order form. Reserve the inflatable as requested by the customer and fill out a delivery order form with the customer's information while you have them on the phone. After the call transfer that same information to your rental book and your database.
3. Confirm a few days before the event. At least three days before the event, call all of the customers you have scheduled in your rental book and verify their orders.
4. Map out all of the deliveries. It will be necessary to map your delivery day's activities by scheduling your deliveries on a flow chart. (Thursday is a good day to fill out paperwork for the weekend.) Print a map on the back of the delivery order form, so that you have a copy of your original agreement. Fill out the rental agreement form. Staple the delivery order form map side up to the rental agreement form. Put all your forms in the order that you will deliver with a copy of the flow chart visible on the other side.
5. Deliver and provide forms to the customer. Deliver the inflatable on time; have a customer sign the rental agreement form, and provide them with a copy.
6. Pick up and clean the unit in a timely manner. Thank your customer.
7. Send your customer a friendly periodic reminder. Contact your customers on a regular basis to see if they are having any events that you can provide inflatables for. The minimum amount of contact should be once per year, but every 3 months or 6 months is ideal. Use the information provided on your delivery order form or in your database.



Susan's Jumps Delivery order form

Day: (*Saturday*) Date: (*22, Oct*) Time: (*2*) to (*4pm*)

Customer Name: (*Betty Jo Customer*)

Home Address: (<i>22 West Starr Road</i>)		Park:	
City: (<i>Big Town</i>)	State/Zip: (<i>CA, 90656</i>)	Ramada Number:	
Phone: (<i>123-4567</i>)	2 nd Phone: (<i>123-4568</i>)	Cell Phone: <i>none</i>	
Delivery Address: (<i>same as home</i>)			
This Party is for: (<i>Little Betty Customer</i>)		Age: (<i>4</i>)	
Directions: <i>(North on Beach, west on Randall, North on Starr to address.)</i>			
		Surface: <i>(grass)</i>	
Module Jump #1 Toy Story Art Panel <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer Art Panel <input type="checkbox"/> Disney Princess Art Panel <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Happy Birthday Art Panel <input type="checkbox"/> * Add \$20 premium for Licensed Panels		2 Hours \$80. 4 Hours \$100. 6 Hours \$120.	\$ <i>(100.)</i>
Module Jump #2 Toy Story Art Panel * <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer Art Panel <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Disney Princess Art Pane*1 <input type="checkbox"/> Happy Birthday Art Panel <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> * Add \$20 premium for Licensed Panels		2 Hours \$80. 4 Hours \$100. 6 Hours \$120.	\$
Castle Jumper	2 Hours \$80.	4 Hours \$100.	6 Hours \$120. \$
Lion King Club	2 Hours \$150.	4 Hours \$170.	6 Hours \$235. \$
delivery fee	\$ <i>(0)</i>		
		Tax \$ <i>(7.66)</i>	
		Total Due: \$ <i>(107.66)</i>	

Sample Delivery Order Form



The delivery order form is a worksheet. It's what you fill out when gathering information about your customer. This information will be used to file in your database for customer profiles and used the following year to send out postcard reminders for the customer's upcoming birthday party. It's a good idea to have these preprinted to fill in, then flip over the original to print a computer generated map on the other side, that way you have all the information when doing the actual delivery. Always ask for 2 phone numbers. If you're delivering to a park make sure you get a cell number.

Saturday October 22,

Module #1 Panel: <i>DisneyPrincess</i>	Module #2 Panel: <i>Soccer</i>
Name: <u>Betty Jo Customer</u>	Name: <u>Joe Renter</u>
Address: <u>22 W. Starr</u> ----	Address: <u>414 E. Sunfire</u> ---
Phone: <u>121-4117</u> Phone: <u>123-4511</u>	Phone: <u>121-4117</u> Phone: <u>121-1111</u>
Deliver to: <u>same</u>	Deliver to: <u>Green Park</u>
Other: <u>set up on grass</u>	Other: <u>Meet customer at 11:30</u>
<i>2pm to 4pm</i>	<i>12pm to 6pm</i>
Castle Jump:	Lion King Club:
Name: _____	Name: <u>Big Church</u>
Address: _____	Address: <u>123 Holy way</u>
Phone: _____ Phone: _____	Phone: <u>211-1122</u> Phone ; <u>None</u>
Deliver to: _____	Deliver to: <u>same</u>
Other: _____	Other: <u>Set up on asphalt</u>
<i>to</i>	<i>9am to 1pm</i>

Sample Rental Book

Just like a day-planner, your rental book will help you organize your day at a glance. It reminds you which units are available or rented and tells you where you need to be and at what time and helps you determine if you can re-rent units.



Date: *October 22*

Day: *Saturday*

	9am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm
Module #1				<i>Deliver 1st st./ Starr</i>		<i>Pickup 1st st./ Starr</i>		
Module #2		<i>Deliver Green Park</i>						<i>Pickup Green Park</i>
Castle Jump								
Lion King Club	<i>Deliver Main/ Holy</i>		<i>Pickup Main/ Holy</i>					

Sample Flow Chart

The flow chart is used to look at your day in brief and easily see where you need to be and when you need to be there without flipping through your forms to find out at what time your pickups and deliveries are scheduled. It's important to be familiar with your area. Fill out the flowchart with recognized landmarks and cross streets so that you are aware of how much time you have in between deliveries. As you become more comfortable with the distances, set-up times and breakdown times you will be able to plan your deliveries closer in sequence. As you grow larger this document becomes more and more important.



Rental Contract

Drivers License:	Balance Due:	
Lessee: <i>Betty Jo Customer</i>	Lessor: Susan's Jumps	
Address: <i>22 E. Starr</i>	Start Time:	End Time:
<i>Big town, USA</i>	Phone#1:	Phone#2:
Signature:	Tarp	Confirmed:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Name:
	Grass	Date:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Time:
Delivered By:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Module #1 <input type="checkbox"/> Module #2 <input type="checkbox"/> Castle <input type="checkbox"/> Lion King Club		

1. EQUIPMENT, RENT AND TERMS OF RENTAL AGREEMENT: THE UNDERSIGNED LESSEE, HIRES FROM SUSAN'S JUMPS AS LESSOR, ONE SUSAN'S JUMPS UNIT IDENTIFICATION NO: _____ BLOWER ID NO: _____ THE RENTAL AS STATED ABOVE IS PAYABLE IN ADVANCE FROM THE TIME OF COMMENCEMENT STARTTIME TO END TIME.
2. **DELIVERY:** TO THE STREET ADDRESS SPECIFIED ABOVE BY LESSEE (CUSTOMER) LESSEE GRANTS LESSOR RIGHT TO ENTER THE PROPERTY AT THE SAID STREET ADDRESS (DELIVERY ADDRESS) FOR THE DELIVERY AND SUBSEQUENT PICKUP OF THE SUSAN'S JUMPS UNIT AT THE SPECIFIED TIME.
3. **TRANSPORTATION EXPENSE:** Except as provided herein, all charges in delivering and subsequent pick above. In the event that the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit is not returned at the appointed time by Lessee to up of the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit with respect to the Delivery Address are included in the Rental Fee noted Lessor then a \$50.00 Transportation Fee will be automatically imposed.
4. **GENERAL RULES TO FOLLOW DURING USE OF THE SUSAN'S JUMPS UNIT:**

a. Only compatible age groups and size shall play on the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit at the same time. The Maximum number of riders of each group that should play in the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit at one time are:

Unit Size	Children 8 & under	Children 9 to 12	Older Teens	Adults
10 X 10	5 - 6	NONE	NONE	NONE
13 X 13	8	5 - 6	3 - 4	3
15 X 15	10	6 - 8	4 - 5	4

- b. All riders MUST REMOVE SHOES before playing in the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit.
- c. To avoid neck and back injuries, FLIPS ARE NOT ALLOWED.
- d. CHILDREN'S SAFETY DEPENDS UPON YOU. YOUR PERSONAL SUPERVISION IS ABSOLUTELY REQUIRED. AS THE LESSEE OF THE SUSAN'S JUMPS UNIT YOUR SAFETY OF ALL RIDERS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. INT: _____
- e. Absolutely no "Silly String", gum, candy, food or other sticky substances are allowed on the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit. If upon pick up, such cleaning is required then a \$50.00 cleaning fee shall be automatically imposed.
- f. DO NOT MOVE the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit from the place where it was installed. If the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit moves, pull the corner back to its original location of installation. CAUTION: Keep the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit away from swimming pools.
5. **SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:** THE SUSAN'S JUMPS unit's equipment is reliable. Should the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit begin to deflate:
 - (1) The motor may have stopped, in which case, check the cord connection at the outlet of the motor, and remember to keep only the 100 foot extension cord on the outlet (stronger outlets are in the kitchen and laundry room).
 - (2) If the motor is continuing to run, check the air intake on the side of the motor for block and check both tubes at the back of the SUSAN'S JUMPS unit for snugness; re-tie if necessary.
 - (3) If you can not correct the problem call SUSAN'S JUMPS.
6. **SAFE OPERATION ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** LESSEE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HE HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED ABOUT AND FULLY UNDERSTANDS THE SAFE OPERATION OF THE SUSAN'S JUMPS UNIT THAT IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS RENTAL AGREEMENT. LESSEE



Sample Rental Contract

The rental contract is the most important form you have. It is the legal agreement between the lessor (you) and the lessee (your customer). It outlines the responsibilities of both parties and provides that the lessee must take responsibility for both the inflatable unit and the children who play on the unit. This document must be signed before the equipment is released to the customer and prior to the event. It saves time to have this form filled out before the delivery. It is advisable that you provide a copy for the customer.

5. Hire Professionals

Although there is an abundance of accounting software on the market, nothing beats an accountant to walk you through the process of keeping your books in order. Even if you merely use them to set up and do your taxes monthly, it will save you lots of grief, not to mention penalties and fines for late and incorrect payments.

Attorneys are also highly recommended when setting up the legal aspect of your inflatable rental business. It is recommended that you have an attorney read your rental agreement form (even if you intend to use the form provided here) to make recommendations for changes. It is also good to have an attorney to call in case you receive a bad check. You might want to sign a contract with a collection firm to handle bad checks, but an attorney usually has more impact.

6. Create a Database

Keep track of your customer information by creating a simple database. Customers should be categorized by month of rental in order to contact them the following year with a reminder card. Databases are essential to maintain your customer contacts. Customers like to feel that they are important to you. In turn, they will respond by giving you their business year after year and referring you to their friends. You don't need special software to set up a database, but programs like Microsoft Excel or Access make it very easy to input and locate records.

Add the following information to your database:

1. Month and date of rental
2. Customer name including spouse name
3. Customer address
4. Customer phone numbers
5. Inflatable rented
6. Children and their ages
7. Birth date

7. Advertise Your Business

To start generating business, you need to start advertising and getting your new business name out to potential customers. It's all about reaching the right audience with the right message. Start with family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and associates; these are all potential customers. Plus, every time your inflatable goes up it's great advertising for your business. The market for your business will be families who want to throw large parties or business and organizations who want inflatables at their events. Examples of organizations that rent inflatables include churches and schools, grocery stores and chain stores, flea markets and swap meet and car dealerships.

Schools and churches have parent groups PTO's or PTA's, carnivals, festivals, classrooms and congregations full of children. Every child in that school or congregation is a potential client. Your objective is to persuade those potential clients to rent from you. Provide the PTA or Church with a coupon that offers a \$5 to \$10 discount on a jump rental. That \$5 isn't for the customer, but a donation for the church or the PTA.

Grocery stores have grand openings, events, remodeling and holiday events. If you don't know your local grocery store manager, get to know him or her. (All mothers shop at grocery stores.) Ask the manager if you might schedule a morning (double coupon day if available) to set up a jump. You can either charge the store or if not just volunteer the unit. (You might need to add the store as additional insured to satisfy the corporation.) Take plenty of business cards.

If you live near a flea market or swap meet make a trip to visit it on a Friday or Saturday evening and see just how busy it is. Some businesses have been built solely on the referrals they get from flea markets. Set up a jump, (it's a good idea to take folding chairs, people are always looking for a place to sit) and charge a dollar or two for kids to jump and while they're jumping pass out business cards to the parents. Take your reservation book.

The bane of car dealerships is children. Children can make or break a deal. Bored children often become restless and distract potential buyers. On the weekends when the traffic is heavy dealerships will be more inclined to spend the money on inflatables. These are just a few examples of organizations to start with to begin building up your business.

Website

Setting up a website, even if it's just a very simple page with all of your contact information is essential. It will add credibility and professionalism to your business. The ability to see the bounce house before it is delivered and possibly schedule the unit on-line at your leisure is very convenient for your customers. Having a web site for your business will cost very little per month, after the initial setup. It is a very inexpensive form of advertising.

Search Advertising

When you did your initial research online you found maps of your area with all of your competitors listed. When a potential customer searches for inflatable amusements in your area, you want to show up on this search, too. Make sure to list all of the cities and communities that you serve on your website. This will help you appear in searches for particular areas. To do paid search advertising, you can sign up for Google AdWords and pay a flat fee for each click on your ad.

Social Media

A very inexpensive way to start getting your business name out there is by using social media. Start by setting up a Facebook page for your business. You can add photos of your inflatables for rent, detailed information about your services, prices and more. Share the page with your friends and family, and ask them to share with their contacts as well.

Business Cards

As a sales tool business cards should not be underestimated. It is the most requested, easiest form of advertising you can carry, and if you fail to provide it, more than likely you will lose potential customers. You can easily turn your business card into a refrigerator magnet by purchasing business card sized adhesive magnets at an office supply store. If you plan to do this have your cards printed in full color so the customer will be more likely to display them. This advertisement reminds the customer who they rented from and saves them the trouble of leafing through the yellow pages, and seeing the ads of your competitors.

Thank You & Reminder Cards

Make the most of the database you created and keep in touch with your past customers. They more than likely be happy to hear from you and remember the great event you helped them with. Send them thank you notes, reminder postcards and ask for referrals to friends, relatives and co-workers. The most effective thank you notes are done by hand. They should be sent out the week after the event. Postcards are cheaper as reminder notes than letters. They can be colorful, fun and feature your newest units. Reminder cards should be sent out a month prior to the previous year's rental. For example: If Billy Brown had a jump delivered in September of last year for his birthday, you would want to send out a reminder in early August. The reminder should read something like this, "It's Billy's 7th birthday party on September 14th. Let's make a date! Happy Birthday Billy, Susan's Jumps."

There are many forms of paid advertising including Yellow Pages advertising, coupon advertising, television and radio advertising. As discussed previously, the Yellow Pages are initially the easiest way to get your name in front of the buying public. The size of the ad initially should be small, no larger than a 16th of a page. Even if you buy eight or more jumps, ease yourself into the business, become familiar with it before aggressively marketing yourself. Consider establish your style of operation and familiarize yourself with the industry prior to pushing for growth.

Print Advertising

Contact your local newspapers and community publishers (those that send out newsletters, magazines, flyers). Ask them what they charge for a print ad. Usually a quarter or 1/8th of a page will be a reasonable cost. Coupons can be inserted into a newspaper or packet of coupons that is mailed ads can be costly. If you go with a mailing publication they will charge based on the delivery area. Your sales person can provide you with the demographics of the area that they will mail to. Make sure that you are targeting areas with families and small children.

Print flyers and ask local merchants if you can leave several of them on their counter or near the door. Many local businesses are happy to help promote other local businesses. Make sure to build a relationship with the merchants in your community. You might also offer to have an inflatable outside of their store in exchange for some free advertising, especially if it's a store that has a lot of traffic from families that might be your future customers.

Television & Radio Advertising

Television advertising is expensive but effective. You will get business from it, but initially you won't have the equipment or staff to accommodate all of the events or the calls. Cable TV advertising is a better choice because it offers time slots at a fraction of the price. Radio advertising is also expensive, but if you can barter with them to offer your inflatables at their next event, they may be willing to help you advertise. Radios frequently broadcast from locations. They are paid to air their programs from these locations by the merchants. The job of the radio stations is to use their celebrity to draw customers to that location. Offer the radio advertisers a supervised jump whenever they are broadcasting from a mall, toy store, car dealership any event that can be construed as child related, and their part of the deal is to tell consumers who is providing the inflatable and let you pass out business cards to advertise your company.

Giveaway & Promotional Items

Shirts, car panels, pens and other giveaway items are fun to have but not the most effective advertising. T-shirts or polo shirts are a form of advertising that not only reminds customers who is providing their jumper, but also adds a touch of professionalism to your business. If you use T-shirts to advertise, make sure you keep them clean and pressed, toss the old ratty ones out. Only use magnetic door panels on your vehicle to advertise if you have an attractive vehicle to attach them to. A door panel can be a mobile form of advertising and every bit of advertising counts. Pens may or may not be effective advertising for you. You do need pens and they add to name recognition.

You may want to join or get information from trade organizations that exist to support the inflatable business. An association called the IIPG&A or International Inflatable Products & Games Association has been formed and should be helpful with news and information. They can be reached at 407-438-8813. If there isn't an association in your area there is one you might want to look into called ASPIRE Entertainment Group (1c 888c 394c 5692). They are located in



Southern Arizona but currently are expanding into other parts of the country. Your local Chamber of Commerce will no doubt contact you, and depending on the size of your community you may want to join. Through the chamber you get information like the new businesses which are opening in your area and the sizes of the businesses that belong. (Grand openings and company picnics are events that often use jumps)

8. Take Orders & Payments

Once you start telling people that you are in business and start advertising, you can expect to get phone calls. It's a good idea to have a system for how to handle general phone inquiries. "What do you have available?" "What are your prices?" The two most commonly asked questions in the inflatable rental business. It's easy to rattle off the themes you carry and your prices. It takes a little salesmanship, enthusiasm and belief in your business to convince a customer that they found what they are looking for.

For example: Joe Customer: "What themes do you have available?" You: "We have lots of fun themes to choose from. What is your event?" Joe Customer: "It's a birthday party." You: "Wonderful, is it for a little girl or a boy?" Joe Customer: "My son." You: "Does your party have a theme?" Joe Customer: "I think my wife said it's going to be Harry Potter." You: "Excellent, I have the perfect unit for your party. We have a green dragon with big red toenails and a ridge of orange tips down his back he's fun, whimsical but not scary and couldn't be more perfect for a Harry Potter theme." Joe Customer: "Let's do it."

Customers are looking for a reason to stop calling around. You have convinced them that they just found the perfect inflatable for their party or event. The rest of the call is fairly easy after that. Fill in all the blanks on your delivery order form, repeat all the information back to the customer and promise to give them a reminder call a few days prior to the party to reconfirm their reservation. Reminder calls are very important; they remind the customer that they have an event coming up. If they have had an emergency and aren't going to have the party after all, you'll know. That gives you several days to find another customer for that time slot and inflatable.

9. Deliver Your Products

Organization is key in the rental business. If your events are scheduled for the weekend, get all the paperwork for your deliveries ready by Thursday afternoon or Friday morning. Flow charts should be done by Friday afternoon at the very latest. Plan a dry run before you set out on your first delivery. Choose a location and determine the time it takes from load up to set up. You need to allow for any unexpected issues that might arise or if the customer is late or the setup location is difficult to get to. Many things can happen to slow the delivery process.

Being early by at least a half hour is a good habit. Most business owners will tell you they'd rather be an hour early than 5 minutes late. Customers will rarely complain about an early delivery but will expect a discount if you're even a few minutes behind schedule. If you are more than a half hour early call the customer to okay the delivery time and to confirm that they will be at that location to accept the delivery.

Just as key as being prompt for the delivery, picking up a unit on time is very important. A prompt pick up demonstrates the professionalism of your company. Particularly when delivering to a park, you need to watch the clock. Generally when a customer has given a time for the pickup they are ready to leave either at that time or prior to that time. Giving them your cell number is helpful, but explain that it may take you some extra time if they call last minute to request an early pickup.

10. Tell everyone that you're in business!

Once you officially start your business, it's time to tell everyone. Let your friends, family and co-workers know you've started your own inflatable business. Ask them to refer business and tell their network about your services. And consider telling your completion as well. Getting to know your competitors is both the most difficult and the most constructive thing you can do to move your business ahead. There is a certain amount of apprehension when one considers the prospect of calling up your competitor and saying, "Hi I just went into business and noticed that you were doing the same exact thing. I'd like to get to know you and find out what you're doing and how it's working for you." You might hear a click or you might be surprised, and they might have a very enlightening conversation. This business owner may regard you warily at first, but as time goes on they might begin to trust you and eventually be helpful to you. You might someday use each others generators when you have exceptionally busy weekends or occasionally do a pickup for each other. Of course this won't happen over night and certainly shouldn't be suggested at the first conversation. But when that competitor runs out of equipment for the weekend, don't be surprised if he doesn't send that extra business your way.

Conclusion

There is hardly an industry that is more fun, more satisfying and more profitable than that of inflatable rentals. It is doubtful that you will ever find a business that is so affordable to get into, with so much potential for revenue. In today's demanding market there is yet the promise for more growth. The industry has expanded tremendously in the past ten years and if the enthusiasm of the customers is any indication, it will continue to do so. So let's get started!