



Removing Graffiti Etching (and other Scratches) from Glass

A Natural Addition and Profitable Up-Sell

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Photo provided by Lambert & Martin
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If you look, you will find scratched glass at almost every establishment you step foot on. Whether it is deep damage, like graffiti etching, or smaller scratches from improper cleaning or even hard water and acid etching, the damage is there. This damage represents the single biggest opportunity to make some serious profits from customers already using your cleaning services, or from new customers who may end up using your cleaning services after you fix their glass.

The markets for scratch removal are limitless, and they are places you are already cleaning. Both residential and commercial properties have damaged glass, and while most damage is not graffiti, graffiti removal from bus stops, train stations, buses, schools and universities are huge. Residential properties are going to have damage from irrigation overspray (hard water staining), building runoff staining, new construction damage, pet scratches and improper cleaning. Anyone who has glass can be a potential customer.

While we may have grown accustomed to the presence

of window damage and don't notice it, the windows' owners certainly do. These blemishes block their view every day. Repairs are often not done simply because the window owners don't know it's an option, or because the cost to replace the glass is beyond their current means. One of our top users loves to tell me how he "makes believers every day" simply because the act of scratch removal is beyond the scope of most peoples' realm of possibility.

The Science Behind the Process

Scratch removal requires grinding the damaged surface of the glass from where it was to the bottom of the damage, to create a new surface. In most instances, the damage is about 0.001" to 0.005" deep, or less than the thickness of a business card. More serious damage, such as that caused by graffiti etching, can be removed as well.

Scratch removal has been around for about 25 years, but until about seven years ago the science was imperfect due to one misconception: you have to use water to grind

on glass. When you introduce water into scratch removal along with any type of grinding apparatus, you run into problems with optic distortion or “lensing.” When you introduce water between a spinning disk and a stationary surface, the water will move to the outer edge of the spinning disk. Water is non-compressible (the magic of hydraulics) and thus the outer edge of the abrasive disk makes poor contact with the surface you are grinding on. If the center of the disk is making great contact, and the outer edge is not, you will grind a lens into the surface of the glass. These lenses will create a distorted path for light through the glass and leave the window looking like a fun-house mirror.

Understanding that this was one of the major issues facing the glass restoration industry, we embarked on developing a method to restore the glass without leaving any optic distortion. By using a dry grinding method, our system allows contractors to consistently and evenly remove glass stock until we reach the bottom of the damage. This way, when light travels through the glass, it will maintain that straight pattern, preventing distortion.

The damage removal typically involves three steps. First, choose the appropriate grinding pad based on the depth of the damage. Deeper damage naturally requires not only choosing a coarser pad, but requires grinding a greater surface and can take longer to remove. However, it can be done.

The process is not magic, in fact it is very much the same method you would use to remove a scratch or gouge from a piece of wood. You are going to sand the glass down to the bottom of the damage, and then go through a succession of finer grit abrasives to get the surface smooth again. The only difference is that we are working on glass with very specialized abrasives. If you can sand a piece of wood, you can remove scratches from glass. After you have removed the damage, you then are going to work on polishing the surface of the glass back to clarity.

The process is simple, the concept is simple, but as with any trade or skill you can spend a lifetime improving. On average it will take you a few hours to get comfortable with the tools, but after that you should be fine.

How To Sell Scratch Removal

I always recommend that before you invest in a scratch removal system you should make a couple of sales first. This will not only help offset the cost of the equipment, it will help you see how easy a service it is to sell.

Selling scratch removal is no different than selling any other service. The only difference you will find is that because most customers don't know about scratch removal you will need to do a bit more educating during

the sales process. There are a number of sales pitch strategies that many have used and found to be very effective in closing jobs. Here are a few of them.

1. Start out with your existing customers. Their windows will be damaged. You are already there on their property cleaning. They will be happy to know you offer this service. You might also add a special to any promotions you are offering. Craigslist is a goldmine. Not only are you able to market your services, you get a back link to your website to help build your SEO. You will be amazed with how many customers will be interested in booking this service.

2. Use the “Porthold Sales Pitch.” I use this when calling on a customer that clearly has bad damaged glass. What I will do is find an area of damage that is big enough to show the repair, yet small enough to require them to hire me to remove the balance of the damage. No different than using a metal stencil with your power washing equipment to demonstrate your cleaning service. I will do the small demo and then I will hand a pre-completed estimate to the customer and let them know that they need to book soon as my schedule is filling up fast. By having the estimate already done and putting a little urgency in my closing statement I am usually able to get the customer to agree and schedule before I make it back to my truck.

3. Implement the “Anchor Theory.” Generally, on any commercial block, your bigger businesses are located on the corners. If you can sell the corner business, then it's much easier to sell the rest of the block. After I sell the corner stores, I go visit the managers at the neighboring shops and tell them I'm going to be in the neighborhood removing scratches from the corner store on whatever date. I explain when I'm scheduled to be there, how long I plan to be there, and that since I will



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already be in the neighborhood, I can come over afterward, repair their glass, and knock off ten to 15 percent since I will be there anyway.

Pricing

A general starting place is to price jobs at around 30 percent of how much it would cost to replace the glass. To find this out, you'll have to do some research beforehand by calling window and glass shops to see how much they charge per square foot for different types of glass. Be sure the price includes labor. We also offer an estimation app for smart phones (both iPhone and Android) to help in the estimating process for our users.

There are three ways to price glass repair:

1. By the square foot. This is

great for large jobs, but will limit your earning potential if it's only something small.

2. By the job. This is better for small jobs.

We have a video on our site that goes into more detail on pricing, but keep the 30 percent of glass replacement in mind. Of course, deeper damage takes longer and you will likely need to charge more. In fact, on some minor damage such as hard water stains, you might be able to just pre-polish and polish the glass, skipping the grinding step altogether.

3. By the hour. I DO NOT recommend this method. It's much easier to sell a per-job price than to prove you're worth a certain amount per hour. You'll lose money in the end. For example, I recently did an acid etch removal job the other day. It took me 45 minutes and I made \$375. Replacing the glass would have cost \$1200. If I told the customer that I charge \$500 an hour, there is no way they would hire me, but quoting a price of \$375 made the price look very reasonable.

Of course, you also have to make sure you are pricing high enough to cover your time, your material costs, your overhead and your profit. On average, new users can do 10 to 15 square feet per hour, and figure you are going to spend around \$0.22 per square foot on materials.

We have created a video series on our website that provides more in-depth information on the scratch removal process, including demonstrations of the process. You can view these at <http://www.glassrenu.com/videos.htm>



During Scratch Removal



After Scratch Removal