

20 Tips from

MICHAEL HOCKMAN

GUTTER DOGS



DIRT AND MOLD HAVE A WORST ENEMY

When I called Mike Hockman of Gutter Dogs at our scheduled interview time, he answered elated. “Hey Allison. Guess what? I just got off the phone with a customer. I took what was going to be a \$120 gutter cleaning job and added a \$350 housewash. Plus, now my schedule’s full for the week.”

I share this because it reiterates Gutter Dogs’ philosophy: don’t be afraid of the small jobs. They can help fill in the gaps in your schedule, and often turn into bigger jobs.

This is a lesson Hockman has learned since starting his own business in 2004. Early on, this Maryland-based contractor worked as a painter/lawnmower/gutter cleaner. While mowing lawns was his favorite task, cleaning gutters was the one that seemed to stick.

Since that time, Hockman – whose business has been 100 percent residential until recently – has added a number of other services, including house washing and roof cleaning. Yet, gutters remain Hockman’s bread and butter service, and it’s a skill that he and his Gutter Dogs crew have mastered. The following tips have resulted from cleaning hundreds and hundreds of gutters over the years.

1 If you don’t want gutters to be your primary source of business, don’t use the word “gutter” in your name! Despite attempts to promote and advertise other cleaning services, Gutter Dogs still gets more gutter-related calls than anything else.

2 You owe it to your customer to inform them about other services you offer. “It took me awhile to practice this, but I now realize that I’m actually doing my customer a disservice if I don’t offer add-ons,” he explained. “They already know me. It makes sense to offer other services, then perform them at a discount since I’m already on the property.”

3 Never give away work. This was a hard lesson Hockman learned a couple of years ago when he referred a number of gutter cleaning clients to a competitor during his busiest season. “By Fall, I was wishing I still had those customers!” he said. “I should have found a way to get their cleanings done, even if it meant buying another vehicle and hiring more workers.”

4 Ask for customer testimonials. Hockman supplied his technicians with a video camera and trained them to ask for video customer testimonials before leaving the site. “We’ve collected 86 so far.”

5 When it comes to cleaning gutters, get in, get up and get out. “Unless there’s a real problem with the downspouts, you should be able to get the gutters cleaned in 15 minutes.”

6 Check the roof while you’re up there. As a courtesy, let your customers know if you find soft spots or damaged shingles.

7 Use a blower. If the roof is walkable and the gutters are dry, Gutter Dogs does the majority of the cleaning with a blower. This even works in cases with mesh-type gutter protection systems in place.

8 If the gutters are wet – and there hasn’t been a recent rain – it means the downspouts are clogged somewhere.

9 If the downspouts appear to be clogged, clean them first then drain the water.

10 When the downspouts are clogged, check the elbows first. “Ninety percent of the time, that’s where the clog is going to be.”

11 Use a penny to tell you if the downspout is clean. Hockman has crew members carry a pocket full of pennies with them, then drop them into the

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downspout and listen. “If you hear metal all the way down – ‘ding, ding, ding, ding’ – then you know it’s clear. But if you hear ‘ding, ding, THUD, ding’ – there’s still a clog. And by using this method you can tell where the clog is.

12 Never skip downspouts, thinking you’ll return to them later. The Gutter Dogs team stops at every downspout and gets them cleaned before moving on to the next batch of gutters. “Otherwise, you’ll inevitably skip one by accident. We’ve found it’s better to just do them as you come to them.”

13 Clean the highest gutters first. “It seems like common sense, but some guys don’t catch this,” said Hockman. “If you clean the lower gutters first, you’re going to get them dirty again when you clean the higher gutters. Work your way down.”

14 For exterior gutter cleaning, use a pole and work from the ground. Hockman has two 25-foot poles from Home Depot that he uses, and his product of choice for gutter whitening is F13 Gutter Grenade from Pressure Tek. (See ad on page 15). “Working those poles is kind of tricky until you get them figured out,” he said.

15 Tie a t-shirt or towel about two feet above where you grip the pole. “This will significantly help reduce the amount of solution dripping down your arms.”

16 Don’t leave a mess. Clean up whatever you blow to the ground, either by mixing it with the landscaping or bagging it.

17 Stay away from frozen gutters. “Those are bad news and not worth it.”

18 Don’t be greedy. “I don’t believe in charging \$500 for a \$100 job. I don’t lowball, but I also don’t overcharge. If I can do the job for \$60, then I’ll do it for \$60. That way, the customer is happy, they’ve gotten a fair deal, and they’ll

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come back for more. Plus, sometimes that \$60 gutter job will turn into a \$350 house washing job.”

19 Don’t be afraid to take on the small jobs. Again, Hockman has built his business off of the small jobs. While he would love to bring in more high-dollar historic roof restoration projects, the small jobs are fast and often bring repeat business as well as add-on services.

20 Learn from others. Hockman is a big participant in the industry’s social media groups and has also participated in a number of industry-related events.

Along those lines, Hockman asked me to be sure to include the following point in this article. “I really need to thank Chris Tucker of RCIA (Roof Cleaning Institute of America). My roof cleaning business has more than doubled because of Chris and the help he’s given me.”

With that said, Hockman was also more than thrilled to be able to share his gutter cleaning knowledge with *eClean* and our readers. “I’ve gained so much knowledge from others giving back to this industry. I’m happy to finally be able to do the same for someone else.”

To learn more about Mike Hockman and Gutter Dogs, visit their website: www.GutterDogs.com



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