

CHALLENGES OF MOBILE

It is nice to be independent of other employees and work alone in a mobile grooming set up. You are on your own time frame and no one is looking over your shoulder or making decisions without your input. With that being said, it does come with some potential pitfalls.

Some of the biggest conflicts in working mobile are expenses and time management. They are parameters you have to observe very closely. With the rising gas prices these days, it becomes even more significant. If it costs you \$50 to do a \$75 groom, you are not making any money. Unlike the brick and mortar practices, the gas prices and down/travel time affect your costs directly.

There are several ways to combat the cost of gas increasing. First, take the most efficient route as possible. I actually priced out implementing mobile for my veterinary hospital, because I do believe it is a wonderful service. The only way it made sense for my hospital was to upcharge for a luxury service (me going to them) and trying to set up in central locations. The more travel time you have, the more time, gas, and wear and tear you have on your vehicle. It is best to market to a smaller area and be wise about the clients you choose to service. If you have to travel 5 miles for 1 dog that is different then if you do 5 dogs in the same household. When we start up, we want to service everyone, but it doesn't make sense if the fee doesn't reflect the costs involved in traveling to the client.

One strategy to compensate for longer driving distances is to charge a mileage charge. Gas has increased immensely, and your trip charges need to reflect that. If you are not taking this into consideration, you might be going backwards financially. The good news with this approach is if the cost of gas goes down then you can also back off on the trip charge fee. Many groomers prefer not to do it that way but somehow there needs to be some type of compensation to make up for the difference. Clients appreciate this a lot more than just raising prices because of the transparency involved. Below are some numbers if you are doing a price increase. It isn't a large increase but if you don't keep up with the increase then it is coming out of your pay to compensate for it.

	MILES/DAY	COST/ DAY	COST/ YEAR	ONE YEAR INCREASE	REC PRICE INCREASE**
COST OF GAS*	10	\$ 4.50	\$1125	375	.30
	20	\$9.00	\$2250	750	.60
	50	\$22.50	\$5625	1875	1.50
FIGURES BASED ON ~10 MILES/GAL (VARIES GREATLY WITH TYPE OF VEHICLE USED) \$4.50 GAL UP WHICH IS UP ~\$1.50 FROM A YEAR AGO					
**CONSIDERING 5 GROOMS A DAY 250 GROOMING DAYS A YEAR (TOTAL GROOMS 1250) THIS WOULD BE THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT TO RAISE PRICES PER GROOM JUST TO BREAK EVEN WITH GAS PRICE INCREASE.					

Are you booked out weeks to months in advanced? Often mobile groomers are because it is a luxury and convenient service that clients love. Are you charging accordingly? Mobile prices need to be considerably higher than brick and mortar not only because of the convenience but your “down time” is considerably more than that of a normal salon. How many days did you lose for maintenance or repairs on the vehicle? Money lost in repairs? How many hours do you lose a day, a week, or a year just in travel time? Let’s put some figures to it:

If you do 5 grooms a day (5 work days) in an 8 hour day working 50 weeks a year. Figure average groom price of \$75.	
POTENTIALLY MISSED REVENUE IN A YEAR	
TRAVEL TIME 2-3 HOURS A DAY	\$25,000- 37,500
VEHICLE MAINTENANCE 2 DAYS A YEAR	\$ 750
MAJOR REPAIR OR WAITING ON PARTS??? 2 WEEKS	\$ 3750
COST OF REPAIRS	???

As you can see, the travel time adds up quickly so being efficient in this area is extremely important. Down time is the second most costly in the example. Something to consider is how to minimize this area also. Experienced mobile groomers tell me simple is better. It is always nice to have all the “bells and whistles” that some of the fancy vans and trailers have, but that means more things can go wrong. It often means more down time, harder to get parts, and more expense.

There are a lot of advantages in building your own van or trailer. One is you can get it customized to your preference. The second is if you do the work yourself then you know how to fix things. Keeping spare parts and being able to fix common problems can change your down time and the wait time on parts. Recently the turn around time has been quite extensive for new parts. If you do need to wait on parts for a couple of weeks, this could affect you both physically and financially. You would have to make up for two weeks of work in an accelerated period of time, or you might end up losing clients as they get tired of waiting.

Another challenge is the small space to work in. There are challenges of preventing dogs from accidentally escaping to good ventilation. I know groomers that have fell ill from carbon monoxide poisoning or strong products like tick and flea dips because their vans or trailers were not ventilated adequately. This is definitely something to keep in mind, so that you don’t put the pet’s or your life at risk. Winter time can be especially challenging when you can’t open windows or vents because of the cold.

Water storage is always a challenge in these units especially on days with freezing temperatures. This limits what can be used to bathe the dog, but also for clean up between dogs. Without the luxury of

unlimited water, you have to be careful to make sure the pets are adequately rinsed to prevent skin issues associated with products left in the coat. It is also important to make sure that the area is cleaned well to prevent spread of any infectious material between dogs.

Mobile is a wonderful service and a great way to work independently doing what you love. It does require that you work smart in order to avoid some of the pitfalls that can be associated with it. Clients love the convenience and accessibility! Remember it is not necessary to hurt your profits by charging inadequately.