



# Maid to Order

Emerging system Messy Maid distinguishes itself with custom residential cleaning *By D'Arcy Jenish*

**P**rity Gouveia and her partner Barry Driedger knew pretty quickly that they had a winning concept on their hands when they launched Messy Maid residential cleaning services in Edmonton in February 2010. They embarked on a promotional blitz by delivering flyers door to door to households in selected neighbourhoods. They dropped off flyers and put up posters in Legion branches and real estate offices and by March had signed their first customers. By that summer, they were generating \$10,000 a month in revenues and their sales went up from there.

"It really did take off and there were a lot of major competitors in the Edmonton area," recalls Gouveia, President and Chief Executive Officer of Messy Maid.

"My partner has been in franchising for 30 years and he thought we had a good concept to start franchising."

Driedger became Vice-President of Franchise Development. The couple set up head office in Toronto in order to target the heavily populated southern Ontario market. The business quickly took off and since then they've hardly had time to pause or catch their breath.

They sold the Edmonton business to a family member and have since signed franchisees in the Belleville-Trenton area, Ottawa, the rapidly growing Durham Region on the eastern edge of the Greater Toronto Area, Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Toronto, Mississauga, and Barrie.

Messy Maid is an emerging franchising system in a business segment crowded with competitors, but Gouveia

## emerging system

and Driedger have found a number of ways to bring added value to the customer and to distinguish themselves from the competition.

“The biggest thing that makes us different from our competitors is that we use standardized equipment and cleaning systems across the network,” says Gouveia. “There isn’t really any standardization in the industry.”

That delivers advantages to the franchisees and the customers. Messy Maid buys all its cleaning products and supplies in bulk through the corporate head office, which means the company gets volume price discounts that can be passed on to the franchisees and their clients.

There is a second important differentiator. All Messy Maid vehicles are equipped with GPS tracking devices, which serves the interest of both the franchisees and the clients. The devices create detailed and accurate records of staff travel between cleaning assignments.

“These records re-assure the client that if we bill for an hour we can show that a cleaning team was in their home for an hour,” says Gouveia. “We can verify that and supply the client with a report if necessary.”

The company also insists that franchisees conduct criminal background checks on all staff members



Messy Maid has developed proprietary software to help franchisees manage their bookings, staff, and payroll.

before putting them to work in a client’s home. “Criminal background checks are a big thing for us,” says Gouveia. “We make sure all our staff are checked and if a client asks to see it we can produce it. Other companies don’t do that.”

Messy Maid has territories to award across southern Ontario, as well as other parts of the country, and is looking for franchisees, ideally with some sales, marketing or accounting backgrounds, although such experience is not absolutely essential. Most importantly, incoming franchisees must be prepared to follow the system because, as Gouveia puts it: “Franchising is all about following policies and procedures.”

They should also be outgoing, ambitious, and prepared to knock on doors and do sales cold calls.

“We want people who won’t just sit at home and wait for the phone to ring,” she says. “They’ll never grow their business that way.”

Franchisees can run their businesses from home, which is a big cost-saver since they do not need to rent business premises, but they must be prepared to answer the phone whenever it rings to handle calls from clients or staff.

Messy Maid provides new franchisees with two weeks of training, the first in a classroom setting, the second working in the field with an established franchisee. The company assists with many of the routine tasks required to establish their business, including setting up phone lines, opening bank accounts, drafting articles of incorporation, purchasing insurance, and setting up merchant services so they can accept credit cards.

Head office also assists with another significant hurdle during the franchisee start-up phase: human resources. “The biggest challenge for franchisees is finding good quality staff,” Gouveia says. “We get good quality staff because we’re definitely paying them more than minimum wage, but it’s still a challenge. We help with hiring when franchisees are starting out and we go through the interviews with them until they get the hang of it.”



The Messy Maid team

Messy Maid has developed its own proprietary software for franchisees and it allows them to manage their bookings, schedule staff, and run their payrolls. In addition to technology, the franchise is also able to offer more hands-on guidance. Because Messy Maid is an emerging system, Gouveia and Driedger can provide personalized ongoing support to franchisees.

“We’ve got one of the best after-hours support systems for franchisees who are stuck,” she says. “There’s always a way to reach me. They have my cell number and my office number. I’ve had people call me at eight or nine o’clock at night and I always pick up.”

Most of the marketing is done locally by franchisees who develop their territories by handing out flyers, putting up posters, knocking on doors or attending home shows, but head office contributes as well. Gouveia attends the larger regional or provincial home shows to find clients and the company advertises with Google to ensure that Messy Maid franchisees appear on page one when a homeowner in one of their territories is looking for a cleaning service.

“We put a lot of money into Google ads,” says Gouveia. “If someone is searching for cleaning services in Mississauga, for example, we want to make sure we’re on the first page of results.”

Gouveia and Driedger plan to have 12 franchises up and running by the end

of 2015. For now, their focus remains on southern Ontario. They are considering opening corporate locations in Hamilton and the Niagara Region, developing a client base and selling the locations to franchisees. They are also open to area developers who may want to secure the rights to an entire province and develop it with individual franchisees.

“Ten years from now I would be happy with 50 franchisees, mainly in southern Ontario, but I’d like to expand west as well,” she says. “It’s a great market.” 🍁

**STATS**

- Franchise Fee:** \$15K
- Investment Required:** \$30K - \$40K (includes Initial Franchise Fee)
- Available Territories:** All of Canada
- Training:** 2 - 3 Weeks Plus On-Going Support
- Franchise Units Canada:** 7
- Corporate Units Canada:** 1
- In Business Since:** 2010
- Franchising Since:** 2011
- CFA Member Since:** 2012



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