



Why Should You Rent Drain Cleaning Equipment

General Pipe Cleaners attends a lot of rental trade shows every year, and we hear all kinds of excellent questions from attendees. Some of these questions are from owners and operators that are already familiar with drain cleaning equipment, and some are from those who are not. I often see the second group hovering around an imaginary force field five feet outside the booth, scratching their heads while imagining what it would be like to jump into this unique and profitable swimming pool. They see drain cleaning as distinct and separate from other types of rental tools/machines, and there is sometimes a hesitancy to dive into the market. In our experience, some of this hesitancy is simply a natural and logical aversion to sewage. Yes, sewer cleaning equipment must be inserted down a sewer to do its job, and some of that residue and odor will accompany the machine back to the shop upon the completion of the rental. However, we have found that the main reason rental store owners and operators sit on the sidelines mulling the acquisition of drain cleaning machines is because they don't fully appreciate the potential return on investment (ROI) and how these machines can bolster other rentals. So, let's talk about both of these issues.

Return on Investment (ROI)

General has been selling drain cleaning machines to the rental industry for many decades now, and we've talked to a LOT of satisfied customers! We see them beating a path to our booth every year at the national shows, and talk to them daily on the phone. We see them buy machine after machine, expanding their offerings when possible and replacing worn out machines when necessary.

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Why do they like us? Granted, we are a great company to do business with, and our machines are the best in the market, but most of all, they like us because our equipment has made them lots and lots of money. How much money? Well, we've been told many times that the drain cleaning segment of the rental industry hovers in the top five of all products in terms of return on investment. Once the word gets out that a store has drain cleaning machines, they tend to rent consistently. So much that, depending on the device, they can pay for themselves in a few weeks or months, and we make them so durable that they can last for years. Unlike other machines that a rental store may invest in, drain cleaning machines can pay for themselves over and over again. And, at the end of their lives, most stores can still sell them at a discount to local do-it-your-selves, plumbers, or facility maintenance managers. As one customer told me recently, if you do the "needful" and perform the necessary maintenance, having a drain cleaning machine in your rental fleet is like printing money. So, in the spirit of full disclosure, how much maintenance is necessary to keep your drain cleaning machine in the top tier of money makers? The answer is, "not as much as you think."

Like all electrical power equipment, drain cleaning machines should be inspected upon return to the shop for broken plugs, worn or cut power cords, damaged switches, and any harm to the motor. Any of the preceding can create a potentially deadly situation for the next renter that the store must avoid at all costs. While this is true of any and all electric powered machines in the rental universe, it is especially important with drain cleaning machines because of their proximity to both electricity and water.

After checking the electrical systems, the most important preventative maintenance habit to develop is lubrication. While this is important with any metal equipment, it is especially important with drain cleaners because of the extreme environment in which they operate. Sewers are wet, dirty places, filled with corrosive elements like Drano and Plumber's Helper, sharp edges, and other pitfalls. Most rental owners assume that every customer has poured a liberal amount of Drano down the drain before escalating their efforts to the level of renting a drain cleaning machine. Since there is nothing you can do to prevent exposing your equipment to the effects of strong acids or bases, the next best thing is to spray or wash the affected parts of the machine (the cable and cutters) and then add a petroleum based preservative, like General's Snake Oil product.



One of the reasons that General and other manufacturers of rental drain cleaning equipment use open cages on their machines is that it gives the rental staff easy access to the cable housed within. Generally, after checking the machine back into the store, they wheel it outside or to the garage and clean the cable with a pressure washer or garden hose. After removing as much of the dirt and corrosive material as possible, they then use a spray bottle to apply the Snake Oil. In addition to preserving the life of the spring steel used to construct drain cleaning cables, this product deodorizes. Think of it as the gift that keeps on giving!

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This whole process usually takes ten or fifteen minutes, but it pays for itself many times over. When rental owners/operators get in the preventative maintenance habit, they are preserving the life of their investment and putting money in their pocket. I have talked with rental owners who, by using these techniques, had drain cleaning cables last more than ten years in machines that rented several times a week. Since the cable is the most expensive replacement part of any drain cleaning machine, this dramatically improves ROI. Generally speaking, anything that you do to preserve the life of your machine will increase your ROI on that machine. This goes for everything in the store, but especially drain cleaning.

In addition to preventative maintenance, there are two other things you can do to increase your ROI on drain cleaning machines. The first is to display machines in a prominent place within the store – someplace where the customer has to walk past them in order to reach the counter. As was mentioned above, once your customers know that you have drain cleaning equipment, their rental frequency will increase dramatically.

The other thing that you can do to increase rentals and ROI is to market the tools to your existing customer base. If you are like other rental stores, you probably already do business with plumbers, drain cleaners, facility maintenance engineers, property managers and other contractors. Frankly, this group should be your target audience, because they already know the value and correct usage of the machines. Trust us, your drain cleaning machines will last a lot longer if you are consistently renting to contractors instead of homeowners. So, let the contractors in your customer base know that you have drain cleaning equipment, and be specific! List the type and size of your machines, specifying cable style equipment, high pressure water jetters, pipe inspection and location units, and anything else that you have. Often the contractors that you are already renting to have drain cleaning equipment, and will be happy to know that you can provide them options should their machines get damaged or stolen.

Opportunities for Additional Sales

When a rental operator truly understands the way drain cleaning machines work together, and how contractors make money with this equipment, it can create a synergy that prompts additional rentals.

For example, it is an excellent idea to have a wide assortment of drain cleaning machines, because one size definitely does not fit all when it comes to this industry. There are small, medium, and large drains, all of which must be cleared with different sized equipment. If you attempt to clear a large drain with a small machine, or vice versa, you will be unsuccessful. Because the customer may not have a clear idea of the size of the pipe that is causing their problem, they may be back several times for more equipment.



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Also, some of the devices work well in tandem. If you add a pipe inspection camera to your rental fleet, you should also have snake and high pressure water jetter style machines that have the ability to clear the pipe of sewage. For all of their sophistication, pipe inspection camera systems can't see under murky water any better than you can, and the line must be cleared before inspection can begin. For that reason, a conversation must take place before renting a pipe inspection system, and that conversation may result in renting two machines instead of one. In addition, we have found over the years that camera systems and jetter systems go together like peanut butter and jelly. They are both good by themselves, but even better together. Without the use of a jetter system to clean the inside of a pipe, a camera can't give you the best view down the drain. And, without a camera system, your customer won't know how great a job the jetter did in clearing the sewer. Renting both together produces the best results...not just for the rental operator, but for the contractor as well.



If you have rented a camera and/or jetter system to a plumber or drain cleaner, you have handed them the tools they need to find and sell pipe replacement or pipe relining opportunities, which can be quite lucrative. Over the years, I have talked to many service plumbers and contractors who have admitted to me that they make most of their money on pipe replacement jobs, and that their drain cleaning services are just a lead generation system for that end. If they find a leaking, broken, or out of code drain one out of every five drains they clean, they can transition those opportunities into a thriving business. Crucial to this business plan is having both pipe inspection systems and jetters. They use the jetter to clean the pipe so that problems are visible to the camera system, and then make a video that becomes a marketing tool for the next part of the job that they have a solution for. Essentially, the camera system switches from a diagnostic tool to the sales tool in the middle of the job, and the jetter is what makes it all possible.

Granted, most of the players in this field already have camera systems and jetters in every truck, but as we all know, machines break, and everyone needs a "Plan B"! Marketing your available drain cleaning machines to your existing customer base will ensure that you become their back up plan. Keep in mind that there are usually dozens of drain cleaning companies in a metro market, and most of them advertise the machines that they have.

Finally, when a plumbing company sells a pipe replacement job, they will be in need of a backhoe, excavator, or jack hammer, creating other opportunities for the rental operator. Plumbers and drain cleaning specialists do not always own these machines, and even when they do, every job is different. Once you understand how these contractors make their money, you can be alert to opportunities that you didn't know existed before acquiring drain cleaning machines.

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All of this creates a higher average ROI for the rental operator as the result of diving into the drain cleaning segment. So, to sum up:

- Drain Cleaning machines have one of the highest ROIs in the Rental industry, and they can often be sold at the end of their effective lives.
- Routine maintenance on Drain Cleaning machines is necessary, but not excessive.
- Marketing the availability of Drain Cleaning machines to your existing customer base can be enormously profitable.
- It's important to have a wide variety of Drain Cleaning machines, because one size does not fit all.
- Many Drain Cleaning machines work well together, and can be rented together to increase the likelihood of success.
- Many Drain Cleaning professionals make a lot of their money from pipe replacement jobs, which usually require the use of excavation equipment that the Rental Store carries.
- The more that you know about how your customers make or save money with the machines that you rent them, the better position you will be in to reap the rewards of unexpected opportunities.

For more information about this topic, feel free to call the Drain Brains at 800.245.6200, or visit drainbrain.com/rental.



About the Author

David Dunbar is the National Sales Manager for General Pipe Cleaners, a leader in the drain cleaning/pipe inspection industry. He has been with General since 1996, starting as Customer Service Manager, then Assistant Sales Manager, and National Sales Manager since 2017. He earned a BS degree in Psychology from the University of Pittsburgh and has graduate credits in Human Resource Development and Organizational Theory. David enjoys using his extensive public speaking, video, and writing experience within the industry. He can be contacted at daved@generalpipecleaners.com.