A collection of plumbing tools and components including a red-handled adjustable wrench, a braided metal hose with a brass fitting, a brass pipe with a threaded end, and a silver pipe with a threaded end.

PLUMBING SERVICE 101

Module 2 of 6

Markets for Plumbing Services

Because the markets for plumbing services are wide, diverse and complex, this module will take a closer look at the type of research that needs to be done before making a final decision along with ten specific target markets that create possibilities for the HVACR contractor looking to add plumbing services.



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Plumbing Service

Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

1. Identify approaches that can be used to recognize and understand markets for plumbing services.
2. Incorporate primary and secondary market research techniques into the decision-making process.
3. List possible target markets for plumbing services within and outside the traditional HVACR business.
4. Determine how potential target markets fit with the three possible service levels.
5. Identify markets for plumbing services that should be avoided.

INTRODUCTION

The first webinar of this series, ***“Plumbing Service Business Basics”*** introduced the concept of expanding HVACR businesses, both vertically and horizontally, with the decision to add a range of Plumbing Services to the existing HVACR services line up. This second webinar, ***“Markets for Plumbing Services,”*** will cover how companies can answer important questions and acquire the information needed to evaluate this opportunity in relation to their unique business situations.

The appeal of adding plumbing services is the recognition that these services are needed alongside HVACR in most installations. They share many common characteristics with HVACR from the viewpoint of users or potential customers. This is an accurate perception, even though the plumbing services performed require a significantly different technical skill set than for HVACR services.

Both types of services are widely needed for maintenance, update, and new construction in virtually all residential, commercial, and industrial facilities. Both are critical for efficient processes, safety, and environmental comfort of workers and building occupants. Further, the piping and controls for gas, liquid, and waste flows, while technically in the domain of the plumbing field, are usually a critical component of HVACR installations, making plumbing and related services integral to and closely associated with most HVACR systems and facilities.

When looking for reliable plumbing services providers, customers often find choices capable of meeting their high standards to be very limited. This is because the plumbing industry is quite fragmented, consisting of many small and sole proprietor businesses with limited capabilities and widely varying quality standards. Additionally, many non-union plumbers on the commercial side are commissioned plumbers.

For commercial and industrial customers with critical needs, the option of a single source vendor that can provide HVACR and plumbing is very attractive as an alternative to existing suppliers, especially if the service is performed with high service standards, competent staff, and assured reliability.

These facts create a compelling rationale for many HVACR companies to provide both types of services in their product line up, giving them the opportunity to increase revenue and expand into complementary, but untapped, markets through the added plumbing services and market access.

MARKET DECISION FACTORS

Regardless of the appeal to many HVACR companies, the choice to integrate plumbing services is a major decision involving many factors, requiring significant investment and resource commitment for the company. It is a typical business expansion choice with no guarantee of outcomes, so it is important to have the right match of capabilities, strategies, target markets, and potential customers before venturing into this business in order to ensure success.

In the first webinar, we discussed the SWOT process, which outlines a basic analysis procedure for making this type of business decision and deciding the most effective strategies for success in implementation. If you have already started this process, you have probably found that it has initially generated more questions than answers. Even for those long term HVACR customers you thought you were most familiar with, there may not be enough knowledge of their specific needs for plumbing services to develop an effective business strategy that assures you will be equipped to satisfy their requirements.



To move ahead, you will need much more information before you can make informed decisions about this new business direction. Before deciding on what strategies, customers, and market targets you will focus your plumbing services, it is important that you gain a better understanding of the overall plumbing services market, as well as the specific local market and customer targets that you hope to address.

This is where market research comes into your analysis. An effective market research effort can fill in those information gaps where knowledge is lacking. Market research can provide the missing details needed to complete your SWOT analysis and make informed decisions about optimal strategies, customers, and target markets needed to help assure success in this new business area.

MARKET RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

So what is market research and what is its purpose? Market research is a range of processes for acquiring critical information about a business area and the target markets associated with it. The main role for market research is to provide a company with an in-depth view of the markets, customers, competition, and business environment in order to meet customer needs in ways that can be profitable and provide differentiation over other competitors.

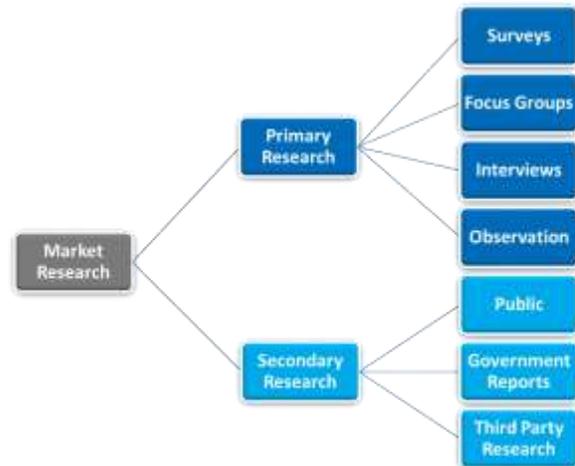
You may think you already understand your customers adequately and don't need to do further research before starting up new service offerings. But in fast changing environments, failing to do market research can easily result in targeting the wrong markets or missing a critical customer need, resulting in a failed or disappointing business result. Companies that do the best are the ones that do their homework with market research before jumping into the new marketplace.

There are two categories of market research that can assist in your evaluation: primary research and secondary research.

Primary research is information directly obtained from and specific to potential customers and target markets. This is first-hand research that is developed by you or by others for you. Talking directly with your existing and potential customers to acquire information about their needs for a new service is a form of primary research.

Undertaking a primary research campaign is a way to leverage existing customer relationships. Because the usual method of conducting this type of research is through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations by field technicians, it can provide opportunities for additional customer "touch points" beyond the normal sales and service activities.

Secondary research is more general research covering an industry or broad market area. It involves gathering statistics, reports, studies and other data usually already existing from sources such as third party research companies, government agencies, trade associations, libraries,



and even your local chamber of commerce. This information may be free, in the public domain, or more often available for purchase directly from various research groups.

You will probably find that information from some combination of these two approaches will be most useful for your business planning. Regardless of the method used, the goal of market research is to increase knowledge about markets and customers so you can best address customer needs with successful business strategies.

CONDUCTING A PRIMARY RESEARCH CAMPAIGN

Surveys are no doubt one of the most widely used and visible methods for both product and services market research. Surveys come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, from that little “tell us how we are doing” survey card on the table at your local restaurant to the ubiquitous satisfaction surveys you may already be using to follow up on customer satisfaction after a service call. And almost everyone has received many of those short follow up web satisfaction surveys the next day after receiving an Amazon purchase, almost always before you have yet opened the package.



Surveys make a lot of sense when you already know the specific topics you want to explore. They are a very cost effective, quick way to get quantitative or check box responses from a larger audience that would be impractical or costly to reach with other methods.

A survey might be a good research method to get a snapshot of your sales potential across a potential target market and customer base by asking questions such as the following:

-
- What is your satisfaction level with your current plumbing provider?
 - What is the annual budget range for plumbing expenditures?
 - How interested are you in changing plumbing vendors?
 - What specific types of plumbing services are needed by you?
-

In today's technology environment, it is quick and easy to create and execute online surveys customers can take from laptops or mobile devices. Using on line survey providers such as surveymonkey.com or surveymethods.com, that provide different survey types and usable sample surveys is a starting point.

Focus groups are a variant of the interview method which involves discussion with a sample group of people selected from potential customers, people with specific experience in target markets, or expertise on the specific topics of interest in the research. When conducting a focus group, it is usually preferable to have it run by a moderator not known to the focus group participants. It is the moderator's responsibility to guide the discussion and encourage interaction in order to get a more active and deeper discussion that reveals valid opinions and information.

Members of trade associations, such as BOMA and IFMA, can be an effective source of focus group participants.

Focus groups are excellent for free form qualitative research, when you are looking for a lot of relevant information, but don't yet know what important questions to ask. The focus group might be used in conjunction with a wider audience survey, using the focus group feedback to develop the key topics of interest for the actual survey. Focus groups can also be used to follow up on the survey results, to elaborate on results, or get clarification and opinion about reasons behind some of the survey responses. Members of trade associations, such as BOMA or IFMA, can be an effective source of focus group participants.

Direct interviews are a widely used and valuable primary research method. They are most useful for in depth research that can uncover subtle, key issues relating to customer opinions and needs about a company, product, or service. Since your primary customer focus when adding plumbing services is your existing HVACR customer base, this method should certainly be one of your main research methods. Taking advantage of existing customer relationships to interview potential plumbing services users from a representative sample of your HVACR customer base work well.

It should not be used until other research has been done, however, so the interview with a valued customer can be more efficient and targeted to avoid wasting the client's time or giving the impression that you are not already knowledgeable about the plumbing services area. Interviews can take a variety of forms, from free flowing conversations

loosely tied to a general topic of interest, to highly structured discussions, following a checklist of specific questions, and any combination in between, depending on the goal.

You may want to have your salespeople, customer service representatives, or dispatchers conduct these interviews with selected customers, if appropriate. Relying on their close relationships with the client can make for the right setting for a free exchange of information. An alternative is to use a technically knowledgeable consultant or professional researcher who can still interact with the customer but discuss issues more freely as an anonymous contact who is outside the existing business relationship.

This market research method can provide deep insights about services, customer problems, pricing issues, competition, and even psychological buying motivations and underlying customer perceptions of service providers. In addition, involving the potential customer for advice early in your planning cycle helps make them feel that they have been a valued contributor to your business, and more likely to support your plumbing services business with future contracts.

Observation is one of the easiest methods of acquiring primary research for plumbing services. Any company representative who is on-site is a candidate for becoming an instantaneous researcher. Salespeople who are calling on potential or existing customers should also be asking and looking for plumbing opportunities. It's easy to walk into a restroom to look for these things:

- ADA compliance
- High efficiency toilets
- Urinal flush valves or waterless urinals
- Pressure regulators
- Low flow plumbing fixtures
- Aerators for faucets
- Sewer odor



Technicians, who we often say are our best salespeople, can also be our best researchers.

SECONDARY RESEARCH REPORTS

Research reports gleaned from secondary research sources can be valuable, even though they are often too broad or generic in nature to provide all the detail you may need to answer questions and satisfy information needs. Regardless, it is useful to take advantage of available secondary research sources to provide a more complete industry and market overview complemented with your primary research methods.

While a quick Google search will show many research companies selling relatively expensive reports that may or may not be worthwhile, there are many sources of public domain or free information that may prove useful. It is worthwhile to check with your local library resource desk, industry trade groups, state or federal government data sources, and even your local colleges to find out what relevant research they may already have available. If you have an existing relationship with a local college or university, you may want to consider partnering with them on a class research project.

“The Plumbers Industry has a very low level of market share concentration. IBISWorld estimates that no single company generates more than 5.0% of overall revenue. The industry is characterized by many small-scale operators competing in narrow regional and local markets. 60% of establishments in the industry employ one to four people, while only 1.0% employ 100 or more people. The industry’s low concentration will likely continue in the five years to 2021.”

. -- IBISWorld and US Census estimates.

“... water use in the residential sector closely tracked population growth, while water use in the commercial sector grew almost twice as fast.”

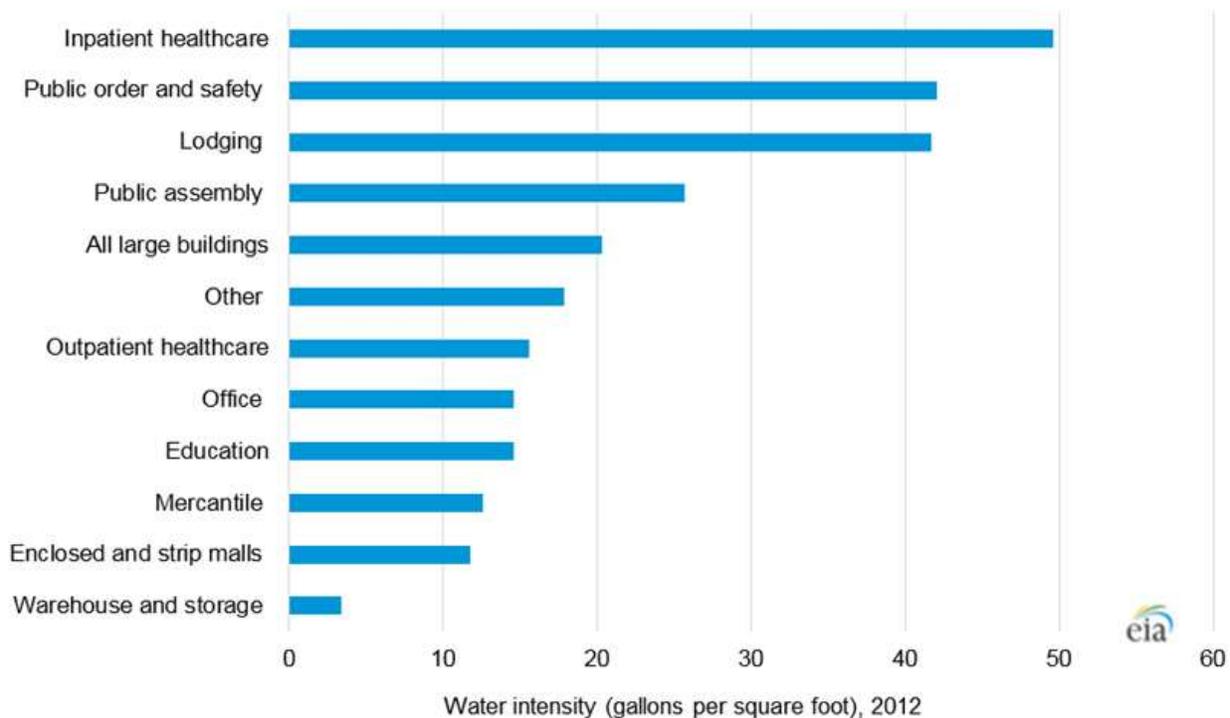
*U.S. Department of Energy
 Buildings Energy Data Book*

As an example, the United States Department of Energy publishes the “Buildings Energy Data Book.” This contains useful information such as the chart on the following page showing which target markets have the highest levels of water usage in various commercial facilities, suggesting a higher potential need for plumbing services in these markets. You can use the Federal Government web site www.USA.gov to search for and



find federal, state, and local government data sources on a variety of industries and topics.

Figure 1. Inpatient healthcare buildings were the most intensive users of water among large commercial buildings in 2012



Source: United States Department of Energy publishes the “Buildings Energy Data Book”

OPPORTUNITIES AND TARGET MARKETS

The opportunities available for plumbing services extend across the variety of markets available in your service area. This can include a range of commercial and industrial target markets such as utilities, manufacturing, mining, hospital, pharmaceutical, hotel, casino, government, and education. When you are equipped to meet their plumbing services needs, the best opportunities and markets for your company are your existing customers and new accounts in those same business areas where HVACR customers are currently operating.

With the addition of plumbing services, other attractive target markets identified through market research that are outside those you have traditionally served can also be addressed. Here is a list of potential markets showing how they might fit with your business objectives. This may represent markets you currently serve as well as other potential markets outside your current HVACR customer base. Begin by first prioritizing existing customers before addressing other potential targets beyond your current customers.

POTENTIAL PLUMBING TARGET MARKETS

Medical

- Inpatient hospitals
- Outpatient/Diagnostic
- Biomed
- Rehab centers
- Sole practice

Institutional/Public

Safety

- Government
- Military facilities
- Jail
- Prison
- Library

Retail

- Shopping mall
- Strip mall
- Stand-alone store

Restaurant & Grocery

- Fast food
- Chain sit-down
- Independent restaurants
- Food courts

Recreation

- Casino
- Stadium
- Theater
- Fitness center
- Amusement parks

Lodging

- Hotel
- Motel
- Multi-unit family
 - HUD managed multi-unit family
- High-rise residential

Education

- Public
- Private
- Colleges
- Technical and vocational

Office

- Under 200,000 sq.ft
- Over 200,000 sq.ft.

Industrial/Manufacturing

- Food processing
- Pharmaceuticals
- Product-specific

Warehouse

- Company-specific
- Self-storage

There is definitely no shortage of possible markets for plumbing services. The real key is to find a match between the investment you want to make, the labor available to service the desired market, and experience in the market you are trying to penetrate. A complete chart, similar to the one below, is included on page 15 of this workbook. There you will find the ten different markets, the revenue potential of each, and the types of services you could provide, depending on the level of commitment you choose to make.

TARGET MARKET REVENUE AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Market	Revenue Potential	Service Type Needed		
		Minimal	Typical	Full or Specialized
Medical				
Institutional/Public Safety				
Retail				
Restaurant				
Recreation				
Lodging				
Education				
Office				
Industrial/Manufacturing				
Warehouse				

See the chart on page 15 for details.

MARKETS TO BE AVOIDED

Would anyone actually use market research for the purpose of avoiding customers? Most of the time we are looking for ways to find additional customers and markets, but there are definitely customers you may want to identify and specifically avoid. In addition to finding high potential market segments, effective market research can also help to flag those business areas and customers where there is a poor fit with your business objectives and potential inability to adequately meet those customer needs.

The reasons to avoid some customers can be varied and will be highly dependent on your own situation and strategy. As a new provider of plumbing services, you will probably want to **avoid those markets that entail high litigation hazard, unreasonable demanding performance requirements, high risk environments, or marginal business practices.** Examples of these might be plumbing services in various industries, such as steel smelting or nuclear power generation, which involve extreme conditions, hazardous environments, and critical service requirements where service failures could have severe and irreversible consequences.

It is also obvious you would not want to target a market for which you do not have the requisite technician skills or availability, such as businesses requiring 24/7 fast response service, when you are only staffed for a normal eight to five work schedule.

Another good example of a market which might seem attractive, because of legal and financial risk is the emerging legal marijuana business. While this industry is literally “growing like a weed” in those states where it has been legalized, questionable legal status at the federal level creates potential legal, credit, banking, and ethical issues for companies trying to work with those businesses in this market.



Someone new and just starting out should also avoid the restaurant market. Retail stores – whether stand alone or in a shopping mall – have limited plumbing needs, while a restaurant’s commercial kitchen and multi-user bathroom facilities are much more intense for plumbing. Without properly working plumbing, a restaurant is usually shut down by the local health department. Because of that, the restaurant market appears to be attractive, but there are significant risks that need to be addressed in order to be successful in that market.



Finally, be aware of high-rise residential buildings. Homeowner’s associations will generally approve work on the central equipment. However, units for individual homeowners should be avoided. With back-ups, there is a high likelihood of the water traveling from one unit to another. Before you know it, you are putting homeowners up in hotels, replacing expensive flooring and wall coverings, and reimbursing for dry cleaning and any other expenses the customer feels is the responsibility of the contractor.

As a guideline, any target market where you are only able to meet a limited portion of the customer needs is probably something you will not want to take on to minimize customer disappointment and service failures. While these are only general examples, your market research and SWOT analysis can help you better identify those markets and customers that should be avoided for your specific business needs.

CHALLENGES IMPACTING MARKET SUCCESS

Every market requires some level of plumbing service. Even in a slow economy, if they aren’t building, they are at least maintaining and/or servicing. Leaks need to be fixed, drains need to be cleaned and backflows need to be tested. This is what makes plumbing service attractive. However, there are definite challenges the HVACR contractor needs to be aware of before fully committing to the addition of plumbing to the menu of service offerings. These can affect the decision itself as well as target market choices.

1. Finding a plumbing technician will always be one of the greatest challenges for the contractor. Equally difficult is finding a plumbing salesperson. You have to really know the business and the market to sell it. As a result, it is difficult to train someone right out of college or school to do plumbing sales.
2. To provide 24-hour emergency services, a high level of commitment is needed from all of your staff. The real challenge is to avoid burnout of the employees and giving them ample time to rest. Carefully consider the market requirements before selecting your niche.
3. Getting plumbers the right training for the market you are entering is probably the greatest challenge. Today's plumbers need to understand electronic controls, gas pressures and troubleshooting these appliances. Getting the type of sophisticated training required for most of today's products is very difficult. Without the right personnel in place, success may be elusive in some markets.



SUMMARY

The attractive markets and customer potential for plumbing services both within and outside existing HVACR markets provide “low hanging fruit” opportunities for HVACR companies to dramatically expand their businesses and profitability. At the same time, contractors can add significant value for their customers by providing a reliable, high quality and single source provider for both HVACR and plumbing services, where none existed before.

A reasonable market research effort will help the HVACR contractor identify the highest potential market segments to target and help them understand the unique needs of customers in those markets. This effort will result in a company better prepared to address and exceed their customers' requirements. Used in conjunction with an effective SWOT analysis and business plan, a market research will allow companies to stand out from competitors and assure success of the addition of plumbing services to their HVACR businesses.

TARGET MARKET REVENUE AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS CHART

Service Type Needed			
Market and Revenue Potential	Minimal	Typical	Full or Specialized
<p>MEDICAL</p> <p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Bedpan washers, flushing rim sinks ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning ▪ ADA fixture install and repair 	<p>Minimal, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thermostatic mixing valve setup and repair ▪ Circulating systems and pumps ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Acid neutralization tank ▪ Planned maintenance 	<p>Typical, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RO and DI water systems ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Hot water and cold water cross connection troubleshooting ▪ Booster pump systems ▪ Medical gas install and repair
<p>INSTITUTIONAL/ PUBLIC SAFETY</p> <p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Specialty plumbing fixtures, such as one-piece WC/lava combo, gang shower ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	<p>Minimal, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thermostatic mixing valve setup and repair ▪ Circulating systems and pumps ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance ▪ Grease trap maintenance ▪ Multiple temperature hot water systems 	<p>Typical, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hot water and cold water cross connection troubleshooting ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Water audits ▪ Booster pump systems ▪ Kitchen special equipment, such as sprayer units, dump lever waste

Market and Revenue Potential	Service Type Needed		
	Minimal	Typical	Full or Specialized
<p align="center">RETAIL</p> <p align="center">LOW</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	<p>Minimal, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance 	<p>Typical, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Vacuum operated waste systems
<p align="center">RESTAURANT</p> <p align="center">High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	<p>Minimal, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance ▪ Grease trap maintenance ▪ Gas piping ▪ Multiple temperature ▪ Hot water systems 	<p>Typical, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Booster heater for hot water ▪ Kitchen specially equipment, such as sprayer units, dump lever waste, glass fillers, water filters
<p align="center">RECREATION</p> <p align="center">LOW</p> <p align="center"><i>(It is often seasonal)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	<p>Minimal, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electric eye faucets, flush valves ▪ Shower rooms ▪ Thermostatic mixing valve setup and repair ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance ▪ Grease trap maintenance 	<p>Typical, plus the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Water conditioning systems

Market and Revenue Potential		Service Type Needed		
		Minimal	Typical	Full or Specialized
LODGING High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plumbing fixture repair Water heater service Backflow Piping repair Drain cleaning 	Minimal, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video inspections Jetting Planned maintenance Thermostatic mixing valve set up and repair Thermostatic and/or pressure balance shower valves 	Typical, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ejector pump install and service Sewage and storm pit pump and clean Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance Storm water harvesting system maintenance Hot water and cold water cross connection trouble shooting Decorative fountain service and repair Water conditioning systems Circulating systems and pumps 	
	EDUCATION High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plumbing fixture repair Water heater service Backflow Piping repair Drain cleaning 	Minimal, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video inspections Jetting Planned maintenance Grease trap maintenance 	Typical, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ejector pump install and service Sewage and storm pit pump and clean Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance Storm water harvesting system maintenance Water audits
OFFICE Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plumbing fixture repair Water heater service Backflow Piping repair Drain cleaning 	Minimal, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video inspections Jetting Planned maintenance 	Typical, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ejector pump install and service Sewage and storm pit pump and clean Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance Storm water harvesting system maintenance Booster pump systems Water audits 	



Market and Revenue Potential	Service Type Needed		
	Minimal	Typical	Full or Specialized
INDUSTRIAL/ MANUFACTURING High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	Minimal, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance 	Typical, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance ▪ Solenoid valves ▪ Circulating systems and pumps ▪ Water conditioning systems ▪ Lab gases, acid waste
WAREHOUSE Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plumbing fixture repair ▪ Water heater service ▪ Backflow ▪ Piping repair ▪ Drain cleaning 	Minimal, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Video inspections ▪ Jetting ▪ Planned maintenance 	Typical, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ejector pump install and service ▪ Sewage and storm pit pump and clean ▪ Storm water retention and filtering system maintenance ▪ Storm water harvesting system maintenance