

New Courier guide Part 2

A Guide for new Self Employed Couriers.

What sort of Courier do you want to be?

The word 'Courier' covers a large variety of different types of work, from cycle, motor bike, car small vans, large vans and HGV's.

For the purpose of this article, I am going to concentrate on the van side of courier work, for the simple reason that this is where the majority of the work is, and is the business I specialise in.

This segment of the business can be broken down into lots of different segments. The reason you researched the market, was to find the segment which suits you best.

The first thing you need to decide is, whether you are going to work local or long distance.

Local work tends to mean you are home early most time, this can be important to someone with family commitments. The biggest sector in local work is parcel and contract deliveries, with either a small or LWB van. The smaller the van the lower the mileage rate you can charge, typically 25% to 30% below the LWB van rate.

Contract deliveries entail delivering to customers, or group of customers every day. Contract work tends to be less profitable, but is regular money coming in, with some contracts paying out weekly. Contract work is a good place to start, what you will find is a group of like minded contractors who have a wealth of experience, and can point you in the right direction to more profitable work. Typical contract work is delivering products which people need on a regular basis such as, news, food and consumer products. [The section Maximising your profits, explains why these contractors, who know so much, still work contracts.]

Long Distance work tends to be more profitable, longer unsociable hours, occasional nights away, and usually means the use of a large van. This side of the business is much harder to break into, you will need a lot of customers, and this takes time to build a broad base of customers. The easiest and quickest way is to work for Courier Companies while your own business builds. There is an unwritten law, 'NEVER TRY TO POACH THE CUSTOMERS OF A COURIER BUSINESS YOU WORK FOR' You may do it once, but it won't take long for word to get round, and then nobody will deal with you. [And you may be sued if you are working under a contract that forbids this practice] Courier companies are notorious for not paying, check with the drivers who work for the company.

Multi Drop Deliveries can be local, semi local or long distance and can be very

profitable. Usually you are collecting from a central warehouse, loading the van yourself according to a manifest prepared by the company you are working for. Some multi drop runs are for timed deliveries, and can be stressful. Multi drop work is not for everybody, if you can do it, there is plenty of work out there.

What you need to start

When you have decided what segment of the market you want to be in, you need to get started. You will have decided that you are going to go with several courier companies who have given you the best information with your market research, or you have managed to pick up one or more contracts during your market research. The first thing you need is a van, if you have already bought a van, you may find your choices are restricted.

You will also need insurance, your insurance will be dependent on what sort of work you are doing. Your insurance must cover you for 'the carriage of goods for hire or reward'. Goods in Transit insurance and public liability are also a requirement, and dependent on your circumstances you may need employer's liability.

Depending on what you are carrying you may need a trolley. For a small van delivering parcels, a lightweight folding trolley is ideal, for heavier deliveries a sturdy trolley with pneumatic tyres is best, for heavy goods where steps need to be negotiated, a trolley with 3 wheels at each side that will 'walk' up steps. You may also need cargo straps to tie your load down securely.

If you are carrying pallets, you will definitely need cargo straps and a towing rope with metal hooks at each end. The tow rope is safest method of dragging pallets out of a van when there is no extensions for the fork lift truck unloading you.

You will need a mobile phone with hands free facility. A Sat Nav, and if you are doing long distance runs, a good quality map. Sat Navs don't always give you the best routes: check on a map for the 'preferred route'. If you are working London an A4 London A to Z is a must. Work out the way back to an arterial road on the A to Z before you get to your destination. Sat Navs don't reset all that quickly in built up areas when surrounded by tall buildings.

Finally you will need steel toe cap boots, most warehouses / distribution depots won't let you in without them, a 'High Vis' vest or jacket is a must at all times. Some sites may also require you to wear a Hard Hat.

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