

# ***THE SIDE HUSTLE SHOW***

with Nick Loper



**Episode 295**

## **A Local Service Business that Scales – From Zero to \$60k a Month**

**(w/ Chris Schwab)**

<http://www.sidehustlenation.com/295>

Chris Schwab is the founder of [ThinkMaid.com](http://ThinkMaid.com), a residential house cleaning service in the Washington DC area he started on the side while still a university student.

Less than two years later, the business is doing \$60k a month worth of cleaning work, all without Chris ever lifting a mop or dusting a shelf himself.

## **Where'd the Idea for Think Maids Come From?**

“It’s actually a really simple business,” Chris said. At its core, it’s a business that finds people who need a cleaner and connects them with someone who’s good at cleaning, and Chris takes a part of the profit for connecting them.

It was an idea Chris thought of while in University. He started researching local cleaning companies and saw a common theme. They were good at providing cleaning services, bad was all the business side of things.

He would see 1,2,3-star reviews on Yelp all pointing out how the businesses didn’t have good online booking forms, were not consistent, reliable, and so on.

Chris knew that if he could figure out how to do the business side of things well, he’d jump ahead of the competition. “The only hard part I had to do was the marketing and finding good cleaners,” Chris said.

He put up a website and hired some cleaners off Craigslist to clean his home as a trial run. He said this was the point when he had the realization that he could do this.

## **How Chris Found His First Customers**

“They were terrifying,” Chris said of his experience landing his first customers.

Chris didn’t have any experience working with people in a service business, he’d never even worked a full-time job before. So, he had to learn a lot of as he went along.

[Thumbtack](#) was becoming more popular in his area at the time so he decided to spend \$200 on advertising on this platform.

He studied some of the other successful businesses in his area and how they used Thumbtack for ideas. He copied their templates, made sure to respond to customers quicker than them, and set up a 5-step follow up sequence.

His sequence was to send the original quote to the customer. Then follow up an hour later, a day later, 2 days later, 3 days later, and 4 days later to show them how serious he was about getting their business.

Chris would even give customers a personalized link to a page on his website with some of their information filled out for them. It did this with a plugin called [Launch27](#). Chris also said he got a lot of bookings by being available outside of business hours.

As a side hustler, he “got ALL the business between 5pm and 9am.” When other businesses were closed, he was on his phone responding to customer requests.

## **How Chris Had Cleaners Ready for Customers**

There’s a bit of a balancing act between having cleaners ready to work and a steady flow of work to keep them around.

At first, Chris put up an ad on Craigslist offering rates higher than his competitors to ensure he would find good cleaners.

He did a test clean on his own apartment and found two good teams that were willing to work for him.

Chris does his recruiting a little differently now. He reversed engineered sites like Thumbtack and Yelp acting as a customer looking for cleaners to find new cleaners when he needs them.

This gives him the chance to look through cleaners' profiles and see their reviews, reducing the amount of time he'd have to spend vetting cleaners responding to his own ads.

### **Pricing and Margins**

Chris looked at the average price his competitors were charging and added an extra 20% on top. He did this because he wanted to present his cleaning business as a premium service.

He then offered 35% off as he was a new business starting out and paid his contractors 65% to break even in the beginning.

Over time he started to reduce that discount. He had built up a reputation at this point and carried on getting bookings at the full price.

### **Other Marketing and Growth Tactics**

Chris tried some SEO but admits, "I was absolutely terrible at it." The first few months were all about Thumbtack. Chris wanted to dominate one platform instead of spreading himself thin across several different platforms.

Later on, he started using Craigslist, [Yelp](#), and Google AdWords. But says he owes all his early success and growth to Thumbtack.

If you're thinking about marketing your local business Chris recommends doing some research into which platforms are popular in your area. It may be [Home Advisor](#), Yelp, Thumbtack, or another platform. When you find out what it is, focus on dominating it.

Chris also attributes his continual growth to the high level of customer service he prides himself on.

"It's always more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to get an existing or past customer to book with you again," Chris said. He has always focused on following up with customers to ensure they were happy with the cleaning service and see if he could turn them into long-term customers.

Chris said he converts 20-25% of new customers into regulars just off the follow-up call to see how they enjoyed the service.

He also uses text marketing to follow up with customers. Text marketing has a 98% open rate, and around 70% reply. Compared to email marketing these numbers are huge, and it's been another key to the growth of Chris' business.

(He recommended [Simple Texting](#) as a way to automate this.)

## **Managing the Logistics of a Rapidly Growing Business**

As Chris was still studying at the same time as growing ThinkMaid's it wasn't long before the workload starting conflicting with this studying.

It was over a Halloween period when he accidentally overbooked his cleaning teams and had some teams pull out as it was a holiday period when he realized it was all becoming too much for him to handle on his own.

Chris decided he needed an office manager. Unable to afford a full-time in-house employee, he decided to outsource to virtual assistants.

He quickly dismissed going overseas and found a couple of assistants based in the US that could handle all the scheduling and day-to-day tasks remotely.

This has not just taken a huge workload off Chris' shoulders. It's helped enable him to do what he loves more, travelling the world.

## **Outsourcing and Stacking Side Hustles**

Other local business owners were noticing how Chris was running his business and started asking for help finding virtual assistants for their own businesses.

This prompted Chris to start another business called, [InoVA Local](#). In this business, he trains virtual assistants on a wide variety of tasks aimed at serving local businesses.

He's since delegated most of the operational tasks of InoVA Local and started his third business, [LocalBusinessHustlers.com](#).

LocalBusinessHustlers is a community for local businesses to help each other. No selling, promoting, or any of the other stuff commonly done in free Facebook groups, just a place for local business owners to grow and learn together.

## **Chris' #1 Tip for Side Hustle Nation:**

*"Take a moment to clarify your priorities."*

## **More Info:**

- <https://www.thinkmaids.com/>
- <http://www.sidehustlenation.com/295>

Until next time!

-Nick