



HVAC
BUSINESS SALES

The 90-day test

How much of the business is you?

2027 edition 16-minute read

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A practical guide with an owner dependency scorecard

Images are illustrative.

The whole guide on one page

The test asks whether your business could quote, dispatch and sign off gas and refrigerant work for 90 days without you. This guide shows you how to find out, one job at a time.

The test	What good looks like	Evidence to gather
1. Who can quote without you	A written pricing method that someone else has used	Last quarter's quotes, with the author on each
2. Who can dispatch without you	A board showing each engineer's tickets	The rota and the out-of-hours call log
3. Who can authorise gas work without you	A registration that does not rest on you	The engineers listed, and every licence card
4. Who can authorise refrigerant work without you	A company certificate that holds when you are away	The certificate, the qualifications and the gas log
5. Who holds the customer approvals	Approvals in the company's name	Supplier forms, permits and named contacts
6. What your role costs to replace	Profit after a real salary for your job	Your week, written down hour by hour
7. Running the test	A dated plan and a score at each end	The scorecard, filled in twice

Ninety days is the length of the test. It is not a market standard.

The scorecard near the back puts all of it on one sheet. When you have filled it in, bring it to a free first conversation about our Pre-Sale Programme: **01285 704466**.

The question behind the test

1 in 10

plumbing, heating and air-conditioning installation companies where every individual owner on the public register is 60 or over.

Reads analysis of Companies House data, October 2026 [1]

That is between 5,135 and 5,194 of the 49,775 active companies registered under SIC 43220.

On the public register	Companies
Active companies under SIC 43220	49,775
With at least one individual owner	47,648
Every individual owner 60 or over	5,135 to 5,194

Age does not tell you who will sell, or when. It does tell you how many companies have owners at an age where a handover is worth thinking about.

A buyer looking at any of those firms can fairly ask one thing. When this owner goes, what goes too?

In heating and cooling the answer can be specific. It can be the gas registration, the F-gas certificate, the knowledge of how to price a plant-room job, or the customer who will only ring you.

This guide takes those one at a time. For each you will find what good looks like, then what to check in your own business.

You do not have to be selling for this to be worth doing. A business that runs for a quarter without you is also one you can take a proper holiday from.

The test, and the business we use to show it

The test is one question. Could the business quote, dispatch and sign off its gas and refrigerant work for 90 days if you were not there?

We chose 90 days because it spans a quarter of trading: three month ends and a full round of quarterly service visits. It is the length of the test and nothing more. It is not a market standard, and no buyer has to apply it.

We follow one business through the guide. Brackenfold Climate Services is invented, and the figures for this business are illustrative.

Where the Brackenfold owner's week goes

Illustrative



A 50-hour week. Only the 6 hours of office work could pass to anyone.

Brackenfold turns over £1.2m: £600,000 of installations, £420,000 of income from maintenance contracts and £180,000 of reactive call-outs. It has four engineers, and the owner is one of them.

The accounts show £180,000 profit after the owner has taken £40,000 in pay.

Look at the week. Only 6 of the 50 hours are office work that anybody could pick up. The other 44 need a ticket, a pricing judgement, a customer's trust or a decision about who may do what.

A gap is not a reason to put off selling. It is a job to hand over, with a name and a date against it.

1. Who can quote without you

Pricing a multi-split install or a plant-room boiler swap takes a survey, a load calculation, a choice of kit and a view on the labour. If all of that sits in your head, nobody else can send the quote.

What good looks like

A written pricing method that someone else has used, covering labour rates, margin and the rules a quote has to respect. One of those rules is law. In Great Britain, since 2025 a new single split air-conditioning system holding less than 3kg of refrigerant cannot use a gas with a global warming potential above 750. The guidance lists exceptions, such as air to water systems [7].

Kind of quote	Test question
Service contract renewal	Is there a rate card anyone can apply?
Like-for-like replacement	Could an engineer price it from a template?
Designed installation	Who does the load calculation and picks the kit?

Brackenfold

Illustrative

The owner surveyed and priced every job behind the £600,000 of installation turnover. Nobody else has sent an installation quote.

What the buyer is thinking

If only you can price the work, the order book stops when you do. Show me quotes that someone else wrote and won.

Check this

- ☐ Write the author's name on every quote sent last quarter.
- ☐ Give someone else a live enquiry to price, then compare it with your own figure.

Rule of thumb

Count the quotes sent last quarter. Then count the ones you did not write.

2. Who can dispatch without you

Dispatch is deciding which engineer goes to which job, and what happens when a chiller trips at two in the morning. It looks like diary work. It depends on knowing who is allowed to touch what.

What good looks like

A board showing each engineer's tickets. Only a category 1 F-gas holder can do every refrigerant job. Category 2 stops at systems under 3kg, or 6kg if hermetically sealed [2]. Each Gas Safe licence card lists that engineer's work categories and their end dates [3]. There is a clock too: a leak found during a leak check must be repaired as soon as possible and the check repeated within a month [6].

Decision	What has to be written down
Who goes to a gas job	Each engineer's categories and end dates
Who goes to a refrigerant job	Each engineer's F-gas category
Who takes the night call	The rota, and who can approve parts

Brackenfold

Illustrative

Out-of-hours calls ring the owner's mobile. The owner decides who goes, from memory, and approves any part that has to be bought that night.

What the buyer is thinking

I can hire a scheduler. I cannot hire one who knows which of your engineers may open which system, unless you have written it down.

Check this

- ☐ Let someone else run the diary while you watch and say nothing.
- ☐ Divert the out-of-hours phone and log every call that still reaches you.

Rule of thumb

Count the calls that still reached you. Each one is a decision nobody else could make.

3. Who can authorise gas work without you

Gas work runs on two permissions: the registration held by the business, and each engineer's own competence. If the registration rests on you, your absence can stop the work, not just slow it.

What good looks like

A registration that does not rest on you. A registered business must always have at least one listed engineer holding current certificates. With none, it becomes "not registered" and cannot legally do gas work [3]. With two narrow exceptions, the law stops an employer letting staff do gas work unless the business is in the class approved by the Health and Safety Executive [5]. Evidence of gas competence accepted for registration must be less than five years old [4].

Gas question	Where the answer is
Which legal entity is registered	The business registration certificate
Who is listed against it	The Register's record for the business
What each engineer may do	The categories on each licence card

Brackenfold

Illustrative

The owner is the only person who covers one specialist gas category. With the owner away, nobody can do that work or commission it.

What the buyer is thinking

Your competence is not mine to buy. I need to see who holds each category on the day after you leave.

Check this

- ☐ List every gas category you sell, with the engineers who hold it.
- ☐ Ask Gas Safe Register, in writing, what your leaving would change.

Rule of thumb

Count the engineers who hold each gas category you sell. If the answer is one, that work depends on one person.

4. Who can authorise refrigerant work without you

Refrigerant work also needs two things: a certificate held by the company, and a qualification held by each engineer. In an owner-run firm one person can end up looking after the first and holding the second.

What good looks like

A company certificate that holds when you are away. In Great Britain it is renewed every three years, and the company has to employ enough trained staff and have a written procedure for handling the gas. Each engineer needs their own qualification, even when working for someone else [2]. For equipment holding 5 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent or more, the operator's records name the company that did the work and its certificate number [6].

Task	Test question
Certificate renewal	Who knows the date and holds the file?
Refrigerant log	Who records every cylinder and top-up?
Leak-check diary	Who tracks which sites are due?

Brackenfold

Illustrative

Two of the four engineers hold the F-gas qualification the contract book needs, and one of them is the owner. The owner also keeps the refrigerant log and deals with the certification body.

What the buyer is thinking

If the certificate depends on your own qualification, I am one resignation away from turning refrigerant work down.

Check this

- ☐ Read the company's written procedure. Check that it names a role, not you.
- ☐ Hand over the refrigerant log and review it at the end of the test.

Rule of thumb

Take yourself off the list of qualified engineers. Ask your certification body whether those left are enough [2].

5. Who holds the customer approvals

A facilities manager approves a contractor, then deals with a person. Over the years the two can merge. Site inductions, permits to work and the mobile number on the plant-room door can all end up in your name.

What good looks like

Approvals in the company's name. The rules already point that way. Gas work under a registration has to be carried out in the name of the business that holds it, and so does the paperwork, such as a landlord's gas safety record [3]. Where a customer has to keep F-gas records, they name the company and its certificate number [6]. The customer's file should match.

Approval	Whose name is on it
Approved-supplier form	The company, or you personally?
Site induction and permits	Which engineers are inducted at each site?
Contract manager	Is anyone else named in the contract?

Brackenfold

Illustrative

Of the £420,000 of income from maintenance contracts, £150,000 is with three customers whose only contact is the owner. That is about 36% of the £420,000.

What the buyer is thinking

I will ask to meet your largest customers before we complete. If they only know you, I need you to stay until they know someone else.

Check this

- ☐ Read each approved-supplier form and contract for a named person.
- ☐ Take a colleague to the next review meeting with each large customer.

Rule of thumb

Add up the maintenance income from customers whose only contact is you. Divide it by all your maintenance income.

6. What your role costs to replace

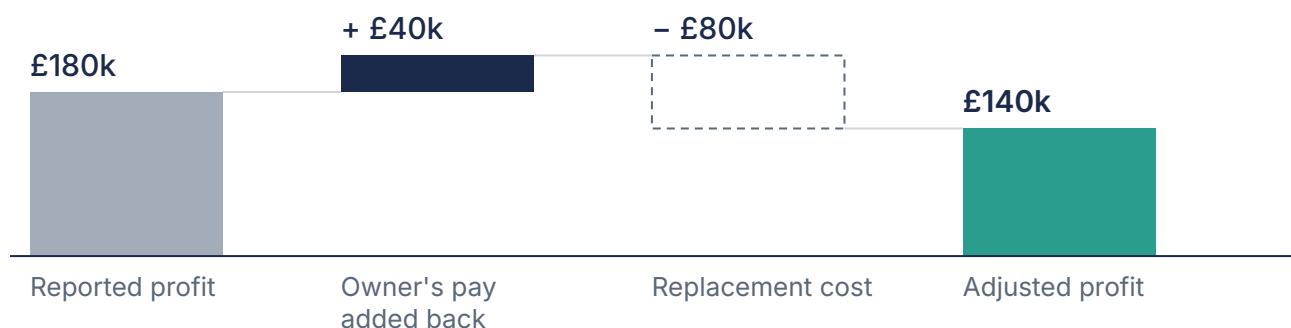
Suppose you survey, price, commission, carry a ticket and take the call nobody else can fix. If someone else has to do that, their salary comes out of the profit a buyer is looking at.

What good looks like

Profit worked out after a real salary for your job. In 2025 the median full-time salary was £41,166 for air-conditioning and refrigeration installers and repairers and £56,021 for production managers and directors in construction [8]. At the higher figure, employer's National Insurance and the minimum pension bring the cost to about £65,000, before a van or a bonus [9].

Take your own job out of the profit

Illustrative



£180,000 plus £40,000 less £80,000 leaves £140,000.

Brackenfold

Illustrative

£180,000 profit, plus the owner's £40,000, less £80,000 for a manager who holds the gas and F-gas tickets and can survey, price and commission: the £65,000 above, plus a van and a bonus.

What the buyer is thinking

If you leave at completion, I have to hire that person. If the job is already filled and paid for, your accounts show it and I do not have to guess.

Check this

- ☐ Write down a normal week, hour by hour.
- ☐ Mark the jobs that need your own gas or F-gas tickets.

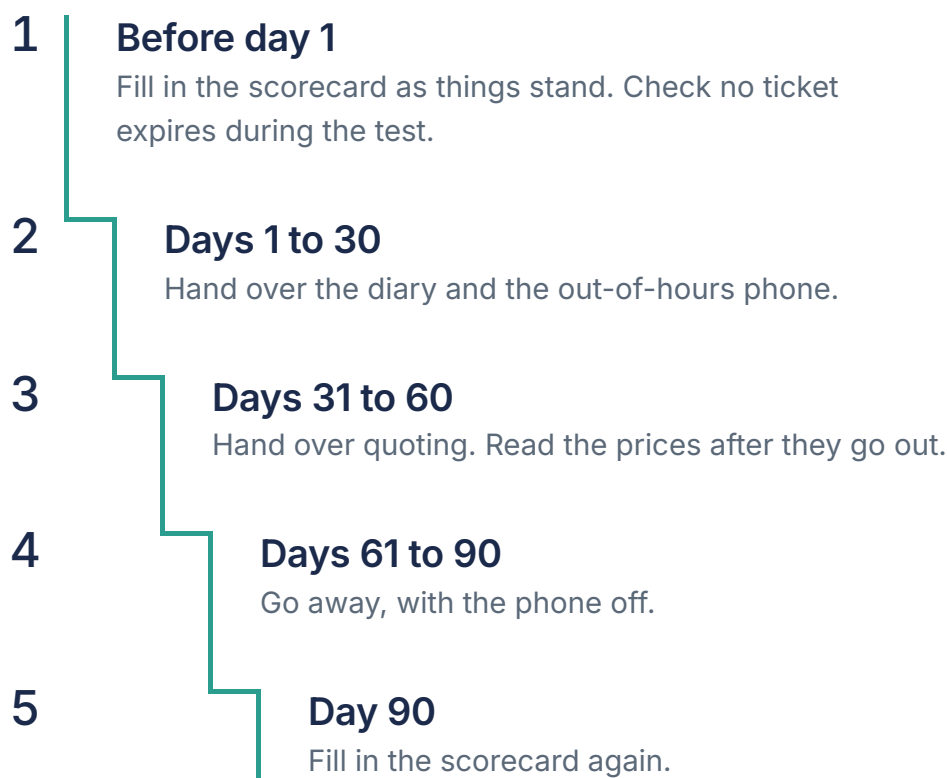
Rule of thumb

Price your own job as a hire: salary, employer's National Insurance and pension [9], then the van.

7. Running the test

Do not start by disappearing. Hand the jobs over in order, stay close enough to watch, and go away only at the end.

The 90 days



What good looks like

A calendar of every ticket, so the test does not run into an expiry. Gas competence can be renewed up to six months early without losing any of its five years [4]. The company F-gas certificate comes round every three years [2].

Brackenfold

Illustrative

On the first score, quoting and the specialist gas category are red. The plan is one engineer trained in that category and one priced job handed over each month.

What the buyer is thinking

Show me the two scores and what changed between them. That tells me more than a promise that the team can cope.

Rule of thumb

Ninety days is the length of our test, not a buyer's rule. Keep going until a full quarter passes without you.

Who stayed when firms changed hands

Some announcements say who was going to run the firm afterwards, and the public register shows who took control. Three examples are here.

When	Buyer and firm	What the source shows
January 2026	Nordic Climate Group and Allcool (NW)	The managing director was to carry on leading it, with the team [10]
June 2025	KSX Holdings and Elite Pacific	Control passed to a company controlled by a person already on its register [11]
August 2024	Johnson Controls and Password Services	The owners and the full team planned to remain [12]

Allcool is a refrigeration, air-conditioning and service company near Blackpool with 40 employees, founded as a family-run business in 1977. The buyer said it would keep its name and its site [10].

KSX Holdings was formed in April 2025. Its controlling owner was already on the register as a person with significant control of Elite Pacific, a company registered in Wakefield. The register does not say who runs the work [11].

Johnson Controls said the purchase enhanced its HVAC capabilities in the UK [12].

In each case, people already involved in the firm were part of what happened next. The test in this guide is how you find out whether your business has those people, or has you.

Bring your scorecard

Fill in the scorecard, then book a free first conversation about our Pre-Sale Programme.

01285 704466

See the Pre-Sale Programme

Owner dependency scorecard

Score your business as it runs without you, before the test and on day 90.

Business and date



Red: it stops



Amber: it slows



Green: seen to run

What has to run without you

R, A or G

Quoting installations

Who surveys, sizes and prices the job?

R A G

Quoting service work and renewals

Is there a rate card anyone can apply?

R A G

Dispatch and out-of-hours calls

Who decides which engineer goes where?

R A G

Gas Safe registration

Is another engineer listed against it?

R A G

Gas work categories

Does someone else hold every category you sell?

R A G

Company F-gas certificate

Are there enough qualified staff without you?

R A G

Refrigerant handling and the log

Who else can work on every size of system?

R A G

Customer approvals

Whose name is on supplier forms and permits?

R A G

Customer relationships

Who else does each large customer know?

R A G

Your role in the accounts

Is a replacement salary in your figures?

R A G

What you will hand over first, to whom and by when

Sources and validity

1. Reads analysis of Companies House data, October 2026. [Company snapshot](#), 1 October 2026; [persons with significant control snapshot](#), 9 October 2026.
2. Environment Agency and Defra: [Company certification to work with F gas](#); [Qualifications to work with F gas](#). Great Britain.
3. Gas Safe Register: [Registration Policy](#), February 2026, sections 4.5, 5.2 and 7.
4. Gas Safe Register: [Becoming registered](#).
5. [Gas Safety \(Installation and Use\) Regulations 1998, regulation 3](#). Great Britain. The approved class is registration with Gas Safe Register, as source 4. Paragraph 4 excepts replacing certain hoses and regulators.
6. Environment Agency and Defra: [Checking F gas equipment for leaks](#); [Record F gas in equipment you own or service](#). Great Britain.
7. Environment Agency and Defra: [Bans on F gas in new products and equipment](#), updated 27 August 2026. Great Britain. The guidance lists exceptions, including air to water systems.
8. Office for National Statistics: [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2025, Table 14.7a](#). Air-conditioning and refrigeration installers and repairers; production managers and directors in construction. Employees, UK, year to April 2025, provisional. The engineer figure rests on a small sample.
9. HMRC: [Rates and thresholds for employers 2026 to 2027](#); GOV.UK: [Workplace pensions](#). £56,021 plus 15% on earnings over £5,000 (£7,653) plus 3% of earnings between £6,240 and £50,270 (£1,321) is £64,995. These are the rates as they stand today.
10. Nordic Climate Group: [announcement](#), 15 January 2026.
11. Companies House: [Elite Pacific Limited](#), registered office; [its persons with significant control](#), change dated 26 June 2025; [KSX Holdings Limited](#), incorporated 1 April 2025.
12. Johnson Controls: [announcement](#), 8 August 2024.

Checked 12 October 2026. We review every guide after the Autumn Budget on 28 October 2026. Tax, legal and technical treatment depends on your own business, so take advice from your own solicitor or accountant.

The 90 days. Ninety days is the length of the test in this guide, chosen because it spans a quarter of trading. It is not drawn from any source, and it is not a standard that buyers, lenders or registration bodies apply.

The opening figure. 49,775 active companies list SIC 43220, which covers plumbing as well as heating and air conditioning and leaves out firms filed under other codes. An owner here is an individual person with significant control. 47,648 companies have at least one. Every such person is 60 or over in 5,135 to 5,194 of them. The range is there because the register gives month and year of birth only. Age on the register says nothing about one owner's plans.

The example. Brackenfold Climate Services is invented. It is not a Reads client or a real sale. Its figures and the views given for its buyer are there to show the arithmetic and are not market evidence. The three public examples show who took control and, where an announcement says so, who was to stay. None is evidence of a price. The images in this guide are illustrative.

Bring the job you cannot hand over



You do not need a finished test for a first conversation. Bring the scorecard as it stands and tell Simon which line worries you most.

A first conversation is free, and there is no obligation to go further.

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