

Open your own dance studio!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Dance Studio
Owner**



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1. Introduction

Congratulations on taking the first step towards starting up your own dance studio, a step into the fast-paced, ever-changing, exciting world of dance instruction. You're about to spend your days surrounded by music, dancers, and the people who enjoy the joys dancing brings to their lives.

People have danced since the beginning of time—to express themselves, to tell stories, to perform rituals, to celebrate events, as part of courtship, and as a form of recreation and social interaction. Today, people continue to dance for many of the same reasons.

Some people dance for artistic reasons, using their bodies to execute graceful leaps or daring feats. Others dance for recreational reasons, for the sheer pleasure that moving their bodies brings. Others dance for the health benefits that dancing brings, others to celebrate their culture and pass along its traditions. And many people dance for a combination of these reasons, and the pleasure they get sharing their pastime with others. Dance studios provide a place for all of these people to learn and develop as dancers.

1.1 Owning a Dance Studio

Most people who are interested in the idea of owning a dance studio have certain things in common, so we think we might already know a little bit about you. Do you have a passion for dance? Do you love learning new dances and teaching them to others? Do you get a thrill out of seeing others as they master new dance steps and techniques? If so, you probably have already spent a lot of time in dance studios and know what you like and don't like about them.

Perhaps you're a dance student with years of dance training and you find yourself wondering if you could own your own studio. Perhaps you're a dance teacher with years of experience working in someone else's studio and you're ready to strike out on your own. Or maybe you're a dance professional winding down a career as a performer and looking for a way to stay involved in dance. Or maybe you're none of the above but you have a strong passion for dance and the desire to share your delight in it with others.

Chances are you've spent some time in dance studios and you might possibly have worked in one or two. While it can be fun and rewarding to work in someone else's studio, nothing quite compares to the satisfaction of running your own business, and taking credit for your own ideas.

Today there are hundreds of dance steps, routines, and styles. Your options for selecting what type of dance studio to open are enormous. You can choose from a variety of styles, including modern dance, ballet, round dancing, tap, jazz, ethnic or folk dances, freestyle, hip hop, or belly dancing, just to name a few. You can offer open, or drop-in, classes, where anyone is free to join a class without prior registration, or scheduled classes, where students sign up in advance and meet for a certain number of classes over a period of time.

You can open a studio that provides formal training for the serious dance student or one that provides less formal instruction for recreational dancers. Your dance studio can target certain markets, such as preschool children or future brides and grooms preparing for their wedding dances, or it can target the general population. You can add services, such as private lessons or tutorials, recitals, summer camps, and dance companies that perform at events.

One of the biggest advantages of this career is that you can start small and grow once you determine your desired scope and your community's needs and preferences. Owning a dance studio offers flexibility, but it also requires adaptability. As your studio develops a reputation, your enrollment and customers will grow, but it will be necessary to stay abreast of new dance styles and trends to stay competitive.

1.2 A Growth Industry

1.2.1 The Dance Studio Market

Consumers in the United States spend over \$1 billion for dance education and related services and products every year. The majority of this money is spent on tuition and fees for dance instruction and performance, as well as dance competition-related expenses. A small amount—approximately 3% of industry sales—is spent on purchases of dance products, such as dancewear and accessories.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are around 6,000 establishments providing dance instruction in the United States. These include dance studios and dance schools for professionals as well as children. The majority of these schools are small, independently run firms. Many are run by sole proprietors who typically are studio owners/operators and provide dance instruction. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the number of firms continues to increase each year, and is expected to grow at a steady rate in the future.

In Canada, there were over 17,000 establishments that provided arts, entertainment, and recreation services in 2007, according to Statistics Canada, which does not break down figures by type of schools. Like schools in the United States, the majority are small, independently run schools with a sole proprietor.

1.2.2 Dance Trends

Dance trends vary based on geographic location, demographics, and other market preferences, but interest remains high in social and recreational dancing such as ballroom dance. It probably doesn't surprise you that television shows are one trend driver. While people have always danced, an increasing number of people want to learn how to

dance thanks to popular television shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing With the Stars*.

In some areas, Latin dance is immensely popular among students of all age levels. Interest generally is highest among adults, but even young children enjoy it, with classes offered to preschoolers in “Baby Samba” and cha-cha. Teens often take classes in Latin-inspired dances, or Latin fusion classes, such as Zumba, which combines Latin dance and aerobics.

Other trends are dances that combine elements from one or more dance styles. Often called fusion, these dances are known by names some as Funk Fusion, AfroFusion, or, a new name, such as Zumba. Some dance instructors create their own styles of dance by combining movements and techniques from different dance styles.

Renuka Srinivasan, owner of Tala Shruti School of Dance, says, “The emerging trend is to combine or fuse two or more forms of dance together. Any aspiring dancer or teacher would do well to train in a new form, other than the dance form they are experts in.” This is precisely what Renuka is doing. A trained exponent of Bharatanatyam from Southern India, Renuka started learning Western dance three years ago and has gone on to win awards in Western dance. “My desire is to combine the two forms of dance to create something unique and contemporary.”

1.3 Benefits of Being a Dance Studio Owner

Owning a dance studio can be a fulfilling and rewarding career. In addition to the benefits of working for yourself, it offers the possibility to shape the size and type of your business according to your own preferences and personal ambitions. You can work to establish a studio that turns a profit and provides a fair income or expand into a much larger studio once you have become established and profitable. You can offer the dance classes you want, create the environment you want, and offer the services you want—it’s all up to you and your own personal goals and ambitions.

Share Your Passion for Dance

For dance studio owners who are also dancers, owning a studio gives them the opportunity to pursue one of their strongest interests and to

stay involved in the world of dance. The studio allows them to share the joy, the passion, the excitement, and the thrill that dancing brings to them.

This benefit is perhaps universal as it was mentioned by many of the people we interviewed for this book. Eliza Minden, author of *The Ballet Companion* and founder of Gaynor Minden, describes it succinctly as “Knowing that you are bringing joy to people’s lives.” Marie Sunderland, director and choreographer of Red Desert Dance Company, says, “We often dance at senior citizens homes and for veterans and the joy that it brings them is such a huge reward, nothing beats that.”

Margot T. McCray Gough, founder and artistic director of MTM Dance Factory, describes one of the moments in her studio that makes it all worthwhile: “There is nothing more exhilarating then the feeling of being in the spotlight, accomplishing your goals, overcoming your fears and making your dreams a reality. It is just like when you were 7 years old ready to dance in your first recital... there are butterflies in your stomach and a rush of energy in your fingertips and toes. It feels like your feet are not touching the ground and you think how am I going to remember the choreography, but not only do you survive it but you get an enormous response. This is just like seeing the results of all the hard work and time put into your dance studio. As a studio owner you get to see the progress of your dancers and you know you are instrumental in that.”

Help Others Develop as Dancers

Many dance studio owners get started in this business because they want to share their knowledge of dance and help others develop their dancing ability. Knowing they have nurtured an interest in dance and helped others become skillful dancers is one of their greatest benefits. In fact, several of the dance experts we interviewed for this book emphasized how important this was to them.

Renuka Srinivasan, owner of Tala Shruti School of Dance, said, “I am especially grateful for the opportunity to be able to inspire the younger generation, as well as motivate them and transmit important aspects of the culture to them. When I see the result in an exceptionally talented dancer, my heart fills with pride.” Pat George Mitchell, owner of Pat George Mitchell’s Studio of Creative Arts, told us, “The most rewarding

aspect of my career has been developing a child's ability in dance and nurturing their vessel from early childhood thru age eighteen or until I can get them to a level whereby they can be accepted to a professional school to develop their dance career."

Raisa Bersten, owner of The Magic Ballroom, points out another closely related benefit. She opened up her dance studio "to get the best instructors to come and teach my kids." For parents who want to provide high-quality dance instruction for their own children and are unable to provide it themselves, opening up a studio is one way to get it, especially in areas with limited studios or that lack the type of dance instruction desired.

Be a Respected Member of the Arts Community

Many dance studio owners have become respected member of the arts community. Just think about names like Arthur Millar or Fred Astaire, both of whom owned their own dance studios. Not only that, but they also taught many celebrities to dance. Whether it's your own local arts community who seek you out for your dance professionalism and knowledge, or it's the wider world of dancing fame and fortune, owning a dance studio gives you the chance to become well respected and perhaps even famous yourself.

Financial Rewards

While money isn't everything—not a single dance studio owner surveyed gave financial rewards as the main reason for opening a studio—making a profit is essential in order to stay in business. Studio owners can easily earn profits from the low \$20,000s to \$200,000 or more a year. Profits depend on the size of the studio, the target market, services offered, and reputation.

1.4 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Dance Studio Owner* is organized to help take you step-by-step through the basics you will need to open and operate your own studio. The chapters are organized as follows:

Chapter 2 (“*Dance Studio Basics*”) describes the different types of dance studios and the types of dance instruction offered in both. It describes the variety of dance styles, the reasons people obtain dance instruction, and the different types of dance students as well as additional services and products you can offer. It also explains the roles performed by dance studio personnel.

Chapter 3 (“*Getting Ready*”) explains how to learn the skills you will need as a dance studio owner. It covers ways of learning from experts and through observation. You will also discover ways you can communicate and learn from dance studio owners around the world. You’ll find numerous resources for learning more—about running a business and running a dance studio.

Chapter 4 (“*Starting Your Dance Studio*”) will help you decide what kind of dance studio you should open. This chapter discusses how to select your niche and will help you decide whether to buy an existing studio, operate a franchise, or open a new studio. It also explains what you need to get started, including your business plan, start-up financing, studio name, and other important matters.

Chapter 5 (“*Setting Up Your Dance Studio*”) offers the information you need to actually set up your dance studio. It gives advice on how to choose a location, arrange your studio, and discover what equipment and supplies you will need. It also explains how to get started setting up your classes by creating a studio calendar, class schedule, and studio policies.

Chapter 6 (“*Running Your Business*”) takes you into the day-to-day challenge of running your dance studio once it’s open. It explains how to develop an operations manual, manage payments, keep financial records, and manage and hire your employees.

Chapter 7 (“*Getting and Keeping Customers*”) gives you tips and tools for marketing your business, providing exceptional customer service, and growing your business. You’ll learn about effective marketing tools, ways to keep customers coming back, and much more.

By following the steps in this guide, you will be well on your way to living your dream of opening your own successful dance studio.