START A BUSINESS - NEW YORK

How to start a vehicle wrap and graphics business in New York

Form the business, collect sales tax on wraps and installation, learn New York City's and the federal lettering rules, and ask the DMV whether your work needs repair shop registration.

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1 Is a wrap business right for you?

Wrap shops design, print and install vinyl wraps, fleet graphics, lettering and USDOT numbers. It suits detail-oriented people with design or installation skills.

2 Form the business and get a Certificate of Authority

1. Choose a structure. An LLC files Articles of Organization with the Department of State ($200), then within 120 days publishes notice of its formation in two newspapers and files a Certificate of Publication ($50); if it does not, its authority to do business is suspended. A sole proprietor or partnership using an assumed name files a business certificate with the county clerk.
2. Register for sales tax through New York Business Express at least 20 days before you start, and wait for your Certificate of Authority. Display it where you do business. Operating without one can cost up to $500 for the first day and $200 for each day after, up to $10,000.

3 Licenses and a question for the DMV

We found no New York license specific to wrap installation. The DMV's repair shop regulations define repair as any alteration or adjustment to a motor vehicle and do not list wraps among the exclusions, so ask the DMV Office of Vehicle Safety (518-474-0919) whether your work needs repair shop registration.

4 Lettering rules your customers rely on

- New York City: for the city's parking rules, commercial vehicles show the registrant's name and address on both sides in characters at least three inches high, in a contrasting color, about midway on the doors or side panels.
- Federal: vehicles that need a USDOT number show the carrier name and USDOT number on both sides, readable from 50 feet in daylight. FMCSA lists New York among states that require USDOT numbers for intrastate commercial vehicles.

5 Sales tax

The Tax Department lists tangible personal property and the service of installing it as taxable. Charge sales tax on wraps and installation and ask the Department about sales for resale.

6 Equipment

Plan for a wide-format printer and laminator or a print partner, a plotter, heat guns, squeegees and a clean, temperature-controlled bay.

7 Your first steps

1. Form the business and get your Certificate of Authority.
2. Ask the DMV about repair shop registration.
3. Set up a clean installation space.
4. Learn the lettering rules for fleet customers.

5. List your business on Nearby Car Care

Requirements at a glance

Form the business (Department of State or county clerk)

Required - State - New York Department of State; your county clerk

Corporations and LLCs file with the New York Department of State; an LLC files Articles of Organization and then, within 120 days, publishes notice of its formation in two newspapers and files a Certificate of Publication, or its authority to do business is suspended. Individuals or partnerships using an assumed name file a business certificate with the county clerk. The DMV asks facility applicants for the DOS filing receipt or the county business certificate.

Fees: LLC Articles of Organization: $200. Certificate of Publication: $50 (newspaper costs are extra).

Official application: https://dos.ny.gov/articles-organization-domestic-limited-liability-company-0

Sales Tax Certificate of Authority

Required - State - New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

If you will make sales subject to sales tax, register with the Tax Department through New York Business Express at least 20 days before you begin business and wait for your Certificate of Authority. Display it at your place of business (or in your vehicle if you have no fixed location). The rate depends on the location; use the Department's rate lookup by address.

Fees: Operating without a Certificate of Authority: penalty up to $500 for the first day and up to $200 for each later day, up to $10,000; $50 penalty for not displaying it.

Collect sales tax on wraps and installation

Required - State - New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

The Tax Department lists tangible personal property and the service of installing it as taxable. Ask the Department about special cases such as sales for resale.

New York City commercial vehicle name and address display

Required in some cases - Municipal - New York City Department of Transportation

For New York City's parking, stopping and standing rules, a commercial vehicle must bear commercial plates and display the registrant's name and address, permanently affixed in characters at least three inches high on both sides of the vehicle, in a color contrasting with the vehicle, about midway up the doors or side panels.

USDOT number marking on commercial motor vehicles

Required in some cases - Federal - Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Vehicles that need a USDOT number must show the carrier's name and USDOT number on both sides, in contrasting letters readable from 50 feet in daylight (49 CFR 390.21). FMCSA lists New York among states requiring USDOT numbers for intrastate commercial vehicles.

Ask the DMV whether wrap work needs repair shop registration

Required in some cases - State - New York State Department of Motor Vehicles

The DMV's repair shop regulations define repair as any alteration or adjustment to a motor vehicle, and require registration for anyone who repairs vehicles for compensation. Wrap installation is not named among the exclusions. Ask the DMV Office of Vehicle Safety whether your work needs repair shop registration before you open.

Official agencies and links

49 CFR 390.21, Marking of self-propelled CMVs and intermodal equipment

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (eCFR)

https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-III/subchapter-B/part-390/subpart-B/section-390.21

Articles of Organization for Domestic Limited Liability Company
New York Department of State, Division of Corporations
https://dos.ny.gov/articles-organization-domestic-limited-liability-company-0

Motor Vehicle Repair Shop Regulations (CR-82, Part 82)
New York State Department of Motor Vehicles
https://dmv.ny.gov/forms/cr82.pdf

How to Register for New York State Sales Tax (TB-ST-360)
New York State Department of Taxation and Finance
https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs_and_bulls/tg_bulletins/st/how_to_register_for_nys_sales_tax.htm

Quick Reference Guide for Taxable and Exempt Property and Services
New York State Department of Taxation and Finance
https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs_and_bulls/tg_bulletins/st/quick_reference_guide_for_taxable_and_exempt_property_and_services.htm

Trucks and Commercial Vehicle Classifications
New York City Department of Transportation
https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/truckorcomm.shtml

Frequently asked questions

What must a commercial vehicle in New York City show?
The registrant's name and address on both sides in characters at least three inches high, in a contrasting color, for the city's commercial parking rules. Federally regulated vehicles also show the carrier name and USDOT number.

This guide is general information, not legal advice. Rules change and can depend on your city or county, so confirm with the official agencies linked below before you apply.