I keep a living shortlist of small companies worth a closer look around London, and I mean both Londons. London in the UK has dense, competitive deal flow with a cosmopolitan mix of sectors. London, Ontario offers community roots, owner-operator opportunities, and friendlier price tags. If you have been searching phrases like companies for sale London near me, business for sale in London near me, or even businesses for sale London Ontario near me, the best path to a good purchase usually looks the same: narrow the radius, tighten the criteria, and get to conversations faster than other buyers.

The shortlist below is not a static table of targets. It is a way to think about finding and vetting owners who are ready to transition in your backyard. I have bought, sold, and advised through enough deals to know the glossy listing is only the start. Most wins arrive through patient outreach, quiet broker relationships, and level-headed diligence. I will show you how to build that pipeline and what numbers to watch, and I will call out local wrinkles that matter whether you plan to buy a business in London near me or buy a business in London Ontario near me.

What “near me” really gets you

Location is leverage. Proximity trims risk on three fronts. First, you recruit and retain better because you can read your labor market without guessing. Second, you understand hyperlocal demand, whether that is a surge in basement renovations in Forest Hill, London Ontario or weekday lunch traffic around Shoreditch. Third, your transition looks less like a handoff to a stranger and more like continuity. Many sellers in the sub 2 million revenue band care about that legacy. I have had owners in both cities pick the second-highest price because the buyer lived ten minutes away and could keep the original staff.

When you type small business for sale London near me, the search engines will give you marketplaces and brokerages. Useful, but incomplete. The better question is which seller, within a transit ride of you, has pain you can solve. Retirement without a successor. An exhausted couple who built a great maintenance route but never hired a general manager. A microbrand tripped up by Ops, not marketing. That is your near-me advantage.

Where the deals live, on and off the map

On-market deals are the storefront: BizBuySell equivalents, Rightmove Business, Daltons, commercial agents in the UK, and brokerages in Ontario. Off market is the stockroom where the best boxes are still closed. The phrase off market business for sale near me points to a wide world of owners who will listen if someone respectful knocks with specifics and proof of funds. A quick story: I once mailed nine letters to duct-cleaning companies within a 45-minute drive of London, Ontario. Five replied, three met for coffee, and one sold to us six months later. That deal never touched a public site.

If you lean on brokers, expect them to keep you honest. I like brokers who set buyer gates: one-page bio, proof of funds, a note from your accountant, and evidence you have run teams. When you search liquid sunset business brokers near me or sunset business brokers near me, ignore the vibe and ask two questions. How many closed deals, by sector, in the last twelve months? How many of those buyers still own the company? Good brokers know their post-close survival rate.

The London UK landscape

Greater London teems with service businesses that trade below institutional radar. Think fire compliance testing, end-of-tenancy cleaning, IT managed services with 10 to 40 seats, small food manufacturers, commercial landscaping, specialty wholesalers with loyal routes, or B2B creative studios with sticky retainers. Retail and hospitality are abundant as well, though lease liabilities tilt the calculus.

Three patterns show up again and again:

- Owner-operator firms with 600k to 3 million in revenue and margins between 8 and 18 percent. They often have one admin who does everything, little documented process, and a proprietor who carries sales on their back.
- Staffed operators with a thin management layer, 3 to 6 million in revenue, 10 to 20 staff, and a founder who wants out within a year. These are big enough for bank interest if you bring a deposit of 20 to 35 percent and personal guarantees.
- Micro e-commerce or Amazon FBA plays with 300k to 1.2 million revenue. Easy to list, harder to diligence well, and valuations vary wildly with product concentration.

If you are chasing business for sale in London near me or buying a business London near me, I suggest sectors where proximity adds durable value: building services, compliance, waste, fleet-based trades, and commercial catering maintenance. You can meet clients, audit vans, see routes, and understand seasonality. In-person beats spreadsheets for these.

Valuation norms are broad, but for profitable firms under 500k in discretionary earnings, you will often see 2.0 to 3.5 times SDE, nudging up if recurring revenue is real and churn is low. Add lease obligations and capex needs back into your net picture. London rents can burn through free cash if you misprice the next five years.

The London, Ontario angle

Cross the Atlantic and the game changes while the rules rhyme. London, Ontario has about 420,000 residents in the metro, a strong healthcare and education base, and a healthy trades ecosystem that radiates into Middlesex and Elgin Counties. Prices typically sit a notch lower than the UK once you adjust for currency and scale. For the same SDE, you may find a more favorable multiple, a steadier workforce, and a seller more open to a vendor take-back.

Search phrases like small business for sale London Ontario near me or business broker London Ontario near me will surface recognizable names. What matters is fit, not the brand. Ask whether they close in your target bracket, whether they understand financing through the Canada Small Business Financing Program, and if they help with vendor take-back notes. In my experience, 10 to 30 percent VTB is common at this size, with two to five-year amortizations. BDC shows up for larger, stronger files, and chartered banks will lean on personal guarantees and property-backed security if you have it.

You will also find owner-manager companies where the couple plans to winter in Florida, the daughter became a nurse, and nobody wants the shop. That is where phrases like business for sale london, ontario near me or sell a business London Ontario near me lead you to personal transitions, not just financial ones. Respect that timing. Have your financing lined up, and show them your plan to keep their team working.

Pricing sanity checks that save months

I have seen buyers fall in love with revenue tallies and forget the quality of those pounds or dollars. A better move is to interrogate earnings, customer concentration, and reinvestment needs before you grind on price.

Here is a quick filter I apply when skimming teasers within a 90-minute radius of either London. Keep it next to your shortlist.

- If SDE is under 200k and the owner works 60 hours, add a manager’s wage before you apply a multiple.
- If one customer is over 30 percent of revenue, haircut the multiple or build a rapid diversification plan into your first-year budget.
- If fleet age averages 9 years or more, assume capex bumps in years one and two, especially for trades.
- If rent exceeds 8 to 10 percent of revenue for a service firm, you need clear pricing power or a relocation plan, particularly in central London post-lease renewal.
- If growth in the last two years came mainly from price hikes, ask for unit volumes or ticket counts. Inflation can flatter flatlining demand.

What off market outreach looks like when it works

The phrase off market business for sale near me gets romanticized. In practice, it is steady and polite. You build a list of 30 to 60 targets within your radius by NAICS or UK SIC codes. You send letters, not emails, with proof you can close. You show up on time and talk less than the owner. Your goal is not a clever offer, it is trust.

If you want a simple blueprint that stays within a few hours a week, use this:

- Write a one-page buyer profile with your background, available capital, and local proof, such as previous employment or a professional reference.
- Send five handwritten letters each week, by name, with two specifics about their business that show you did the work.
- Track replies on a single sheet or simple CRM, and follow up once every three weeks, never more.
- Take every plant tour you are offered, even if the fit seems off. Pattern recognition forms at the fourth shop, not the first.
- After each meeting, write a two-paragraph memo to the owner summarizing what you heard and what you would like to explore next.

A few live categories that earn their keep

Most of my current shortlist in both cities tilts toward steady, sometimes unglamorous operators. Picture a three-van fire alarm testing firm with maintenance contracts across Walthamstow and Stratford. The owner does quotes and two technicians carry the load. Or a commercial janitorial route in London, Ontario with twenty evening cleaners, two daytime porters, and five buildings that have renewed every year for a decade. These enterprises lack sizzle, which is exactly why they endure.

A story from last year: we looked at a boutique IT MSP in South London with 28 clients, each under 3 percent of revenue, and 60 percent on monthly retainer. The owner wanted 3.2 times SDE. The numbers made sense, but the tech stack was idiosyncratic, and the lead engineer planned to move to Spain. That risk tipped us toward a smaller MSP in Croydon with two engineers who wanted to stay. We paid more on a multiple basis, but the team stayed intact, churn stayed at 2 percent, and EBITDA grew 12 percent in nine months because onboarding was smoother than anyone forecast.

In Ontario, a heating and cooling business with 4 million in revenue, 12 percent EBITDA, and a 25-year phone number can be a gem if the install to service mix leans toward service. You will often see 30 to 40 percent of revenue from maintenance agreements. Those lines are durable as long as your dispatch stays tight in January. If the seller offers a 20 percent vendor take-back, you can keep senior debt lower, which gives you breathing room during the first winter shock.

Brokers worth your time, questions worth asking

Whether you type business brokers London Ontario near me or hunt for a boutique in the UK, you win when the broker knows how to package small complexities into bankable stories. Ask for anonymized info memos on closed deals. A good one reads like a field manual, not a sales flyer. They should flag warts: deferred maintenance, a wobbly bookkeeper, the founder's brother who handles IT on weekends. If they hide the tough parts, your diligence will be combative later.

Some buyers worry brokers only juice price. In smaller deals, the right broker can be your translator. They separate owner wages from true operating profit, help vendors understand holdbacks, and herd solicitors or lawyers when the week goes sideways. If you dislike an intermediary, keep talking to the seller directly while staying professional. Misaligned communication is how perfectly good companies die on the vine.

Due diligence that actually protects you

I prefer diligence with a spine. You do not need a 200-item spreadsheet to buy a plumbing route or a packaging wholesaler, but you do need to test cash truth, customer durability, and the people who make the machine run. If your own time is the scarcest resource, spend it here.

Use this lightweight checklist during the first serious pass, before you pay for third-party reports.

- Bank statements that reconcile to management accounts, in full, for 24 months. Scan for seasonality, cash spikes, and unexplained transfers.
- Customer list with invoice history that shows retention, ticket size, and concentration for at least two years.
- Payroll detail that proves who does what, at what pay, and whether the owner's family is on the books.
- Lease, vehicle finance, and key supplier contracts with renewal terms, assignment clauses, and break fees.
- Equipment and fleet age, service history, and any red-tag safety or compliance items that could trigger capex in year one.

Financing that closes in the real world

In the UK, high street banks will listen if you bring sector experience, a clear plan, and a strong deposit. Asset-based lenders can secure against receivables and equipment, but interest will be higher. Personal guarantees are standard. The British Business Bank has had various programs over the years that grease liquidity for smaller firms, but your banker will underwrite the person as much as the project at this size. Plan for 20 to 40 percent equity depending on quality of earnings and hard assets.

In Canada, buyers for companies in London, Ontario lean on the Canada Small Business Financing Program for equipment and leaseholds, but it does not neatly fund goodwill at scale, so you combine it with conventional debt and a vendor take-back. BDC can step in for cash flow lending if the file is strong. If you lack asset cover, sharpen your integration plan and be ready to sign a guarantee. It still closes if your numbers and people plan line up.

Legal shape of the deal, UK and Ontario

Legal structure changes the tax and the headaches. In the UK, you will often see a share purchase for clean companies with no hidden liabilities, partly because it can be tax efficient for the seller. Buyers may push for an asset purchase to ring-fence risk, but VAT registration, TUPE for employees, and contract assignments become the work. Bring a solicitor who has closed deals under 5 million, not just a big-firm M&A lawyer who lives in spreadsheets. Real people and vans, not data rooms, decide these closings.

In Ontario, asset purchases are more common at the small end, with the buyer taking equipment, inventory, and goodwill and leaving behind historic liabilities. HST on asset deals has quirks your accountant will manage. Make sure your lawyer understands labor transfers, WSIB, environmental checks if you are buying anything with solvents or storage, and municipal licensing. You do not need to overlawyer a 1 million deal. You do need the right lawyer.

Three snapshots that earned a spot on my shortlist

A water hygiene testing firm in East London that does monthly legionella checks for 140 buildings. Revenue 1.1 million, EBITDA around 180k, three field techs, one scheduler. The owner priced it at 3.2 times SDE because of recurring contracts. I like the work, but the fail point is technician retention. My shortlist note: acceptable multiple if we can recruit two trainees within 90 days and the seller spends 60 days on ride-alongs.

A specialty coffee kiosk group with four high-footfall sites near transport hubs. Revenue 2.4 million, EBITDA 240k before owner comp. Lease renewals staggered, two look challenging. I love the brand, but the lease risk in central London cuts true value. My note: still interesting if we can roll one site into a nearby vacancy with rent no higher than 7 percent of revenue and secure supplier terms that buffer coffee price volatility.

An HVAC service-heavy company in London, Ontario with 3.6 million revenue, 14 percent EBITDA, and 1,400 service plan subscribers. The owner wants to retire to Sarnia. Vehicles are aged, but the techs are lifers. My note: assume 250k in capex in year one for vans and lifts, but with a 20 percent vendor take-back and conservative senior debt, cash flow handles it by month 16.

These snapshots live or die on people, not pitch decks. When a seller says their foreman is the backbone, listen. Put the foreman in your model. Pay them. Write a retention bonus that triggers at month 18. Your first year will be much less exciting, and your second year will be much more profitable.

How to choose where to focus this month

Let your own skills pick the sector. If you ran routes, chase routes. If you built sales teams, consider MSPs or creative shops with steady retainers that need outbound lift. Your shortlist in London UK might include fire safety compliance, access control, commercial cleaning, and light manufacturing with repeat buyers. In London, Ontario it might be plumbing and heating, building envelope services, vending and micro markets, or B2B distribution with route density along the 401.

Tactically, commit to a rhythm. Five letters a week to owners inside your radius. Two broker calls a week, one on each side of the Atlantic if that is your range. One coffee with a seller, even if it is not a fit. Keep a one-page memo for each target, with headline SDE, customer spread, team notes, lease terms, capex forecast, and the one risk that can kill the deal. Revisit those pages every Friday. Patterns will surface quickly.

When to walk

Not every appealing business should be yours. Walk when cash truth wiggles under light testing. Walk when the key employee will only stay if you keep the founder as a consultant forever. Walk when the landlord wants a 5-year personal guarantee and a deposit that eats your runway. Walk when the seller will not sign reasonable non-competes or when customer trust is obviously founder-name dependent with no clear path to transfer.

I once passed on a very profitable commercial window cleaning route in the UK because the two largest contracts were awarded to the founder’s brother-in-law who ran facilities at a property group. Everyone swore the work would continue. Maybe it would have. I chose not to learn that lesson the hard way.

What a real handover feels like

The friendliest transitions have a simple arc. Before closing, you ride along, you watch the ops desk handle chaos, and you co-create the first 90 days. In the first two weeks, you meet every staff member, especially the field leaders, and you ask exactly one question in each department: what is the thing we do that makes your day harder than it needs to be? Fix one of those in month one. Not all of them, just one. Then you visit top customers with the seller and state the plan plainly. No grand rebrands, no surprise pricing, no new uniforms on day three. A steady hand is a competitive advantage.

If business for sale london you picked well, the business already works. Your job is to sand friction, professionalize reporting, and gain one or two sticky contracts or routes that change the slope of earnings. The compounding from those small, durable changes is why we chase local companies instead of tossing resumes into distant ventures.

Putting your shortlist to work

You do not need a giant pipeline to find a company worth owning within an hour of your home. Two dozen serious conversations in London and a dozen in London, Ontario is plenty for a first-time buyer. If a listing says business for sale in London Ontario near me or buy a business London Ontario near me, treat it as an invitation to learn, not a finish line. Ask to see the last twelve months of bank statements. Ask to meet the supervisor who juggles the vans. Ask how many quotes turn into jobs and why.

If you prefer to stay entirely on the buy side and avoid running outreach yourself, stick close to a few well-chosen intermediaries. When you reach out to a business broker London Ontario near me or to a boutique agency in the UK, show them you are serious with a buyer dossier and references. They will call you first when a quiet, good fit appears. Those calls rarely go to the loudest buyer. They go to the buyer who looks prepared to close.

Your shortlist should now feel less like a wish list and more like a plan. Two neighborhoods, two markets, one approach that respects the local ground. Whether your next call is about a small business for sale London near me or buying a business in London near me, you already know what to ask, what to test, and how to earn the handover. That is the difference between dealing hunting and company building. The latter is how you turn a liquid sunset into a steady dawn.