A car rental agency supplies vehicles in several categories (compact, mid-size, full-size, and many more) to drivers for limited periods of time ranging from a single day to a month; it does not rent for periods longer than a month. Terms of rental vary widely; weekends may have different rates than mid-week, and there may be an extra charge when there is more than one driver. Mileage is a factor in most packages, although “unlimited mileage” is offered in a few.

Vehicles can be reserved up to two weeks in advance.

Renters must supply a credit card; cash is never acceptable. Drivers must show a driver's licence valid for the entire time of rental. Drivers must be over 25 years old.

When the renter picks up the vehicle, an agent examines the vehicle with them to identify any problems such as dents and scrapes and records the information on a paper form; the inspection is repeated when the vehicle is returned. There are extra charges for repairing new defects.

If a vehicle is dropped off outside of office hours, the driver puts the keys through a mail slot and the paperwork is filled out and mailed to them the next business day.

During regular business hours the company can supply a pickup and delivery service using available rental vehicles (not necessarily the one being rented).

Vehicles are usually leased from a variety of sources, commonly from subsidiaries of car manufacturers. It is possible that an individual franchisee may own a few vehicles directly.