

MAKING MONEY AND FRIENDS IN THE HANDYMAN BUSINESS

There are a lot of people today who just can't take care of all those "little things" around the house and yard that need to be done. Painting the cabinets, fixing a leaky faucet, installing a new plug on the lamp cord or replacing a screen can be real problems to some people.

And, unless you have in a cave for the past few years, you know how much it can cost to call in a plumber, and electrician or carpenter these days.

A Handyman Business (whether it is a man, woman or teenager) may be just the answer!

Calling a professional plumber, electrician or carpenter for even a small, uncomplicated job is expensive: most of them charge for a house call, a hefty markup on any parts plus \$25 or so per hour for their time (and of course, most also have a minimum charge).

Much of the time, they are called for "minor" jobs that most handyman could handle: replacing a wall socket, fixing a leaky faucet or repairing a cabinet door. These are classic examples of what most any handyman could do with ease!

They can perform literally hundreds of tasks that elderly and handicapped people might not be able to do, or a busy executive might not have time for.

It is unusual for a home owner to be charged \$30 to \$50 to have a 10 cent washer replaced.

Simply because it was replaced by a master plumber who must be paid for his time, training and investment. Talk about job over-qualification!

This problem is magnified in cases where rental agents send plumbers to replace washers and electricians to fix appliance plugs. This work must be done now - and, who else can they call?

The home handyman can solve most of these minor maintenance problems for a rental agent, and leave only the truly difficult jobs for the \$25-per-hour-plus professionals. Yet, the handyman can charge \$10 hour and be a godsend to many thankful customers.

To go into this lucrative business, you need only some household tools and some advertising about the type of work you do. Business cards (or a rubber stamped card, Notices on community and supermarket bulletin boards, a small ad under Services in the paper will do to get the ball rolling. Add a pair of magnetic signs for your car or truck as soon as you can afford it.

Be very specific in your conversations and ads about what you do. This will help avoid getting calls for things you don't do and spark the interest of those who can use your services. As you progress the range of tasks you will feel confident to handle will undoubtedly expand.

If you need special tools, but them as needed for specific jobs - and let the job help pay for them. If they are really unique tools, sometimes you can include the total cost in your bill.

At first you may want to charge by the hour, but it will be better for both you and your customers to

charge by the job. You should make a little more, and the customer won't have to worry about going over budget.

When you are working, always look around for other things that you might could take of. You can do them cheaper if you are already there and still make the same amount of profit.

Naturally, you should always look presentable, act professional and avoid long (especially controversial) discussions with your customers.

Once you are started and the "word" gets around that you do good work are honest, you will have no problem getting all the work you want.

Just don't make the fatal mistake of taking people for granted: always keep your word. If you say you will be there this afternoon **BE THERE** or at least call. Many businesses have failed because the owner neglected his customers!

Find a building supplier that will give you a business discount to increase your profit margin. You can hire helpers, but be sure they measure up to your standards of honesty and good work letting them go on a job by themselves.

If you can find reliable helpers with additional skills, you willable to expand your services. Work with your helper first, until you are sure he/she can handle jobs -- then send them out on jobs where they get paid by the hour and you, by the job.

Another possibility is to contact out-of-town home owners and arrange to take care of their places (including calling a professional when necessary). Have agreements with other services to refer each other (you recommend a specific plumber on a tough job; he recommends you for light ones).

If you get stuck, there are plenty of repair manuals around: many are on file in your local library.

Also, check Business Sources below, for discount book suppliers (Dover has many how-to and fix-it books in the \$2 to \$5 range).

Another trick is to contact the manufacturer or authorized dealer on how to repair or service one of their products.

If you don't see their address, get their name and look up their address in Thomas Register, a large set of green colored reference books at the library.

Perhaps the most lucrative and desperately needed handyman type service is for rental agencies and real estate companies.

These businesses spend thousands on upkeep and repairs and seldom have time to find out whether the problems are serious or simple.

A typical rental agent gets 10% of rents collected -- and never even visit the unit being rented. When the tenant complains about something not working, the agent calls a service company and gets it fixed -- now.

Often, the price is less important that worrying about the tenant moving out. If you make up a little brochures of what you do, how to get in touch with you, and an idea of what you charge, and take it

to 4 or 5 rental or real estate agents, you will probably at least be called to see how to you do.

In fact, it would not be surprising if one or more of them wanted a guarantee that they would be priority one -- which is something you might consider if the price or retainer is right.

For example, you could agree to treat one wholesale customer as priority one if you did not make it a secret. That is, when calls come in, tell your retail customers you will be there as soon as your contract work permits.

There are two major potential problem areas in this business: the first is overloading yourself with either too much work, or jobs that you find you cannot do.

To avoid this trap, make sure your customers understand you are a "helper," and that you will do the job if you can. If you can't say so as soon as you can, refer the job and do not charge the customer.

Of course, if the professional you refer pays you a finder's fee that is a different matter. The other "no-no" is not keeping your word.

It takes time and money to build a reputation in a business, but a good reputation can be ruined in short order if the word gets around that you don't show up when you promise or your work is not as represented. Pay your bills, keep your word and do a good job and your business will thrive!

BUSINESS SOURCES

DISCOUNT BOOKS, INC., 427 Ferry St., Newark, NJ 07105. Discount books.

BARNES & NOBLE, 126 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 11011. Discount books.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St., Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office supplies.

IVEY PRINTING, Box 761, Meridan, TX 76665. Business stationery. Write for price list.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. Rubber stamps and business cards.

USA PRINTING, 160 Washington SE, Ste 30, Albuquerque, NM 87108. Quality printer. Envelopes and letterheads. Fast and courteous service. Write for price list.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 66048-2556. Business cards and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality but no choice of style or color.