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6 Garage-Sale Tactics from the Pros

You may think having a garage sale is just a matter of posting some signs, putting out your castoffs, and hoping for a sunny day. But there's an art to running a successful sale. With the right know-how, you can spare yourself headaches and turn a handsome profit, say garage-sale gurus and professional organizers, who normally offer their services for a fee. Their expert advice:



1 Know the law. After you've settled on a day and time (Saturdays from 8:00 A.M. to early afternoon draw the most people), check with your city/town hall to see if you need a permit, which usually costs between \$5 and \$10.



2 Sort your merchandise by price. Find space in your basement or garage for at least half-a-dozen large boxes, and label each with a price (25 cents, \$1, etc.). In the weeks leading up to the sale, fill the boxes with items you know you'll never use again, says Amanda Kovattana, owner of Don't Agonize, Organize! in San Carlos, CA. Then price each item, using color-coded stickers (a blue dot for 25 cents, a red dot for \$1, etc.).

As you sort, think about what people are likely to buy. Good-condition table linens, children's clothes, adult coats, name-brand toys, bicycles, and collectibles, such as sterling-silver and cut-crystal pieces, will move briskly. Large-ticket everyday items, such as furniture, rugs, and appliances (air conditioners, television sets), also do quite well. On the other hand, don't have very high

expectations for stuffed animals, souvenirs, posters, and vinyl records.

You can price more expensive items a little higher than what you expect to get, so there's room for bargaining. "But if you suspect that your antique lamp could bring in more than one hundred and fifty dollars, look in the phone book for an auctioneer who'll come to your house and appraise it, then sell it through newspaper ads," says Christy Best, a professional organizer in Monterey, CA.



3 Spread the word.

Place an ad in your local paper to appear within a week of the sale. Attract buyers with headlines like EVERYTHING MUST GO! Mention if you're selling anything as big as a couch, which would require a truck for removal. In addition to the time and address, note whether the sale will go on rain or shine.

At the same time, put up flyers in churches, synagogues, community centers, and grocery stores. "Find out beforehand if your town has regulations on posting flyers on trees and telephone poles," notes Deborah Gussoff, president of In Order, Inc., in Montclair, NJ.



4 Equip yourself with tools of the trade.

You'll need an extension cord to prove appliances work, as well as a calculator, pens, pencils, newspaper to wrap fragile items, and empty bags and boxes for customers to cart away their purchases. Be prepared to make change: Get up to 100 singles, \$50 or more in \$5 and \$10 bills, and several rolls of quarters. And if you're using color-coded price stickers, mount a chart explaining the system.

What's It Worth?

The condition of an item is the most important factor in determining the price, but experts say you can follow these guidelines:

| The Goods | What They Usually Go For |
|--|--------------------------|
| Hardcover books (excluding collectibles) | |
| Fiction: | 50¢-\$1 |
| Cookbooks: | \$2-\$15 |
| Art books: | \$5-\$50 |
| Paperbacks | 25¢-50¢ |
| Children's toys (excluding large play equipment) | 50¢-\$10 |
| Linens | 25¢-\$10 |
| Costume jewelry (unsigned, not collectibles) | 50¢-\$10 |
| Lamps (excluding antiques) | \$5-\$25 |
| Coats (nondesigner) | \$10-\$20 |
| Carpets/rugs (room-size, excluding Orientals) | \$15-\$100 |
| Furniture (excluding antiques) | \$5-\$150 |

—C.S.H.



5 Create eye-pleasing displays.

Have plenty of tables, shelves, and clothing racks if necessary, so you can present your wares attractively, says Gussoff.

Use your imagination; for example, set a table with the dinnerware you're selling. Group similar items together. If you want to sell your child's bedroom set but it's too big to take outdoors, have a photograph of it enlarged so you can show it to potential customers.



6 Attract foot traffic.

On the day of the sale, put a big sign on your car with brief directions and a large arrow pointing to your house; park the car on a nearby cross street. Then pull out your tables and place your larger items near the sidewalk, where they're more visible. Enlist your children to sit out front and sell popcorn or lemonade, or ask them to blow up balloons or hang banners. Play music and offer coffee or freshly baked cookies to prospective buyers.

—Cindy Schweich Hander

Hiring an Expert

If you have a lot of valuable stuff to sell and not a lot of time to get organized, it may be worth your while to hire a professional. For \$25 to \$75 an hour, a percentage of the profits, or a flat fee plus a percentage of profits, an organizer will do everything from price items to run the show from start to finish. The best way to find one is through referrals from friends. You can also look in the yellow pages under Organizing Services or call the National Association of Professional Organizers at 512-206-0151.

—C.S.H.