

Making Money At: GARAGE SALES SWAP MEETS FLEA MARKETS



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Overview

On almost any given weekend across the country, someone is holding a garage sale, attending a swap meet or setting up a booth at a flea market. The quote “someone’s junk is someone else’s treasure” makes these events both plausible and plentiful.

Most of us are accumulators. We pack what we can into our house without regularly taking inventory until it’s busting at the seams. Then it’s time to decide what to keep, what to throw out and, more importantly, what to *sell*.

So many people spend their weekends out looking for bargains at these types of events and there are plenty of opportunities to make money. Much of it will be clear profit since there is virtually no overhead cost involved— certainly not the same as in a retail shop.

Your first garage sale can be to clean out your “junk”. Your subsequent sales can be for items you pick up at bargain prices at flea markets, swap meets and auctions, which you then turn around and sell out of your own garage. You can still give someone a bargain and make a profit on the merchandise turnover.

Why not you? If you’ve ever had a garage sale, you must have realized the potential involved. All of these customers come to you simply because you put a small advertisement in the newspaper. People come for all kinds of reasons: a day out, a specific objective, or someone who likes browsing in search of that little unknown gem that might have great appeal.

What do people look for? Almost anything! Clothes, books, art, old records, furniture, pots and pans, a fishing pole— you name it! Most people will buy at least one thing. They have that shopping itch! They want to be able to tell someone about the bargain they found! Garage sales are full of surprises for these people. It’s not like going down to a K-Mart or Sears where you know what the merchandise is and where it’s located. Something that would be of no interest to you can be someone else’s hobby!

As you get to be a garage sale *expert*, you will end up going around to these sales and acquiring great deals which you can turn around and sell at a profit. If someone needs cash, there may be tremendous deals out there on the tables. Or if someone is moving and wants to get rid of whatever they don’t wish to move this means a great opportunity to pick up something unusual or needed without spending much cash yourself.

How much money you can earn at your garage sales depends on the inventory and the customer traffic. The variety of goods you have will make your sale more attractive, especially if you start having them on a regular basis. If you’re preparing for one and cleaning out the house, you will likely stumble upon items that you might not have known you had— some of them almost brand *new*!

If it's stored in your attic, basement or other storage space and you haven't seen it for years, much less used it, it's a good candidate for the sale. Some people have wedding gifts they've never used, duplicates or whatever, and they've forgotten they even have it.

It's not only the hidden items, though. Items in plain sight, that are taking up room, have taken on a familiarity so that you may not even see them anymore. It may be a lamp you haven't turned on since you installed a ceiling fan with a light. It may be a chair you never sit in. It may be clothes at the back of the closet that don't fit any longer.

You're ready! You're in the right frame of mind for this task, so let's set up your garage sale.

Making Money At Garage Sales

Introduction

The lamp, chair and clothes we've just discussed are now items to be marked. Get out a pad of paper and pen and start going through your rooms. Begin where you feel most comfortable. The kitchen, the bedroom, the den, wherever! You choose!

Once you pick out the room, go through it thoroughly. Check every corner of the closet, the cabinet, the shelves. Evaluate everything honestly. Try not to over-sentimentalize or you'll end up keeping more than you need. Emotionally detach yourself from as many items as you can.

When listing your inventory, write everything down and make a note next to it like *Must go!* or *Takes up too much room!* or *Can't part with!* These notes will reflect your initial reaction to the merchandise which you can refer to later if you question why a certain item is out on the table for sale.

Everyone has gifts they received but never used. While they appreciated the thought, the item just wasn't *them*, so the gift was kept and never used. Brand new items appear all the time at garage sales and can be priced a little higher than the usual second-hand stuff. It will still be a bargain, and clear profit for you.

Clothes that don't fit or are out of style, couches that are worn, linens that belonged to the kids who no longer live at home— garage sale items are everywhere!

Don't forget the garage itself! Old tools, tires, lumber, rope are all items that someone may buy! If you have a backyard shed, check it out! Put the ladder up and get into the crawl space! Look through the barn! Any part of the house and its various extensions are fair game.

It may be a bit wearisome trudging through the entire house listing items, but don't think about the current tasks. Think instead about the money which can be earned from this work! Think of it as your regular job now.

Setting Up

You've been everywhere and made your entire list. Now it's a question of preparing these goods for the sale.

The greater the assortment of goods, the more likely you'll turn a healthy profit. But just having the goods to sell is not the only ticket to big cash! How you lay them out on display can play as important a role as the items you have in realizing a good money day.

Organization! Organization! Organization!

This is your key to a successful set-up for your garage sale. Items that are thrown together on a table aren't going to be as attractive to customers as those that are diligently laid out in a certain order.

For example, your front tables should have some eye-catching, good value pieces on them. These are the items that will bring shoppers in further. Clothes should be clean and arranged in a colorful manner that looks attractive from the street. If the clothes aren't clean or arranged fetchingly, the "drive-by" shoppers won't even get out of the car. If it doesn't look good from their car windows, they'll go on to the next sale.

All jewelry should be kept in one place, preferably laid out on a nice cloth (perhaps velvet) that will accent their beauty and make them more pleasing to the eye. Lighting is important here, too, as you're trying to highlight the best pieces. A gleam will do— and that's what a good spotlight will do for you. You can even put the jewelry on a swiveling piece to make it easier for people to study the items and turn them around without significant handling. It will also help you to continually rotate the jewelry to feature your best pieces up front.

Whatever tables you use— yours, your neighbors, your friends, your relatives, ones you rent— make sure you decorate them! There are plenty of colorful papers you can buy to cover the tables. Paper tablecloths will do the trick. You can find them at a party store or even the large discount chains. Tape them down or, better yet, put thumbtacks around in several spots to keep the cloth in place. Who knows? It could be a breezy day! Or someone could pick up an item and half the cloth with it. So be sure these are secured.

How do you know where to place your merchandise? How can you be sure it will all fit correctly and as you want it laid out?

The best way to find out is to measure. First, measure the width and length of your garage to see how much overall space you have. Then, measure the tables you will be using and list each one accordingly. Tables can be card tables, picnic benches and table, Ping-Pong board across a couple of cinder blocks— whatever! Just be sure you measure each piece!

Now, on a sheet of paper drawn to scale lay out your tables as they fit into your garage's width and length. Be sure to leave room for people to move easily through to look at the items. You may want to plan to put a table or two into your driveway, but don't count on it. If the weather is bad, you'll need to be sure the garage can adequately handle all components.

Once you've drawn in the tables, now select the places you want to put certain items. Begin labeling the tables with assigned merchandise. Once you know where everything is going, it will be easier to begin setting up your garage for the sale. If you are going to get some help setting up, you can give each helper a copy of the layout with the assigned items per table. It will make it easier for them to follow rather than having to stop and ask you where a particular item goes.

If you intend to have coffee available at the garage sale, be sure it is in a place where no one can trip over a cord. You will also need to make an outlet available for people who want to try out an appliance or other electrical item to be sure it works. This is a good tip for you, too. You don't want any item out that doesn't work without some indication of it. You might still want to sell it to someone who can fix it up, but tell them up front and charge a lower price accordingly.

Selection and Pricing

What items can be sold at the garage sale? Well... just about anything you can think of will be a candidate. Here's a list if you want to keep it to check against what you have. This list is certainly not complete, but should cover most of the items you might have.

Clothes	Books	Radios	Television
Hamper	Toaster	Computer	Tape deck
Irons	Magazines	Sports equipment	Pots & pans
Dishes	Records	Rocking chair	Bicycle
Glasses	Cassettes	Typewriter	Bed or cot
Silverware	CDs	Space heater	Pictures
Pottery	Fishing equipment	Alarm clocks	Coffee pot
Pillows	Tools	Tent	Picture frames
End table	Patio furniture	Playpen	Skis
Tennis racquet	Drapery/rods	Musical instrument	Dresser

Workbench	Rulers	Art supplies	Games
Croquet set	Lawnmower	Leaf blower	Plants
Electric drill	Desk	Ice cream maker	Jewelry
Screens	Aquarium	Exercise bicycle	Luggage
Crib	Roller skates	Vacuum cleaner	Paper/pens
Mixer	Telescope	Calculator	Chairs
Doll house	Flatware	Record/Tape holders	Wastebaskets
VCR	Lamps	Sofas	Loveseats
Saw	Tires	Filing cabinets	Card table
Mugs	Blender	Christmas decorations	Antiques
Posters	Fireplace tools	Racquetball racquet	Candlesticks
Backpack	Dehumidifier	Bedspreads	Linens
Towels	Perfume	Stuffed animals	Toys
Knickknacks	Barstools	Scuba gear	Cameras
Swing set	Hats	Ironing board	Mattress
Gardening tools	Baskets	Electric trains	Bookcases
Dining table	Car parts	Air conditioner	Ice skates

Well, it's a start. You'll think of others as you look around; like that mirror or those bookends. Everyone's list is different and you may have items of great value that don't mean that much to you. Maybe it's an original work of art you can't stand or a 1928 edition of *Oliver Twist* that you've never read. Good items! If you're truly not going to use them, let someone else enjoy them!

Now that you've selected your items, how do you price them? This is a key question. Many people price their goods too high and are surprised when so much is left over. One of the purposes of the garage sale is to get rid of stuff, remember? What good is it if you priced items out of reach for the everyday garage sale browsing?

What is a low price? There should be few items over \$10.00. The stuff you really want to sell should be down under \$2.00, depending on the item. One idea for you is to have special tables marked as *All Items On This Table are \$1.00*. Other variations are 50 cent tables and even \$2.00 tables. People like these layouts. They can pick up several items and only spend three or four dollars. People who

have kids along with them are prime targets for this. If you have some stuffed animals or old toys, put them in a *priced to go* mode, by having all items at one low price. This way the child can get something that doesn't cost Mom or Dad much and may prompt the adult to focus on other items, too, since they've already been treated to a bargain or two on behalf of their kids.

Pricing garage sale items is kind of an art. The big-ticket items like a \$500 antique bookcase will not fit into the \$10.00 or less guideline, obviously. That's okay! You can have a few higher-priced items that serve as anchors around the garage on the sides and in corners where people won't be handling them. You'll find the treasure seekers come early on the first day to buy just such items for their second-hand store. They can clean up the item, nearly double the price, and sell it in their shop!

Specialized antiques or very high priced items might be better sold through a local *Pennysaver*-type publication. You can also bring them to a second-hand shop or an antique store and offer them to the shop owner on a consignment basis. The garage sale is intended for low prices on the great majority of merchandise.

Here are some basic pricing rules to go by:

Clothing: Items that you display on a rack should be priced from 50 cents up to \$5.00 depending on the age, wear, style, type and newness of the garment. Non-racked items should be neatly arranged on a table and priced from 25 cents up to perhaps \$3.00 for a sweater.

Appliances: If you have a number of items, like a stove, washer/dryer, refrigerator or the like that you don't want to sell privately through advertisement, then you should look in your local newspaper classifieds to see what people are pricing these items to sell. This should give you a reasonable range to choose from. Remember, if you really want to sell it, price it low enough to guarantee it to move. A few dollars less than you think it's worth is a smart move if it gets the item sold and out of the house. You can price the smaller items like a toaster oven or a microwave in a similar fashion or simply give it a low price— to move!

Electronics: If you have televisions, radios, record players, VCRs, calculators, computers, typewriters, tape players and items as such, if they are in good shape, you can probably price them at a third of retail price to move it. They should be cleaned up and in good condition. If something is wrong, subtract dollars from your one-third retail starting point.

Books: Divide your collection up into paperbacks and hard covers. Paperbacks should be priced at 10 to 25 cents. If you use 25 cents, offer 5 for \$1.00, too. Hard cover books can be priced at \$1.00 each, except for the older, valuable first editions. Offer the same type of deal, such as 6 for \$5.00 on the hard covers. Many people come to garage sales simply looking for books.

Records, etc.: First, assess your collection of LP and 45's to see if you have any real valuables that collectors may like. If you're unsure, bring them to a record store and ask the owner. Music people will likely pay a better price for some of these. Otherwise, price your 45's at a quarter or less and the records at \$1.00 - \$2.00 each. Cassettes can go for \$1.00 each or less. Compact discs can command a higher price, perhaps \$3.00 each, if in good shape.

Linens: Towels, linens and tablecloths are normally priced at \$1.00 to \$5.00 each. Rugs can be priced up to \$5.00 if in mint condition. Draperies depend on size and condition and can run from \$5.00 to \$15.00 for a set. Find out what new prices are for these items, judge the shape your items are in, and price accordingly.

Knickknacks: Old souvenirs, vases, ash trays and other novelties can go for \$2.00 or less and look good together on one table. It can be one of your *All Items on this Table are \$1.00*. These are the things that have been collecting dust in the house for a number of years, or taking up too much room, or that you won't use (you bought it on vacation when it seemed like a great idea). Price them to go— the lower, the better. You don't want to see these items again!

Selection and pricing of the items are critical tasks. But placing the items out in a certain order can attract the customer, as we have previously mentioned.

First, clean the garage as best you can. You want your *storefront* to be as neat as possible. This would include mowing the grass, trimming the hedges, cleaning up the yard, and even pressure-cleaning the driveway. If you're selling a tent, it's best to set that up outside if the weather cooperates. Other similar *yard* items can join the tent on the lawn or in the driveway: tires, bicycles, lawnmowers, wheelbarrows and similar items are too large to lay out wisely in your garage. They'll just take up too much room! Line the items up on your lawn (or driveway) as you'll line up your merchandise inside: in rows, with aisles for people to comfortably get around and examine the merchandise.

Next, make sure you have enough room on your tables to lay out your items so they can be seen. If items have to be in a box, make it a *fun* box, with all items in the carton at 25 cents each. Well-displayed merchandise looks cared-for, adding to its value in a shopper's mind.

Clean and press clothes you'll be hanging to sell. Mark the sizes clearly so people can see them and won't have to search for tags. People won't buy dirty clothes and you don't want to have to keep telling people the sizes or the prices. Place this information in full view. Label individual clothes with a piece of paper pinned to a sleeve or a lapel.

For electronic items that you still have the original boxes for, place them in or next to the carton if there's room. The original box will list all of the features for you. If you have the original instructions or owner's manual, include it. It could be the feature that cinches the deal.

If you have an unusual item that people might not recognize for what it is, put a card next to it identifying the piece, with its price. If there is something unique about an item's history, write a short narrative about it and place it next to the item. Conversely, if there is a negative thought such as a broken piece, note this on a card and place it next to the damaged item. Honesty is always the best policy. A good bargain is often found by those who can fix goods and use them personally.

Use small circle-stickers to individually price items. These are inexpensive and can be put right on the item without a problem and, more importantly, can be removed by the buyer easily and without damaging their purchase.

Advertising

Selection, pricing and layout is only as good as the number of people that come by to shop at your garage sale. To attract customers, you must get the word out. One sign at the top of your street will not bring in the folks who will do a lot of buying.

First, you should check to see if your city requires you to take out a garage sale permit to hold the event. There is usually a fee and the permit is good for two or three days. You can try and duck this requirement, but you have to take the chance that someone in an official capacity will come by to see if you've obtained the permit. If so, you'll pay a fine that could eat up most of your garage sale profits. It's not worth it! Get the permit and then display it openly in your garage. This looks impressive to your customers, too.

All the major daily newspapers and the local community weekly publications have spaces set aside for classified advertising. There is even a special section separately for *Garage Sales*. This is the first and best place to advertise. Since many garage sales start on Friday or Saturday, you will find the local garage sale *experts* up early and buying the paper to check out where the sales are being held. They will then arrange an orderly plan of attack, geographically efficient, and go to work. Much of this is done at 6:00 a.m. or earlier, so that by the time you open your sale at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m., a group of cars is already assembled with passengers waiting to embark on their treasure hunts.

While it costs money to place the advertisements, it's not much and well worth the value. Newspapers will need some lead time, weeklies greater than dailies, so get your advertisement prepared early. Some newspapers even have garage sale kits that you can pick up with sample ads and material you can use to make signs and price notices.

Your advertisement should be short, to the point and give enough details to spark some interest. Begin with an intriguing heading. Rather than simply say *Garage Sale*, why not print *Incredible Garage Sale* or some similar positive, enthusiastic description of your sale. *Bargain Hunter's Paradise* will probably bring the shoppers out.

Your address may be sufficient alone or you may have to add a couple of words to pinpoint the location better, like *just off Central Avenue*. Make it easy to find you! If the shoppers can't locate your house, the garage sale will not go as well as hoped.

Give a specific time that you'll be holding the sale. Leaving out the time will have people knocking at your door at 7:00 a.m. (those 6:00 a.m. planners, remember?). If you intend to open at 8:00 a.m., you might want to put 9:00 a.m. as your advertised time. Otherwise, if you open up at 7:45 a.m. to put items out, you'll be greeted by the early-risers who want to be there before everyone and you'll find yourself somewhat disorganized and dealing with customers before you're ready. Advertising at 9:00 a.m. means you can open the doors at 8:00 a.m., place your items outside, and arrange your tables for a good twenty to thirty minutes before the early-birds show up.

You have a smart opener, your location and the times of your sale. Now, you have to promote certain items that you believe might get someone's attention. If you have a lot of antiques, say so. If you have a marvelous book collection that you are unloading, write *books* in the ad. Something like *clothing, books, records, antiques, furniture, unique items* may fit the bill. It gives people a general idea of what you have without being too wordy. Words are money in an advertisement.

Finally, you should note whether you will hold the sale in inclement weather. If not, indicate this to save people the trouble of coming by if there is rain, snow, sleet or hail.

The classified advertisement will bring most of the traffic. But there are ways to pull in others who may not have read or missed the ad you placed. These hand-planted signs can do the job in helping people find your garage sale— those that were already coming and those who spot your sign and spontaneously decide to come by.

If you live in the back of a development or several streets off the main road, you will need several signs to use as both advertisers and directionals. These signs should be LARGE and easy to see. Don't go for the 8 1/2 X 11 sheet of paper nailed to a ruler. That won't be easily seen and will not stay up for long in any event. Think in terms of two feet by three feet to make it a sign everyone can see and read.

Use colorful, eye-appealing paper. Write *Incredible Garage Sale* on top with the time, date(s) and address to follow. Make the lettering large and easy to read. Put arrows if directionals are indicated at the place you've posted the sign. Staple the cardboard sign to a piece of wood and nail it into the ground or put it up on a telephone pole or street sign. Municipalities aren't crazy about sign hanging, but if you don't abuse the privilege and take down the signs and nails immediately after the sale is over, you'll be fine.

You can even employ your children to walk up and down a main thoroughfare advertising the event, carrying a placard much as they would for a political candidate or if they were on strike. The more noticeable the advertisement, the more likely you'll draw the curious.

Get your signs out early to advertise the day of the sale. This is another reason to start at 9:00 a.m. instead of 8:00 a.m., so you'll have time to get out and place them. If you leave them out the night before, they may not be there in the morning for any number of reasons, from weather to vandalism.

Make sure you have your directional arrows pointed in the correct way. If drivers could come from either side, have arrows on both sides of the sign. People make errors on their directions all the time and it leads to frustrated shoppers who will simply go on to the next sale.

Proper sign design takes some time, so don't leave it for the morning of the sale. You should only be placing them around that day. Do your signs in the evenings leading up to the sale. It will be a busy week tagging items, setting up the tables, putting merchandise on them, *and* sign-making, but it will be worth the time and effort.

Your signs are going to be the shopper's first impression of you and, by extension, your goods for sale. A favorable image, portrayed by a neat, easy to read, colorful sign, will be in the shopper's mind as they approach your tables. They'll be feeling positive— and that usually means a few sales

for you!

You might consider putting up flyers about your garage sale on bulletin boards in grocery stores, Laundromats, church and community centers. If you work close by, you may be able to place a flyer on the company bulletin board or even an ad in the company paper. People know you and may want to swing by to see your sale!

In addition to avoiding municipal trouble, you should retrieve your signs, nails and flyers when done, since you may be able to use them again for your next garage sale. It will save you the cost of buying all of that material again.

A week or two before you plan to have your sale, you might want to take a weekend and hit the garage sales locally. You're not out to buy, unless you see a deal you couldn't pass up. You're out to learn. See how others set up their sales. Notice what works and what doesn't. Listen to hear compliments and complaints. How is everything organized? Are the prices marked clearly? What are the prices?

You should see some consistency in the pricing and arrangements. At least you should get some ideas as to how to arrange your garage sale. You'll see mistakes to avoid and find ideas that will work well for you. If an attractive layout catches your eye, chances are it will catch someone else's eye when it's your turn for the sale.

Other people may want to "go in" on the garage sale with you. Your garage, their items. Decide yourself if this is a good idea. You don't want to turn down a friend or relative if you have room, but if adding a few other items of theirs will detract from your merchandise arrangement, then be firm and tell them it's not possible to combine efforts this time. Set up another date when you might have less stuff and, in combination with their items, may do quite well at this later time.

You can also hold a "Friends Preview Sale" the night or two before the sale is open to the public at large. Invite a few friends over, have a few refreshments and then turn them loose. You may earn a substantial amount of cash just from this special advance sale. Make it friendly and fun!

Bookkeeping

How do you know if you did well at your garage sale? Good records are a sure bet to value your efforts. Simply listing inventory, expenses and revenue will paint a picture of your financial success. This would also be critical if you are selling other people's merchandise in addition to your own. You'll have to track it separately. Label the price tags with different colors or other codes like prefixes (N- 25 cents) to properly identify the articles that belong to the various sellers.

Keeping separate envelopes at your cashier's stand can help you organize the goods as they are sold. If you have a couple of friends or relatives selling items, too, simply pull off the tag at sale-time and place the coded label in the appropriate envelope. For example, if you have codes N, S and T to indicate pieces being sold on behalf of three separate parties, all the N tags removed would go in the N envelope all the S tags in the S envelope and all the T tags in the T envelope. You can note each

item on the outside of the envelope as it is inserted and the tag placed in the envelope. Noting as “candlestick - \$2.00” will be a second way to check the inside coded tags against the running totals on the outside.

Maintaining a separate inventory list for each seller is important, too. As time permits, you can cross off items sold as you compare it to your specific envelope. What’s not crossed off by the end of the day should still be out on display. This way you can check it easily.

If you have to depend on memory, your relationship with a friend or relative could be on shaky ground. Better to have detailed, organized records, especially if you intend for this to be a career for you. Specializing in garage sales may mean your selling a lot of items from other people on consignment. It’s best to get your system down early on, and it will create trust in the minds of your seller-clients.

Make sure you have plenty of change for your cash box. Dimes and quarters should abound as well as one dollar bills. Get fifty dollars in various quantities of these three and keep a record of how much you initially place in the cash box and of what denomination.

Should you take a check? That’s up to you, but it is recommended that, without a driver’s license to record information from on the back of the check, you shouldn’t take it. Most of the time, a check will be for a higher priced item(s) anyway and the person should have plenty of identification for you to copy on the back of the check. If you choose not to deal in checks, you could accept a deposit to hold an item for a set time limit (three hours), giving the person time to acquire the necessary cash to complete the transaction.

There might be some people who offer you a figure you believe to be too low for one of your higher priced items. Don’t completely rule it out! See if the individual will leave a name and phone number to contact in the event you are not able to unload it for your price. That party may still be interested at the end of the weekend and it’s better to get something for your article as opposed to keeping or otherwise disposing of it for nothing.

The art of negotiation is one best practiced. There are people who are really good at it and others that detest the entire process. This is the way goods have been bought and sold in this country for much of our early history and there is still some of that old “*horse-trading*” going on today. While you wouldn’t be able to do this at your grocery store check-out counter, it’s a perfectly acceptable procedure in a garage sale.

People are out for bargains. Part of the fun is to see if they can get you down from the price you’ve listed on your items. Expect it! Don’t be insulted! Get into the game yourself! An item priced at \$8.00 may bring an offer of \$6.00. Counteroffer with \$7.00 and settle for \$6.50. Make the sale! People enjoy the bargaining process and so should you if you want to specialize in garage sales. When you go around to buy items that you can sell at a profit later, negotiate. The lower the price you can get, the better the chance to sell it at a good price during your subsequent garage sale.

There are professionals out there to watch. These are the folks who will make you an offer for the entire inventory you have displayed. Or for a collection of something. Or for all your glassware. Or for your hard cover books. Be careful! You can often make far more by holding out and continuing your garage sale rather than settle for an offer to move the entire lot off your property. If you are

selling goods for others, you should discuss this with them in advance. They may want you to take a one-time offer for their articles. If so, it's good to know that in case the "pro" happens by.

Make money and move your inventory! That's the objective, no matter how it is accomplished. Keeping that in mind will help you get through the negotiating that will be a part of garage sale day.

The Sale

You're ready. You've made your selections, priced your goods, made your signs, advertised and the big day has arrived. Hopefully, you'll get a good day, weather-wise. Everything is on the prescribed tables. The layout is well thought out and designed to attract viewers— and buyers!

You've put out your morning signs. You advertised your sale an hour later than you're prepared to handle it, leaving plenty of time for last minute touches, or any final plans you've overlooked. You may have forgotten to label an entire table! Better to do it before the guests arrive! That extra hour will help.

It won't be an hour, either. The early birds will begin cruising in 30-45 minutes ahead of schedule, but that's okay! You're ready! The *All Items 10 Cents* boxes are displayed in prime view— one for the kids and the other for adults to browse through. This is the carrot that will bring them in for the other items.

Do you want to put out refreshments? It's not a bad idea, but don't overdo it! Coffee is fine in the morning, iced tea in the afternoon. You can offer muffins, donuts and other food, but it's not necessary. If some of the food you bought is tainted for any reason, you may be in for more trouble than your good intentions warrant. If you offer anything, keep it to drinks in paper throwaway cups.

Be careful to keep children away from the tables that have china or glassware or other breakables. Stores have the same problem. Just be aware of it and set those tables up well inside where kids are less apt to be. Adults will still be able to get to the table and look without it being up front or accessible from all sides.

Shoplifters can be present just as they would be in a normal retail environment. As much as you can, keep an eye out for the occasional thief. If you have your higher priced items in the back of the garage near you and the cash box, it's less likely you'll have a problem with these individuals. Children may take something without knowing, which you can easily point out to the adult who accompanied the youth. Having a couple of people helping you out can discourage those who would try to steal any articles.

At the end of your sale, check your inventory. You may receive a few offers from last minute shoppers to take the rest of it off your hands for one low price. If garage sales are your specialty, you may decide against that offer, knowing you may be able to sell the items at your next sale. If you really want to unload it all, take the offer and be done with it.

For other leftovers you don't want to keep, check your local charities like Goodwill, the Salvation Army, the local homeless centers and the like. Books may be great donations for a hospital or nursing home while clothes may be perfect for a downtown shelter and toys for a local orphanage.

If you have some high-priced items left, run classifieds or advertise those items specifically by name on a flyer posted at area bulletin boards. Leave a box at your curb with a sign that says "help yourself" for some items. People will! You can also package up the "junk" and take it down to the local landfill. There will be assorted places to dispose of the various remainders.

Congratulations on a successful sale!

Once you've attained your degree in garage sales, you can move on to the flea markets and swap meets and mix with the real professionals. These are the mega garage sales where people can go from one "garage sale" to the next without getting in and out of their cars. Whether they're called Flea Markets or Swap Meets, it's the same idea; acres and acres of goods for sale by people like yourself.

Generally, they're open on weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) just like garage sale, since it's when most of the people can come. There may be new or old merchandise for sale, inside and outside of shelter. You will see several jewelry displays, record collections, books, clothes, some furniture, many antiques. In short, it's a larger garage sale! It's like a Mexican marketplace — only right here on American soil. It's the social event for small-town America.

You can find some items you might want to include as part of your next garage sale, providing you can buy them at a price low enough to turn around and re-price it for sale. You may decide that, if the inventory you've accumulated is large enough, you want to purchase booth space and sell your goods here with the rest of the sellers.

If you or a family member specializes in some type of homemade crafts, this can be an outlet for your wares. If you or a relative or friend is an artist, perhaps some paintings would be well suited to this purpose.

The best sellers are usually new goods available for extremely low prices. If you have access to goods that you can buy in volume and turn around for a profit, this is the place for you. The weekly earnings of many of these merchandisers are hefty!

Since there are so many booths, you have to do something to make yours stand out from the rest. Balloons tied to your booth's sides will set you apart. Or an attractive, eye-catching neon sign might do the trick. Free popcorn from a popping machine may bring the shoppers to your merchandise. Any good trick will do!

Like your garage sale, try and do your best to make an attractive, organized appearance. The same reason someone driving by your garage might slow down and stop will be the device that slows the traffic down at a swap meet or flea market. Be polite and courteous and friendly! Smiling is contagious! Make sure people are glad they stopped by even if they didn't buy anything. Being positive is a great way to approach life.

If you think the art of negotiation was important at your garage sale, you haven't seen anything yet. Wait until you check out the haggling that takes place at one of these ultra garage sales! There will be much bartering, counter-offering and bluffs associated with this type of buying method. Be prepared for it.

If you do it well, you can earn a small fortune at this type of selling. If you've got a garage, you're in business! If you don't, but have a yard, you're in business! You can carry it to the next level and buy booth space at a flea market or swap meet, but just some well-planned local garage sales will earn you a lot of cash. You're on your way to big profits!

APPENDIX

GARAGE SALE ORGANIZATION

4 weeks before the sale:

1. Determine if you are doing the garage sale alone or if others will be involved in it with you.
2. Organize a meeting of all those involved.
3. Agree on a date.
4. Agree on the location.
5. Take inventory of all participants and divide up the allocated space accordingly.
6. Agree on all pricing up front.
7. Begin to set aside items in an organized fashion by placing items together by table.

3 weeks before the sale:

1. Call your newspaper and see if there is a garage sale *kit* available. Find out their deadlines for advertisements.
2. Identify other publications in which you intend to advertise and find out their deadlines.
3. Diagram the floor plan of the garage or yard. Assign tables based on the inventory notes made last week.
4. Determine how many tables you will need and begin to accumulate them from whatever sources you intend to tap.

5. Assign categories by table and by individual. Note these on your already drawn diagram.

2 weeks before sale:

1. Place your advertisements that need to be in at this time.
2. Recheck the house and all the storage spaces to be sure you didn't miss anything.
3. Pick up the material and begin making your signs and flyers.

1 week before the sale:

1. Place any other advertisements that work on a shorter deadline.
2. Put out the tables in prearranged order in your garage. Put up the clothes rack.

The last week:

1. Put up your flyers on area bulletin boards.
2. Start arranging the merchandise on the various tables.
3. Price every item, using self-adhesive labels.
4. Obtain your cash box.
5. Pick up change in dimes, quarters and singles for your cash box.

The Day of Sale:

1. Put up your signs around the neighborhood.
2. Put out your items that will be in the yard/driveway.
3. Plug in the coffee pot.
4. Have Fun!

Good Luck!

Richard Dean

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