

House Numbers - The "Instant Profits" Business

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House Numbers - The "Instant Profits" Business

Anyone who lives in a city has ready access to an old standby that's always good for a daily income. In Los Angeles for example, it is not unusual to work about four hours, spend less than \$3.00 for materials, and take home \$50 - \$100 for a day's work painting house numbers on curbs!

There are almost never any rules for house numbers in residential areas -- some have large numbers on the door, others small numbers or names on their mail boxes, on the side of the house (under the ivy or behind the rosebush) and still others with no markings whatsoever.

If you have even tried to find an address in a strange neighborhood, you have undoubtedly experienced the frustration of looking for a house number where there are none displayed. Most people understand this frustration, which is why it is not difficult to make money solving the problem.

To get into the curb painting business, all you need a set of number stencils and a couple cans of fast drying spray paint. Then find a neighborhood that needs house numbers on the curbs and go to work!

The procedure is to paint on the numbers first, then go up to the house, explain what you have done and ask if they would care to contribute a dollar or two towards your expenses and labor (leave the actual amount up to them). Since you are not charging for your service (only accepting donations), you will seldom if ever, need a license or permit (if in doubt, check with city hall or the county clerk's office). That is all there is to it!

Although there are many variations, the system described here is recommended for beginners. You can always alter your procedure after you have a little experience under your belt. If you ask the people first you may do fewer numbers for nothing but you will also get fewer contributions.

Technically you also will be contracting for service and therefore fall under many laws that don't apply to "volunteer" work and contributions. Asking the occupants first gives them the opportunity to say no.

Many people that would not otherwise pay (renters, visitors, people in a bad mood, or those with something else on their minds for example) will feel obligated to contribute when you tell them you have already done something for them and would appreciate a donation if they think it was a good job.

A psychologist would tell you that you have just switched the question from whether or not they want to pay to have their curb painted to whether or not you did a good job! It's very tempting to get into various styles and color combinations, but resist that temptation.

One well-meaning but unsuccessful curb painter started out with a can of white latex (background) and dark green enamel for the letters and proceeded to ASK PEOPLE if they would like him to paint their number on their curb. He didn't do very well!

Color options might be OK for those rare people who ASK for a custom job -- but the easiest, fastest, cheapest and smartest way is to use black fast drying paint and metal or hard paper standard style stencils.

After getting started, you can design your stencil holder so to hold 4 or 5 numbers that can be slipped in and out rapidly. Your holder should also be engineered to place all the numbers about the same height from the street (and the top of the curb).

Other extras may include a can of fast-dry cement colored paint (you might to mix the color yourself) to correct mistakes or cover curb blemished.

Also, some making tape, edging paper and fast-dry white in case someone asks for a white background (in this case, you simply white over the already painted numbers, re-do them).

Note that the fast-dry requirement is to allow you to move fast -- to be able to change the numbers rapidly and make any necessary corrections without making a mess.

Of course, it always helps to look presentable. Dress for the area you are working in so you won't frighten or alienate the residents that you want to contribute. You want them to see you as a nice guy who has just done them a favor and is performing honest work in exchange for volunteered payment.

All of the number you paint should be the same size, style and color, and should be placed as close as possible to directly in front of the main entrance to the house. Most curb painters use 3 or 4 inch numbers (depending on curb sizes), plain block style, and a dull, fast dry black (or dark green) paint.

For special orders, you can use fancier stencils, reverse image (white numbers on a black background) other colors, or even florescent paint. You can use paper or metal stencils that slide into a holder (you can make yourself), or get a set of brass stencils that interlock. Either can be put together fast and easily cleaned.

The technical procedure is to first determine which numbers go where, something you can usually find out by looking around a little.

Most numbers advance by two's on each side of the street; odd numbers on one side; even on the other. When you are satisfied that you know the correct numbers, set up your stencils, "shoot" the street number, then go up to the house and ask if they would like to donate. Most will, but some won't -- or will not be home.

You can do nothing about the ones who do not care to donate without causing more problems for yourself, so just smile and let them enjoy their freebie. They may be financially embarrassed, just visiting, or planning to move out the next day.

For the ones that aren't home, have some small notices printed that explain what you did and tell them where to send their donation. You can type out several of these on a single sheet of paper, then have copies made and cut them into say 6 per sheet.

You will soon find that painting X number of curbs will generally yield so many dollars in donations, so few "not homers" and a couple of refusals aren't going to ruin you. They correspond to the hot checks and bad debts other businesses have and are considered "part of the cost of doing business" -- except that at least yours don't cost you anything perhaps a penny's worth of paint!

If you do this very much, it might be a good idea to have some inexpensive business cards printed (see WALTER DRAKE, Sources), and place inexpensive ads in community papers.

Some operators hire neighborhood kids to go up and down the streets the day before they plan to work, distributing "flyers" that say you will be there the next day or so paint on their number, that the service is free, but they are welcome to contribute -- and what to do if they prefer.

If you use this system be sure and include what to do if they do not want their house number painted on the curb. This action seems to stimulate donations, and also lets people know what that guy out there is doing to their curb. These flyers can also include an offer to do custom work.

One other alternative is to provide those who donate with a "receipt" that just happens to have your name and other services you offer.

In this business, as with most others, your image is very important. You want to appear as an honest, hard working, but commercial individual (so do any people you hire), who is trying to earn extra money by providing a needed service. This is why a

rubber stamped or inexpensive business card and home-made (and copied) flyers are fine.

BUSINESS SOURCES

DICK BLICK, Box 1267, Galesburg, IL 61407-1267. 800/477-8192.

Large, reliable supplier of art and related suppliers. Has brushes, stencils, etc. at good prices.

THE KELSEY CO., P.O. Box 941, Meriden, CT 06450. 203/235-1695. Art and printing supplies, all kinds (including brass and paper stencils suitable for curb painting). Old, reliable co.

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. Letterhead: 400 sheets plus 200 envelopes - \$18.

SWEDCO Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3; Business cards - \$13 per thousand.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) 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.