

You Can Be A Professional Engraver In Six Weeks!

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You Can Be A Professional Engraver In Six Weeks!

Plastics (and some metal) engraving is accomplished with the aid of a pantograph -- a scissors-like device with tracing stylus on one end and a cutting tip on the other. It works something like a Le Roi set. The operator guides the stylus by following or tracing within the grooves of brass "masters" (letters or designs), which causes the other end to cut or scratch the identical design, but not necessarily the same size into material fastened beneath it. By adjusting settings on the pantograph, the operator can make the design the same size, twice as large, or up to eight times as large as the pattern being traced by the stylus.

Plastic name tags, signs, etc. are made from layered plastic. The core is one color, coating another. When the top layer of blue is cut through, the white core shows -- which results in white letters on a blue background.

Different sized cutting blades are used so that large letters have wider strokes and the edge of the name tag is beveled to frame the finished product. There are many combinations of colors; some even have three layers for usual effects.

Metal name tags are similar except that the cutting blade does not rotate and the design is actually "scratched" into the surface. Metal tags are considerably more expensive and are probably not worth the extra cost. The metal is usually brass or some other soft material that comes with a plastic coating but still scratches easily.

The vast majority of name tags and engraved signs are on plastic, some of which looks very much like metal, but wear better and are easier to work with.

Plastics engraving requires no special talent or extensive training. One only needs to acquire a little dexterity, which can be learned in a few hours and a high school understanding of measurements and ratios.

Engraving is a business that grows amazingly fast and has very little competition. With an initial investment of \$1,000 - \$3,000 in equipment and startup materials, you can learn to operate the machine, lay out copy and start turning out finished products.

It takes about 30 minutes for the average person to learn how to make a one line name tag, complete with cutting the letters, beveling the tag, and attaching the pin on the back. With a little time (and a few mistakes of course), you can easily master multiple line layout and some of the other routines.

Turning out a name tag only takes a couple of minutes for an experienced engraver, especially when many are made assembly line fashion.

Engraved plastic signs and badges routinely sell for ten to twenty times the cost of the materials because of operator skill, investment in the equipment, and the fact that there is not all that much competition.

Used engraving machines (New Hermes are one of the better brands) are sometimes offered in ENGRAVERS JOURNAL for about half retail along with other pertinent equipment and supplies.

There are two basic types of engraving machines -- manual and computer. They both turn out good quality work, but the computer is much faster.

The computer engravers run several thousand dollars, but are well worth that to large operations that turn out hundreds of badges and signs per day. Whatever machine you get, make sure it has multi-ratio adjustments. Some of the cheaper and older models will make letters only exactly 2 or 4 times the size of the pattern -- which just won't do. You must be able to adjust the size of the letters at fractions of those ratios, according to the length of the line.

A name like Joe Doe, for example, should be in bold letters, while Frederick H Moskovitch must be adjusted down to fit within the width of the name tag.

With the cheaper models, you have little choice and sometimes have no choice but to make these names too big or too small.

With an adjustable pantograph, you simply place the cutting blade at the margin of the name tag, and that is the setting. All names will "look right."

This multiple adjustment is even more critical when you get into logos and larger signs, where 4 times won't fit on the sign and 2 times the size will make the sign look like it has too much wasted space. With the adjustments, you can always have nice margins -- about the width of two letters.

This business is adaptable to wholesale or retail trade -- and there are plenty of places where you can send out work that you can't (yet) do -- large companies that "service the trade, and still leave you room for a modest profit.

If, for example, you got an order for 1,000 fire escape signs that you simply could not do in the allotted time, you send the order out to a company that does the work by computer. You would

not make as much doing the work yourself, but then you would not be doing the work either. In fact, you would be working on other jobs. Not only that, but your customer dealt with you -- he knows that you can take care of him.

To get a good look at the engraving industry, subscribe to THE ENGRAVERS JOURNAL (418 per year). Read a couple of issues, investigate some of the advertisements, and notice the different companies that serve the industry -- these can help you get a good well-rounded business started.

A special note of possible interest: rubber stamps can be made from engraved designs! Anything you can engrave into phenolics (hard plastics for outside use), you can make into a rubber stamp with a stamp or laminating press. Engrave the design fairly deep; clean and dust with talc (baby powder is fine), cover with rubber and heat 5-7 minutes at 2-4lbs. pressure. When cured, peel off, trim and glue to a mount. Years ago, vendors would set up shop in heavy traffic areas and make rubber stamps to order in about 10 minutes.

It is easy -- almost unavoidable -- to add profitable sidelines, such as hot stamping, inside signs, rubber stamps and desk accessories to an engraving business once you get started. these require essentially the same skills, very little additional investment, but most importantly, you already have a ready-made market for these added products because it is the same as for your engraving business!

Probably the biggest and most expensive headache encountered by engravers (as well as sign and rubber stamp makers) is getting the name or message incorrect.

Most "pros" soon discover the value of repeating back, letter by letter, every word of copy that is to go on the product. There are some letters that some of us seem to have more trouble with (like "B" and "D") over the phone -- so if there is any possible doubt, it is a good idea to say "B as in boy or "D as in dog."

On a single name tag the loss is not much, but large orders could be disaster. Also, keep a dictionary handy (within easy reach of the engraving table) and look up any word that could even possibly be incorrect (call the customer if necessary). Last, but certainly not least, keep the order that shows the desired copy in full view during the engraving process -- and check it constantly.

BUSINESS SOURCES

THE ENGRAVERS JOURNAL, Box 318, Brighton, MA 48116, 313/229-5725. The trade journal of the engraving industry. Subscribe to this as soon as possible!

A TO Z ENGRAVING, 1150 Brown St.,Wauconda, IL 60650.
312/526-7396. Custom engraving and hot stamping for the trade.

NEW HERMES, INC., 20 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003.
Manufactures high quality engraving equipment and sells high
quality (and high priced) parts, accessories and supplies. Their
engraving mechanical engraving machines have been industry
standard.

AWARD SUPPLY CO.,1212 California Ave.,Arlington, TX 76015,
817/465-7210. dealer in used engraving equipment.

ABILITY PLASTICS, INC.,3254 Laramie Ave.,Chicago, Il 60650,
800/323-2722. Engraving equipment, cutter sharpening, wide
assortment of supplies and materials -- excellent prices.

ENGRAVING MACHINERY AND SUPPLIES, 419 East 91st St.,New York, NY
100128. Wholesale engraving equipment and supplies.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 31 East 2nd St.,Mineola, NY 11501.
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. Write for price list.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3;
business cards - 413 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 ink or color.