

# Starting A Small Printing Business From Your Garage

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## Starting A Small Printing Business From Your Garage

With a small printing press in your garage, basement or shop - accept and contract (at first) for printing jobs that are too small for your competition. The possibilities include doing jobs for stationery stores, advertisers, sub-contract work for larger printers and the local newspaper, as well as custom retail orders such as wedding announcements, personalized greeting cards, advertising flyers and the like.

Most printers, including many small town newspapers have a problem with very small (less than 1,000) orders because of their set-up costs and the fact that their system is geared towards large orders (small ones can actually be a nuisance).

They have acquired presses, typesetters, computer oriented equipment at a very high cost - so they can do the big jobs efficiently. In most cases, their fancy equipment requires a lot of work, time and expertise just to set up a job regardless of how many copies are to be printed.

Offset printers may waste several hundred copies just getting their equipment properly aligned! That's why they may charge \$250 for 100 copies and only \$300 for a thousand.

Some commercial printers would be happy to sub contract their small jobs. They can probably make more profit - and keep their customer too! Of course, you would return the favor by referring or sub-contracting jobs that are too large for you.

Actually, there are three basic types of "printing". Although our concern here is with the printing press (the old-fashioned way), we should be aware of the basics of the other two methods.

Copy centers nowadays offer "printing" services - they can print in several different colors, reduce and expand, and they can provide excellent master copies by the "cut and paste" system (glue text, illustrations, logos, onto "masters" and then copy them).

Desktop computer systems are also fast coming onto the scene. A computer system costing as little as \$5,000 can produce finished pages that look almost like magazine pages. Although both of the above are used to produce "copy ready" masters for copiers and photo-offset printers, these are normally very large jobs that a small printer couldn't handle anyway.

The smaller printer's only real competition (aside from other small printers) is the copy service and desktop publisher, both of which are fairly expensive.

A desktop publisher would probably charge \$25 to \$50 to design a master for a single page flyer. The customer would take the finished flyer to a copy service and pay about 5 cents per page to have them copied ("printed"). Total cost for 1000 flyers: \$75 - \$100.

In contrast, a small printer could set the type in a few minutes and run off 1,000 copies in an hour - at a total cost of about \$5 (paper and ink) plus labor.

Obviously, the small printer can do the job for considerably less, therefore, he can charge less and still make a good profit. And, the customer only has to make one stop!

Small printing is an interesting and potentially profitable business that is well adapted to a garage or shop operation.

One large room is usually adequate and it is an art that most people can learn in a very short time. Kelsey (see Sources) offers an impressive "Printer's Guide" for \$2.50 that should be especially helpful to the novice.

New printing press outfits start at around \$300 for small (3" x 5") printing capacity and go on up to well over a thousand dollars. Used ones are much cheaper and are becoming more plentiful as more of the "biggies" upgrade to sophisticated equipment and computers to go after the large jobs.

You should be able to find a suitable used press at a very good price if you look around. Look under Business Equipment in large city want-ads, where complete outfits are sometimes offered (retirees, companies that are updating, as well as those that want out).

Some of these outfits will include variations that can result in increased opportunities. A printing operation that must get out a paper every day and two magazines a month is concerned with speed, capacity and labor costs.

When they upgrade, their old equipment has usually already been depreciated out (the entire price they get for the equipment is considered "profit" by the IRS). And, they need the room for the new presses NOW - so they are usually anxious to sell!

With their old equipment, a small business person (like you!) can learn the business, do a variety of profitable jobs, and make a very good living in the bargain. One of the first things to learn is to maintain contact (business friendship) with one or two larger printers.

Usually, they will be happy to advise you (after all, printing

is their "first love", too) as well as take care of any jobs that are too big for you. Learn their rates - what they can and cannot do, and how long it will take them to do a job.

This is not only to get an idea of how you should operate, it is also so you can still accept work that you can't handle and "farm it out" to the larger printers, who will give you a discount (your commission). This way, you make a little profit instead of none - and keep your customers!

Another trick is to work with your customers to help them get the most for their money (especially when it doesn't hurt your profit margin).

For example, it is much cheaper to use one color ink on colored paper than two colors of ink on white paper - yet the effect is virtually the same. Quite often, saving the customer a small amount here and there will build customer confidence that no amount of advertising could accomplish.

A printer is also concerned with "cuts". These are metal dies that produce illustrations, logos and decorations other than type. Most printers soon accumulate an assortment of cuts such as borders and corner embellishments - many of which are available at very low cost from printer supply houses.

When a customer wants his logo to appear in print, you will have to send out the illustrations to have a cut made. Many large printers make cuts and charge \$5 or so per square inch. The supply houses do too, but printers are cheaper (and faster, if there is one in your own area).

The general rule for a logo is that the customer pays the entire cost (sometimes the small printer adds a little for his trouble); the printer keeps it, and all future use of it by that customer is at no charge.

In the event the customer wants a personal copy of the cut, charge him at least double, because he probably wants to let another printer use it.

When you use it, you only charge him "wholesale", but if he wants it, he must pay "retail" for it! If the cut is copyrighted, it cannot be used for any other customer - if it's not, but is associated with that customer, ethics demand that you not use it for other customers in the same area.

Of course if it is simply a common illustration, there is no problem with using it for other customers. The one who needs it first pays for it.

When you get started, consider buying or renting a copy machine

for VERY small orders and to enable you to make up sample lay-outs by the "cut and paste" method, run off a copy and show the customer a "proof" of the order.

A copier is also an excellent device to attract customers into your place of business. Also, for about \$100 or less, you can get a new "roaster" attachment for small printing jobs. This is a heater system that uses special inks that expand (curdle) when heated, to look just like those expensive thermograph print jobs! This produces very high quality looking business cards, for example.

Another high profit potential is to offer pictures on your printing jobs. Have a large printers (or newspaper) make photoengravure cuts to fit your press.

In addition to doing sub-contract work for larger printers and stationery stores, there are literally thousands of printing jobs that can be done for private individuals. Especially if there is a good deal of competition in your area, you need to look around to see where a good market might be.

Note that all you need is an idea for a couple of products or services that are not now being adequately provided, or if they are, they are inadequate or too expensive.

Some examples are: business cards, advertising sheets (flyers, mail-outs), menus, forms, announcements, cards, programs (sports, school plays), tickets, letterhead, personalized note pads, resumes, and don't overlook printing a few copies of the local poet's works! One printer, located near a college, specialized in printed resumes whose letterhead includes the client's picture.

One additional, potential profitable option is to print your own products to sell: booklets, maps, guides, coupons or even a small advertiser (paper).

See also B223, Publish a Home Business Index for Fast Profits, and B254, Starting Your Own Co-op Coupon Business From Home.

Any of these suggestions can be used in combination with others shown here, or that you might come up with.

For example, you could print your own "product" between custom orders, add a fast copy service, or even your own computer typesetter and/or desktop system. The main thing to remember is to do quality work and keep your word - produce what you promise WHEN you promise.

Before you even solicit that first commercial job, be confident that you have practiced enough and "ruined enough paper" to feel

confident that you can do it right. Your most severe critic should be YOURSELF.

## BUSINESS SOURCES

THE KELSEY CO., Box 941, Meriden CT 06450. Printing equipment and related supplies (paper, fonts of type, inks, woodcutting tools, hot stampers, presses). Old, reliable company.

GRAPHIC ARTS TECHNICAL, 4615 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15214. Printing supplies for the home printer.

TURNBAUGH PRINT SUPPLY, 104 Sporting Hill Rd., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055. New and used printing equipment and printing supplies.

PRINTING INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, 1730 Lynn St., Arlington, VA 22209. Information on starting a printing business.

GRAPHIC INTERNATIONAL, Box 4639, Margate, FL 33036. Trade magazine for printers; features new and used equipment for sale.

INNES CO., Box 368, Northbrook, IL 60062, 312/564-5490. Publishes IN PLANT PRINTER, trade magazine for printers.

AMERICAN PRINTER, Box 132113, Whitehall, OH 43213. Wholesale printing supplies; info on starting in the business.

LELLI PRINTING & ADVERTISING, 2654 Cr 175, Rt 2, Loudonville, OH 44842. 419/994-5302. Write for current price list.

CREATE-A-BOOK, 6380 Euclid Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45236. Home base book binding business (investment = \$4300).

PERSONAL PUBLISHING, Box 390, Itasca, IL 60143. Trade magazine for desktop publishers, especially beginners (features MacIntosh) - \$30 yr.

MECKLER PUBLISHING, 11 Ferry Lane West, West Port, CT 06880. Publishes SMALL PRESS, trade magazine for small printers and publishers.

EMPRINT, 329 Gunckel, Dayton, OH 45410, 513/252-1452. Offers used small photo offset printing presses.

R.R. BOWKER CO (XEROX CORP), 205 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017, 212/916-1887. Publishes SMALL PRESS, bi-monthly trade magazine for small printers and independent publishers.

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. Low-cost printing.  
Write for price list.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps,  
business cards, etc.

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.