

Turn Clutter Into Cash with these Simple Garage Sale Secrets

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Countdown to a Garage Sale

The larger your sale, the more traffic you will have and the more buzz it will create! So consider having a neighborhood sale—or at least asking a few neighbors in the area to join you on that day.

Start by finding out if you will need a permit, or if there are restrictions and rules you'll need to follow. If you have a homeowners association, start with a call to them. They may have all that information. Or call your city government offices. Tell the operator to connect you to the appropriate department.

Now--let's get started!



- Go through closets, kitchen drawers, the kids toys, clothing closets and start filling boxes.
- Make sure you have plenty of tables. There is nothing more annoying than having to look at things too packed onto tables and spread all over the ground.
- Do a little arm-twisting for help on the big day. Line up a few friends to work the sale with you.

One Week to Go

- Start saving newspapers and plastic grocery bags. Make sure you have plenty of them saved so you have enough to put people's purchases in or to wrap fragile items in.
- Wash and clean everything. Dirty items are hard to sell.

Two - Three Days to Go

- If you are having the sale in an enclosed/covered area, start setting out tables and clothes racks and placing items out.
- Bundle up bath towels and hand towels that match. For bedroom linen put the size on it (such as "queen" or "full." Put a ribbon around the bundle to make it look attractive and to prevent people from taking things apart.
- Use Ziploc bags for small items which are hard to put a sticker on, such as little toys with extra pieces, also for jewelry that might be easily walked off with.
- Keep "like" items together such as books on one table, kitchen stuff on another.
- Get a large cardboard box or two for freebies. Label the box "Free for Kids Only". Fun goodies like McDonald Happy Meal toys, balls, toy cars, crayons, etc. This keeps the kids busy while parents shop and is always a big hit.
- Make name badges to identify you and others as the sellers so shoppers know whom to ask for help.

- Have an extension cord handy so people can check electric items.
- If some toys need batteries, have batteries available so shoppers can make sure the toy works.

Pricing and Protecting

- Masking tape is a great tool for making price stickers. Cut the masking tape into approximately one inch stickers and line them all up on the back of a cookie sheet. Pull them off as you need them and with a thin magic marker write in the price per item. Or you could use a colored sticker system so that items don't have to be individually priced. Post a legend on a prominent poster board - (For example: orange sticker is 25 cents, red is 50 cents.)
- Also use the poster board to put up prices of items that will all be the same price: (jeans: 50 cents, hardcover books: \$1). That way they don't have to be individually priced.
- Tape two-piece breakables together. But first be sure the tape won't take off the finish!
- If an item is broken and doesn't work or is missing a part (such as a toy), mark that fact on the item.
- Make sure you have plenty of change. (\$75 to \$100 in bills should be sufficient. Have lots of dollar bills and quarters.) Don't keep all of it outside with you. Keep some locked up in your house for use later. Make sure you write down how much change is in the change box so you can subtract that from all your sales at the end.

Tips for Realistically Pricing.

- Price items realistically. Give folks a bargain, but don't give it away. A general guideline is to price items at 1/4 or 1/5 of the retail price. However, this is a very general guideline. You may be able to get more on some items and much less on others. Obviously new items will bring more (especially if the price tag is still on it!). You'll want to consider the demand for the item you're pricing.
- Mark every item. You'll avoid a lot of questions and haggling this way. Groups of similar items like books or video cassettes are an exception; it might be easier to just mark them 25 cents each rather than mark each one. Items such as this are also great to offer a deal: 25 cents each or 5 for \$1.



- You'll never get book value or even close to it at a garage sale, but it's still nice to know what something might be worth online. So if you're not familiar with the value of an item, check online to see what it is selling for on eBay (checked closed auctions!). It might be worth holding onto and selling at a later date online.

Day of the Sale

- Put on a pot of coffee--put out a few Styrofoam cups and offer it to those early morning shoppers (free).
- There are mixed feelings on whether to allow the Early Birds. If your signage or advertisements say you open at 8 am, some garage sale gurus say be sure you are open by 7:30am. Many good shoppers come very early to ensure they get the best buys. They are the professionals--there to spend money. The other side of that coin is that opening early annoys those who play "fair" and show up at the designated time. It's your call. If you don't want people coming and browsing early while you're trying to set up, place a chair at the end of your driveway with a sign on it that says "Absolutely NO early shoppers!" They will stay away.
- If it's a hot day, consider having water or soft drinks to purchase. If you've got younger kids--set them up with a lemonade stand (but offer water too).
- Designate one person to be in charge of the money box, as well as keeping a close eye on any small valuable items. Remove the larger bills out of the money box periodically through the day.
- Say hello and goodbye to shoppers, it's not any fun to go to a sale where you are completely ignored by the seller who is reading a book or engrossed in a long-winded telephone conversation. You should never be too busy to say hello.
- When people purchase a breakable, be sure to wrap it up in newspaper before bagging it up. Or if you are super busy, give them the space and opportunity to pack it themselves.
- When it's time to discount stuff (at the end of the day when you want to slash prices) remove any items marked "firm" and put them away or on a special table.
- Consider putting up a sign advertising everything left will be 1/2 price after 3 PM (or whatever time you choose), with the exception of a few things marked firm.

Advertising & Signage

- At least a week before, start listing the sale on Craigslist. Listings are free and can be very effective. Every two days, re-list the sale so that it stays near the top of the listing page.
- Place an ad in the local newspaper or advertising flyer. This may cost you \$20 but should pay for itself if you have a good selection of merchandise.
- If you really want to get serious. Create some flyers. Leave some in local coffee shops, libraries, post offices, grocery stores, church bulletin boards, etc. Use bright colored paper to print the flyers on, as this will stand out more.
- Make use of free advertising bulletin boards in your community to publicize your sale. You can also advertise in your local newspaper.
- Make sure that you have signs strategically placed in your community. Place them in high-traffic intersections within a few miles of your home. If you live in the boonies, include directions in your ad. Use bright (yellow or lime green work well), paper with BIG, fat lettering. Staple your bright, easy-to-read sign to cardboard for stability. Drive by your own signs to make sure that they are visible from a distance.
- If you live in a community with a homeowners association, be sure to learn the homeowner rules before putting up signs or considering a garage sale in the first place.
- Use your network of friends and business associates by sending them an e-mail. Ask them to send it on to others as well who they may know are interested in purchasing items at a reduced cost.
- Create a sign that reads: "No reasonable offer refused". Bartering is the fun of it!
- Make sure you have signs posted that all sales are final, you are not responsible for accidents, and if you are accepting checks. You can even have signs that stated "You break it, you buy it!".

- Word of mouth can have a great affect. A few days before, begin telling everyone you can about the yard sale, and ask them to pass the word on.

What items don't sell well:

Baby clothes sell very well at garage sales, as do baby toys and other baby items. However, adult clothes and shoes tend to not sell well, as adults are more wary of worn out clothing and shoes. If you do decide to sell clothing, then separate your clothing tables by sizes and hang the clothes.

Use a little psychology.

- For the early morning shoppers, consider having donut holes and coffee.
- Have pleasant easy-listening music playing in the background; shoppers will linger longer.
- If the weather turns out to be a hot day, you may want to have a large tub filled with ice and cans of pop or small water bottles for sale.

After the Sale:

- Don't be afraid to give most of your left over goodies to charity. Some of them will give you a tax write off form for your donations. Only keep things that you want to try to sell at the next sale. If it doesn't sell after two sales, you should donate the item(s) to charity then.
- If you're going to donate the leftovers, find out who will come pick them up or where you can take them immediately after the sale. Be sure to take off any price tags you put on items. Some charities won't take items that have price tags on them.
- Be sure to remove your signs promptly. You won't want people knocking on your door after the sale is over.

A Few Words About Safety: Scammers and Thieves.

Fortunately, thievery isn't all that common, but as your mom always said, "Better to be safe than sorry." Here's a list of common ploys designed to distract you while you're getting ripped off.

- Distraction is a common tool that yard sale thieves use. Sometimes they may bring a small child and let the child loose at the sale, hoping that the seller will keep an eye on the child to make sure they don't bump into the table of glassware giving the scam artists opportunity to shoplift or switch price tags.
- A scam artist may try to "help" the seller by totaling the prices of their items they want to purchase. Probably 99% of the time it's an honest buyer just wanting to save time and be helpful. But be aware of this tactic.
- A shoplifter may try to be less obvious by just taking the actual item (like pocketing a CD but leaving the empty case), or opening a box with an item inside - pocketing the item - and then leaving the empty box on the table so it doesn't appear obvious.
- When selling small valuables, such as jewelry, it's best to designate one person to watch over the table.



Above all...keep your sense of humor and make the day enjoyable for everyone. Encourage people to haggle and make a game of it. You'll sell more stuff, make more money, and have a lot of fun with the right attitude. Best of all--you'll clean out your house!