

# HOW TO START YOUR OWN PAPER RECYCLING BUSINESS

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## **HOW TO START YOUR OWN PAPER RECYCLING BUSINESS**

One of the easiest - and in fact one of the oldest ways of making extra money - is by collecting old newspapers and selling them to a recycling plant in your locale.

Believe it or not, you can develop a very respectable income collecting and selling paper to the recycling centers. It certainly does not take any education, specialized training or experience; it's as simple as saving your old newspapers and turning them in to a central collection depot.

Some "paper recyclers" are making more than \$100,000 a year in this business. If other people are doing it, then there's no reason you can't do it! About the only equipment you'll need is a pickup truck or trailer that you can pull along behind your personal car. We even found one "old timer" who was collecting paper in this era with a pushcart! While interviewing him, we found that he was deliberately choosing not to expand, although he very definitely could have.

The prices being paid for paper these days by the recycling centers will astound you (and remember that the quotations we give here may have escalated sharply since our research). For instance, old news papers are commanding \$50 per ton and more; used cardboard, \$75 a ton; and high grade office paper as much as \$120 per ton. This kind of money for used paper that you can generally pick up for free can move you onto Easy Street in a hurry. Everything, of course, depends on how well organized you are, and how hard you work at building your business.

Make no mistake about it, we live in a paper world. Americans use 200 million tons of paper each year - for everything from daily newspapers to books and cardboard boxes. After quick use, we throw away at least 100 million tons of this paper, almost all of which could be recycled. This means that there's about 8 billion dollars worth of paper out there that can be collected and recycled each year. So if you are looking to start a business with real profit potential, what are you waiting for?

Just look around your own home. In the garage or basement, for instance. What do you do with the old newspapers after you've read them? How about all the mail you get each week? Chances are this waste paper just piles up in some corner of the garage or basement until one of the kids asks if he can haul it off for the school or cub scout paper drive. Or maybe your wife and kids get ambitious some weekend, clean out the garage and haul it all off to the collection truck at one of the local shopping centers. (We said maybe!)

It's true that selling stacks of newspapers you've accumulated during the past couple of months or so won't make you rich. In fact, it's doubtful your own accumulation of paper will add up to a ton a year, and that certainly won't amount to much in extra income. But think about the tonnage involved in the stacks of old newspapers you could collect from your relatives, friends and neighbors. You could easily collect a 100-pound sack of old newspapers from the people in your neighborhood each week - and that's your immediate neighborhood.

And then think about the total extra income you would have when you have hauled all this paper down to the recycling depot. If you're serious, and get yourself properly prepared, you can easily make \$300 or more every weekend, and it won't involve all your time. Some planning and effort on your part are the prime requisites.

Start by clearing a space in your garage for storage. One side of a two-car garage, or any 8 by 12 foot space should be sufficient. If you have a garden shed that's dry, that would work well also. Some paper collectors even rent space in a neighborhood mini-warehouse. We've even seen some paper collectors store their collected paper on pallets in their backyards, using tarpaulins over it to keep it dry. The important thing is to have a space available to store your collected paper until you're ready to haul it to the recycling depot.

Being a firm believer in doing as little as possible of the physical work involved in any business, I recommend you hire people to do a lot of this for you. By that I mean you should contact all the cub scouts, girl scouts, and civic organizations in your area; tell them you'll pay them money for the paper they collect and turn in to you. At the same time, contact the counselors at the schools and colleges in your area and tell them you'll pay them for all the paper they collect. The idea is to get everyone in your area collecting paper for you, eliminating the need to do the actual collecting yourself.

How much of the gross profit you allow or pay these people who do the actual collection is up to you. The average rate is \$25 to \$30 per ton when you are getting \$50 per ton.

In the beginning, you may have to make up a sign and tape it to the side of your pick-up or car, and "pound the pavement" yourself, but you would expect to do this in starting any business. Basically, there's nothing to this excepting that it takes time you could be using to do other things; but is there anything more important than getting your new business "off the ground?"

A simple sign such as JOE'S PAPER RECYCLING SERVICE - Phone 123-4567, is about all that's necessary. You could have this made up on a magnetic mat at most quick print shops. Have a college art student make one up for you on butcher paper, or have a professional sign painter produce one for you on heavy card stock.

With this sign on the side of your pickup, car, or trailer, simply drive through the residential neighborhoods of your area. Park in the middle of a block, get out and start knocking on doors, asking the residents if they have old newspapers or cardboard boxes they'd like for you to haul away for them. Generally, you'll get an armload of old newspapers at every house. Simply carry them to your pickup or trailer, then go on to the next house.

If you'll set up a definite route to follow, certain streets on certain days about once every two weeks, you'll find the homeowners will have stacks of paper waiting for you. Regardless of whether the person answering the door gives you a stack of papers, always leave a business card at each home.

Some paper recyclers offer to pay the people saving newspapers for them, and having it ready for them when they make their collection rounds. Generally, this isn't necessary. If you'll develop regular collection days for each street or neighborhood,

you'll find the people putting papers out for you just as they set out their garbage for collection.

There are even some paper recyclers who charge the people to haul their paper away. This isn't advisable, because once you start hauling rubbish, you'll end up doing clean-up work, and hauling more to the dump than you do to the recycling depot.

Once you have your collection routes organized, you can hire students to make your collection rounds after school, and haul the paper to your storage center. You can set up crews of three - one to drive the truck or car while the others knock on doors on each side of the street.

Depending on how much paper each route gives you every two weeks, you could have a crew working several routes each day for minimum wage, probably so much per truck or trailer load, and expect to collect a couple of tons of paper for every three hours they work.

Again, by hiring other people to do the actual collection work for you, you'll not only free yourself for other work, but you'll be making more money: Three people can do more in less time than one person.

The next thing is to set up an area-wide collection depot. This could be a pre-fab building on a vacant lot, a vacant used car lot, or a closed service station.

In setting up an area-wide (or neighborhood) collection depot, you will need space - some sort of shed to store or stack your papers in until you load them up and haul them to the recycling center where you sell them. You'll need a scale to weigh them, and some sort of office or desk space to manage your cash and books.

You'll need space enough for your customers to drive in beside the scale and unload their papers, and at the same time an arrangement whereby you can pay them immediately. A vacant service station would be ideal. Your customers can pull in just as if they were going to purchase gasoline; you could have your scales set up between the driveways where the gas pumps are usually located, and store your accumulating loads in the service area of the building.

In most cities or counties, you'll need a business license or permit. For more details, see our report, *Basic Steps To Starting Your Own Business*.

You'll need a couple of signs, one on each side of your driveway. These will announce the fact that you buy old newspapers. They need not be anything fancy, just simple attention-getting announcements that you're open for business and paying money for paper. Generally, the going rate for newspapers dropped off at a central collection depot is \$.02 per pound, and the papers need not be bundled. This will give the sellers \$40 a ton for dropping them off, and at \$50 a ton, that will work out to \$10 per ton profit for you. (Again, these rates are rising, so be sure you are absolutely current by checking out the going price in your area.)

In addition to old newspapers, you should organize your time and schedule to call upon all the businesses, stores and warehouses in your area. Talk to the business owners or store managers and ask them if you can haul away their old cardboard boxes.

If there's competition in your area, you might end up having to pay for these boxes, provided they're clean. The thing to do is to call upon everybody who uses paper products or cardboard boxes. Remember, the more people you have giving you paper, the more money you are going to make. Many already established recycling services do not bother with the smaller stores and warehouses, but these add up quickly if you are diligent in finding a number of them.

Check close by in your surrounding area, and find out if the businesses are satisfied with their present pick-up service. Ask first if you can "have" their old boxes; many of the smaller stores will give them to you because it decreases the load for their rubbish service to haul away. Where necessary, offer to pay per pound if they'll save them for you.

As mentioned before, the important thing is to get everyone providing paper for you - people collect and have it ready for you to pick up when you drop by on your designated collection day. Besides that, you start making really big money when you can park your truck in one place and fill it up from a group of closely located stores or businesses. With this in mind, you could conceivably drive through four blocks, making one stop in the middle of each block, and have a ton or more of paper or cardboard boxes every fourth block.

One other thing you'll need in order to efficiently handle cardboard boxes is a sharp knife with which to slit the sides of the boxes and flatten them out as you load them onto your truck or trailer. A simple "handyman's utility knife" costing about \$5 will handle this chore for you with ease. When you buy one, though, be sure to buy an extra supply of blades as well, because cutting through cardboard will dull your knife very quickly.

Another paper products source: the offices in your area, particularly those with computers. The age of computers has ushered in more reports for offices than ever before, adding reams and reams of paper to the average office trash basket. When you visit these offices, take along a couple of "Save-a-Tree" boxes and ask the office people to discard all their waste paper into these boxes for you - letters, envelopes, outdated reports and files. You can usually get the "Save-a-Tree" boxes at your recycling depot, and when full, we're talking about 35 to 45 pounds of paper. Most offices will fill one of these boxes in a week or two, depending, of course, upon their volume of paperwork. And while you're on this kind of "foraging" trip, don't forget to check in at all the print shops. They waste and throw away almost as much paper as they sell.

It will pay you to contract for a quarter page ad, or the largest ad available that you can afford, in the yellow pages of your area telephone and business directories. Whether or not you advertise the prices you pay in the ad is entirely up to you, but generally it's not a good idea to do so, because you would be stuck with those rates for over a year. You might word your ad to explain that you pay one rate per pound when paper is brought to you, and another rate when you pick up and haul away.

At the same time, you should run a regular classified ad, perhaps even one with more words in the Contract Jobs section of your daily paper. Your best advertising days will be Thursday through Saturday. These are the days when people are specifically thinking about cleaning up around the house or their offices. Also, these are the days when people think about what they can do to earn extra money.

This is the kind of business that "snowballs" with visibility and word-of-mouth advertising. It will definitely benefit you, then, to join the various civic and service clubs in your area, attend their luncheons and mingle with the business leaders in your area. Volunteer to assist in some fund-raising events, and whenever possible, become a guest speaker and tell about your business.

It isn't hard to stand up before a group of people and talk about your business, particularly if you know what you're talking about and believe in what you're saying. It does take at least an outline of a script, perhaps a few notes, a rehearsal and the essential ingredient of enthusiasm.

Make your talk interesting and informative. Do some research and present statistics on how much paper the people of this country use each year. Explain the limited supply of timber, and the need to recycle as much as possible. Detail how these facts and figures opened your eyes, and caused you to do something about it - to open your own recycling center. And then, lead your talk into explaining how the recycling business is an avenue for everyone to benefit: the ideal fund-raising endeavor; a cleaner environment; and a chance to preserve some forest land.

Getting free publicity for a recycling center can be easy. In addition to serving as guest speaker before civic and service groups in your area, you may find radio and television stations and newspapers, and even weekly shopping guides anxious to give you time or space.

By all means, try to get a story into these people detailing your grand opening, follow-up with appearances on talk shows, and press releases about the different organizations raising money by collecting newspapers and turning them in to you. Set up a contest among the different organizations, with prizes for the teams or organizations collecting the most paper. Hold special "Seniors' Days" when you pay extra for all paper turned in by persons over a certain age. Keep an eye out for angles such as the largest amounts turned in, and stories about your regular collectors who keep turning in paper regularly until they attain money goals.

Emphasize in your publicity contacts that recycling is a kind of community service that benefits all citizens. You're cleaning the environment, conserving timber, and putting money into the pockets of all who participate. Think about it; submit press releases to the media; calling them and inviting them to cover human interest stories emanating from your business!

This business takes organization, some energy on your part, and at least in the beginning, your time. But if you put forth the effort as we have outlined, there's no reason you shouldn't easily realize a very comfortable income with your own RECYCLING BUSINESS. It takes effort on your part, but if you're looking for a lucrative business, you have here a plan to act on!