

# A Furniture Refinishing Business In Your Home

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## A Furniture Refinishing Business In Your Home

If you have a garage or work building and are willing to learn a craft, upholstering, re-upholstering and/or furniture refinishing would make an excellent home business. The investment is comparatively small and there is always a market for these skills and the products they yield.

if you do not already know how to upholster or refinish wood, the first priority is to learn how. If you are experienced, you can begin with small projects and work your way up to the more complex and better paying jobs.

In the case of a husband and wife, one could specialize in each to provide a complete service! Learning these crafts starts with reading, then practicing. If possible, get a job working in the field to learn direct from the professionals. Otherwise, there are schools, courses and hundreds of books covering every possible aspect of furniture upholstery and refinishing.

During your preparation, you may decide to specialize --modern, antiques or just chairs and sofas for example. When you are ready for customers, have a sign made and place an ad that announces your services (be specific). Put signs on your car or truck too, so people can see them when you pick up or deliver furniture.

When you bring in jobs that are badly in need of repair, take "before" pictures of them -- to compare with "after" pictures when they are finished.

Post the best of these in a photo album to show prospective customers and for possible future use in ads or brochures (you may need well contrasting black and white photos for these.) Arrange your album with good examples of each major type of work that you do and include a short (no more than 3 line) title and explanation for each. This way, if you are busy, customers can browse through them while waiting.

These pictures will not only show what fine work you do-- they will also suggest other jobs to the customer. Use a good camera for these pictures (hire a photographer if necessary), so the pictures will accomplish their mission.

Plan your shop according to the work you are going to do in it. You will need more room to refinish tables, stands to do smaller items and a dust free section for the application of wood finishes. Upholstering takes less room, but the area must be safe from mice and moths -- especially your storage areas.

When operating a business like this, you will be asked to

recommend finishes, fabrics and methods. As a professional, you are often in a better position to answer these questions than your customers, but be careful not to routinely recommend those things that bring you the most profit. remember that they may also ask someone else! It is OK, however, to point out things that are easier (therefore, cheaper) to work with.

You will find that in the long run, honestly really is the best policy!

Pricing in a business like this is very difficult, and you have to give estimates on most of our work. If you see the cost is going well over your estimate, give the customer a call before proceeding.

The rule here is "never surprise a customer with bad news." If the cost is slightly more, and your "estimate" was pretty firm just absorb the cost as the price of a "lesson" in how to estimate. Your pricing of course, will be based on the cost of materials, labor and utilities plus your profit.

Note that labor and profit are two entirely different categories.

Labor is the amount you would have to pay someone to do the job;

profit is your "override" on the labor plus your profit on the materials (usually 25-40%).

A fully qualified upholster or furniture refinisher should not earn less than \$10 (gross) per hour -- and in some areas, \$25 per hour may not be out of line for top quality work. When making your estimates, add a little "padding" (perhaps 5%) to cover unforeseen costs. Always figure your estimates and prices with good quality materials -- when you use lower quality materials, usually to save money, let it be your customer's decision.

The fastest way to learn if you want to get into the furniture refinishing or upholstery business to redo some of your own.

Take a chair or table, set up a practice area and try your skill. Use BIX finish remover (available at most hardware stores) to remove paint ( a second coat will also remove the stain), clean thoroughly, sand and apply the new finish.

The secret is not to get in a hurry! Let the wood dry between operations; take the extra few minutes for a first class sanding job; wait another day for the finish to dry enough for the next coat, and go over the surface with fine steel wool (if recommended) and wipe thoroughly between coats.

In a business, you will have several pieces in different stages of completion, so the temptation to rush will not be so great.

Another way to help expedite your "education" is to hire an experienced helper -- for both the assistance and "lessons."

In addition to your signs, have a good quality 3 or 4 line rubber stamp made to custom print your own invoices and even business cards.

If funds are scarce, get some duplicate ticket books at the local stationery store and stamp your name on each original ticket to get "custom printed" invoices.

As long as your business is not too professional, you can place 3 x 5 cards with your name and services on supermarket bulletin boards. Keep an ad in the local paper, but change it a little every so often (like a new special every month), to help stimulate interest. When you are ready for more business, put an ad in the yellow pages.

Whenever business lags, you can always contact rental agencies (both real estate and furniture) to either buy used (but good quality only) furniture that needs repair, or to do their repair work. The profits will be lower, but low profits are better than NO profits.

Also, bear in mind that refinishing and re-upholstering other people's furniture is not your only option.

You can also buy things to restore -- from auctions, garage sales, foreclosures (business furniture is a whole new market!) and from individuals who answer your "will buy" ads. The item you buy to refinish must bring at least double its cost PLUS a fair return for your labor and materials to restore it.

For this reason, buy only high quality or antique furniture, so you will "have something" when it is completed.

One possible pitfall in the refinishing and upholstery business is unpaid bills. People sometimes really want to have a couch recovered and visualize how nice it would look with a nice, quality (expensive) fabric.

Trouble is, while the couch is being covered they spot a new item at half what they owe on the old couch -- and buy it!

This leaves the upholsterer with \$100 worth of material cut and sewn onto a \$50 couch. The message here is to protect yourself; get enough down to ensure the recovered couch will be worth your investment should the customer "disappear."

**BUSINESS SOURCES**

MINUTEMAN, INC., 115 N. Monroe, Waterloo, IA 19101. Sells furniture refinishing supplies, plus a "business kit".

BEDFORD LUMBAR CO., Box 65, Shelbyville, TN 36710. sells unassembled cedar hardwood furniture.

DATHO MANUFACTURING, INC., Box 12110, Lubbock, TX 79452. Manufactures of upholstery sewing machines.

MODERN UPHOLSTERY INSTITUTE, Field Building, Kansas City, MO 64111. Offers a course in upholstering; free booklet.

UPHOLSTERY TODAY, Box 2754, High Point, NC 27261. Trade journal for furniture upholsterers. Note: this is the journal of the Upholsterers International Union of North America, 25 N 4th St., Philadelphia, PA 19106.

JIM DANDY SALES, Box 30377, Cincinnati, OH 42530. Upholstering instructions and supplies.

FREESTYLE, 17835 E Skypark, Irvine, CA 92714. sells "Sundura" furniture kits wholesale. Free info.

LEISURE PRODUCTS BY BB, Box 3171, Apollo Beach, FL 33570, 813/677/8280. Instructions and fittings for PVC furniture; kit \$15 with samples, catalog and manual.

HOME FURNISHING, Box 581207, Dallas, TX 75258, 214/741-7632. Biannual magazine for home furnishings dealers and manufacturers.

VISTA COMMUNICATIONS, INC., 180 Allen Rd., NE, Ste 300, Atlanta, GA 30328.. Monthly magazine for furniture retailers.

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.

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.