

All About Getting Into Rubber Stamp Business

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All About Getting Into Rubber Stamp Business

Every business and most households use rubber stamps routinely - they are accepted as a necessary part of life.

Although there are several variations (self-inking, impregnated rubber), the "old fashioned hit the ink pad" type is still far and away the most popular -- and is likely to remain so for the future. Making rubber stamps can be both interesting and profitable.

There are at least six different methods for making rubber stamps and anyone considering this as a business should know about them.

The oldest method is hand carved type, which is still used today in the orient - Chinese in little stalls on the streets of Taipei for example will hand carve your "han" (Chinese family name) into a rubber stamp for a few cents, or into an ivory or bone han for a little more.

Not long ago, it was possible to have a genuine signature stamp made this way. It took one of these artists (who speaks Chinese) about 10 minutes to carve a complete signature (in any language) from a carbon (backwards) copy -- at a cost of less than a dollar. A similar art is still practiced in this country - but more on that later.

The most common method of making rubber stamps is with hand set "foundry" type. Individual printer's type is hand-set, along with any borders or illustrations (cuts) into a holder (chase).

The stamp maker inserts the letters, spaces (ems,ens), lines and line separators (leads) and any fillers into a reverse image of the desired stamp. All of the letters, etc., are "type high," a standard term meaning equal height so they will protrude from the chase to make a uniform impression.

When assembled, the chase is tightened to hold the "copy" firmly in place and a trimmed piece of specially treated, plasticized board (matrix) is placed over the design. The chase and matrix are then placed in a machine that applies measured heat and pressure which gently squeezes the layout in the chase into the matrix and leaves a positive impression of the desired stamp in the matrix, which is allowed to cool and cure.

Since matrix is a thermosetting plastic, it can be molded only once; it will not soften when re-heated. Raw rubber is then cut to size and pressed into the matrix by the same heat and pressure machine. When the rubber is "cured" (2 or 3 minutes), it is trimmed, glued to a mount, and PRESTO, a rubber stamp! During the

molding process, powder is used to prevent sticking -- and plain baby talc works great.

The second method is very similar except that NEGATIVE (not foundry) type is used. This type is the same size (type high) as the former method, but much more expensive.

With negative type, the finished rubber stamp is formed in a single molding operation; there is no need for matrix or a second heat stage.

The disadvantage is cost and the fact that negative type tends to stretch (due to heat and compression in the chase), which produces uneven letters on the stamps. This method is recommended only for single and "rush" jobs.

Third is the use of the really old fashioned linotype molding machines (e.g., Ludlow) that actually mold a newspaper column width line of type at a time.

This used to be printing industry standard and works fine for rubber stamps, but is quite cumbersome.

There are a few around today only because newspapers and other printers have sold (or given them away) to upgrade to modern printing equipment) these machines use molten lead, are quite large, and understandably generate a lot more heat.

When you type a line, molten lead is forced into its internal molds to produce a standard line of type, in whatever style molds that have been placed in the machine.. Once the line of type is cooled, it is placed in a chase and made the same way as foundry type stamps.

The fourth is the same general idea as the Chinese "han" carver, and is not used by professional rubber stamp makers in this country. It is the art of hand-carving designs, logos, etc., into a large eraser (especially art-gum) or polymer, then using it as "stamp art."

The official publication for this type of stamping is RUBBER STAMP MADNESS (see Business Sources), which contains helpful hints, ads and subjects of interest to enthusiasts.

The fifth method is seldom used anymore, except by stamp makers who are also engravers, but it is worth of mention to those who also engrave.

Using phenolic plastic which will stand up to heat), the operator engravers the design as deep as possible into the plastic (like a plastic name tag, or the bank teller's sign). The plastic is dusted with baby powder, a strip of stamp rubber applied, and the

combination placed in a heated stamp press.

Since the impression is negative (just like negative type), the finished stamp can be molded direct.

These stamps usually do not have deep letters compared to the type molded varieties, but can be made fast. They might be nice when customers want the same logo on a badge and stamp. It only takes about 10 minutes to cut a name (for example) into a piece of phenolic and then mold a rubber stamp into it.

Some have done quite well with this system setting up in shopping malls.

The sixth and newest method involves photo processing and requires a larger investment, but it represents THE rubber stamp industry of the coming age.

It is rapidly replacing the other methods because it is cheaper, faster and much more versatile. These rubber stamps are not rubber at all -- they are PHOTOPOLYMER. Most look like clear plastic, although colors can be added to disguise their appearance.

In this process, a facsimile (picture) of the desired stamp is types, printed or even drawn onto a sheet of paper and photographed (or exposed onto film). The image is then placed in a machine that exposes a light sensitive plastic gel (polymer) in sheet or liquid form (the plastic "sets" only where light strikes it). The entire underside is exposed, and then the top is exposed, and then the top is exposed through the film with the desired stamp design.

After a few moments of cure time, the exposed polymer is washed (most is water soluble) and cut up into individual stamps (most stamp makers do a full page at a time). In the washing process, the raw (uncured)plastic simply washes away, leaving a 3-D impression of each facsimile, which becomes a "rubber" stamp.

Obviously, anything that can be put on paper can be made into a rubber stamp with this process: regular type, Illustrations, even signatures!

Photographs can also be made into rubber stamps with this process as long as there is sufficient contrast. The foundry type method is the least expensive way to get into the rubber stamp business. Heated presses start around \$250, and type runs about \$25 per set (font) new. For starters, you will need a set each of 10, 12, and 14 point type, a chase, fillers, leads and spacers, and an assortment of routine cuts and designs, plus some rubber,matrix and a selection of holders.

An outfit large enough to start making rubber stamps commercially should run \$500 or so, but very soon you will have perhaps a thousand dollars in supplies because all of them get cheaper as you buy more.

You should be able to find plenty of used foundry type -- since many printers are going to photo offset and computers, and it would not be impossible to locate a used press as well. If you want to go "all out," Ludlow sells a plastic processor for around \$2,000 that should take care of a pretty good sized business.

Note that with the photo process you don't need type -- just polymer and stamp mounts, plus a system to put the impressions onto paper (copier or newspaper headline marker).

Stamp moldings and handles are purchased in volume. Handles come in many sizes, but 1/4 and 3/8" (the size of the shaft that is inserted into the mount) are the most popular.

Also, natural wood seems to be the best choice if you carry only one type. Here are cheap plastic handles and mounts, but forget them until you are established. Mounts are sold in 24 to 36 inch lengths, which you saw to each desired length and finish the ends.

The best mounts to start with are the ones with clear plastic sides under which you can insert a printed sample of the stamp.

When the stamp rubber is ready, cut a piece of molding to length, sand ends slightly (on a rotary sander if you have one), install a handle with a rubber mallet (no glue is necessary unless it is a bad fit), and glue on the rubber strip.

Print the stamp on the paper that comes with the kit, cut and insert it, and you have an finished rubber stamp. Note that plain paper glue is used to hold stamps to their holders.

TIP: When you buy paper glue, also get an equal amount of thinner. That "rubber" glue dries out easily, but a little thinner now and then does wonders.

Marketing rubber stamps is almost as varied as the manufacturing methods. You can retail them through advertisements (local or mail order), specializing in one size and type style, or wholesale to local stationery stores.

A typical three line stamp retails in local stores for about \$4.95, but will be offered in mail order magazines for 42.95 because the marker specializes, takes a couple of weeks to get your stamp to you, and gets a little extra for "postage and handling."

You can produce self-inking stamps simply glue the rubber impression into a \$2 self-inker), notary seals with a special chase and cut; or contract with large companies to make all of their stamps.

Wholesaling involves a discount of 25 to 40 percent, but the retailer does much of the "work" in exchange for his share. The cost of making a three line rubber stamp is approximately 35 cents, plus 5 or 10 minutes labor.

Once a rubber stamp business is established, there are many "sidelines" that can make much more profit with little more investment in either time or money. You could handle embossers (take orders), specialty advertising, stock signs, and desk plates.

the same people who buy your rubber stamps will also be in the market for other products that go with starting or running a small business, and they are already there! Find out what those other products are and add them to your "line."

TIP: If you have any future plans to include laminating, check the machines offered by Warner (see Business Sources). Their laminating machines are not much more expensive than "plain" models, but have several additional features that are very useful in stamp making as well as laminating.

They are water cooled, have accurate temperature and pressure gauges (and controls), and there is heat to both the top and bottom platens.

Something to watch out for in the rubber stamp business is misspelled words and incorrect copy. When taking an order, be especially careful to get it exact.

When setting up a stamp, keep a copy of the order in front of you, and double-check it "religiously." Also, keep a good dictionary handy and use it whenever there is any doubt.

It is also important that your finished stamps look good. Make sure the ends of the stamp mount molding are smooth, that the copy you stamp in the window on the stamp is clear, straight and well centered.

These are little things, but they are very important.. They can make your business successful.

BUSINESS SOURCES

EVATYPE DIVISION OF EVATONE, 4801 Ulmerton Rd., Clearwater, FL 35520. Negative type (possibly only source left - prices accordingly!).

JACKSON MARKETING PRODUCTS, Brownsville Rd.,Mt Vernon, IL 62864, 800/851-1334. Stamp making supplies and equipment; makes dies (cuts) for the trade (good place to get a notary die for your state made).

SUPERIOR STAMP MFG. CO., 1800 W. Larchmont Ave.,Chicago, IL 60613. 800/621-1205. (also, office in Dallas).Rubber stamp supplies and equipment -- also embossers and other possible sidelines. Large company.

MARTIN RUBBER STAMP SUPPLIES, 1432 Major Dr.,Jefferson City, MO 65101. Rubber stamp supplies; custom and standard cuts at good prices.

GREGORY MFG. CO. INC., Box 1303, Jackson, MS 39205, 800/647-7152. Wood stamp mounts (handles, strips, inserts, etc.), desk sign mounts. Reliable company; excellent prices.

THE ENGRAVERS JOURNAL, P.O. Box 318, Brighton, MI 48116. 313/229-5725. Trade journal for engravers, hot stampers, rubber stamp makers.

WARNER ELECTRIC CO. 1512 Jarvis Ave.,Chicago, IL 60626. Laminating machines and supplies. Their laminating press also makes an excellent rubber stamp press; has temperature & pressure gauges, timer and heat to both top and bottom patens.

ODESSY PUBLICATIONS, Box 168, Newfield, NY 14678. Publishes RUBBER STAMP MADNESS, interesting magazine for hand carved rubber stamp enthusiasts (not professional stamp makers).

CONSOLIDATED STAMP MFG. CO. (COSCO), 11432 Chairman Rd.,Dallas, TX 75243. Rubber stamp and related supplies. Large Company.

JUSTRITE-LEWIS MELIND, 2912 McKinley Ave.,Dallas, TX 75204. Rubber stamp equipment and related supplies. Large company.

START STAMP SUPPLY, 1720 Marshfield, Chicago, IL 60622. Rubber stamp supplies and equipment.Catalog - \$1.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC. 31 East 2nd St.,Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc. Good source for photopolymer stamp cuts selection.

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 and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design for \$1 more, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run Business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality, but little choice of color or style.