

# WHAT REALLY MAKES MONEY

*An Independent Review of Business Opportunities & Money-Making Enterprises*

## 8 Good Reasons to Steal the Secrets of Britain's Most Successful Retailer

I'm inspired to bring you this opportunity after reading about an exciting new development at John Lewis.

John Lewis... what's that got to do with me, you may well ask?

As you might know, in times when bricks and mortar retailing is having a pretty tough time, John Lewis is something of a shining light. Take their Home Solutions business. Home Solutions helps customers find tradespeople to do jobs round the house like building, plumbing and electrics. And it's absolutely thriving at the moment. Consider the fact that there are 1.2 million new kitchens installed every year! That's a lot of handiwork.

Well, a little earlier this year things took a very interesting turn when John Lewis bought a company called Opun. Here's their website: [Opun.co.uk](http://Opun.co.uk). Basically, Opun is a start-to-finish project management service for home improvements. They handle everything from design to drawings, planning, fitting and building work for home projects.

And now John Lewis are apparently combining these operations into a single streamlined business that will not only carry out home improvement projects for customers from start to finish but plan, organise and manage every single aspect of them too. In simple terms, a start-to-finish home improvements service.

### So Can You See What I'm Getting at Here?

Quite simply, if John Lewis think a new product or service idea has a chance at being a winner then it probably does. Smaller entrepreneurs should take notice! Because, chances are, it could be a winner for you too.

In fact, I should say that this opportunity is a lot simpler

than you might think. You don't need to have a budget the size of John Lewis's Christmas TV ad budget. You don't need any building skills or knowledge of building. And you won't be doing any building or even DIY work.

This is essentially a desk-based, phone-based business, organise-sort-and-fix-it opportunity.

You will need good planning and organisational skills. It would also be an advantage if you're good at dealing with people. You'll also need to be fairly handy at sorting out the inevitable problems that happen with every home improvement project. This is where the real value of this kind of service probably lies.

### 8 Good Reasons to Get Into This Opportunity

1. **There's absolutely huge potential.** According to market research firm JKMR, those *1.2 million new kitchens* installed each year are worth £6.7 billion a year in sales. You could build a huge project management service on kitchens alone. But kitchens are just a tiny part of the market.
2. **It locks into the 'improve rather than move' vibe at the moment.** According to *What Mortgage?* magazine more people are now renovating or extending rather than moving right now. They say that factors like Brexit and high moving costs are to blame.

Think of it this way: It's actually cheaper to extend rather than move in many cases. Moving costs including fees and Stamp Duty on an £800,000 house could easily be £50,000... for which you can build a very nice extension.

3. **Project management services can actually save customers money and be cheaper!** According to a survey by project management

*please turn over...*

company CLPM, most unmanaged building projects in the UK – 90% of them – overspend by an average of 20%.

So, on a £100,000 home extension and remodelling scheme, a house owner could easily overspend by £20,000. You could charge them £5,000 for your project management service and they would still be £15,000 better off!

**Tip:** These two money-saving angles would be great angles to use in your marketing.

4. **There's very little competition in most places.** There probably aren't many – if any, project management services in your local area. Check for yourself and see.
5. **This kind of service locks into the rising popularity of what's known as the concierge culture right now.** Concierge services that bundle up products and services into one easy-to-use package are becoming really popular with consumers.
6. **This kind of service appeals perfectly to cash-rich, time-poor customers.** People who want to make home improvements but don't have time to organise everything themselves because they're busy with work etc. are usually great customers.
7. **This kind of service can be as popular with service providers as well as home owners.** Businesses who sell home improvement products and services will be just as keen to link up with you, if not keener than you are. (You can generate revenue from them too. I'll explain how this works later.)
8. **This is just a service that makes so much sense!** If you've ever done a major home improvement project you'll know that it can be a major headache. Just finding people to do the job is often bad enough. Then getting quotes. Then choosing exactly what you want, ordering it and waiting for it to be delivered and so on. Then there is organising everything. And dealing with all the problems that inevitably arise.

If you think doing a major home improvement project is a hassle that's worth paying someone else to take

away then millions of other people will too. (At the end of the day, this is a problem-solving business, and people will always pay to have problems solved.)

## What Home Improvement Projects Can You Manage?

The potential here is absolutely enormous. But here are a few tips and ideas on what kinds of projects you can manage in your service...

» **New kitchens.** Just look at all the TV, press and online adverts – and the money spent on them – to see the size of the market.

New kitchens are absolutely perfect for project management because there are so many different tasks even within what seems a straightforward project. For example, there may be extension work and building work, and there will be plumbing work, gas work, electrical work, carpentry work, tiling and eventually decorating. So there's lots of scope for things to go wrong... and lots of need for project management!

» **New bathrooms.** What can be said about kitchens also applies to bathrooms. It's a big, big sector of the market with lots of different operations involved that all need to be co-ordinated.

» **Fitted bedrooms.** Fitted bedrooms are the third main home improvement project, although quite a distant third. The more complex projects are much more than just assembling flat-packs and involve extensions, building works, en-suite facilities, fitted or even custom-made furniture plus all the decor. As well as bedrooms for adults don't forget teenager or childrens' bedrooms too.

» **Loft conversions.** Extending living space into the roof is a popular kind of extension, especially in London and some other cities where people tend to build up or down rather than out. Managing these projects involves pulling in a range of specialist services including architects, planners, structural engineers and roofers as well as the other services needed with an extension.

» **Basement developments.** Basement projects can include converting and fitting out an existing cellar. They can also include so-called 'iceberg'

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developments where the ground below a property is excavated to provide more space – again, these are most often found in London and can be extensive.

- » **House renovations.** Renovating a complete house from scratch is a popular home improvement and, as you might expect, it can be a huge job – so perfect for services like this – needing every possible building service.

The market for this service is partly those who just decide to give their home a makeover. But here's an extra opportunity: it is also ideal for offering to those who have bought – or are looking to buy – a house that needs renovation. Either to live in themselves or to renovate to sell.

- » **Conservatories.** These home projects have been around some time but are still a popular improvement project. A more contemporary take on them is the orangery, which is like a conservatory but has a roof and skylights.
- » **House conversions.** For example, turning a large house into flats or perhaps a period house comprised of flats back into a single house. Also very popular at the moment are projects where commercial buildings are converted into flats or even large single family homes.
- » **Garden rooms/cabins/lodges.** A new and fashionable improvement right now is to install a freestanding cabin or lodge in a garden. These are used as, for example, home offices, playrooms, media rooms or guest accommodation.  
Far from just being a glorified garden shed, some of these are high quality buildings, properly insulated and with electrics, plumbing and broadband installed.
- » **Garden landscaping projects.** With this kind of business it pays to think outside the box – outside the house in fact. Lots of home improvements are carried out in the garden. You can offer complete gardens, or individual projects. Here are some opportunities: Driveways. Patios and terraces. Decking. Lawns. Planting schemes. Sheds. Summerhouses. Gazebos. Water features and ponds. Children's play equipment. Roof terraces and roof gardens. You could even offer high-end garden features such as hot tubs, swimming pools and tennis courts.
- » **Commercial projects.** Although this opportunity is principally aimed at home projects you could

also extend it into commercial project management if you wanted to. These could potentially make much more money but the basic principles are essentially the same.

Now, some commercial projects are literally massive – for example, the building of a new factory or warehouse thousands of square metres in size. But there are still plenty of manageable commercial projects that you could work on. For example: A restaurant doing a refurbishment. A pub landscaping their beer garden. A local dental surgery who wants to polish up their image with a new shop front or reception area. A local business that wants to fit out their offices with new furniture, telecoms and IT. All these need project management services.

### **Project Management Example 1:**

#### **Project: New kitchen With Bi-Fold Doors to Garden**

What you'll do:

- » Discuss ideas with customer.
- » Suggest kitchen designs and fittings. Collect and show them brochures and catalogues.
- » Find a kitchen designer. Get quotes.
- » Find a kitchen fitter. Get quotes.
- » Find supplier/installer of bi-fold doors.
- » Source builder/landscaper for new terrace to garden.
- » Find other services such as plumber, electrician.
- » Source units and other fittings, place order.
- » Source new appliances if required.
- » Supervise progress of work on site.
- » Order skips, arrange waste disposal.
- » Source tiles/flooring and find fitter.
- » Source decorator, arrange painting/wallpapering.
- » Source light fittings, smart home products etc.
- » Suggest and source new furniture.
- » Check everything is working, demonstrate to customer.
- » Do snagging list after completion and arrange for any rectification works.

Likely cost of project: Between £20,000 and £100,000 depending on size and specification.

## **Project Management Example 2:**

### **Project: Two-Story Side Extension Including New Media/TV Room with New Guest Bedroom Above**

What you'll do:

- » Discuss ideas with customer.
- » Measure and photograph site.
- » Find an architect, ask them to prepare plans.
- » Suggest design and find installer/fittings for en-suite bathroom.
- » Source quotes from builders.
- » Help with planning application.
- » Arrange site clearance.
- » Find other services such as plasterer, plumber, electrician.
- » Source carpet/flooring and find fitter.
- » Source decorator.
- » Source new fitted bedroom furniture (if required) and fitter.
- » Source, order and supervise installation of home cinema system/media as required.
- » Source new soft furnishings if required.
- » Do snagging list after completion and arrange for any rectification works.

Likely cost of project: Between £35,000 and £120,000 depending on size and specification.

## **Marketing Your Project Management Service**

This is a service where it will take time to build up a reputation. It's not something where you can just place an ad and business will come flooding in. So you need to be prepared to take your time and build things up gradually.

This is also a service where you should get repeat and recommendation business. Someone might hire you for a new kitchen project, then later hire you for an extension... or recommend you to a friend for a new kitchen project. So, although this will take time to benefit from, your very best method of advertising will be the projects you've completed.

Suggested marketing methods:

**Door-to-door brochures.** Create a brochure explaining what you do and what the benefits of your service are. Make sure it is good quality. Add lots of photos – use library photos of property to illustrate it, until you have

some photos of your own.

Drop the brochure door to door in your target areas.

**Tip:** Choose areas where there are lots of home improvements going on already.

**Local lifestyle magazines and free magazines.** Most areas have a good selection of these publications. They range from fairly simple advertising magazines with short articles that are dropped door to door... right up to quite lavish, glossy lifestyle and business magazines that as well as being distributed door to door are mailed or emailed to subscribers.

Go for the magazines that have lots of home improvements ads and house and home type articles.

Although you could just advertise in these publications it would be better to set up some kind of advertising feature with them. Ask them to do an interview where you talk about what you're doing.

**Partnerships with home improvements businesses.**

As I've mentioned earlier, this business is all about managing the services provided by home improvements businesses, be they builders or decorators. But as well as working with them these businesses can be a great marketing method too because they will already be in touch with people who are having home improvements done. So they can put you in touch with likely customers. In fact, it could ultimately bring you in all the work you need without needing to do any selling as such yourself.

These businesses will also, most likely, be advertising their services already. So it would not be too difficult to set up an arrangement where they suggest/recommend you to those contacts and customers.

I've made a list of possible businesses to work with later. So draw up your own list of local businesses. Contact them by phone, letter or email and try to set up an arrangement.

In most cases there won't be a conflict of interest here. A few of these companies may project manage (check, and if they do don't contact them) but most don't. In most cases they don't want to. So they probably will be happy to suggest/recommend you.

There are two main ways you could work with partners. You could either pay a fixed fee for every customer lead they send you. Or, and I think this will be easier and better, pay your partners a commission for every lead they provide that results in a project. About 0.1%-0.25% just for a successful lead would be fair.

Don't forget that partnerships work both ways. You can also sell their services for them, if they want you to,

and earn a fee or commission too.

One important point with this kind of arrangement: If you're recommended to a customer by one of these contacts you'll generally need to use them in the project for the type of work they do. For example, if a builder puts you in touch with someone who needs a house renovation you'll need to use them for the actual building part of the project.

## Simple and Effective Methods of Online Marketing

To do any really effective online marketing you'll probably need to wait until you have two or three projects under your belt. Then, it can be an absolutely fantastic way of spreading your message.

Now, you could just set up a plain, ordinary website. But what I think would work better is to try and hook into the massive potential of image-based marketing there is right now. People love to post and share images with their friends and contacts. And images of house and home, interior design and so on is one of the biggest image themes online, right up there with images of dirty burgers and grumpy cats!

You can post pics to your own website or blog if you have one, or any social media but Instagram and Pinterest are ideal for this. You can also make or collect videos and post them to YouTube.

**Suggested strategy.** Search online. Collect, curate and post as many images as possible of home improvement projects and everything related to them such as ideas, plans, tips, designs and reviews. Focus these on the projects you want to be working on. Use home improvements magazines and blogs. They can also be sourced free from public domain or Creative Commons sources. (Just search your area of interest plus 'public domain' or 'creative commons'.) Repost it to your own social media, with captions that refer to your project management service.

Once you have some projects up and running these can be pics of your own completed projects. (Ask your customer if it's OK to do this of course.)

**Recommend a friend.** Once you have a few customers this could work really well. Give your customers some 'recommend a friend' vouchers offering a discount to their relatives, friends and also neighbours who might use your service. This can be a very effective way of getting your customers to be unpaid salespeople for your business.

**Home services portals.** You can register your services with these portals and, for a fee or commission, they

will send you enquiries from customers who use their portals to source quotes for project management Try: MyHammer.co.uk. CheckATrade.com. RatedPeople.com. Bark.com. MyBuilder.com. Although these services charge a fee/commission they will provide an extra source of enquiries that might be hard to find any other way.

**Using model properties.** As I said, no marketing is likely to work better than examples of projects you have successfully worked on. Not only does this inspire prospective new customers with what their house could look like, it shows that you can actually provide the service you say you can.

Once you have some completed home improvement projects, ask the customer if you may use their project in your marketing. Although not all will agree, most probably will. You could also offer a discount from the outset if the customer is willing to let their home be used as a model property.

As well as taking pictures at the various stages of the project – videos would be even better – ask if these customers might be willing to give you a testimonial or reference. You can use all this material in your marketing and even, customer willing, invite prospective new customers to actually go and see the demonstration property.

**Tip:** To make this technique even more useful, and kick-start your business, consider offering your project management service for free on some initial projects.

## Finding Home Improvements Businesses to Work With

This is a project management business. The whole principle of this business is that you don't do any of the home improvement work yourself. But, of course, you need some people doing the work to project manage!

With some projects, you may find that your customers already have suppliers lined up in mind. In which case you'll need to work with these. But, in many cases, one of the reasons customers will use your service is because you will supply and liaise with all the different home improvements businesses needed on their project.

You can wait until projects come in to do this but it's a good idea to start making some contacts right away.

**Think of it this way:** This could be a really great opportunity for many home improvements companies. Many of these companies, especially smaller ones, find it difficult to find enough work to keep them busy all of the time. Many of them, especially owner-operator type businesses, hate marketing or aren't very good at it. So

they would probably jump at the chance to have high quality, potentially high-value jobs fed to them without having to do any marketing or dealing with customers, and with someone else doing all the organising for them.

## Checklist – Some Basic Requirements for Suppliers:

As this is generally a higher-end service you should be fairly selective about who you use. Here are some points to bear in mind:

- ✓ Use well-established businesses who have experience in the type of work you're doing. Benefit from their experience!
- ✓ Use businesses with trade association memberships where relevant, E.g. Federation of Master Builders for builders, NICEIC for electricians, etc.
- ✓ Ask suppliers if they can show you projects they have completed. Again, you might be able to use these in your own marketing with permission.
- ✓ Ask for references and testimonials.
- ✓ Businesses should have relevant insurance, e.g. public liability insurance when working on customers' properties.
- ✓ Businesses should be professional with smart, well-presented staff, vehicles, etc.
- ✓ Importantly – businesses should be open to working on a project run by a project manager and as part of a team.

## What Sort of Arrangement Should You Have With Home Improvements Businesses?

You could just have a simple, informal arrangement with suppliers. You manage the whole thing. They do the work. The customer pays them for it. It's simple and straightforward.

But you could turn a working arrangement into an extra profit centre too. Do this by negotiating a small discount with the supplier, and adding a small margin to the price charged to the customer – all creating a larger margin for you.

## Checklist: Suppliers You Might Need in Project Management

### Window Installer

How to find suppliers: Personal contacts and local recommendations are a good way to find suppliers – ask friends and family. Facebook can also be a good source.

If that's not possible, home services portals are another approach to use. Try: MyHammer.co.uk. CheckATrade.com. RatedPeople.com. Bark.com. Mybuilder.com.

Also try good old-fashioned local services directories. Try: ThomsonLocal.com or Yell.com.

## Managing a Home Improvements Project – Tips and Techniques

Here's a suggested procedure for managing home improvements projects. There are no hard-and-fast rules though, you can work in whatever way works best for you.

- » **Meet with customer** – initial briefing. At the first meeting find out exactly what the customer wants to do. For example, is this a kitchen renovation... or an extension too? Also get some idea of their design direction, if they have one. Will it be conventional, ultra-modern... or a period conversion?

At this stage, also explain how your management service works, what the benefits to the customer are, and what you charge for it.

- » **Draw up some outline proposals.** This could be done at a second meeting with the customer. Draw up an outline proposal for the job, and a provisional schedule for the works.

Your customer might have clear ideas about what they want, or they might not. If the customer needs design ideas then offer some input. It will help smooth things along. Provide links to some product websites you think they might be interested in. Collect product brochures and samples to show them.

- » **Arrange for plans to be drawn up.** Once the customer has broadly decided what they want now is the time to start working with your first service provider. This may be someone the customer appoints, or someone you find for them.

Who you use here will depend on the project involved: For example, a new kitchen will need a kitchen designer or planner. An extension may need an architect.

- » **Finalise the plans.** The next step is to the customer to review the plans, ask for any changes they want and finalise them.

Several reviews and consultations may be needed here. You can really add value to the service you offer at points like this by liaising with everyone and following

everything up in a timely fashion

- » **Assist with the planning process.** Depending on the project, planning permission might be needed. Check with your local council. While you won't apply for planning permission yourself – it is done in the name of the customer – you can help the customer with the process, co-ordinate with architects, builders, etc. and the council.

For more complex projects you might need to hire, on behalf of the customer, a planning consultant.

**Useful:** The Planning Portal – [PlanningPortal.co.uk](http://PlanningPortal.co.uk) – is a really useful resource for help with planning permission.

- » **Identify exactly what suppliers will be needed.** This stage can be commenced as soon as the plans are finalised. Draw up a list of what suppliers are needed, e.g. builders or window fitters. Also draw up a list of what supplies might be needed, e.g. kitchen units, bathroom fittings or soft furnishings. As with other suppliers these might be contacts your customer already has, has already booked, or they might want you to find them.
- » **Request and collect quotes.** Next, ask for quotes from suppliers and also materials suppliers. As a good rule of thumb, three different quotes should be obtained for each product or service. But this is entirely up to your customer. They may want more or they may be happy with fewer.  
Send quotes to your customer for them to choose their preferred suppliers.
- » **Finalise the project.** Now you can go back to your customer with the plans and all the quotes and finalise everything. Draw up a final specification showing what is going to be done and how much it's going to cost.  
**Tip:** Aim to get the customer to make a commitment to the final version. Stress that if they want to make changes later suppliers are likely to charge them more.
- » **Book in suppliers.** Next book the suppliers needed for the project. Arrange the suppliers in the order they'll be needed on site. Contact the first one first to obtain a start and completion date, and then work down the list to contact the others.  
Bear in mind all these dates are likely to be estimates. But a valuable part of your service is keeping these estimates on track as much as possible.
- » **Order materials and supplies.** In many cases, your suppliers will be providing or at least ordering

the necessary materials for you. But there will also be projects where this is done separately, e.g. a new kitchen is supplied direct from a kitchen company but a separate kitchen fitter is hired to fit it.

When ordering supplies bear in mind lead times – the time between ordering supplies and them being ready for delivery. Bear in mind that there may not be any storage room on site and they may need to be delivered on a 'just in time' basis.

- » **Draw up a project schedule.** Lastly, the most important and valuable part of your service... drawing up a schedule to help co-ordinate everything.

Your schedule will have two main purposes: You can use it yourself to run your project management from. You can also give copies to your customer and suppliers to show them what they need to do and when.

There are two different ways of keeping a project schedule:

- » **Paper charts or spreadsheet-based systems.** An old-fashioned paper-based project management chart is still perfectly practical, especially for smaller, simpler projects.

There are some sites where you can download printable forms and spreadsheets for free. Try: [ProjectManager.com/templates](http://ProjectManager.com/templates)

- » **Project management software.** There are lots of project management software packages available today.

These vary from simple to complex ones. Some basic ones are free but the more sophisticated ones usually involve a one-off payment or subscription. Some allow you to share your schedule and collaborate with other users and also the customer. As well as computer-based packages there are now app-based ones too.

**Useful contacts:** [OpenProject.org](http://OpenProject.org), [Zapier.com/blog/free-project-management-software](http://Zapier.com/blog/free-project-management-software), [WorkFlowMax.com](http://WorkFlowMax.com), [Self-Build.co.uk/5-digital-tools-help-make-your-project-success](http://Self-Build.co.uk/5-digital-tools-help-make-your-project-success)

**Useful apps:** There are also now lots of phone apps that can help you get ideas, plan and schedule home improvements projects. Take a look on Google Play or the App Store. Some are free, some are charged for.

**Tip:** [Houzz.co.uk](http://Houzz.co.uk) is one of the best.

This article looks at a selection of apps:

[HomeWarrantyReviews.com/guides/20-home-improvement-apps](http://HomeWarrantyReviews.com/guides/20-home-improvement-apps)

## Project Management Once Work Starts on Site

One of the most important parts of your service will be managing the project once work starts on site.

Exactly what you will do depends on the nature of the project and also how you want to run things – there is no wrong or right way. However, here are some of the tasks you'll probably need to do once work starts on site:

- ✓ **Compile daily lists of tasks to be done that day.** (Day before.)
- ✓ **Check availability of service and product suppliers on tasks for next day.** (Day before.)
- ✓ **Ensure service suppliers turn up.** Follow up if necessary.
- ✓ **Ensure products and materials turn up.** Follow up if necessary.
- ✓ **Morning briefing.** Check tasks have commenced, monitor progress.
- ✓ **Afternoon debriefing.** Check what has been completed and what remains to be done at end of day.
- ✓ **Liaise with individual suppliers and the customer.**
- ✓ **Deal with any problems that arise.** For example, anything from an RSJ that has not been delivered to a request to paint the walls a different colour to that planned.
- ✓ **Chase tasks that are falling behind schedule.** Implement a 'catch up' approach to accelerate them and bring them back on schedule. Revise schedule accordingly.
- ✓ **Co-ordinate actions required to comply with building regulations.** For example, some types of work, like a new extension, need an inspection by an approved Building Inspector. Some types of work, like replacement windows or heating systems, require details to be filed with the local authority.

This section of the Planning Portal gives lots of useful information about building control: [PlanningPortal.co.uk/info/200128/building\\_control](http://PlanningPortal.co.uk/info/200128/building_control)

- ✓ **Communicate with the customer, keep them informed of progress.** This is one of your most important and useful jobs, and will prove the value of your service to your customer.  
Ask the customer what sort of level of communication they require. For example, a weekly report, a daily report, or contact only as and

when necessary, e.g. in the case of a problem.

- ✓ **Compile daily list of tasks for next day...** and repeat until project completion.

## How to Charge for a Project Management Service... and What You Could Make

There are two ways you could do this. A more complicated but more profitable way... and a slightly less profitable but easier way!

I'd suggest you start with the easier way initially. That is, just charge a commission for your project management work based on the cost of the project. This can be whatever you feel is right for the work you do and in your area – and of course whatever your customer is willing to pay. About 5% is possible. You might start on 2-3% commission until you get an established name.

With this method, although you collect quotes from suppliers, agree the prices with your customer and order from your suppliers all the bills go direct to your customer and they pay them. Your customer then pays your fee direct to you. You could ask for it in stage payments if you wanted to which would give you some income before the end of the project.

So, let's say the total project cost was £10,000. You'd make £500 just for organising everything. If it was £80,000 you'd make £4,000.

The other way of charging is, rather than charging a commission, add a margin to whatever each supplier charges you. You could also negotiate a discount with the supplier, further widening the margin. This is pretty much what any builder would do anyway, so industry standard.

For example, if the total project cost was £10,000 and you added 5% while negotiating 5% discount you would make approximately £1,000 on the project. If it was £80,000 you'd make £8,000.

**Important:** The important difference with this way of charging is that the bills will come to you, and you will need to obtain the money from the customer and pay them. You may even need some working capital to bridge the gap between paying the bills and receiving the money. The opportunity to turn a bigger profit from the project is, if you like, the payback.

## Tips for Making Your Project Management Service More Successful

» **Focus on smart, mid-market housing areas.**

There should be lots of people in these areas who want/need such a service and are able to pay for it. But you won't be in competition with the high-end market John Lewis is pitching at.

» **Start in one local area.** It is much easier and more effective to focus your marketing efforts on one small area, than to try to market to a whole city or county. This could be in your area or elsewhere.

**Tip:** Use all the possible marketing methods within that local area. This will give the impression of being the biggest – and best – in the area.

» **Choose the projects you take on to fit in with the type of business you want and what you feel comfortable in managing.** For example, don't take on major new housebuilding projects if you only want a part-time sideline – renovations would be a better option here.

» **Specialise.** Specialise in one or a handful of types of projects, rather than trying to do anything and everything. This will make everything simpler. Specialising will also help with marketing as potential customers will see, for example, that beautifully landscaped garden you've project managed and realise you could do it for them too. But, very importantly, you'll also be able to become expert in those particular things and even become known as the 'go to' management service for that sort of project.

» **Get involved in projects as early as possible, ideally when the project is just an idea.** It's

much easier to manage a project from when it is a clean sheet – much harder once it has started and problems have already emerged.

» **Keep up with trends.** Keep up with what's going on in the home improvements market. What kinds of things are people having done? What styles, types of materials and so on are in fashion? Read newspapers, magazines, websites and blogs. Notice what's been done in your area.

**Useful sources:** These blogs have lots of ideas on the latest trends in home improvements: MadAboutTheHouse.com. Home Building & Renovation at HomBuilding.co.uk. FreshDesignBlog.com

» **Be ready to offer ideas... lots of ideas.** Although in some cases customers will know exactly what they want, in other cases they won't. In fact, they will be motivated to use a management service because you can offer ideas... as well as managing the project.

But... draw a fine line between offering ideas and inspiration and pushing your own ideas on customers. It's very important that they have done what they want to have done.

» **Last but not least, don't do any of the actual work yourself.** Tempting though it might seem to try and throw some designs together, do some decorating or choose the curtains for a project, don't do it. Use professionals and experts to do everything.

Your customers will be looking for a professional management service using professionals, and using DIY could compromise the quality of it. You'll generally also make more money from just managing the work than actually doing it.

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### Business Blueprint: Decluttering Service

# How to Make £90+ Per Hour Tidying Up

I don't know how it happened, but everywhere I look in my life, there's clutter! Piles of paper on my desk. Cupboards full of mysterious wires and chargers. A garage piled with junk. Wardrobes of clothes that I never wear. A loft so packed that I've forgotten what's up there. It's a huge problem for many people. It can

cause stress and anxiety. Distract them from their work and hobbies. And simply 'tidying up' only leads to a short-term fix, as the clutter soon comes back if we don't change our behaviour. If you are one of those lucky people who is naturally tidy, organized and doesn't hoard train tickets or phone chargers from the

1990s, then you could be in big demand...

These days people will pay good money for someone to declutter their life. Not only in the short term, by removing the clutter, but in the long term, by helping them organise, simplify and economise.

The benefits for the customer are amazing – less stress, fewer distractions, more money in their pocket, more free time, more space in the home and a calmer mind. So this is something you can deliver that has a huge amount of emotional and financial value. Which brings me to this neat little business idea – a decluttering service with an extra twist to make it even more profitable for the time spent on it. This is something that will appeal if:

- » You prefer a more off-line business that doesn't need a lot of online activity.
- » You like honest, hands-on work.
- » You don't mind getting out of the house now and then.
- » You like meeting new people.
- » You have experienced your own clutter problems and dealt with them – or you're one of those people who like to be tidy.

There is really good earning potential with this business, in which you could charge as much as £90 an hour for your service.

Let me first lay out the essential background.

## Why Decluttering Has Become a Growth Trend

In the latter half of the 20th Century our society became increasingly throwaway. The price of clothes, toys and electronic gadgets fell, meaning we began to accumulate more products in our home. Many of these items weren't really built to last. Some quickly went out of fashion.

This was all part of the capitalist drive to keep us buying the latest model, or the newest brand, so that companies could keep growing by delivering endless streams of new products to advertise. However, there has been a sea change in attitude.

Firstly, the environmental impact of a throwaway culture has led to the pollution of rivers, seas and the water table, as well as creating monstrous landfill sites. These have been widely publicised on natural history programmes like *Blue Planet*. Secondly, a trend for living a more sustainable life has become more widespread. In January, the *Where the World's Moving* Global Report, a study of people in Australia, China,

USA and the UK, found that “*increasingly, consumers crave opportunities to live sustainably*”. That means more recycling, less waste and less stuff in general.

Thirdly, the recession after the crash of 2008, along with austerity policies and increasing economic uncertainty, has led to a trend in “*Make do and mend*” where people go back to living a more simple, basic existence where their money goes further.

Finally, despite all the prosperity we enjoyed, with access to wonderful new innovations and ‘time-saving’ gadgets, we have come to realise that more stuff doesn't equal more contentment. Society isn't necessarily happier. We aren't any less busy or stressed.

In fact, many experts believe that overconsumption is making us unhappier and technological advances are making us feel more busy, more stressed. Author Annie Leonard, who researches overconsumption, says: “*Our obsessive relationship with material things is actually jeopardising our relationships, which are proven over and over to be the biggest determining factor in our happiness once our basic needs are met.*” She points to research by Tim Kasser which showed a connection between materialistic behaviour and higher levels of anxiety and depression. What's more, clutter causes distraction. If you've ever tried to work at home in an untidy house, you'll know how tricky it is to maintain your focus. The same goes for doing an ambitious project, like writing a book or starting a business – you need a clear, uncluttered space so that you can concentrate totally on what you are doing.

All of these factors have increased the public appetite for decluttering. This can be seen in the popularity of Marie Kondo, author of bestselling book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying* and host of her own popular Netflix show. She is a master of the ‘KonMari’ method of decluttering and simplifying your life for a more peaceful mind. In her book she writes:

“*When you put your house in order, you put your affairs, and your past in order, too. As a result, you can see quite clearly what you need and what you don't, and what you should and shouldn't do.*”

Another guru in the field is Joseph Ferrari, a professor of psychology who carried out a study in 2016, entitled *The Dark Side of the Home*. He found that clutter lowered people's productivity and life satisfaction. “*What we need to do is let go of things,*” he advises.

OK, so as you can see, decluttering:

- » Is a widespread problem that has serious negative effects on people's lives.
- » Has an outcome that brings important

psychological and financial benefits.

- » Is an established enough trend that has created bestselling books and hit TV shows.

Decluttering is also a proven business model. For instance, a successful business called You Need a Vicky ([YouNeedaVicky.com](http://YouNeedaVicky.com)) offers bespoke decluttering and organisational services. She has been featured in the *Guardian*, *Daily Express* and *Telegraph*, with great reviews from customers.

Over in the United States the average income for a professional organiser is around \$42,000 according to the job website SimplyHired. And with the special twist I will show you, there are ways to make sure you earn more than the average.

## Benefits of a Decluttering Business

- » Low start up costs, including some basic tools and equipment and a small budget for printing flyers and Google Ads. You may need to purchase a vehicle to remove larger items.
- » No official qualifications needed.
- » You can practise and build your confidence by doing small jobs for family and friends.
- » It's a scalable business – you can recruit people to carry out work for you so that you can service more clients.
- » You can add other income streams – for instance re-selling and upcycling items, as well as information to help people declutter (eBooks, courses).

The downsides:

- » It does take a bit of physical work and getting out and about, which might not appeal to everyone.
- » Some of the work can be a little unglamorous and messy
- » Occasionally a client might be annoying or difficult (for instance, serious hoarders might resist your advice).

## What You Need to Get Started

- » **Website** – a basic WordPress website is essential so that you're visible online and easily found when people want a decluttering business. It should include: about you (who you are, why you set up the business); why declutter (a section extolling the many benefits of decluttering); a contact page with phone number, email address and any social media links; images of some of your work; rates or prices (or an option to email you for a free quote). Ideally,

post a regularly updated blog about what you're up to so that Google rank your website more highly.

- » **Facebook** – set up a business page on Facebook with your details, location and opening hours, including plenty of pictures of decluttered rooms.
- » **Tools** – some basic items for the physical job itself including: rubber gloves, wipes, face mask, screwdrivers, spanners, Allen keys, power drill and tape measure. You won't need all of them for every job, but occasionally you might have to dismantle furniture or deal with some heavy dust and grime.
- » **A smartphone or tablet** – for taking photos, recording the job and being able to receive calls, messages and emails from wherever you are.

Here's a time-saving tip: offer a virtual consultation so that you don't need to visit the home first to offer a quote or assess the job.

Instead, offer a virtual assessment. Get the prospective client to email you photos of the clutter. Create a questionnaire to ask all the questions you normally ask, which they can fill in online and return. This way you can do one trip to carry out the job and save yourself time and travel costs.

## The Job

Once you have assessed the work you will need to tackle each problem space identified by the client (e.g. bedroom, garage, loft, basement) and separate the items into the following:

- » **Essential items they need to keep** – but you must drill down to the reasons why, and help the client let go of things they feel they need to keep, but would be better letting go of.
- » **Resell** – items that have resale value (I'll explain how to monetise this for your business in a moment).
- » **Give to charity** – items that are probably too much hassle to sell in return for the profit you make, but could be used by someone in need.
- » **Archive and store** – some sentimental items can be kept in convenient storage for the future. Again, you'll need to work with the client.

Remember, part of your service is to gently encourage the client to let go of as many items as possible. As much as possible, try and do the work first without them peering over your shoulder, then once the items are separated into the four piles above, consult with them on the final decision.

**TIP:** you can add value to your service by offering

aftersales advice to the client that will help them remain decluttered. This could take the form of an eBook, a manual, an email newsletter, a course or a membership service.

You can include:

- » Organisation tips.
- » Schedules and life planners.
- » Decluttering strategies.
- » Digital decluttering (computers, hard drives, inboxes.
- » Psychological tips for focus, stress and motivation.
- » Storage tips.

Either offer this added aftersales service for free in order to raise customer satisfaction, encourage repeat business and get better reviews... Or charge for this as an extra service to increase your income per job. I'd recommend that you offer eBooks and email newsletters for free (and use them to stay in touch with the client for more future business) and charge if you create a more complex course or membership service.

## Advertising

You can start simply using largely old-fashioned strategies like these:

- » **Flyers** – post a note through the doors of residential homes in your local area.
- » **Newsagents and cafes** – post on windows and notice boards.
- » **Press release** – tell a story about your business and its amazing benefits and send it to your local newspaper and radio station.

You should also consider some basic online marketing.

- » **Instagram** – post images (with permission) of the results of your work, perhaps before and after pictures and put them into an ongoing Instagram feed for your business, making sure there's a link to your website in the biography
- » **Google ads.** Consider some basic advertising for your business so that you appear when people look up 'decluttering', 'recycling', 'rubbish removal' and other key terms on Google.
- » **Facebook ads.** Create a sponsored Facebook post and target people in your local area, focusing on older age groups (40+) who are likely to have accumulated lots of clutter.

## How Much to Charge

You can either charge for an entire job, which you assess in advance so you know how much work and

time it is likely to take.

Or you can charge per hour. I'd recommend £50-£90 per hour.

Your costs will include:

- » The time it takes you to carry out the job.
- » Any extra help you recruit for the job.
- » Travel costs to the location and to any tips or recycling plants.

Potential profits...

If you can manage three jobs at week @ roughly three hours work each, that would be £550 a week, or £2,200 a month from a part-time business.

One job each working day could amount to £750 a week and £3,000 a month.

## The Bottom Line

When it comes down to it, this is an old-fashioned house clearance service but one that has a very modern twist. It's not just about chucking out junk but about helping people find peace, contentment and clearer focus without the stress and distraction of clutter.

This business will benefit from a growing trend for decluttering, made popular in books and TV shows, as well increased interest in sustainable living. It's easy to set up and requires no skills or qualifications. So if you're looking for an honest 'hands on' side hustle that helps the environment, then this is for you.

Talking of which, in next month's issue of *What Really Makes Money* I'll be showing you some more eco-friendly side hustles and home enterprises that tap into this growing trend, so please look out for that.