



*Start & Run a
Home Staging
Business*

Dana J. Smithers

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Introduction

This home staging business book is written for entrepreneurs just starting out, and for experienced home stagers who want to refresh their business knowledge. The focus of this book is on *how* to start and run a profitable home staging business, although the information could be used by anyone in a design-related industry. It does not cover the physical aspects of staging a property.

The book takes a step-by-step approach to answer the *why*, *how*, *where*, *when*, and *what* of starting and running your home staging business. There is an opportunity for you to really take a look at why you want to have your own home staging business and to set goals that will propel you forward. By having a road map for your business you are more likely to succeed than having no idea of *what* you are trying to achieve.

The accompanying CD provides you with home staging forms and exercises to ensure

your success as a home stager. You can change the forms in any way you want to suit your needs best — mix and match or use as is with your branding inserted.

Home staging makes a great part-time or full-time business opportunity. You may find as you grow your business that you will need to hire employees, but most likely in the beginning you will work with reliable contractors, and some may even be other home stagers in your area.

If you want to really expand your home staging business, you may decide to invest in some significant rental inventory (such as furniture). You can still create a very lucrative staging business by providing your own small inventory and renting from rental furnishing stores in your area. If you do not have any rental stores in your area, you may have to purchase your own inventory, or you may decide not to work with properties that require larger inventory.

Many savvy sellers over the years have been preparing their property to get it ready for market; in essence, they were doing some home staging. Home staging as a professional service industry began in the mid-1980s in the United States and United Kingdom. It has gradually emerged to become a well-recognized profession throughout Canada as well. Each year the demand for home stagers increases. Staging is now a *must-have* marketing tool for successful realtors and sellers.

Many people do not understand what services home stagers can provide for them. The purpose of staging is to *create broad buyer appeal for the seller's target market* so that the property sells for top dollar and in the quickest possible time. Home stagers do this by offering services such as consultations, report recommendations, shopping services, sourcing for rentals services, installation services, hands-on staging, photography services, and professional organizing. Depending on the skills you already have, you may also be able to confidently add project management and home renovations to your business model. You can create a niche market providing the home staging services you want to offer in your area.

Home staging is a relatively inexpensive start-up business. Unless you are providing significant inventory and need to rent a warehouse, your staging business will more than likely be home-office based. You may incur

a nominal rental cost if you decide to rent a small storage locker. Initially your biggest expense will be spent on your marketing tools such as creating your website and promotional materials. However, this book will introduce you to economical ways to get started with marketing your new business.

You do not need to have a background in interior design to become a successful home stager; if you have completed some interior decorating courses, professional organizing, or other industry-related training, these can be assets but are not necessary. You can be taught the business aspect of starting and running your business, which is the intention of this book.

Having taught and mentored hundreds of home stagers since 2004, I have found that the most successful home stagers have been born with the “gift” of knowing what looks great. Many closet home stagers have been helping their friends and families for years without being paid for their work.

Regardless of whether you are looking for a part-time or full-time career in home staging, this book will give you enough insight into running and operating your home staging business. It will help you determine if this is something you will feel confident doing. It is a fun and creative business to be in if it is the right one for you!



1 Getting Started

As you have probably noticed, there are many popular television shows on home staging. The people on these shows make it look so easy and they always have so much fun! If you think this is what home staging is all about, you are partly right. There is nothing more satisfying than making a room or an entire property look beautiful and having satisfied clients rave about your work. It's equally as satisfying to know that your business reputation is growing because referrals begin to come your way. At that stage, you will feel like you are a successful home staging entrepreneur! However, getting to that stage in your business starts with having the right skills, talents, and attributes.

1. Determining If This Is the Right Business for You

Knowing that this is the right business for you is a necessary component to getting started and will ultimately lead to your success. Asking yourself some key questions before you get

started is the smart thing to do before jumping into something you are not sure is right for you.

1.1 Creative talents and physical abilities

You will need a variety of creative talents and physical abilities to become an expert home stager. Your main objective is to have the creative ability to stage a home so that it has the WOW! factor by —

- ↳ arranging the seller's own home furnishings (lovely or not) into attractive furniture arrangements, and art and accessory groupings;
- ↳ mixing some of the seller's home furnishings with some of your inventory;
- ↳ selecting the right rental inventory for a vacant home;
- ↳ having the physical stamina to do the labor involved with lifting and carrying furniture and/or by moving product in

and out of the home and up and down the stairs, and

- ✦ a passion for creating beautiful spaces that will have broad buyer appeal for the seller's target market, and not necessarily according to your own personal taste

1.2 Skills and attributes

Some of the skills and attributes you will need to have as a great home stager include:

- ✦ Business knowledge on how to start and run a home staging business
- ✦ Professional appearance to attract the type of clientele you want to create long-term relationships with
- ✦ Ability to sell your services as *value-based* whether you are providing product or not
- ✦ Great people skills that allow you to work well with homeowners, realtors, industry-related personnel, and anyone you choose to hire as contractors
- ✦ The ability to present your services in a confident manner, whether during one-on-one meetings with realtors or homeowners, or for groups at trade shows, library talks, and realtor meetings
- ✦ Networking skills that allow you to get connected with like-minded business-people to market your services
- ✦ Ability to be flexible when things go wrong, and problem solve in a timely manner
- ✦ Keen interest in staying on top of your industry through awareness of your colleagues, real estate trends, memberships, meetings, social media, reading, and/or attending conferences

While you may have many of the skills, talents, and attributes listed above, there are a few other things to consider before starting your home staging business. You want to consider if there is a viable market in your area to support your home staging business part time or full time, depending on your goal. Will you have the time, money, and energy to dedicate to your start-up? In the beginning, you will be wearing a lot of different hats and need to be able to take one hat off and put on another until you can afford to hire out work you no longer want to do. How easily can you do that?

Being a home staging entrepreneur can be a very rewarding and fulfilling career choice. It can be a fun business to be in and at the same time it can be a very demanding business to enter into. You will also be working with home sellers who have a lot of different emotions about selling their homes. Some are happy and some are sad; some are upsizing while others are downsizing; some are getting divorced, some are getting married, and some are widowed; some are putting their parents into retirement or care homes; and on the list goes. There will also be some realtors that you click with and establish great relationships with and other realtors that you might want to refer another home stager to work with.

Because home staging is still considered a new service industry, you can be part of this exciting, growing, and emerging industry, if you decide it is the right fit for you! See Exercise 1 to help you assess your home staging skills. The form is also included on the CD.

If you are going to become a home stager, then the answer to most of these questions should be "Yes." If you have some questions you responded "No" to, take a look at those and be honest with yourself. How could you turn them into "Yes"?

EXERCISE 1
SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR HOME STAGERS

No.	Question	Yes	No
1.	Do you watch home staging and home decorating television shows and read home decorating magazines?		
2.	Do friends and relatives always turn to you to help them make their home look great for living and/or selling?		
3.	Do you instinctively know what looks good and what looks bad in terms of decorating?		
4.	Are you physically able to lift furniture and move furniture around?		
5.	Do you currently organize your time well and set goals for yourself?		
6.	Are you a great multitasker who can wear many hats?		
7.	Do you enjoy working on your own some of the time and with others some of the time?		
8.	Whether you have had a business before or not, do you think you can learn what you need to know to start and run a successful business?		
9.	If you need help, will you call on a professional to assist you?		
10.	Is there someone you know who could be your assistant when you need help for the hands-on staging?		
11.	Do you have a support team that will cheer you on and help you celebrate every success?		
12.	Once you know your business well, will you be able to sell your services and/or product easily?		

2. Setting Your Goals

Prior to deciding to start your own home staging business, you probably had some ideas about how you would go about starting your business. You may have a vague idea of what you wanted to achieve and how you would go about doing it. You may have only looked as far ahead as the current or next year, or you may have done a substantial five-year formal business plan that you could take to the bank to get financial support. If you are going this route, it is most likely that you are going to have a warehouse of inventory for your start-up. If you are not, you will be doing what is called a “road map” or an informal business plan. No matter what your style is, you do need to have a business plan that meets your goals. (See Chapter 2 for details on creating a business plan.)

Goal setting is a critical part of today’s entrepreneurs’ successes. I suggest that if you are unfamiliar with setting goals for yourself that you start doing this on a daily basis. You may already be doing this in the form of your daily to-do list. This is a type of goal setting. You might be someone who loves making that check mark once you accomplish your goals. I am!

2.1 SMART goals

Many years ago when I was taking sales training, I was introduced to the SMART goals method. I have used it for years and recommend that you become familiar with it. It is the only way you can turn your dream into a reality. Dreams must be time and action bound otherwise they stay in the ether and never materialize for you!

I would like to give you a heads-up on how you might be feeling when you are just starting your home staging business:

- ↳ Overwhelmed
- ↳ Unbalanced by the “idea avalanche” in your head

↳ Doubtful that you can do all that you want to

↳ Fearful of making mistakes

There is a way to avoid these negative feelings and turn them into positive ones. Take baby steps in setting your goals. Incorporate the SMART goal setting method on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis:

S — Specific: Keep your goal small and simple; you can build on this.

M — Measurable: Determine the criteria you will use to ensure you can measure how much of your goal you have accomplished.

A — Achievable: Set the goal so that you can achieve it.

R — Realistic: Evaluate if the goal is achievable in the time and manner you are suggesting.

T — Time bound: This is what gives structure to your goal; you will know if you have accomplished your goal or not if you achieve it within the time frame you set.

Once you become familiar with using this SMART method and goal setting you will be able to write your business plan with confidence.

2.2 Determine your revenue streams

One of the most important concerns that the majority of new entrepreneurs have is determining how much money they *need* to make. I use the word “need” because you will want to be realistic in determining what your sales will be as well as your operating costs, especially in your first year of business. (For more on operating costs, see Chapter 9.) I highly recommend that you work your sales figures backwards, deciding how much money you

need to make, and then determine what home staging services you will offer that will allow you to make the sales revenues you are projecting.

Depending on your financial situation, you may be able to start working on your home staging business right away with no concern of bringing in an income. However, if you need to stay in the job you currently have, start making plans to reduce the number of hours you work at your job or look for a more flexible job, which will give you time to start working on your own home staging business.

If you decide to look for part-time work, then I recommend you look for work in a related field. If your passion is lighting, then apply to work part time in a lighting store. If you love paint and color, consider applying at a paint store. Perhaps working with a mortgage broker is a better fit. Go where your passion takes you and where you can start to build your strategic alliances while learning about other businesses related to the home staging industry. If you live in an area where there are home staging businesses, see if you can work

part time for one or some of them. You may be required to have insurance if you work for a home staging business as a contractor. (See Chapter 5 for more information on insurance.)

A fun exercise to do is to look at where 100 percent of your revenues are going to come from. Sample 1 shows what your revenue streams might be if you started part time. On the CD you will find a blank chart called “Your Revenue Streams” to use when figuring out your own revenue streams.

Often your first year can require that you do whatever it takes to get your business going. Everyone’s financial situation will be different and, therefore, their approaches will be different as well. This is a guide for you to use to work backwards, to grasp where you see yourself in year one, year two, year three, etc. Once you start your business, you will be continually reassessing what your business *is* and the goals you have set. Your goals will be based on what income you *need* to maintain and grow a successful business.

**SAMPLE 1
REVENUE STREAMS**

100% Revenues — Year One		
Part-time job 75%	Part-time staging 15%	Other: Commissions from decorating stores 10%
100% Revenues — Year Two		
Part-time staging 50%	Part-time retail 25%	Other: Commissions, referrals 25%
100% Revenues — Year Three		
Staging 75%	Other: Commissions, referral fees, product sales 25%	