

START & RUN A CRAFT BUSINESS

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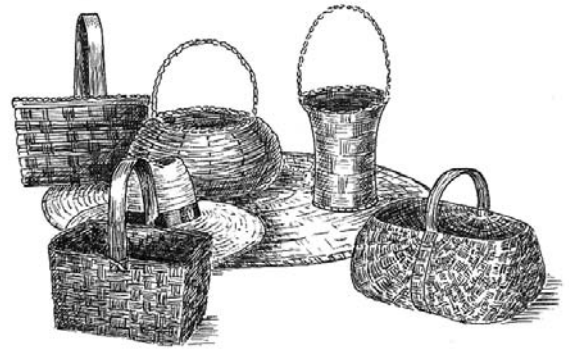
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Chapter 1

THE ADVANTAGES OF A CRAFT BUSINESS

A successful craft business can be started and operated by almost anyone who is prepared to follow the suggestions in this book. If you are already involved in crafts as a hobby, you have a good head start, but even if you have never produced a handcrafted product, you can still learn to set up and operate a successful craft business.

One man, bored and frustrated with a dead-end job, turned his woodworking hobby into a profitable business that now provides full-time employment for himself and an assistant.

A homemaker and mother of two small children wanted to do something in addition to looking after her children. She did not want to go to work for someone else, especially since she had no specific job training except as a secretary, a job she had always disliked.

Then one day she had a brilliant idea. She had always enjoyed designing and making clothes for her own children, and she thought that just for fun she would try selling some of her work in a local craft market. Two years later, she had built up a successful part-time business making handcrafted children's clothes. Her part-time business brings in more money than she earned as a full-time secretary, and it allows her to be at home with her children as well.





CRAFTWORKERS ARE
MADE, NOT BORN.

These two people love their work and, by properly organizing the business side of their crafts, they are making good profits at the same time. What more could a person want?

There are several hundred thousand craftworkers in the United States and Canada. These people range from individuals who earn extra income from their part-time businesses to designers/craftspeople who own and manage substantial companies and direct the work of highly skilled employees.

The technical efficiency of our modern society and its cheap, mass-market products with their built-in obsolescence has created a large and growing consumer craving for finely wrought, individually produced, handmade products. Each year, billions of dollars worth of handcrafted products are sold in North America and the market is growing rapidly.

Most of these products are made by individual craftworkers and small- to medium-size craft companies. Most of these craftspeople work out of their own homes. They usually started their craft businesses in their spare time, so there was no need for them to give up their jobs until their businesses were off and running.

This is one of the biggest advantages of a craft business — that it can be started at home in your spare time. There is no need to invest in a costly plant and equipment. Most handcrafted products are made with the simplest of tools and equipment that rarely cost more than a few hundred dollars — and in many cases, much less.

Your initial workplace can be your garage, basement, or even your kitchen. Most crafts are relatively clean and quiet, involving no personal health or environmental hazards. The level of skill required varies widely, but most craft skills can be easily acquired by a person of average intelligence and manual dexterity.

Craftworkers are made, not born. In the past, they learned from their parents, and skills were often handed down from generation to generation. Today, most craftspeople learn their skills through practice, by taking craft courses, or from a friend.

Large numbers of people are already good amateur craftworkers. Think of the vast number of men and women who make, usually as a hobby or a way of saving money, handcrafted sweaters, socks, furniture, toys, and thousands of other items. These people may not think of themselves as craftworkers, though they already have many of the skills required to start a successful craft business.

Even if you are not making anything now, you can still train yourself as a craftworker. The list of possible handcrafted products is so extensive and the levels and types of skills required so varied that it is hard to imagine anyone who is not capable of making something handcrafted and, with the help of this book, turning it into a marketable product.

In fact, this book will show you how to start no matter what stage you have already reached. It covers topics such as —

- (a) acquiring the skills you need,
- (b) identifying a marketable product,
- (c) setting up a production crafts workshop, and, above all,
- (d) making your business profitable to achieve financial independence.

The value of financial independence has never been greater. Inflation, high unemployment, and general economic uncertainty are going to be with us in the foreseeable future. Rapidly changing technology is making many jobs redundant, and more and more people are succumbing to a feeling that their lives are being altered by economic forces they can neither understand nor control.

A craft business can give you a great measure of personal independence. You can be free of the nine-to-five grind, the pressures of cranky bosses and unpleasant coworkers, and the constant threat of layoffs. You can be your own boss and set your own working hours and conditions. You can make substantial profits.

Another big advantage to a craft business is that it is almost totally recession-proof. This is partly because handcrafts are high-quality, durable goods and, equally important, they are perceived by the public to represent quality and durability. Consequently, crafts are seen to be exceptionally good value for money. This helps keep sales up even in times of recession. In addition, the relatively small size and unique flexibility of craft businesses allows them to adapt to changing conditions more quickly and easily than most other kinds of business.

In addition to all this, a craft business gives you the chance to express yourself creatively, turning out high-quality, aesthetically appealing products.



A CRAFT BUSINESS CAN
GIVE YOU A GREAT
MEASURE OF PERSONAL
INDEPENDENCE.

But you don't have to be a creative genius to start a craft business. In fact, you don't even need to be particularly creative. Many successful craftworkers produce all their work according to traditional designs. Others modify traditional designs to serve their own purposes.

You can produce hundreds or thousands of "production line" crafts (i.e., multiple copies) of the same design. Or you can concentrate on making one-of-a-kind craft pieces, where each piece is a unique design. There are good markets for both kinds of products in just about any craft medium. Whether you want to work in wood, clay, fiber, glass, or any one of hundreds of natural or synthetic materials, the markets for good-quality handcrafted products are large and growing.

What about business experience? Perhaps you feel more confident of your craft skills than your ability to market your work, to deal with the business side of things. What if you have no business experience at all?

Some of the most successful craftspeople around started out with little or no knowledge of business. Many of them even felt that they were not really "business types." Craftspeople come from the most diverse backgrounds. They are former teachers, plumbers, office workers, truck drivers, nurses, homemakers, just to mention a few. Most had no previous business experience and few would lay claim to any inborn "business sense."

What these people had was the desire and the determination to succeed. Most of them learned about business by actually doing business. In the beginning they made mistakes. But these were the kind of mistakes from which they could easily recover, then go back and do things right the next time.

This is another big plus in starting a craft business. You start out small, so that your mistakes are on a small scale. But if you start a craft business today, you probably won't make very many mistakes at all.

This is because times are better than ever for starting a craft business. Anyone starting out today has the benefit of the knowledge and experience of those who have gone before. The pioneers of the craft movement had to learn the hard way. In the early days there were no books like this on craft businesses. The only business books available were theoretical treatises written by academics and books on other types of business that had little or nothing to do with crafts.

The Internet has also created new opportunities for craftspeople. More and more of them are going online in search of information on techniques and new product ideas, to find suppliers, or to market their work.

Are there the same opportunities in crafts today as there were a decade or two ago? Isn't there a lot more competition these days? Yes, it is true there are a lot more craft businesses out there. There are also vastly greater opportunities than ever before because the growth of craft businesses in North America has expanded and increased the public's awareness of and demand for handcrafted products. As public demand has increased, so has the number of opportunities for craftspeople. One side of the equation fuels the other and there is no end in sight to this exciting trend.