CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1 THE HANDYMAN BUSINESS: AN OPPORTUNITY WAITING FOR YOU

1. What a Handyman Does 1
2. Do You Have What It Takes? 2
3. Advantages and Disadvantages 4
4. Part Time or Full Time?
   4.1 Part time 6
   4.2 Full time 6

2 GETTING STARTED

1. Your Goals and Expectations 9
2. Sizing Up the Market 10
   2.1 Market size 10
2.2 Market research 11
2.3 Facing the competition 12

3. Developing Your Business Plan 12

4. Business and Legal Requirements 13
   4.1 Zoning and licensing 13
   4.2 Form of business 16
   4.3 Insurance 16
   4.4 Naming your business 17
   4.5 Hiring employees or contract staff 18

5. Accounting Basics 19
   5.1 Bookkeeping 19
   5.2 Your balance sheet 19
   5.3 Tax requirements 20

6. Getting Professional Help for Your Business 20

3 SETTING UP SHOP 23
1. Getting Organized 23
2. Your Home Headquarters 24
   2.1 Keeping records 24
   2.2 Communication needs 27
   2.3 Your office environment 29
   2.4 Tax advantages to the home office 30
   2.5 Keeping your home and office separate 31
3. Your Vehicle — An Office Away from Home 32
   3.1 Van, truck, or car? 32
   3.2 Using trailers and wagons 33
   3.3 Vehicle supplies 34
4. Tools — The Handyman’s Best Friend 36
   4.1 A basic tool kit 36
   4.2 The right tools for the job 38

4 MARKETING YOUR BUSINESS 41
1. Letterhead and Business Cards 41
2. Word of Mouth 42
3. Advertising
4. Build on Existing Clients
5. Networking
6. Marketing Tips

5 MEETING THE CUSTOMER'S NEEDS
1. Estimates, Quotes, and Pricing
   1.1 Understanding quotes and estimates
   1.2 What to charge
   1.3 Invoicing
2. Scheduling
   2.1 Planning for a job
3. Organizing the Work Site
4. Serving Your Customers Well
5. Dealing with Difficult Situations
   5.1 Not getting paid
   5.2 Damaged property
   5.3 Family arguments
   5.4 Unhappy customers
6. When There Is Too Much Work
   6.1 Saying no to work
   6.2 Hiring help
7. Summary — The Key to Customer Service

6 THE HANDYMAN AT WORK: ON-THE-JOB TIPS AND TECHNIQUES
1. Doing the Right Job at the Right Time
2. Working on New Homes
3. Working on Older Homes
4. Painting Like a Pro
   4.1 Painting preparation
   4.2 Oil or latex?
   4.3 How much paint will you need?
   4.4 Cleanup tips
5. Working with Plaster and Drywall 79
6. Plumbing Pointers 82
7. Rules for Roofing 82
8. Yard Work 84
9. Taking on Wildlife 85
   9.1 Removing animals 86
   9.2 Pest prevention 88

7 KEEPING UP WITH TRENDS — SOME IDEAS FOR TODAY’S MARKET 89
1. Accessibility and Universal Design 90
2. Home Energy Audits 90
3. Home Checkups 92
4. Home Security 92
5. Keeping on Top of Trends 99

8 BUILDING SAFETY AND QUALITY INTO YOUR DAY 101
1. Using Safety Equipment 101
2. Assessing the Situation for Safety Concerns 102
3. The Safety of Your Customers 104
4. A Word about Ladders 105
5. Taking Care of Yourself 107
   5.1 Staying fit and safe 107
   5.2 Taking time off 108

9 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE 111

CHECKLISTS
1. Business Plan Outline 15
2. Home Energy Audit 93
3. Home Checkup 95

ILLUSTRATION
1. Learn to Lift Correctly 109
SAMPLES

1. Business Plan for Goals and Measurables 14
2. Balance Sheet 21
3. Business Card 42
4. Flyer Sample (1) 44
5. Flyer Sample (2) 44
6. Seasonal Reminder Flyer 45
7. Yellow Pages Advertisement 45
8. Community Newspaper Advertisement 46
9. Customer Contact Form 47
10. Customer Follow-Up Note (1) 48
11. Customer Follow-Up Note (2) 49
12. Network Contact Form 51
13. Estimate Sheet 55
14. Service Invoice 60
15. Job Organization Form 61
16. Weekly Work Schedule 63

TABLES

1. The Handyman Business: Pros and Cons 5
2. What Paint for What Job 78
3. Paint Coverage 80
5. Safety Equipment and When to Use It 103
6. Ladder Guide 105

WORKSHEETS

1. Is the Handyman Business Right for You? 3
2. Tools and Materials Inventory 26
1. What a Handyman Does

First and foremost, handymen (and women) are those skilled individuals who can solve problems. Generally their services are geared to home owners who need small jobs done around the house, such as fixing a leaky faucet, installing a light fixture, repairing drywall, or cleaning out a garage. Depending on the skill and ability of the handyman, other services may be offered, such as painting, snow removal, yard work, assembling furniture or equipment, laying carpet, removing junk, or just about anything else you can think of!

The most successful handymen have a wide range of knowledge to draw upon. If you want to start up a handyman business, you should be prepared to work in many areas, including the following:

- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Carpentry
It is also helpful if you have experience working with other tradespeople and you understand when a licensed tradesperson is needed. In other words, you need to know what your limits are.

If you’re reading this book, you likely already have the skill to carry out jobs in many, if not most, of these areas. You’ll need to be prepared to be called on to do any number of other tasks, as well, depending on your customers’ needs. That, simply, is the nature of the handyman business, and it is what makes a handyman so valuable.

2. **Do You Have What It Takes?**

To run a successful handyman business, you need more than the skills listed above. There are many people who can fix things and pick up the odd job, but without some basic business skills and personal traits, your handyman business will not be truly successful. Take the time to complete Worksheet 1 now to help you in your assessment of your business idea.

Starting a business is easy. But making and keeping it successful are the tricky parts. Success in business requires basic know-how. So, on top of your handyman skills, to keep things running smoothly you need to be able to do the following:

- Keep accurate financial records for accounting and tax purposes
- Organize customer information
- Organize your time and work schedule
- Understand basic marketing and advertising principles and practices
- Practise good communication skills
WORKSHEET 1
IS THE HANDYMAN BUSINESS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Answer the following questions honestly. Knowing yourself and how prepared you are to run your own business are key to your success.

1. Are you able to diagnose and fix most household problems?  □ yes  □ no
2. Are you often asked by neighbors and friends for advice on fixing things?  □ yes  □ no
3. Do you enjoy the challenge of repairing things around the home?  □ yes  □ no
4. Can you organize yourself to get a job done?  □ yes  □ no
5. Are you able to do physical work?  □ yes  □ no
6. Do you have the tools, vehicle, and home space necessary to run a home-based business? □ yes  □ no
7. Are you willing and able to market yourself and your business?  □ yes  □ no
8. Can you work on your own, with little supervision?  □ yes  □ no
9. Do you enjoy working with all kinds of people?  □ yes  □ no
10. Are you a creative problem-solver?  □ yes  □ no
11. Can you accept criticism?  □ yes  □ no
12. Can you learn new things and apply them?  □ yes  □ no
13. Can you read instructions and use them?  □ yes  □ no
14. Are you willing and able to get help as you need it?  □ yes  □ no
Think carefully about what you want for your business.

- Learn new things
- Keep interested in business
- Be self-motivated
- Be trustworthy, honest, and respectful

That expertise, the knowledge and skills to meet challenges and problems and overcome them, is necessary for anyone planning a business venture. The good news is that you can learn almost everything you need to know. You can learn from this book, you can learn from talking with other successful businesspeople, you can take courses, and you can read other manuals. The Internet offers a world of knowledge; stores run do-it-yourself seminars; TV shows provide information on home renovations, organization, and maintenance; and self-help tapes and DVDs are available at your local library. The sources of information are almost endless. And, of course, professional help in areas such as accounting and legal advice are available when you need them (see section 6. of chapter 2).

Your first step is to think carefully about what you want for your business. If you decide that starting a handyman business is for you, the next step is to take action to ensure your goals become reality. A clear understanding of the risks and rewards of running your own business is a good place to start your thinking process.

3. Advantages and Disadvantages

The handyman business, like any business, has its upsides and its downsides. As a handyman, you will work fairly independently, set your own hours, and choose your own customers. But you will also be responsible for finding your own work, estimating how long it takes, and dealing with a new boss (your customer) with every job.

Let’s compare the pros and cons of running your own handyman business, shown in Table 1.

4. Part Time or Full Time?

The wonderful thing about having your own business is how flexible it can be. As the owner of your business you can decide when, where, and on what you will work. You will also decide for whom and for how much money. The key is finding the right balance of working the way you want and making enough money to meet your goals.
### TABLE 1
THE HANDYMAN BUSINESS: PROS AND CONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can work independently</td>
<td>Solely responsible for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can set your own hours</td>
<td>Must be able to cope with both slack times and over-busy times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can set your own pay (don’t need to ask for a raise)</td>
<td>Must sell yourself and your skills to every new customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can run the business the way you want to</td>
<td>Must run your business as well as do all the handyman work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can work from a home office; no need to invest in</td>
<td>Family life may be disrupted by home office environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retail or warehouse space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the work you enjoy</td>
<td>Must look for jobs all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to improve people’s homes and make</td>
<td>Must deal with all kinds of people, even the unfriendly and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers happy</td>
<td>difficult ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs and tasks are varied</td>
<td>Some jobs are monotonous and dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No boss or coworkers to worry about</td>
<td>Must be able to work alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can set your own goals</td>
<td>Must review goals regularly and ensure they are reached to enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Handymen and women are often part-timers. The handyman business is often a great fit for retirees who are too young to stop working entirely, but who don’t want the nine-to-five grind any longer. As a part-time business it also works well for anyone caring for other family members, be they children or elderly parents, and who wants or needs to work part time outside the home.
Working part time can work well if you have other responsibilities that just don’t allow you to work full-time hours.

But the handyman business can also be an extremely lucrative full-time job. Let’s look at the two options.

4.1 Part time

Running a part-time handyman business, and by that we mean less than about 30 hours per week, can work very well if you have other responsibilities that just don’t allow you to work full-time hours. You may choose to work two or three days a week, or you may choose to work only when your time allows (e.g., when your spouse is on shift, or when the children are in school). Whatever works for you, you can be successful if you consider yourself — and sell yourself — as a professional.

Time management becomes a challenge if you choose the part-time option. As a handyman you are likely to run into jobs that will require long hours to complete and that must be done in one session. For example, a customer might need a staircase painted, and won’t appreciate your disrupting the home by taking three days to complete an eight-hour job. Any jobs that require the power or water supply being turned off are other obvious cases when your schedule should not overly inconvenience your customer. If you choose to work part time, consider carefully how you will meet this kind of challenge and be clear about your schedule up front. One solution might be to team up with another part-time handyman and share some of the jobs, expenses and, of course profits.

As a part-time handyman, you will need to invest in the same amount of money and energy in starting and developing your business as a full-timer. You will need the same inventory of tools and equipment for completing jobs, a vehicle to get you around, and home headquarters in which to keep your records. A part-timer will likely get the same variety of jobs and will need a similar wide range of skills and abilities as a full-timer. Finally, marketing your business will require the same kind of attention and care as a full-time business.

4.2 Full time

Full-time handymen and women are professional and their work should show it. As with those who choose to work part time, a real commitment must be made by full-timers not only to working for customers as they hire you, but in managing your business.
Working full time means that you can realize the full potential of your business. You can make a very good wage if you can manage your customers and your business. Full time means scheduling work for yourself, 30 to 45 or more hours per week. Some weeks will be lighter and others will be heavier, but on average you can expect full-time hours and a full-time income.

Scheduling has its own challenges for those with a full time commitment. You must be accurate with your estimates of how long a job will take. You must also be able to let customers know that if they have additional work they want you to do once you are on site, you may or may not be able to squeeze it in.

Full-time handymen often have a tendency to never take a day off, a vacation, or even a statutory holiday! As a self-employed person, it’s always tempting to work that one extra hour or day for the extra income, or because you’re not sure when the next job will be offered to you. But be aware, for the sake of your business and your personal health, working full time does not mean all the time.

How you handle your schedule is up to you and your situation and goals. Consider carefully; if you don’t give your needs the consideration they deserve, you will not be happy in your job, nor are you likely to be successful.