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## **Insiders' Secrets To Flea Market Profits**

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### **Author's note**

I'm forever thankful for what the road has given me; the freedom of life that few have experienced.

Most of what I've learned has come from my fellow vendors and customers. Like a vast network of learning...with every set-up, some new thing, a tip, a sales pitch, another location to try out.

All for free!

## **Introduction**

Back in the early 80's, I was fed up with my going-nowhere job. Don't get me wrong, the job was well respected and the money was enough; I was a classroom teacher.

But after a few years, I found myself staring out the classroom windows at the real world. I wanted to travel. I had seen many people wait until it was too late to start living the good life. Many fell into tragic endings, including my own parents.

There had to be a way to break out.

**So begins my story.**

**My journey - and hopefully yours very soon.**

Not knowing anything about how to make money was a big problem.

I knew I had to learn; it was the only way that I could escape the classroom.

It wasn't easy. There was no one interested in showing me anything that would help. In fact, quite the opposite. Friends and relatives like to keep you in your place; you know - the little box they have drawn around your life. They want you to stay in that box. It keeps the pecking order in place.

No help came from that camp.

I really like to travel so the first thing I did was to make a list of possible ways to make money on the road. I wrote down the pros and cons of each idea.

Finally it hit me that the easiest way to make money with the least amount of hassle was to work flea markets!

Over the next two years, I haunted flea markets in my area. I checked out the dealers, what they were selling and also, how they were talking to the customers. I took notes on what seemed to work and what didn't.

Somewhere along the way I realized the **first secret**; only a few vendors were making any real money!

The **second secret** that I discovered was just as important; where and how the flea market was located and how it was managed.

This set the pace of business. Some products worked and some didn't. (What to sell and what not to sell).

The next big problem was I didn't know how to SELL...or...what to SAY to make it work. I found a cheap-priced flea market that was close to home. Finally with great effort, I got the courage up to rent a booth and, telling myself I could do it, tested the waters.

(If you have never sold anything to strangers, don't get too nervous about this short story. You can do it and, with a little practice, you will be making sales with the best of them, trust me. 😊 )

I was a woodworker in my spare time, so I decided to make some routed wood signs. You know, the ones with sayings on them, (that way I figured I could make my own products at home and not worry about the extreme hassle of trying to take a workshop of electric hungry tools to market, let alone do the work and sell at the same time - No Way!)

So, there I was. It was getting close to Christmas. I made some neat folding lean-back racks for the signs to be displayed on. I placed my beautiful holiday signs on the racks. They really looked nice. Much to my pleasure a large crowd of people stopped at my booth. They exclaimed how beautiful the signs were. Some made remarks like “those are the best looking signs I’ve ever seen!” Wow, there must have been 30-40 great compliments that day.

One problem, at the end of the selling day I had made NO SALES AT ALL! The final blow was when some jerk came by and told me it was a great idea and he was going home to make some for himself! A Lesson Learned: **Sell What the Customer Wants, Not What You Want.**

After a few more tries I switched to several kinds of sample signs in my booth and let the customers place orders for them to be ready the next weekend...With Their Own Words On Them! You know, stuff like, ‘The Jones’, ‘Bob & Mary’, or ‘Thank you for not smoking’, etc, etc.

Of course I would always take a small deposit to secure the deal. I made out an order form with the exact size of the sign, type of letter style and so on (this is very important when doing custom work of any kind). Always make sure the customer signs the order form and you have a way to contact them during the week. (Don’t forget to get their phone number also if something comes up, as things happen once in a while.)

I finally was starting to make some weekend money. The dream of traveling was getting closer and closer. Then, quite by accident I discovered a “Directory to Flea Markets.” It listed the markets state by state, the phone numbers, hours of business, etc.

Boy, I was ready to hit the road! I had quit my teaching career and was living down on the Mississippi Gulf coast. With the help of my small weekend market work and a couple hundred a month I got from a real estate mortgage, I was ready to travel.

After trying a bunch of different items on the side, I finally decided that the only thing to do was put my wood sign business on hold and stock up on high mark-up items that took little space and could be sold just about anywhere. Incidentally, that item was jewelry, (see reference section for sources). When I had enough to sell, I packed up and hit the road.

Since that time way back then, I've traveled most everywhere that I wanted to go. The markets have always paid my way. My travels, as well as yours will give you fond memories filled with stories and adventures. I've camped with millionaires and outlaws both, each with their own thoughts and outlook on life. You will soon learn that there is a lot of fun to be had and a lot of things to do and see. Don't wait until it's too late. **GET STARTED NOW!**

P.S. I have had vendors tell me that the first time I break a \$1000 dollars in sales in one weekend, I will turn to my partner and say, "you know, even if I was worth something before, I'll never be worth anything again! Making this kind of money in one weekend!"

## Chapter One

### Secrets The Flea-market Dealers Don't Want You to Know!

Flea markets are not unlike large successful businesses. Each has its own special closely guarded secret. The main difference between flea markets and other large businesses is that a flea market is made up of many small individual businesses, each with its closely guarded secrets, most of which consist of where they got their merchandise and how much they paid for it.

**Rule # 1** NEVER ASK ANOTHER VENDOR WHERE THEY GET THEIR MERCHANDISE.

If you ask they will do one of several things...

- × get mad
- × lie to you
- × get mad and lie
- × teach you a few new vocabulary words

**Rule # 1A** If someone asks you the same question....

Be calm, cool and collected (this is a hard row to hoe) just smile at them and say, "I'm sorry, that's confidential information!"

Once in a while you will get a person who will not take "NO" for an answer. They beg you for a source of supply (so they can go into competition against you).

Here's what I do. If they keep on with me I'll say, OK I'll tell you on two conditions.

First, I need you to agree that you will not set up at this market for (xxx number of weeks, months...never) Of course they will agree and think they have just about ripped you off.

Second, I will give you my source of supply, but first you must pay me for it....(Remember the dog eat dog reality of business.) Figure out how much of a threat the person appears to be and then come up with a LARGE amount of upfront, cash only money. Say.. \$ 500 to \$2,000 dollars. That usually shuts them up. If they agree, go for it, take the money and give them your second best source of supply.

**Never your First! Never!**

## Chapter Two

### Wholesale Prices

If there was only *one thing* that makes or breaks a vendor, it would be how much that vendor pays for his or her merchandise.

Just this morning (6-20-03), a vendor friend dropped by our local coffee shop. While we were shooting the breeze, he mentioned that some vendors at the market he worked went to K-Mart to buy their stuff. Then they were taking it to the flea market and trying to resell it at a profit.

I said, “You’ve got to be kidding?”

“No, I am serious”

I said, “How can they make any money?”

“They’re not!” he replied. “They’re old retirees who don’t know anything about making money.”

You must always be looking for a better price for your merchandise.

***Your wholesale price is all you have to work from.***

The lower it is the more room you have to deal with the customer.

## Chapter Three

### Settle for Less....Get More

I am always amazed at what other people think is important in their lives. Some place great value on how new and expensive their vehicle is, others on their video collection, etc.

What about the price they paid? Do they buy retail? Could they have used this money in a better direction?

Of course!

Every time you spend in the wrong direction you lose, not gain. (author's note: If you spend \$10 dollars a week on junk food, what do you end up with? Heart disease, stroke, the bloats, etc? If you take the same \$10 and buy good wholesale merchandise with it, you end up with an extra \$20-\$70 in your pocket every week!)

If you can find a way to change your spending habits and come up with an extra \$100-\$200 dollars a month, you can put that money into buying wholesale merchandise and start your own on-the-road business!

### The 3x Mark-up

Most flea market items are marked up over cost *at least 3 times* what the vendor paid for it!

I know, I know, you were told that the grocery stores only makes a tiny bit of profit on each item they sell. The retail stores only make about 20-30% profit on their merchandise, blah, blah, blah.

The truth is that you must *mark your products up 2-7 times or more over what you paid for them* if you are going to make a profit on the road.

This 3x mark up is necessary for your survival. Most of the cheaper items that you sell for around \$3 should cost you less than a dollar wholesale.

Look at it this way. When you are on the road you need to break down your selling price into three parts. For an item that sells for three dollars, one dollar goes to replace the just sold item. One dollar goes for road expenses ( booth rent, gas, food, repairs, etc).

The last one-dollar goes in your pocket as profit.

So, to put it another way, if you sell 100 x \$3 dollar items in a day (that would be a busy item), you take in \$300 dollars. Now take that money and

1. *put aside \$100 to replace your inventory* of those items.
2. *put aside another \$100 for road expenses* and
3. *put the other \$100 in your savings box.*

I like to use surplus ammo boxes for this, they have a watertight seal around the lid and are tough enough to stay with you. Of course, you can do it any way you see fit. This just works for me. Remember, *split the money into three parts*. That way you will always know where you are coming from.

## Chapter Four

### Where Dealers Buy and a Few Jokes For the Road

**Auctions** are a joke, spotters are usually placed in the audience to run the price up on junk that's not worth the opening bid. Auctions can cause bidding frenzy. If you find a good one in your area, do not tell anyone, period.

**Catalogs** The joke about many flea markets is that the dealers all buy from the same catalogs. Thus they create a back stabbing environment in which no dealer wins.

Let me explain: most amateur dealers are desperate to make a sale and sell way below the 3x mark up rule. Of course, they go belly up down the road. Catalogs can be a great source of merchandise if you get one that the other dealers don't know about. I use this trick all of the time.

**Garage Sales** Garage sales are tricky. They can be a joke, if the owners of the sale have gone to a few flea markets first and then price everything the same as the market vendors do. That's no profit left for you. If they have some good stuff that you know from experience will sell at a flea market for a 2-3-x mark up, **go for it!**

(Tip: Go as early as possible, even before it opens if possible. If they have some really good stuff, offer to buy it all at one easy price. That way, you both win. The garage sale never happens. The people don't have to use up their day in the hot sun. You load all of the stuff up and haul it all to the nearest flea market. \$\$\$!

**Wholesale Stores** The joke is the same if they are close to the market you are working. You can bet on it that there will be vendors selling the same products.

The back-stabbing begins. There are many wholesale stores all over the country (see resource chapter). Most of these stores require that you have a retail sales tax number, a business card and, sometimes, a business license. So what's the big deal? Get a tax number from the state. (see appendices)

**Wholesale Flea Markets...Dealers Only!** This is NOT a joke. In some areas of the country there are sections, or whole markets, for dealers only. Yes, you will probably need a retail sales tax ID number and a business card to get into the action.

**Factory Over-runs** This is a direct type of sale. You go to the factory in person and see what is for sale. Sometimes they have stuff that they can sell on the side at a great price. You will need a few extra bucks on your hip for this kind of buying. Often these sales are made in cash only. Usually a factory spokesperson will talk to you or give you the name of someone who buys from them. Don't be surprised if a factory rep wants a pay-off under the table to let you in the inner circle of buyers!

**The Internet** I have been searching the Internet for over three years and have yet to find a deal that I could buy, pay postage on and still make good money from reselling it.

If you find a good source, please pass it along to me. ☺

## Chapter Five

### Where To Get Your Merchandise

**If you don't buy right - you're going nowhere.**

Temptation is your worst enemy. Always look for great merchandise.

So what is great and what is not so great?

**The easy answer:** Something that is low in cost, sells high and everybody wants it - like a really good price on cans of coffee.

**Example:** I saw a complete van full of coffee sell out in less than three hours.

They opened up the back door of the van, threw a blue tarp on the ground at the front of their booth. (no tables were furnished at this market)

Next, they filled it with large cans of name-brand coffee. It was early and a lot of vendors started gathering around the booth. Of course, when you see other early birds crowding around a booth, you know some thing is going on. I rushed over to check it out...**wow!** Large cans of name brand coffee at about ½ price. Since my partner and I drink coffee, you can bet that I grabbed up a couple of cans while I had the chance.

Many cities have stores that sell merchandise at wholesale prices. You probably will need some sort of ID and a state resell tax number to buy from them. The reason for this is that it covers their side of the street; these businesses usually don't collect sales tax on the wholesale items so they need a record of who is going to collect the tax. This covers them in case they get a visit from the tax people.

When you buy this way, you are responsible to collect sales tax on the items that you sell retail. Check in your phone book for “wholesale” listings of products of interest”.

The various flea market magazines are a great starting point to finding wholesale merchandise. (See resource chapter at end of book.)

Most market dealers buy from the same wholesale magazines or nearby wholesale outlets. The trick here is to stay on top of what are real hot sellers and how long to keep selling them before they crash. When sales start to drop off, cut prices and get out quick.

Another nice thing about having a resale tax number is that you can usually buy from any wholesale outlet. You can go right in and start buying right beside the pros. Sometimes it’s smart to check out what other vendors are snapping up. This gives you an idea of what is selling before you spend any money yourself.

There is a lot to be said for phone orders:

- ✓ A free order line, no driving around.
- ✓ Direct delivery to your house.

Shop wisely and compare the same products sold by different wholesalers. Check the minimum purchase for the total order. Many wholesalers want from \$50-\$100 dollars or more before they will fill your order. Some have no minimum. In addition, you can often ask for a sample pack to check out the variety and quality of the products before spending more money with that store. With phone orders, all you have to do is place an order. They will tell you right then how much the total amount due is. If you use COD, they will usually either call you back when

they ship or give you a toll free number to call and check on the total amount of the order including shipping. Most vendors order COD or charge it on their credit card. NOTE: UPS, Fed-X, and other shippers no longer accept cash payment for COD's. This means you must get a Postal Money Order or certified bank draft in the exact amount due. A small hassle. I usually get a Postal money order since the Post Office is just down the street.

A credit card is a nice way to order. You save the COD charges and they sometimes even pay the postage on larger orders. Just remember that down the line your monthly credit card charges will come due.

Hopefully, you will have made at least three or four times the amount of your order by then. When that happens, you can smile as you pay the balance due.

## Chapter Six

### Other Choices

#### The First Buzzards Get The Best Pickin's

This is one thing that most know but few act on. It doesn't matter if you are garage buying (going from one garage-yard sale to another). You could be checking out a flea market or any place that has used merchandise. One thing is for sure, if you're not one of the first ones there, you will never know what treasures the early birds have harvested. They are long gone before you ever got there! Yes, my friend, there has been many a profit lost by showing up late. The early birds picked the tables clean.

**Hint:** Some pros specialize in buy-outs. They go to a yard sale really early, usually before they are officially open. They check out the goods and make a calculated guess on the total resale value for them. Next they offer some really low cash prices for the whole lot. Everything for one price. It is not uncommon to make a deal like this. The yard sale people are happy; they didn't have to set up and have cash in hand.. This also works at estate sales. A pro will come along early and make a buy-out of everything.

## Chapter Seven

### Tail-Gaters

When someone comes into a flea market and unloads their yard sale stuff, we call them tailgaters. Sometimes they will use the tailgate of their pick-up to put their stuff on. Most of these people don't have any idea about prices. Often you can buy some really good stuff from them. Many times you just take it back to your booth and mark up the price. Country markets are a great place to find products that you can take back to the city markets to sell. It is not uncommon to find collectables and antiques at give away prices at country markets.

## Chapter Eight

### Table Swapping

Table swapping can bring in some really nice profits. Buy low and sell high. The idea here is to buy from the amateur tailgater. You know - stuff that will sell for a good mark up.

All you do is buy the items and move them to your own tables. Sometimes a sale will be made in just a few minutes.

**Example:** A vendor friend was an early bird at the market we were working. He bought three old beat up wicker lampshades. The tailgater sold them for a \$1 dollar. He thanked the tailgater, walked back to his booth, and put the lamp shades on his table. A couple of hours later the shades sold for \$12 dollars! This kind of swapping goes on all the time.

## Chapter Nine

### Hard Luckers

Another great profit maker (if you have the stomach for it) is to buy from down-and-outers at the market where you are set up. Many times, these broke vendors will sell their whole inventory for just enough money to get out of town.

Sometimes a vendor will get disgusted and sell everything at a give-away close-out price to just quit and get home. Often bad health forces a vendor to take whatever is offered.

They just want to bail out!!

**Note:** This is where it is real nice to have a little money stashed back. You can make an offer and close the deal right then and there.

**Question?** What is a Texas Ten? (See glossary of market terms.)

## Chapter Ten

### Dumpster Diving

**No, I am not kidding!**

Dumpsters are a treasure-house of discarded stuff. They often contain 100's of dollars of things that you can sell at a flea market.

Check out dumpsters in rich neighborhoods.

Check on which days they pick-up at street side or dump boxes. It's handy to have a pole with some sort of hook or grabber on the end. For the really big boxes... well, somebody has to climb down inside and be able to get back out!

Of course, there is always the possibility of stumbling on a dead cat or dog, a corpse or a drunk! Just look at it as an adventure!

#### **Case examples:**

A vendor that I know gets all of his used merchandise at street-side pick-up locations. He drives around and loads up his van real early in the morning. He goes to the best neighborhoods to get the best stuff.

There is a funny thing about this. Almost always, the people place equipment (TV's, VCR's, radios or other appliances that work okay) to the side of the rest of the trash. This lets someone else know that the stuff is still working.

How thoughtful!!

Another vendor friend from out West says that a gal he knows in LA makes 35-50 thousand a year dumpster diving.

What's her secret? Well, first - she dresses real nice and has an old but well kept Mercedes. She drives around in the rich sections of town and blends in fine. Whenever she sees some goodies, she parks way down the street and casually collects the stuff. All of the things she gets during the week go to the flea market on Saturday and Sunday!

You see rich people are rarely satisfied and often bored. So they throw good things away just so they can go out and buy whatever is the fad at the moment! If the color is outdated by a few months, out it goes to the street side pick up or nearby dumpster!

**Note:** Check up on local policies about picking up discarded street-side stuff. Some areas may not allow it and actually enforce the ordinance.

## Chapter Eleven

### What to Sell

**Everything depends on what you sell at which market.**

Some markets are junk markets. If you work one of these, SELL JUNK and lots of it! If you work a large market, there will be a lot of new merchandise, most of which comes from one of the wholesale magazines, (see resource section.)

This may work out for you or it could turn on you.

**Example:** You could get real excited about some advertised product and order a large amount only to find out that the wholesaler sent you junk - junk that nobody wants.

Often you can spot this kind of stuff by the fact it was on sale in the first place!

When you place an order over the phone, watch out for the numbers switch. I once ordered some ID bracelets from a place in Chicago. The order was around \$120.00 dollars worth. It was a COD.

I really needed those bracelets and, when the UPS man came, the COD was for \$240.00! Wow! I went ahead and paid it, ouch! I opened up the package only to discover that they had doubled the order. Two dozen of everything instead of one dozen. Oh well... spend and learn!

Get serious: If you have any sort of health problems, stay away from heavy stuff; furniture, tools, books, or glassware.

Find something that the customers like and are lightweight.

It should:

- ✓ be easy to pack and unpack and
- ✓ sell with a 3x-10x mark up.

Try several small orders of different lines of merchandise. It won't take long until you find your niche.

Check out some markets and take a few mental notes. You can tell if a vendor is selling by looking at them. If they are smiling and alert, it's a good chance they're making some money. On the other hand, if they are sitting down at the back of their booth reading a paperback – well, you know the rest of the story....

## Chapter Twelve

### Where to Get Products

Let's recap some sources of products:

- ✓ Yard sales
- ✓ Wholesale stores
- ✓ Estate sales
- ✓ Wholesale-only magazines
- ✓ Dealers going out of business
- ✓ Hard-luckers
- ✓ Tailgaters
- ✓ Table swapping
- ✓ Wholesale flea markets
- ✓ Auctions
- ✓ Dumpsters
- ✓ Street side pick-ups
- ✓ Self-storage sales
- ✓ Factory over runs.

✓ Garage Sales

**After-market merchandise by the pallet.**

Some companies specialize in store returns. These are usually sold by the pallet or by the truckload.

This area is so specialized that it will take an entire book to make sense out of it.

The best way to learn more about after-market merchandise is go to

[www.samliquidation.com](http://www.samliquidation.com) They have a free Ebook on the subject.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **Where to Set Up**

#### **1. Regular Markets and How to Find Them**

If you have access to phone books, it's often easy to locate markets in other towns. Just look under "Flea Markets".

However, sometimes there are markets that don't list in the Yellow Pages due to the cost.

This is where it is handy to have one of the flea market guides onboard. The guide put out by Clark's is very popular.

Another way to find out about markets is to just ask some local people. When you pull in for breakfast or gas, ask an employee if there are flea markets close by.

Another way to plan ahead is to search on the Internet. Try "Guide to Flea Markets" on one of those search engines. I use Google for this. It's fast and gets the job done.

#### **2. Road Side Set Ups... On Your Own**

Some vendors like to find a spot along a well traveled road to set up. This works, but sometimes it doesn't work. Personally, I have never felt comfortable doing this. Try it if you like adventure.

There are some risks to consider:

- × The Law...Some of our fine law officers seem to get great pleasure out of hassling roadside vendors.
- × Permits...Sometimes an agent of the county or city will want you to buy all sorts of permits just to do business in their fine area. Sometimes they get quite “cocky”, even getting nasty and threaten you. It is a license Merry-Go Round; spend... spend... spend..., an endless circle of profit for them.
- × Accidental Trespass. If you set up on private property without permission, it could turn real bad for you...

If you are just passing through an area, it is usually not worth getting involved with a lot of paper work. This stuff has a way of following after you.

If you plan to stay awhile in one spot, it is much different. Plan on having a State Sales Tax Number. You probably will find a local license and other permits apply as well.

### **3 Parking Lots**

I've worked parking lots several times. One time, a spot was assigned to me for about seven weeks straight and it turned out great.

How much did it cost? Answer: One seller's permit for \$20 plus \$4 per day to the lot owner. This was good for a year. Not too bad, considering it was only 2 miles from where I was living at the time.

In some places, you can set up at gas stations, both open and closed.

Asking permission before you set up is **Very Important**. Checking local ordinances to see if this is allowed would be prudent.

## Chapter Fourteen

### Necessary Permits

#### Maybe or Maybe Not?

Let's get this over with, once and for all. If you are the kind of person that needs to have all of your ducks in a row, then spend away. Get every permit that you will ever need or whatever it takes to feel secure with the authorities. As a newbie, I was real nervous about this when I first started working markets.

On the other hand, why spend the money if you don't have to? I've seen newbie vendors, including myself, so scared about the law that they could hardly function.

Did I Say Break The Law? Of Course NOT!

What I am saying is, check out the rules before hand. Find out what you really need and what you don't. Often there will be a bunch of requirements by different government branches posted at the market office. The office is required to post these notices.

#### *The Big Question.*

#### Are they enforced?

- ? How often?
- ? Never?
- ? Always?

? Sometimes?

? Different times of the year?

It would be a large mistake to ask the market office about these rules. They will be obliged to tell you that all of the required permits must be purchased, of course.

It's better to ask a couple of vendors about this kind of stuff before you go and spend your hard-earned money.

Do this before you set up; who knows - it might be a better idea to go on down the road to another area?

**Here's a good example of what I've been talking about.** I was set up at a nice East coast Florida market. It was in May. Everything was going fine; beautiful weather, brisk sales.

Then, about 10:00 that morning, a guy walks up to my booth. He's got a pull behind cart with him, some books, and other stuff.

He says, "Hi, I am the county license man. So do you have a county license to sell at flea markets?"

I calmly replied "No, this is the first time I've set up in this county. How much is it?"

"Twenty five dollars" he replied.

"Well let me go ahead and get one." I reached for my wallet.

“No need for that.” he said. “Look, just buy the four dollar, temporary license. This is the last time that I’ll be around this market until next tourist season in the fall. No need to spend your money until then!”

So, thanks to this cool tax man, he saved me \$21 dollars. \$21 dollars more in the wallet at the end of the weekend!

What I am saying is, some areas of the country are real tight on permits and licenses and other are easy.

One vendor that I know, worked all summer in a Southern market without any kind of permit, not even a state tax number.

At the end of the summer, he asked the lady who collected the booth rent if there was any need to get a tax number. She replied, “as far as we are concerned, you never worked here at all”.

Needless to say, that vendor left with a smile on his face.

It’s your call. I can’t decide for you. Just be careful and go with whatever needs to be done.

## Chapter Fifteen

### What You Will Need on the Road.

#### A short course in Road Savvy

##### *Supplies and cost*

Unless you are totally broke and desperate, **don't leave home without...**

- ✓ A road worthy vehicle. Preferably, one you can live in.
- ✓ At least \$ 500-1000 dollars in cash plus a debit card and a credit card just in case..
- ✓ Spare parts for your vehicle
- ✓ Toolbox with tools to fix things like the water pump, alternator, starter. I mean take off the old broken part and put a new one on.
- ✓ Tire repair kit
- ✓ Flash light
- ✓ Manual or battery powered air pump
- ✓ Cook stove, gas or propane
- ✓ Cooler
- ✓ Portable tables for out side set up

- ✓ Canopy for outside set up
- ✓ Clear plastic to cover merchandise in case of rain
- ✓ Plenty of plastic tarps, clamps and bungee cords
- ✓ Ant spray
- ✓ Mosquito repellent
- ✓ Sun block
- ✓ Hats or caps
- ✓ Long sleeved shirts for sun protection
- ✓ Gloves for unloading, loading and set up
- ✓ Table tops and folding table legs

The list is much like one for going camping.

It seems like you always forget something.

Let me tell you how it works out on the road. **You will break down sooner or later.**

**Stuff happens.**

If you have the spare parts along, you can usually fix the problem yourself.

The last thing you need is to become a victim of a local rip-off mechanic and his buddy's parts store. Some of the stories I've heard are enough to make you sick - all because the vendor didn't have spare parts for their rig.. Enough said!

**Another thing to watch out for.**

Full hook up RV parks. If you like to spend extra money, be my guest - stay at these parks.

Here's the scenario.

You are driving along and it's getting late. You see a nice billboard sign 'Lazy Oaks Campground - Full Hook Ups. Nice Drive-through Sites'.

So, you pull in.

You tell them that you are self contained and all you need is electric or just a place off to the side to park.

They smile and tell you that you will have to pay the Full Price for hook ups even if you don't use them!

This is going to cost you an extra 10 to 15 dollars. By that time it is getting dark. You are beat up and tired and it's too late to drive on. So you pay the full price just like they planned. Oh well, live and spend!

Always watch out for this kind of scam. When you see a campground advertised with "Full Hook-Up Sites" with no mention of anything else, well - you get the picture.

Many times, all you need is a safe place to park and turn your engine off. Why spend the extra travel money on something that you don't need?

Remember: Plan ahead. Get a campground guide, then you can check on campground prices beforehand. Spend as little or as much as you like.

Don't let some scam RV park take money away from you, be prepared.

Sometimes, I'll go into an RV park office and tell them that all I want to do is park some place out of the way. I'll add that I don't want any hook ups and am leaving early in the morning. About half the time I get a spot for a few dollars (always pay in cash). Everybody's happy. They get extra cash and I get a cheap spot to park for the night.

Here's another way to cut down on campground prices. When you go in to register at an RV park or campground, tell them that you are a traveling vendor on business and not on vacation. Ask for the Commercial rate.

This worked for me at a very nice sportsmen's fishing lodge. The lodge had a nice bay front campground . It was late when I arrived. I went in to the office and told them that I was a traveling vendor and all I needed was a place to park. No hook-ups of any kind. The lady in the office checked with the manager and they said, "Okay." The price for a waterfront parking place? Three Dollars!

I used that same sportsmen's lodge for years.

Every time I was heading down the Gulf coast I would pull in and reacquaint myself with the office. Prices did go up a bit with the new owners. The deal was the same but they raised it to \$4 dollars. I can live with it.

## Chapter Sixteen

### “No One Home” Campgrounds

**These always make me nervous.**

You pull into a nice hometown type of campground and are greeted with a welcome sign that tells you to pick out your own spot. The sign says register and pay in the morning. How convenient; no-one present and nowhere that you can find a price for your overnight stay.

Wow!

Personally, I've never had the nerve to hang around for the night to find out.

## Chapter Seventeen

### The 5 Most Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

**Never take consignments.** All you are doing is filling up your booth with other people's merchandise. If that's not bad enough, you have to split the money with them. Just say, "Sorry, but we only sell our own stuff."

**Never overstep your booth size.** If you rented 10 front feet, make sure you don't take 10 ½ feet. I mean **not an inch over**. Take a tape measure with you. You'll need it once in a while.

If you want people to walk down the outside of your booth on the sides, make sure **you** make space for them inside of your rented area. Never, never set your booth up so that your customers walk on your neighbors turf to buy from you.

**Now listen carefully.**

Most vendors respect each other's turf. If your set-up needs your traffic down the side aisle and your next-door neighbor is set up the same, make sure that he gives up the same amount of walkway space as you do. Usually this means that you split about 2-3 feet between your booths.

This is enough space to let customers squeeze down the side aisles. They can look at your stuff or turn around and check out your neighbor's booth.

**Never Play Loud Music.** Another thing that will get you in to hot water is loud music. If you have to have it on, keep it turned down low. Nothing is more maddening to other vendors than noise or music from your site that is so loud when

they are trying to make a sale and they can't even hear themselves speak, let alone what the customer is saying!

**Never “Hawk” your merchandise at a market.** Yes, some booths are set up as demonstration booths; you know - like showing the customers how great their carpet cleaner is or their car wax ... blah, blah, blah. That's a little different.

Try to keep a few booths away from them as they will ruin your day if you set up next door. Sometimes, they will even try to pull your customers away from your booth before you get a chance to talk to them.

This is not good. Do not do this to other vendors. It is not uncommon for hawkers to get kicked out of flea markets.

One time, I worked the same market all summer, had the same booth etc. The spot next to me was open every weekend to new vendors. The rest of the aisle was rented full time by the month. Somehow it worked out that this booth was the only one available on the whole aisle.

There was a new vendor set up next to me every weekend. One week, a real pushy type of guy took the booth. You know, the kind that couldn't care less about the rest of the planet. First, he plugs in a TV with a VCR and begins playing it loudly. It had to do with his daughter doing some kind of infomercial. It had absolutely nothing to do with anything. Of course, the TV pulled everybody in the area in close. Many of them were blocking the aisle in front of my booth. By the time the customers finished watching the commercial, they just walked on, never noticing anything in my booth!

To add insult to injury, this guy had a demo booth. Next, he started to demonstrate some kind of wonder saw blade. Yes, that's right - a table saw right next door.

This went on all weekend.

By the closing on Sunday I was really ripped. I went to the manager and asked if I could rent that spare booth for the rest of the summer. The manager agreed and this allowed me double the front footage of my set-up. When I got back to my booth, the vendor on the other side of me had a big smile on his face. I said "that's the last time that wonder saw guy will ever set up on this aisle" (it was the only un-rented booth for the summer). We both got a laugh out of that!

I should have rented it weeks before. My sales started doubling over what I had been doing out of a single booth.

Why didn't I go to the manager and complain right off the bat? Well, this had been tried by other vendors complaining about the same guy. No luck, the manager didn't care and didn't want to be bothered (he's no longer employed at that market.)

So, I did the next best thing. With that spare booth rented, the whole aisle was rented full time for the summer and we blocked the guy out!

**Never Lie to Your Customers.** A few vendors think it's smart and cool to lie. They tell the customers anything, just to make a sale. **This is dumb.**

The buyer will often come back to the market wanting a refund when things don't work or break or have otherwise been misrepresented. They often go to the manager. Sometimes they get the law. It goes on and on.

Take a close look at the few dishonest vendors who cheat the customers. They are bums and losers; much like a rip-off mechanic bragging to his buddies about overcharging a couple of elderly RV'ers.

If you are selling used merchandise, make sure it is understood the stuff is sold "AS IS." This means that it comes with no guarantee of any kind. If the customer knows this before the sale, it will keep a lot of grief from coming back on you.

A couple of easy to read signs saying "All Merchandise sold AS IS" will go a long way in heading off potential problems.

**Hint:** Don't make your signs any bigger than needed to be easily read from outside your booth. If you put up a bunch of large signs of that kind, you will scare a lot of buyers away. One sign that I post is a small sign that is easily read from as far away as twenty feet; "All Sales Final".

In sixteen years on the road, I have only had one or two returns! On new merchandise you may have to give a refund or exchange the merchandise. If you take back the product and give a refund, do it politely and learn from it. You know, pay and learn!

## Chapter Eighteen

### How to Deal With Jerk Vendors

Occasionally, you will set up next to someone unpleasant. They will try to take advantage of you. You must nip this in the bud. Here's how I handle it. No I don't get my six-shooter or my cattle prod. Not yet, (just kidding)!

If your next-door neighbor puts his tables on the side lines with no walk space in his booth, (he thinks he'll steal a couple feet out of yours). Here's what I do. First I politely ask, "excuse me, were you planning to sell down the sides of your booth?" If he says yes, then I explain, "good, then you will need to set your tables in a couple of feet. That way, our customers will have room to get to your merchandise inside you own space. I'll do the same and we will have plenty of room for our side displays".

If he or she starts to give me a hard time about it, I just excuse myself. I go and get the manager and let him settle it. When I talk to the person in charge, I calmly and politely explain that I have a problem with the vendor next to me. I ask him to resolve the problem.

This usually works out. The manager checks out the trouble and tells the vendor to move in his set up so that we both share the side walk-way.

Now if you don't want to "go and tell", there's another way to deal with it.

Reverse your set up. Place you tables right up to your sidelines and butt them up next to his. This blocks him off. Now the customers can enter your booth from the

inside and go down the sides completely inside your booth. The trick here is to be flexible. Enjoy and make lots of sales. Don't let another vendor ruin your day.

Here's another trick that a few vendors will try to pull. They place their merchandise in front of your booth. Sometimes they will even try to block your side traffic with their merchandise. Again handle the situation calmly and, if need be, don't hesitate to get the manager.

In some markets, it is customary to place your tables back-to-back with the next booth. I'm talking about the side tables. This provides only side access in your own space. No problem. Go with the flow!

Also, notice how the market is set up. Every market has its rules and customs;

- Sometimes when the market furnish the tables, they want them all set up their way.
- Other markets let you rearrange the tables to suit yourself.
- In outdoor markets, it is not uncommon for you to have to furnish your own tables.
- Some markets only allow you to sell off the front tables, all butted together in one long row with no access to the inside of your area.

Just check around before you set up. If you have a question, ask the office first.

Don't try anything that will get you kicked out.

## Chapter Nineteen

### Give Me the Low Road

#### The low road. What does it mean?

Well simply put, it means that you have a less than new looking rig. One that is not in the “show off” class.

It also means:

- You dress nice but not fancy.
- You stay clean and not smelly.
- You are friendly but mind your own business.
- You have little or no problem making new friends.
- You keep a low profile in everyway.
- You carry cash and merchandise with you, but no one suspects it.
- You can park your rig just about anywhere and draw little or no attention to it.

When you pull up and park in a campground next to some “Big Dog”, you smile. Here you are parked next to a fancy rig. It is the same RV park, the same views, the same shower rooms, the same everything.

**The only difference:** Your rig is paid for!

You didn't have to use up your life chasing the almighty dollar. You are in the same campground at the same time and place, having the time of your life!

One time, I was parked next to one of those big gas-guzzling Dogs. The guy had the hood open and was checking things out. I walked over and started talking to him. You could tell he was, let us say, not a happy camper. He kept mumbling about the awful gas mileage and how much he had spent that day on gas. Of course, I had to make his day by telling him about the 23-28 miles/gallon my trusty little rig got! This really got to him. He replied in a disgusted way that he didn't want to hear about that and walked off.

Oh well, what can a person do?

**Another thing to consider.**

The low road is a much safer way to travel. You fit in, just another RV'er that is enjoying the good life. If new friends want to know what you do, just downplay it. Tell them that you do as little as possible. Tell them that you try a flea market from time to time, just for fun.

When fellow travelers ask me what I do, I always enjoy telling them that I am in business... mostly Monkey Business! Ha!

One of the most rewarding parts of self-employment on the road is that you can pick and choose where you want to stay, how long and how often to set up.

Many RV'ers pick a warm area of the country for winter work-vacations (free heat). Then they head for the mountains to keep cool for the summer months (free air conditioning).

Why pay for heating and cooling when Mother Nature will give it to you for free?

Some vendors like to work a circuit. They have 3 or 4 markets that are all within a short day's drive and they work a different one each week. This keeps them fresh and they don't "fish out" the market. Usually, your strongest sales will be on the first and second weekend at a market. If you only show up one weekend a month, your sales should stay higher.

Some serious full time "Roadies" will work a summer circuit back east and then head for the desert for the winter. Some work the desert markets, then go to Colorado for the summer.

There are as many combinations of travel and work as there are different vendors. Each has their own special plan for success.

**Note:** Fellow vendors, ones that actually live on the road, have a logbook or map marked with all of the best markets. Sometimes - if they like you, they'll let you in on some of these places.

## Chapter Twenty

### Take the High Road

If you feel that you need a fancy expensive rig and can afford it, go for it!

You can make some really big money if you know where to work and what to sell. This subject is so detailed that I'll have to write a separate book to reveal the secrets of the high road.

The low road and the high road - I've done them both.

My advice to all of my high-roller friends is:

- Pick your market and products carefully.
- Don't pull up in a dirt bag junk flea market and expect to sell expensive Southwestern jewelry! There are a lot of high-end flea markets and events that you will blend right in with.

Enough said.

## Chapter Twenty One

### Price Wars

Sometimes, a vendor will get so mad at seeing you at “his” market that he will try to put you out of business. He has the same merchandise you have and is going to “kill you off”.

Price wars can be fun.

The buyers love them. The poor vendor who is going to “teach you a lesson” is losing money right and left just to make his point.

I love it.

Often, he doesn't have enough money to get out of town after the weekend “war” is over. This is a great time to offer to buy him out at about ½ the wholesale (or less) price!

Some of these vendors are such backstabbing morons that they actually think they won the war! Yes, they may have won the price-war battle that weekend. But, they never won the war.

You are a lot smarter.

Remember those three ammo boxes I told you about. You already have your money split-up in them. So, you have reserve money to travel on or to set up at the same market next weekend.

No Big deal.

One of the best ways to block or prevent a price war is to keep your merchandise covered up on your tables until the last minute. What happens is that most of the vendors do the same thing. They try to go around and see what kind of competition they have.

If they see the same stuff on your table *and check your prices..* well, you know the rest of the story.

This has happened to me a couple of times that I know about and probably a bunch more that I don't.

One time, I was set up with a lot of Southwestern jewelry. This was back when silver concho "button covers" were hot. They had been placed out early, before the market was open and, of course, the price was in plain view.

There was some early traffic – mostly, vendors wandering around checking for table swaps. At the same time, they check to see if other vendors have the same merchandise as they do.

I do it too.

I remember it well. A nice looking redhead stopped and checked out the button covers. She asked about the price, thanked me, and walked off. Sales were good that day but no one was buying my button covers. I couldn't figure it out. At \$3 dollars each, they should have sold like hot cakes.

Finally, we got a little slack time near the end of the day. I took a walk to check out the other vendors. Well, you guessed it - about 100 feet down the aisle on the opposite side was a large sign. "Button Covers \$2.00! The mystery was solved. The redhead and her partner were undercutting me and selling theirs for a dollar

less! Lesson learned: I should have checked out who was selling what around me before I put my stuff on public display.

You can sometimes stop a price war before it starts. When you make your early morning rounds of the market and you see a strong challenge (I mean a vendor who has the very same or close-to product) talk to them. See if you can come to a friendly agreement so that both of you hold your price the same.

This works sometimes. They know a price war will hurt their wallet. If they agree and you suspect they are dropping their price behind your back, check it out by asking a customer about the price at the other vendor's booth. Usually you can ask a customer to do you a favor, even bribe them with a cheap gift or discount to check out the other vendor's real price.

I've always wanted to try this.

### ***Have Some Fun, Start Your Own Price War With Your Partner!***

Here's the plan. You and your partner, (this takes two people on the same team) both rent a separate booth. Not next to each other, but close enough that customers can see each booth; 50 -100 feet apart is plenty of distance. Both of you rent the same size booth and split your merchandise in half. Each displays the same exact products.

### **Let the fun begin.**

Get some poster paper and a magic marker. Write "Price War" as big as will fit on the poster. Clamp it somewhere that the customers can see from a distance.

Remember, only one sign up at any one time. Your partner has their sign up for a while. She or he makes a bunch of sales and then takes their sign down.

That is when you put your “Price War” sign up.

You switch back and forth all day long. What fun!

Just remember not to mark your prices down too low. Only do this if it is some dog merchandise that you can't sell any other way.

Is this legal? Is it fair? What about complaints? I can't see anything really bad about it. At the worst, if someone complains, so what? Remember, you are your own boss. It's your stuff and you can sell it, give it away, throw it in the dumpster. Whatever you want.

Set your own price. If you get some flak, just tell them that you made a bet with your partner as to who is the better salesman and you intend to win the bet.

P.S. If you try this and it works out ok for you, let me know...☺

## Chapter Twenty Two

### How to Make Quiet Money... Dealer to Dealer

Sometimes it's better to check out what other vendors are selling before you set up. If you find some strong competition, you can tell them that you have some merchandise that you would like to unload. Make them an offer to sell out. If the dealer has any spare cash and can buy you out for below their cost, many will jump at the chance.

The trick here is to mark up the wholesale price enough to make a quick profit. Unload the merchandise and move on. Another choice; stay and put out a different product line. You do have a back-up product line, don't you?

One time, I bought a lifetime supply of fillet-meat knives. The whole deal cost me \$30.00. It seems that in the big meat slaughtering houses that after a knife gets worn down too much, they chuck them in a 55 gallon barrel and get a new one out. Somewhere down the line the barrel full of knives gets wholesaled off at some incredibly cheap price.

It was a slow, cold day at the market. A vendor friend gave me a tip. He knew that I sometimes sold knives and right behind me on the next aisle was a guy with a lot of knives. He was broke and needed gas money to get out of town.

I went over to his booth and introduced myself. I asked about the knives. He said, "if you'll take all of them, you can have all three banana boxes for ten dollars a box". The deal was made. He picked up the boxes for me and carried them back to my booth. How convenient!

How many knives you ask? Somewhere around 700! I routinely put one or two out at a time for \$3 dollars each. I never leave home without them.

Call it road insurance. I know that I can always:

- ✓ sell them to another vendor for \$50-75/ hundred or
- ✓ trade them or keep selling a few each day for 3 bucks each (fishermen love them).

Here again is an example of freedom on the road.

Another example of dealer-to-dealer sales: Quartzsite, Arizona - a legend in its own time. Quartzsite used to be a flea-market vendor's gone-to-heaven kind of place. So good that you don't want to even share the info with a newbie.

In the short four winter months it's claimed that more than 1 million people stop to shop the five or so flea markets. The markets are strung out along the service roads next to I-10. The traffic builds all winter and peaks with the "Rock and Mineral" Show that is held in February each year.

Ever since I heard about Quartzsite, it was on my to-do list. Luck was on my side.

About 10 years ago I bought a little Chinook motor home ( I still have it ). It was a local sale from an old guy. He re-did everything in the rig. It was in great condition; a perfect rig for one or two people.

I got him down on the price to \$3,000. We agreed and I went right to my bank, got the cash out of my savings and paid him off. We were both happy. What a deal!

I got a completely rebuilt motor home for 3 grand. Everything worked; rebuilt motor, 3-way fridge, stove, heater , 4-speed transmission., bathroom and a closet. It was a traveling low-profiler's dream, 27 to 29 miles/gallon on regular gas. Wow!

**Note:** If you want to travel as cheap as possible, start looking for one of these. They are getting old now and it might take two of them; one to use for parts to get and keep the other one in A-1 condition. The years to look for are 1976 and 1977. They are built on a Toyota pick-up chassis. The 20R, 4-cylinder gas engine is the one to look for. I have heard that it is not too safe to get one with dual rear wheels; it seems that some of those had trouble with the rear axle breaking off. If this is correct, I would stay away from a rear dual axle. The thought of an axle breaking off high in the Colorado Rockies is not my kind of adventure!

Back to Quartzsite. At the time, I was selling and making jewelry. I packed everything I could in the Chinook and headed for Arizona. It is a long drive from Florida. About a week later, I pulled into Quartzsite. The first thing I did was to look up an old friend of mine.

She was known on the road as "Kay the bead lady." We had a nice chat over dinner. Kay had been set-up from about the first of November and was doing well. Over dinner, she started telling me of all the changes that had been made to the markets by the owners and the powers-that-be.

Quartzsite had changed. The town had gone "permit crazy". Everywhere you went, it cost plenty just to set up. There was a lot of competition. Too much competition. Forget it!

At the time, there was a free, primitive campground right behind one of the markets. I stayed around for a few days and bought wholesale jewelry from some of the other dealers. This made all of us happy. I got nice rings with gemstones for 1 or 2 dollars each. The dealers made money and I knew I could mark the rings up at least 5x.

The next day, I ran into a dealer friend from the El Paso, Texas area. He had just arrived and was setting up his booth. He had a small open trailer behind his van that was loaded with bleached-out goat and sheep skulls (these are hot sellers in the Western markets). The trailer had about 425 skulls in it. He put a tarpaulin over it to protect the skulls from the sun and prying eyes - no need to worry about rain out here!

He rented a small 10-foot space and set up his tables under his canopy. Of course, he only put a few skulls out at a time. The others were carefully covered and out of sight.

Word must have spread fast among the other dealers. They started buying from him wholesale. The minimum you could buy to get the wholesale price was 3 skulls. If you only wanted one or two, you had to pay retail for them. If I remember correctly, his wholesale price to other dealers was around 35-55 dollars each. This depended on how nice they were.

Four days later, I decided to check back with my friend. It was early and I was thinking about inviting him out for breakfast. When I walked up to his booth, strangely enough, he had only 2 skulls on his table. He was sitting inside his van reading a gun catalog. As I had said earlier, he was from the El Paso area, so I always called him "El Paso" I approached the side of the van and said "El Paso,

you can't make any money if you don't set some stuff out" El Paso calmly took off his reading glasses, closed the gun catalog and turned to me with a big smile. "I've sold out."

"Wow!", I thought (4 days, \$35-55 dollars  $\times$  425 skulls= ??) go figure. So, off to breakfast we went. He even paid for mine! How thoughtful!

This kind of dealer-to-dealer sales go on all over the country. Who knows, dealer-to-dealer sales could be your cup of tea.

Another time, I had a big load of fashion jewelry; the kind that you would see at K-Mart or Wal-Mart. I had just opened the box. There was a lot of the same stuff in the load. Altogether, there was something like 100 dozen items. It was a Big box.

The guy across the aisle from me said that he had a small store in another town. He kept it open on weekdays and then sold at a flea market on the weekend. He said that he had some jewelry in the store and was looking for more. So I went over to his booth, pulled up a chair next to him.

We were both staring out at the people walking by. I said that I had a lot of duplicates and I could wholesale some to him - that is, for his store but not to sell against me here at the market.

He shook his head and told me the he was not interested. We both kept staring at the people walking by. Then I said, "The necklaces are pre-priced at 3-5 dollars each, I can let you have 50 of them, your choice for \$10 dollars. That would make your wholesale cost only 20 cents each." The guy never looked sideways at me, never smiled, reached in his pocket, and handed me a \$10 dollar bill. "I'll be over in a couple of minutes to pick them out."

A lesson well-learned: You never know until you make an offer. What was in it for me? My cost was 10 cents each, so I doubled my money. I got rid of unnecessary inventory and recovered 10% of my cost for the whole 100 dozen.

All in about 5 minutes!

If you buy right, you can make money selling to other vendors. The down side... if you go full-time at it , you will need lots and lots of inventory and probably a cargo trailer to haul it in.

## Chapter Twenty Three

### Back Door Sales

This means selling wholesale to established businesses through their back door. Some road vendors never ever set up anywhere. They sell wholesale to established stores.

The details of this topic are so closely guarded, that I am writing another complete book devoted to this alone. If you would like to be notified before I release it to the public, simply email me your email address. You will be able to check it out before it goes public. I will probably have to go into hiding after this one hits the fan!

## Chapter Twenty Four

### How To Stay Alive & Well On The Road

Never open up your wallet in a manner that exposes the contents.

Always carry some money in your pocket so you never reach for your wallet.

If someone asks about how much or how well you are doing, play it down. Say something like, “if we keep going like we are, I think we’ll have enough to get some rice and beans for dinner,” blah, blah, blah.

Never camp or park in remote areas.

Always camp early.

Never sleep over at an Interstate rest stop, unless you are really desperate.

Never brag about how much money you carry around with you.

Always park your rig where you can see it when you are in a restaurant.

Do not give out business cards. Do not give out an address with your phone # on it, only a P.O. Box. This should preferably be a rent-it mail forwarding service.

Watch out for people that ask too many questions.

## Chapter Twenty Five

### **E-Z Living...No Money - No Problem!**

One of the cheapest, and often the best, ways to travel is to live at a flea market. You pick a permanent market and stay right there. Many RV'ers do this. Almost every state in the nation has markets that let dealers stay overnight; usually on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Many have RV parks tied to them for vendors. Some allow you to park right behind your booth and stay there by the week or even the month. Often, parking is free or there is just a small charge for electricity.

A lot of markets even have showers and laundry rooms for dealers. If you stay at one of these markets for a few weeks, you will meet some really nice vendors; the kind that never hesitate to help you out in a jam.

I set up in one of these markets in Ga. a few years ago. By the time I got there, we were down to about \$100 in reserve. The front oil seal was leaking on the motor - like 1 quart every 100 miles.

We pulled in and found the manager. I rented a double booth by the week and yes, you could set up every day if you wanted to. I pulled the rig right in behind the booth, unloaded some merchandise on to tables that were supplied by the market.

Next, I put a tarp over the stuff and was basically tucked in for a whole week. At that time, the total cost for a double booth plus free parking behind (no hookups) was \$ 17 dollars!

Living does not get much cheaper in this country. Live and sell right out of the same spot. There are places like this all over the country.

***Road Travel Note:***

If, for some reason you get sick - I mean hospital sick, take some advice I got from an old road Carney. Before you allow the hospital to toss you to the wolves ( the pot-luck doctors), politely and confidently ask a couple of nurses if they have any recommendations about a good doctor for you.

Remember, the nurses are the ones who see the doctor screw-ups and they know who has the highest body count and malpractice law suits against them!!

## Chapter Twenty Six

### Part Time Work at Campgrounds

It is not uncommon for RV'ers to work part-time at a campground in exchange for a free site for the RV, including hook ups. Check out the publication called The Caretaker Gazette

Gary C. Dunn

The Caretaker Gazette

PO Box 540

River Falls, WI 54022 USA

Phone: (715) 426-5500

E-Mail: [caretaker@caretaker.org](mailto:caretaker@caretaker.org)

Another related publication is the:

Workamper News (ISSN: 0895-3678) is published bi-monthly (6 issues per year) and is delivered via First Class mail.

**Publisher:** Debbie Robus

**Editor:** Greg Robus

Address:

709 West Searcy Street, Heber Springs, Arkansas 72543-3761

**Phone:** (501) 362-2637 **Fax:** (501) 362-6769

**Email:** [info@workamper.com](mailto:info@workamper.com) **Website:** <http://www.workamper.com/>

Way out West in New Mexico, I often parked right behind the in-town flea market. This was an ordinance NO-NO. The flea market manager let the cops know that I was “night security”. This worked out great. I parked near the backdoor of the market for free and the cops left me alone.

It’s only human nature to want to help others. So if you are honest, polite, and friendly, you can get by just about anywhere.

One time, I pulled into my favorite campground in Deming, New Mexico. I was running the high road; a late-model 40 foot Coachman Fifth Wheel and a big, shiny, red truck to pull it. A new partner. It was great!

One problem... people were really friendly, too friendly. We were always being offered things to buy. Everyone was nice as long as they thought they had their hand on my wallet. If that didn’t work, they stopped being friendly.

A couple of years later, I pulled into the same campground with my trusty 1977 Toyota Chinook motor home ( I still have both of them).

I rented a spot for a month. At that time, it was 100 dollars a month which included water and sewer hookups. Cable TV was an extra 6 dollars per month. At the end of the month the total came to 126 dollars including the electric. Not too bad considering it was close to everything, had a nice recreation room, clean restrooms, a laundromat and a hot tub to use whenever you wanted.

Boy - was it different. People were honestly friendly with us (yes, I know - the poor drifters, just trying to get from here to there, blah, blah, blah).

This time around they were giving us stuff, not trying to sell us stuff. Several times, we would come back to the RV site and there would be bags full of stuff left for us; clothes, shoes, kitchen gadgets... it was great.

Friends that we made in the campground took us out for dinner. Often, they would give us a ride to the grocery store so we wouldn't have to unhook our little rig. I loved it. Give me the low road any day!!

## Chapter Twenty Seven

### Never Sell Low on Friday

If you are working a three-day (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) market, keep this in mind.

It is usually a bad idea to drop your prices on Friday. Keep your prices the same as always for Friday and Saturday. Then on Sunday, depending on how things are going, you can start to lower your prices. This often works on Sunday afternoon. Start lowering your prices a little at a time. Then, an hour or two before you start to pack, make a few 'close -out' signs or 'Sunday afternoon specials'.

If you really need some extra fast cash, put up a sign that says, "Need gas money, Special sale". Often there will be a few last minute buyers that are eager to take advantage of your problems and spend a lot with you.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

### The Sales Tax Trap

In some areas, sales tax agents will sneak into a market and try to catch vendors that are not collecting sales tax. They often pose as a husband and wife. Just an honest couple looking for a cash buy. Usually, they are dressed well and often have those black government-worker type of leather shoes on.

One trick that they pull is to wait until you are busy packing your stuff. They come up and ask about something and then make a cash offer. You are busy thinking about getting down the road and this will be your last quick sale. It's just a few extra dollars in you wallet. So, you quickly take their money and continue packing. Got Ya!

What happened? You did not write the sale down in your record book, including the sales tax! They usually write you up right there on the spot. Your weekend is ruined. A court appearance, confiscation of your cash box, records, even your merchandise and fines ...it goes on and on.

It is a lot easier to make a habit of writing each sale down as it happens and keep your sales record book close by until the last box is packed. Make sure that you keep each day and location separate. This really is helpful when you want to remember how well you did and if it is worth going back to that market.

I recommend a traveling logbook for your personal records. Keep the sales records in a separate book. Your logbook will become a valued friend as you look back on

the places you have been. The fun, the excitement, the ‘stuff that happened times’. Years later, you can smile at all of the wonderful times you have had on the road.

You should include what happened at the market:

- ✓ the weather
- ✓ the market itself - good or not so good
- ✓ how much you took in and
- ✓ tips from other vendors.

Believe me, a few months or so down the road and you will get everything mixed up without a logbook. It's also a great way to head off an argument with your partner!

## Chapter Twenty Nine

### Prices, Prices, Prices

**Another thing to remember:** Always price your merchandise lower than what Wal-Mart gets (that is, if they have the same stuff). Make sure you buy low enough to be flexible with your prices.

The customers love to get a good deal just as much as you do. When you put prices on your merchandise, it is a lot more professional to mark or label each item with a printed price. Get a price tag gun. This lets your customer know you are for real. For some strange reason, they accept a printed price from one of those price guns as if it were “carved in stone”.

I’ve talked to several vendors who use a price gun to mark their merchandise. They all agree that it cuts the haggling way, way down. Some vendors I know never cut their prices at all. Once the price is stamped on the item, they stick to it.

One vendor that I have always liked, never cuts his pre-made prices on anything in his booth. If someone tries to offer him a lower price, he just tells them that if they cannot afford to shop with him - shop somewhere else! What a guy!

If you do not put your prices on your merchandise, the customers will get suspicious of you - like you just dream up the price depending on what the customer looks like. Not too smart! You will lose a lot of sales if you try to pull that trick, not to mention the customers who are shy and don’t feel comfortable with having to speak up and ask a stranger (you) about the unseen price.

In my opinion, nothing is more amateurish than placing merchandise out with no price on it. Also, if you are a traveling couple and both working the booth (you should be), make sure that both of you know the lowest price you can sell a product for. I don't know how many times I've asked the price on something only to hear, "I'm not sure, my husband/wife went somewhere and won't be back for a few minutes" NEXT!

I am always amazed at how dumb some vendor couples are.

**Another trick that some customers like to pull:** They look at an item of yours. They get a price quote and leave. Usually they depart with, "Well, let me think about it". Later, they show back up at your booth, conveniently when you just left and they proceed to tell your partner that you said that they could have the article for way below what you really said. This puts your partner in a tight spot. Did that so-and-so really put that low a price on it? Am I going to make the sale, or lose it? Am I going to get chewed out by my partner when they find out either way it goes?

Well you get the picture. I've been stuck a few times myself. Remember, **know your prices.**

If you make a special quote on something, call your partner over and say in front of the customer what kind of deal your have made, just in case you have to go to the restroom, blah, blah, blah.

## Chapter Thirty

### Quick Trades Without Money

If you have good merchandise on board, you can make some quick trades.

These are some of the times to consider asking about a trade:

- ✓ Breakfast, lunch, dinner
- ✓ Groceries
- ✓ Repairs
- ✓ Campgrounds
- ✓ Gas for your rig

Most people are willing to help, especially if they think that they are getting a good deal. I have done this a few times myself.

It has always been a dream of mine to travel the entire U.S.A. - trading my way across America, never spending any cash. Oh well, maybe next season!

## Chapter Thirty One

### Stay or Leave

Where you park your rig can make or break your cash flow.

*Rule # 1. After you finish a market, leave.*

Do not hang around and spend money. Head for your next market. Get set up and in place. Things sometimes happen unexpectedly and the last thing you want is to miss out on some neat money-making market because you had an unplanned delay.

Look at it this way. You just finished a three-day market and picked the next weekend market. It's a day's run from where you are. It makes more sense to have some slack time in your schedule. Take off on Monday and get it over with.

Find a nice campground and kick back until the next weekend. This gives you a chance to check out the new market. You can sometimes make reservations early and get your booth paid for in advance.

Check out the local area. NO rush, no fuss. You are well rested and ready to have a great weekend.

If you stay where you are and make a mad dash on Thursday or Friday ... well, just don't do it. You will be cutting your time too close. You will also be tired when you start selling. This will affect your sales.

My advice - never go anywhere on a weekend. If possible, stay where you are for the whole weekend. Let things get back to normal on Monday. You know, everybody's back at work except you! Ha, and me!

## Chapter Thirty Two

### **Building Inventory vs. Money In Your Wallet**

This is always a trade-off. I know of vendors that put every last dime they have back into inventory - always building and building. They usually have to have a large cargo trailer or bus just to haul the stuff around.

For some pros, this is where it's at. They drive large cargo vans around loaded with merchandise. They can pull in a market and put out 60 feet, or more, of tables - sometimes even 100 feet. It is not uncommon for these pros to take in several thousand of dollars in a weekend.

The other side of the coin: A lot of vendors like to have extra cash for those special times, buyouts, long vacations, long trips etc. There is no one right way. That is the beauty of the road.

So, whatever you want is okay. As for myself, I have always been on the crafty side. I always stocked up on raw materials - stuff that I could quickly turn into finished products with a high mark-up.

That's just me. There is so much to learn about the craft markets that this will have to wait for another complete guide.

## Chapter Thirty Three

### One-Day, Two-Day, Three-Day & All-Week Markets

#### One-Day Markets:

One-day markets are a pain. You travel somewhere far away, set up and take down on the same day. It's only one day to make or break your trip.

Sometimes you have to drive the day before and stay overnight, just for one day of sales.

#### FORGET IT!!

On the other hand, some markets are worth the effort. Usually, the one-day markets draw a large crowd. If you can get there the evening before and get some rest from working all weekend, it smoothes things out. That means you will have to break the "never go anywhere on Sunday rule".

Sometimes, you can get there Sunday afternoon and set up right away. This gives you a full night's sleep with no worry of extra early Monday morning set-up. You know, like in the dark!

Who needs it? I, personally, feel that if I can pull in between \$100-200 dollars profit out of a one-day market, it is worth it.

Just remember that these markets can really wear you down physically.

## **Two-Day Markets**

Now, things are looking better. A lot of two-day markets let you set up the day before. Often, you can park overnight right behind your booth. This gives you a couple of free nights parking and no campgrounds to deal with. Not only that, you don't have to go anywhere. You can be well rested, feel good and make lots of sales. Just plain enjoy this crazy life-style!

## **Three-Day Markets**

Three-day markets are about the same as the two-day ones. There is one very important exception. Your first goal on Friday is to make enough money to cover the whole cost of your set-up. This means gas money, booth rent, food etc. It's not hard to do.

Often a Friday will show some surprising sales. Sometimes more than Saturday, although Saturday is usually your best day.

One rule to remember: never count on anything. One Saturday, you knock them over. The next, you barely make your booth rent. Sunday usually starts slow and then picks up around 11:00. Sales last until about 3:00. A lot of money can change hands in those three hours. Most vendors start packing too early on Sunday. My advice: take your time packing on Sunday. The more vendors that leave, the less competition you have.

Personally, I like to stay on until at least 3:30 - 4:30 pm. Sometimes, I will pack part of my merchandise and pinch down the display area. There have been a lot of sales made near packing time. These sales are made long after the eager beavers have left. That is true even with one-day markets.

## All Week Markets

**Wow!** This is beginning to sound like a real job!! Just thinking about it makes me nervous. Why would anybody want to work 7 days a week?

There has to be something good about all week markets? Well, yes, there are a few good points if you find one that will let you park behind or near your booth. This will let you live real cheap. If you locate a market in a high-traffic tourist area, a lot of money can pile up fast. Some vendors work all 7 days a week. They pack back the dough and then kickback all winter and do nothing.

It's all up to you. Work the summer, work the winter.

You are free to do whatever you want!

## Chapter Thirty Four

### First Monday Markets

These are usually money-makers. They are held only once a month; the weekend of the first Monday or is it the weekend after the first Monday? I can never figure it out. One time, I stopped in the famous Canton, Texas, First Monday Market. Everything was fine until I found out I was a week too early! Oh well, maybe next time.

Some vendors work first Monday markets, then travel on to work second Monday markets, then third Monday markets. On and on in an endless loop. There are some real pros on this merry-go-round who are making big bucks!

## Chapter Thirty Five

### Camping for Free

There are a lot of places where you can camp for free. Usually, the only requirement is that you have a toilet with a holding tank. Several campground guides list these places. This is beyond the scope of this book. Just go to a search engine such as “Google” on any Internet-connected computer and type in “Free Camping”. Bookstores are another source for camping guides. Many of the primitive campgrounds have pit-type out houses, *if you can stand them!*

## Chapter Thirty Six

### Sell Your Own Products

Some vendors make and sell their own products. There can be big money in this. Making and selling your own product is such a detailed business that it would fill another complete book.

I have done a lot of this over the years. It's a neat way to sell. Usually, you have little or no competition and, if you do it right, a very large mark-up on the selling price (like something that you make for 5 cents and can sell for 3- 4 dollars)!

**Note: A complete guide is in the works.** If you are interested, sign up now for a pre-publication notice. I'll let you know before the book goes public.

## In Conclusion

### Let's wrap up some of the main points of this book:

Wal-Mart rules the price world. If they sell socks at \$3.25 for 3 pair, then you cannot sell them for the same price. Yes, you can buy the same socks by the dozen at wholesale. Forget about selling them at the same price that Wal-Mart gets. This just will not work. You must go lower. That means goodbye to your 3x mark up.

It can still work.

The trick? You must locate a market with a large attendance; one that you can really move a lot of socks out of. The large volume of sales makes up the difference. If you can't find such a market, forget socks!

When you buy right, you have room to negotiate a little better price with your customer. Often, this is as easy as telling them that the more they buy the more they save.

As you travel around the different markets, you will notice some product "gaps" This could be a great opportunity for you. Sometimes, the local dealers just don't know where to buy certain kinds of merchandise. On the other hand, it could mean that there is no interest in this kind of merchandise - like trying to sell Afro-American stuff at a Southern Red Neck market or trying to sell Native American stuff in Southern Texas. It will not work!

Remember, the cheaper the selling price, the greater the mark-up. Does that mean you are going to make a lot of money? Not necessarily, if you are selling hatpins

for 25 cents each and have a good day, you still might not have made enough money to get out of town! Go figure, 125 sales @ 25 cents each??

There are no rules about the selling price of your merchandise; use the 3x mark up only as a guide.

Watch out for counterfeit merchandise. Sometimes, a dealer will want to unload a bunch of stuff just to clear his own tracks. It is a **Very Risky Business** to sell counterfeit, or “knock-offs” as they are often called. It can lead to heavy fines, property seizures (including your rig), prison and sometimes even a heart attack!

Check out what the successful dealers are selling. This could help you find a niche product that they don't have.

Check out the busy booths. What do they look like? How are the vendors dressed? Are they sitting down in the back of their booth or are they up front, talking to customers?

Make sure that your merchandise fits the market. As I said before, do not put ethnic stuff out in a market that hates ethnic products.

Dress right for what you are selling.

Don't expect to sell high-end jewelry off the tailgate of some old broken-down pick up.

If you take the High Road.... sell high-end products.

*Try to be as self-contained as you can afford.*

Carry as many spare parts as you can afford. Just a water pump and spare starter and a couple of belts will give you a lot of peace of mind.

## Glossary of Terms

**Banana boxes**.....sturdy cardboard boxes that bananas are shipped in. These can be had free just about everywhere.

**Big Dog**..... A large expensive rig, a high-end operation.

**Dog Merchandise**.....stuff that will not sell or is poorly made.

**Down and Outers**.... vendors that are having money problems, usually always.

**Flak**.... complaints and unnecessary attention sent your way.

**Hard Luckers**... vendors that have had sudden money problems, usually over and over.

**Hawkers**.... vendors that try to talk customers into their booth, usually with a loud sales-pitch.

**High Road**.... vendors that run with the “Big Dogs”.

**Kill You Off**.... put you out of business, a punishment kind of thing.

**Knock-offs**... counterfeit merchandise.

**Low Profilers**... vendors that try to keep away from the spotlight, just the opposite of the “Big Dogs”.

**Low Road**.... vendors that keep a low profile with their business and their travels.

**Mail forwarding**.... rent-a-box type of business that forwards or keeps your mail until you tell them where to send it.

**Red Neck Market**.... Narrow-minded, prejudiced and hate filled “good old boys” that are blind to everything outside their very small world.

**Rig**... Type of vehicle that you travel in; motor home, van, car or truck etc.

**Road Carney**... Traveling “Hawkers”.

**Road Insurance**... Merchandise that you can trade or sell fast for cash.

**Texas Tens**... One-Hundred-Dollar Bills.

**Unload** Get rid of unwanted merchandise.

## **Confidential Sources of Supply**

**This information is not to be shared with the public**

**Swap Meet**.....National Magazine for Flea Market Vendors

Published by Forum Publishing Company, 383 East Main St Centerport, NY  
11721

Tel: 631-754-5400

Online: [www.wholesources.com](http://www.wholesources.com)

**East Coast Merchandiser**....America's Leading Wholesale Buying Guide

Sumner Communications, 24 Stony Hill Rd, Bethel, Ct 06801-116

Tel: 203-748-2050

Online: [www.wholesalecentral.com](http://www.wholesalecentral.com)

### **Wholesale Merchandise**

5900 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. #510, Los Angeles, CA 90036

Tel: 1-800-600-7040

### **Closeout News**

5900 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. #510, Los Angeles, CA 90036

Tel: 1-800-600-7040

Online: [www.thecloseoutnews.com](http://www.thecloseoutnews.com)

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US Government auction sites:

<http://www.ustreas.gov/auctions/>

## **Businesses That Work**

**Here is a list of businesses that I have seen making money.**

Of course, it all depends on your set-up, your displays, the kind of market, the time of year, the weather, how you handle yourself and all of the variables that come into play.

Nothing comes with a guarantee.

- ✓ Antiques and Collectables
- ✓ Blue Jeans
- ✓ Books
- ✓ Cast Iron cookware
- ✓ Coins
- ✓ Cookware (used)
- ✓ Dents and Bents (food in cans from grocery stores)
- ✓ Fishing supplies
- ✓ Hats and Caps
- ✓ H & B's in Banana boxes (Health and Beauty supplies)
- ✓ Hunting supplies
- ✓ Incense

- ✓ Jewelry
- ✓ Military surplus
- ✓ Pet supplies
- ✓ Reading glasses
- ✓ Socks
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Tee shirts
- ✓ Tools
- ✓ Watches

Of this list, I have personally sold everything but cast iron cookware, dents & bents, incense and blue jeans.

You can take any of these products and fill up your whole display with them. All of these items have their merits and their demerits.

Many other products with great potential are not listed here. The list is endless. If one thing doesn't work, try something else!

## A Sales Tip

**This sales method can work wonders, sometimes...**

### The Third Man Out

#### Talking to a divine spirit

A hand held two-way radio can be used as an incredible sales tool.

Here's the procedure: A customer makes you an offer to buy something for less than the asking price, you say, "Well, let me check with the boss." You call up your partner who is not in the booth. They could be anywhere, in the bathroom, still in the rig or walking the market.

It doesn't matter. The fact is that an unseen and unknown voice is in control of the deal.

That is what matters.

This "voice from somewhere else" makes the rules. When you relay the price back to your customer, they somehow seem to accept this as if it were written in stone! It may take more than one call to make the sale.

I've seen this used many times myself, often with great success.

## From a Female Point of View

### Tips To Help Your Partner along the Trail

My lady told me to include this from her viewpoint!

#### Get a pair of hand held personal two way radios

- ✓ They help with parking a rig, especially when backing up into a parking spot.
- ✓ More security when making pit stops, never leave the rig without one.
- ✓ Use whenever you are away from your booth.

### Bathroom Procedures

#### *What to take:*

Always take shower shoes, toilet paper, soap, disinfectant spray and a whistle.

Keep your two-way radio handy in a zip lock bag.

Make sure he has his turned on and on the correct channel!

An over-the-shoulder type of bag is just right to carry all of your necessities.

#### *What not to take:*

Do not take money, your wallet, jewelry or anything of value. Just the basic stuff, including your two- way radio

### **Know the prices of the merchandise:**

Make sure he tells you the price of everything and that they are marked clearly on all of your products.

This saves a lot of arguments.

### **What food to take with you:**

Take easy-to-make meals with you.

Don't try to be a fancy cook on the road. You will be as tired as he is at the end of the day and the last thing either one of you need is extra time in the kitchen!

### **Clothing to take:**

Don't overdo it. Remember if you are working flea markets there will always be clothes available.

### **Driving:**

Don't let your partner drive too long. This makes him tired and probably puts him in a bad mood.

### **Breakdowns**

Stay on the sidelines until he cools down a little.

### ***What not to do:***

- × If you break down along the side of the road, it is not the time to pull the "I told you so" routine.

× Be as helpful as possible and do not panic or put on a show!

### **Displays:**

Women are usually better at this. Make sure he gets the message.

### **Helping With the Set-up at Markets**

Help as much as you can with the set-ups. Let him pick up the heavy stuff.

Save yourself for working on the displays.

Try to work out a routine for setting up and taking down. It makes things go a lot faster. This is real important at the end of the day when you are both tired.

## Odds & Ends

### **Make your own tables:**

Most vendors that travel, make their own tables. Usually, they buy the fold-up legs that are available at booths which sell dealers' supplies.

Next, they buy a sheet of ½ inch plywood (4 foot by 8 foot) and cut it in half long-ways. This gives them two table-tops, each 8foot by 2 foot. They usually carry at least four of these tops with legs to match. Most of the legs are sold either as singles or by a five- pack. Expect to pay anywhere from \$5 to \$8 dollars each. It all depends on the local competition from other suppliers.

A good price would be \$25 dollars for a 5-pack. These plywood tops are sharp on the edges. I always sand the edges to eliminate splinters. The corners are also sharp. I cut the corners off and sand them down. It is no fun to have a customer ram into a sharp table corner. It's no fun to catch a splinter in your hand when you are handling them.

### ***Table Covers:***

I personally, like the plastic covers that have fabric backing; the stuff that is used on chairs and couches. You can often get remnants from fabric stores.

This stuff comes in a bazillion different colors. Try to pick something that will not distract from your merchandise. I personally use a black textured one for jewelry. With my showcases, I put out a nice dark-brown. The stuff comes 54 inches wide. This gives you plenty of cover on top of your tables and lets you drop the rest

down in the front. If a sudden rain comes up you can flip the front up and back over your merchandise, then clamp it down.

The stuff is strong and waterproof. With the drop-down in the front, you can store your packing boxes under the tables out of sight. It helps give your booth a professional look. \$\$ 😊

### **Vendor awnings:**

If you work out in the open, you will need an awning to keep you out of the sun and rain. These awnings are usually made in 10 x 10 foot or 10 x 20 foot.

The frame is made of pipe and all the corner fittings are removable for easy storage and set-up.

Prices vary a great deal with these canopies, so shop around a bit before you buy one.

I personally like the 10 x 20 size. In some markets, you can get by with just renting a single 10 foot booth and running your set-up back a full 20 feet. This makes for a nice walk-in type of set up. If you get the right parts, you can make your 20-foot booth into just a single 10-foot booth.

Flexibility is the key to go for.

### **Tarpaulins:**

There are a lot of different kinds of tarps for sale.

For the long run, I like the heavy silver ones with the reinforced corners.

Do not believe the ads on the package covers. They all say *heavy-duty*, *professional* etc. You can tell the difference by how heavy they are and by the higher price the dealers get for them.

Why silver? The silver tarps reflect the infra-red heat the best. White is nice, but you can feel the heat right through them! If you plan on working any fancy events, get the white ones for your top and side curtains.

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