

How To Make Big Money With An Inventory Taping Service

This is, in my opinion, THE business to get into with your videocamera. You only need one camera, decent video skills, little expenses and supplies, and, if done right, very low marketing expenses. Besides your videocamera, you'll need an instant camera and an engraving tool, which together should be able to be found for under \$100.

Here's the business in a nutshell: You videotape household and business inventory and valuables for insurance purposes. Then, if a robbery occurs, the owner has a video documentation of the missing valuables for law enforcement and insurance agents. Your primary prospects for this service will be upper-income families and businesses that specialize in high-ticket items or have a high investment in equipment.

The first step you should take to run a property inventory taping service is to meet with your area law enforcement agencies to find out what regulations, if any, they have. Remember, you will be going into other people's houses and will have full knowledge of their valuables. If you have endorsement from the law, your customers can feel comfortable that you won't use this knowledge for the wrong purposes. The person you want to meet with would be the one in charge of neighborhood watches or community services. Normally, police agencies are enthusiastic supporters of services like this, as it makes their job easier. Others to meet with include insurance agents, private detectives, fire officials and attorneys. Not only will you gain valuable information from them, you will be building up a network for referrals. Be sure to keep a good record of who you meet with so you can send them business cards, brochures and periodic reminders of your services.

While meeting with insurance agents, take care of your insurance requirements. You should carry liability insurance, and you should also get bonded. The extra expense is worth it, as it will both help to get business and will protect you and your customer.

Your service will be ripe for publicity, so prepare a good press release. You should be able to find a good book or two on publicity releases at your library. Get these releases to every daily and weekly newspaper in your area, as well as local business magazines and television stations. When your service gets written up in the papers, keep a clipping of each article to use in your marketing materials. Send a copy to all the insurance agents, attorneys, private detectives and law enforcement agencies in your area. You WILL get referrals from this!

Another idea for publicity is to set up a booth at local home and garden shows, preferably in the home protection areas (alarms, etc.). This will establish your name in the minds of consumers. If you don't mind public speaking, offer to give a short seminar on home inventory protection and how your service can help prevent theft. You can prepare one presentation that can be given numerous times at different community-related functions and locations, such as country clubs.

Now for the meat of the service. When you set up an appointment with a customer, make sure they know you will be charging by the hour, so it will be to their advantage to have things such as jewelry, china or antiques laid out and ready to be taped. Take your videocamera with extra tape and batteries, an instant camera with plenty of film, your engraver, forms for listing valuables, and a three-ring binder for the forms.

When taping valuables, be sure to get a clear picture of them, including any distinguishing characteristics. Be sure to fill out your forms completely, listing special features or characteristics, such as type and weight of gems, etc. Jewelry is probably best photographed with your instant camera, as is any small valuables. Large antiques and other primary household items are easily videoed. Be sure to get any brand names and model numbers clearly taped.

After taping the individual items, walk through the house. Be sure to get any computer and video equipment, phones, TVs, art and other items that would be tempting to thieves. Engrave the client's social security or driver's license number on the back or bottom of items that won't be damaged by doing so. Record all this on the forms, including the location of the engraving and all serial numbers. If the home is burglarized and police recover the stolen goods, this will help the client get his or her valuables back quickly and easily.

Don't forget to tape the outside of the house, including patios, walkways and landscaping. This can help the client establish value in case of vandalism.

In businesses, videotape the office equipment, as well as the offices themselves, inside and out. In specialized businesses, be sure to tape any special equipment.

A good idea is to provide window stickers for your clients that tell potential thieves that items in the house have been marked and recorded. These stickers can be purchased or printed. Your local law enforcement agencies may even be able to provide these to you at a low cost.

When through taping, give the tape a quick run-through to be sure everything's ok, then give it to your client, along with the binder. Encourage them to store these in a safe deposit box, in case of fire.

How much should you charge? A typical mid-sized to large home should take two hours, at most, to tape, if the owner has prepared everything ahead of time. You can charge anywhere from \$50 to \$150 per hour, depending upon what your local market will bear, with \$75 per hour a good figure to start with. You should be able to see how this business can add up!

In your marketing materials, stress the fact that your charge is a small price to pay, considering it is a crime deterrent and will result in far less stress and time on the customer's part if a mishap does occur. You can feel good that you are providing a service which will help people in bad times. Remember to be professional while in the client's home, don't make any comments which could be construed in bad ways, and be assuring about the safety and reliability of yourself and your

service. You can start this part-time and easily move it into full-time, as referrals start rolling in.