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The High and Low-Tech of Yard Sales

by Lew Sichelman

For some folks, yard sales are no longer front-yard operations. Thanks in large part to online auctions and swap boards, these rites of passage have moved from the side streets, dead-ends and cul-de-sacs and onto the information superhighway.

A recent study by eBay found that most households have some \$2,000 worth of unwanted items that could be auctioned for cash online, not just locally but nationally. And there are even service companies that will list your items on the web on your behalf, so you don't have to catalogue each and every little thing yourself.

With AuctionDrop, for example, all you need to do is drop off items worth at least \$75 and weighing less than 25 pounds -- items such as laptop computers, for example, cameras or old Waterford vases -- at your local UPS store and the company will list them on eBay for a reasonable commission.

"Garage sales are terrific venues for selling your used books and small unwanted items, but traditionally consumers don't get full value for their more expensive collectibles," says AuctionDrop's resident expert, Sam Robertson. "Using an online marketplace, selling more valuable items can bring top dollar."

But eBay isn't the only auction site. There are several others. At LiveDeal.com, you can list your stuff locally with no fees and sell it to the highest bidder. "It takes only seconds to post an item for sale and upload a photo," said Steve Harmon, vice president of corporate development. "Then local buyers can make you an offer and pick up the item on the same day."

It sounds simple, but for the majority of people who hold yard sales, the old fashioned way still works just fine: Separate what can go from what needs to stay, run an ad in the local paper, post a few signs on the main road and streets, move your stuff to front lawn, garage or driveway and wait for the crowds to descend.

Of course, you can hold a yard sale, garage sale or estate sale anytime you like. For the most part, though, people bite the bullet when they move from one house or apartment to another. For some reason, it's easier to live with clutter than to part with the wall hanging Aunt Flabby gave us, the one we can't bear to part with, but the monstrosity we'd never put up either.

Perhaps it's a case of out-of-sight, out-of-mind.

One of the good things about these events is that there are no hard and fast rules. For example, some people make sure they tag each and every item with the price and won't

haggle, while others swear that it's best not to price anything and let the excitement of the moment rule.

But since a move from one residence to another is the perfect time to de-clutter, the folks at North American Van Lines offer these suggestions for a well-planned and profitable sale:

Timing: Avoid holiday weekends. Many potential customers will be out-of-town and others will be afraid to venture forth because of the extra traffic. Start early, say 8 a.m. But be prepared for people to arrive even earlier than that. The "professionals" like to beat everyone else to the punch.

Permits: Some jurisdictions require their permission to hold yard sales. Others dictate exactly how and where streets signs can be posted -- and perhaps more importantly, when they must be removed.

Advertising: Yard and streets signs are only part of the equation. Following the local rules, put up your largest posters on high-traffic roads and make sure you have all the avenues to your place covered. Run ads in the local daily, weekly and Pennysaver, and post some information on your community website.

Neighbors: At the very least, warn people on both sides of you that the neighborhood is about to be invaded. But also consider a block sale. Multiple sales on the same street sometimes boosts turnout.

Change: Have plenty of it on hand, not just coins but small bills, too. And have a calculator nearby so you can do the math more quickly.

Power: If at all possible, have an electric cord handy so your customers can turn on your electronic items. People will want to confirm these items run properly.

Helpers: Enlist the entire family, including the kids. But try to keep their hands out of the cash box. One adult should be assigned to collect money.

Traffic: Place your best stuff near the street to attract passersby, and display everything else up nice and neat. Curb appeal counts. Beyond these suggestions, there are no hard and fast rules. I have never put a price on anything and have done very well at several yard sales, for example. But others insist that everything be marked.

And I will put out anything. At one event, I sold several rubber stamps I had made with my kids names on them to mark their clothes for summer camp. My wife said I was crazy, that nobody would buy those things. But someone did. A teacher gave me a buck for each one. She intended to use them to teach hand-and-eye coordination to her handicapped students.

Clothes are difficult to sell, so I'd rather take them to the second hand store or donate them to charity. But if you think you can sell all those old outfits, give it a shot. Just make sure you organize your clothing by size and gender, and be ready to refold, refold and refold again and again and again.

Finally, when your event is over, you'll probably be faced with a mound of items nobody else wants, either. Fortunately, there are a few companies that will be willing to pick it up and dispose of it for you. But don't expect to get much. In fact, you'll be lucky if they don't charge you to haul it away.

AUGUST AT A GLANCE...

26 Women's Equality Day



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Back to School Safety

School Safety

School can be fun and exciting with every day bringing new experiences, but it can also be difficult and even frightening for children. Kids today are faced not only with the challenges of learning new material, interacting with other students, and bullying, but also an increased threat of physical violence in schools.

You can help prepare your children for the experiences they will face at school each year and help create a safer school environment. Read the following tips for advice on how to protect your children, and how to teach them to protect themselves.

Getting there

Map out with your children a safe way for them to walk to school or to the bus stop. Avoid busy roads and intersections. Do a trial run with them to point out places they should avoid along the way, such as vacant lots, construction areas, and parks where there aren't many people.

Teach children to follow traffic signals and rules when walking or biking. Stress that they should cross the street at crosswalks or intersections with crossing guards when they can.

Encourage children to walk to school or the bus stop with a sibling or friend, and to wait at bus stops with other children.

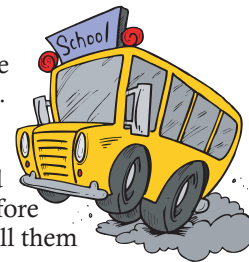
Teach children not to talk to strangers, go anywhere with them, or accept gifts from them without your permission. Tell them that if they see a suspicious stranger hanging around or in their school they should tell an adult.

Help children memorize their phone number and full address, including area code and zip code. Write down other important phone numbers such as your work and cell phone on a card for your children to carry with them.

On the bus

Have your children arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to pick them up.

Make sure children know to stand on the sidewalk or on the grass while waiting for the bus.



Teach children to make sure they can see the bus driver and the bus driver can see them before crossing in front of the bus. Tell them to never walk behind the bus.

Be aware that often bullying takes place on the school bus. Ask children about their bus – who they sit with, who they talk to, and what the other kids do. Let them know that if they see someone being bullied, or are bullied themselves, they can talk to you, the bus driver, or another trusted adult.

In the classroom

Talk to your children about their day. Sometimes children won't tell you right away if they are having problems at school. Ask your children if they see anyone bullied, if they are bullied, or if anything else makes them feel uncomfortable. Look for warning signs, such as a sudden drop in grades, loss of friends, or torn clothing.

Teach children to resolve problems without fighting. Explain that fighting could lead to them getting hurt, hurting someone else, or earning a reputation as a bully. Talk to them about other ways they can work out a problem, such as talking it out, walking away, sticking with friends, or telling a trusted adult.

Keep an eye on your children's Internet use. Many elementary schools have computers with Internet access. Ask your children's school if students are monitored when they use the Internet or if there is a blocking device installed to prevent children from finding explicit websites. Talk to your children about what they do online – what sites they visit, who they email, and who they chat with. Let them know they can talk to you if anything they see online makes them uncomfortable, whether it's an explicit website or a classmate bullying them or someone else through email, chat, or websites.

Ask about the safety and emergency plans for your children's school. How are local police involved? How are students and parents involved? What emergencies have been considered and planned for?



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