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INDIANA WOODWORKER MAKES \$96,000 A YEAR IN HIS GARAGE

Indianapolis - Despite the downturn in home construction, one young man is turning hands-on ability and online savvy into profits by selling high-quality molding to home-remodelers.

Mike Crowder, 27, of Indianapolis, reports, "I made \$96,000 last year, working out of my garage." Mike's business grew "almost by accident," he says, and came when his other business started to slow down.

"I've been in the home remodeling business for over two years," says Mike. "When the economy went bad, my business really started to taper off."

That's when Mike got ingenious. He owned a Woodmaster Molder/Planer, a woodworking machine that turns rough-cut lumber into finished wood products including molding, tongue and groove flooring and paneling. Mike made some molding and advertised it on Craigslist.com, a free online classified ad website. "It sold out the first day," says Mike. Mike made and advertised more molding and the same thing happened. "That second batch sold out in 24 hours," he said.

Today, Mike's one of thousands of men and women who profitably market goods and services online. His success surprised him at first. "It was a shocker that eBay would work so well for me," he says.

You don't need a website to sell online

Today, many websites make it easy for individuals to sell items online. Common sales-oriented sites include Craigslist, a free classified ad site, and eBay, an online auction site. Of particular interest to woodworkers like Mr. Crowder is Woodfinder.com, a searchable database of wood suppliers.

Online advantage

Mike's bread and butter is 3-1/4" crown molding. When that took off, he added almost two dozen other profiles. One of his most popular profiles is 3" fluted casing. "It sells like hotcakes," Mike says. "I sell it in casing sets: two legs, a header, and two rosettes as a set. You can get more money for the sets than you can for just the straight runs."

Mike has competition from other woodworkers but few compete on eBay. Buying raw materials direct from the sawmill helps Mike's business, too. "I order a few thousand board feet at a time and they deliver it to me," he

reports. "Oak's my best seller but I'm starting to get into cherry. This week, I shipped 1,000 board feet of cherry to Oregon."

Early success

Mike's business grew fast. "A year after I bought my first 718 Woodmaster I bought my second one," he says. "When I got into production, it became obvious that I needed an efficient setup. I set it up as a dedicated rip saw and I need one more piece, my ripsaw's right there."

Mike reports his first Woodmaster paid for itself within the first few weeks of full time production. "That's not unusual," says Will Johnson, President of Woodmaster Tools, Inc. "When a woodworker is making \$30 an hour with one of our machines, it doesn't take long for the machine to pay for itself."

Quote for profit

Mike quoted a recent renovation job at \$13,000. To quote his jobs, Mike figures how much material's needed and adds 20%, then multiplies his cost by 2.5 to cover time and materials.

Curved molding is some of Mike's highest profit work. "I just did curved molding for a 4-foot window and charged \$75 per arch. There was probably less than \$5 worth of wood in it."

Big plans

Mike plans to grow his business. "I'd like to get a bigger building and a third Woodmaster. I'll keep advertising for local business. I'm offering contractors 25% off to try me out and give me a shot to earn their business."

Statistically, people aren't moving these days; they're staying in their homes and redoing them. Wood products made by enterprising men like Crowder are in high demand.