

Creating Profitable Displays

*An ideal home business
that can be started on a shoestring*



by Cy Stapleton

Creating Profitable Displays

*An ideal home business
that can be started on a shoestring*



by Cy Stapleton

Creating Profitable Displays...

Creating interesting and unique displays is a great part-time home business than can easily turn into a profitable full-time home business or retirement supplement. You may have a lot of the requirements already, but if not, this is something you can get started on a total investment of less than \$2,000.

I actually got started in the late 1960's or early 1970's for about \$10. I purchased a couple of pounds of coprolite (dinosaur poop) and started creating displays using the poop. I affixed it to wooden plaques I made in my woodshop and added a descriptive label. Most were for gifts to my advertisers and friends but I started selling a few. It was not long before I started advertising the displays and over the years have sold thousands of them at \$10 to \$20 each with a cost of less than \$1 each.

If this hits your hot button, you want to get started as soon as possible. Initially people will not likely beat a path to your door. You are going to have to build a customer base, so the earlier you get started the faster you will start realizing a nice little extra income.

This little booklet is a tutorial that starts with the conception of the idea and progresses through finding the items to use, creating a really nice display, marketing your finished product, and packaging and shipping your sales. I am going to discuss the types of displays that I create, but this tutorial will work for helping you to create displays out of any small objects.

What you will require...

Your requirements will be few to get started...

You will need the following:

A computer - I've had good luck with HP, Dell and Gateway. Look at refurbished machines for a significant savings.

A high resolution ink-jet printer on the order of the Epson Stylus Photo R800 is my favorite - Local computer or office supply store or direct from Epson. I got mine from Red River Paper - 888-248-8774. It uses 8 ink cartridges, but the output is awesome.

A CoStar label printer and a supply of address labels, price tags, and diskette labels - available from www.costar.com.

A supply of paper stock to print your display backings on. I use two types - a white premium long-life ink jet photo paper and an Astroparch "Sand" color cover stock - both available from either OfficeMax or OfficeDepot. I use the Astroparch when I feel an "aged" look to the backing is appropriate. The best premium photo paper I have found is Red River Paper's #1656. Contact them at 888-248-8774.

Some kind of page make-up software like Microsoft Publisher, Word Perfect, PageMaker, etc. One may come with your computer. If not, search for deals on eBay or other online auctions. Make certain it has a spell checker. I use PageMaker.

An inexpensive pocket laminator and a supply of 5-mil Mylar pouches - Local office supply store.

A simple database to maintain your inventory. Search for shareware on the net and look for an inexpensive household inventory program. I set up a simple one in Microsoft Excell.

A 24 or 30" trimmer - Local office supply store.

Some stock 5"x7" or 8"x10" wooden frames - WalMart at about \$2.50 each. Dollar stores have cheaper ones but they don't look as nice.

A supply of Goop Clear Household Cement - any hardware store

Sanford Sharpie permanent marker - any office supply store

A roll of 26-gauge brass wire - I use Mangelsen's Bead Wire available at almost any hobby store.

An electric or battery drill with 1/16" drill bit and a Phillips screwdriver bit - Mine is a Black & Decker battery drill.

A centering tape measure. I use a Baklund-Heller "Center Point" tape measure available from the manufacturer at 800-540-6604 or by special order from most hardware stores.

A small pair of needle nose pliers and diagonal wire

cutters. Any hardware store.

A supply of picture hangers, I use a # 716 with a 1/4" E3210-6 gauge Phillips head sheet metal screw available from United Mfgs. Supplies at 800-645-7260.

A supply of foam pouches available from any mailroom supply house. I use Cheswick at 800-638-9899 and order their #84-0810 and 42-1012 Poly Foam Bags.

Items to put on your displays.

Hand seal (like a corporate seal) and a supply of 2" diameter serrated gold seals - available from Cannazzaro Seal at 718-627-5050. Makes a nice addition to your COAs, but not really necessary. I paid about \$250 for my custom one.

3-to-a-page 8.5" x 11" gift certificate borders. Available from local OfficeMax or OfficeDepot. Or print your own.

Shelving to store your displays - Available through WalMart, Lowes, Home Depot, etc. I use Lundia primarily with some inexpensive steel shelving. Lundia is expensive but wonderful. Search for it on the web.

Tables for computer and for a work area.

USPS Priority Mail boxes available free from your local post office. Other sizes I get from Uline..com

Postage scale. Available from any office supply store.

Possibly a few other items if you decide to participate in art & craft shows, trade days, etc.

The First Step...

Before you do anything you have to decide what you are going to offer your customers. This tutorial is going to cover my particular area of interest, but it will work for any area of interest where the items are small. There are several other things you should consider. You want to select types of items that you can develop reliable sources for and you want items for which you can get some interesting background information.

You may already have a hobby or collection that lends itself to these types of displays. If not, start looking around the

many art & craft shows, craft malls, trade days, etc. to find an area you might have an interest in. One good place to start is looking through the literally hundreds of different categories on eBay.com.

When my bride and I sold our printing company and retired in 1995, I had aspirations of traveling the world with her, visiting the kids and grand babies, etc. That was not in the cards. My bride, Libby, is 15 years my junior and she was not ready to retire. She went back to college, got her Masters, and started a new career as college journalism professor. It was not long before I started climbing the walls and had to find something other than writing three columns each month and doing “honey dos” for Lib to occupy my time.

I have always been interested in history and unusual things. Over the years I had accumulated a huge “accumulation of stuff.” I can’t call it a collection because it was not. I bought anything that interested me - ancient artifacts, Civil War relics, medals, fossils, minerals, postage stamps, autographs, insects, and even buttons. As noted earlier, when we owned our printing company I would occasionally create displays using some of these relics to make unique gifts or donate as door prizes for one occasion or another. It was not at all unusual for someone to see one of those displays and ask me to make one for them. When I had the time, I did. As an example, I created a display of alligator stamps for the curator of our local zoo. After seeing it the zoo gift shop wanted similar displays for different types of animals they had.

I decided that I would try to put together a few of these displays and see if there was any interest in them. Much to my surprise, there was a huge interest in them. It did not take me long to go through my entire accumulation of things I did not mind getting rid of.

I started calling on contacts. Years ago I had been a board member of the Museum of East Texas and developed some excellent contacts with vendors who sold to our museum gift shop and items for display in the museum. I also met numerous directors of other museums across the country. My first really good lead came from the museum director of a San Antonio, Texas museum who gave me the name of the supplier

they used for their fossils and minerals. That particular vendor's "showroom" was an 18 wheeler rig that he used for his quarterly route to museums, rock shops and gift shops across most of the country. He was kind enough to give me the names of several other vendors who specialized in Civil War excavated and non-excavated relics. Another museum director gave me the name of a retired archeology professor whose retirement sideline is dealing in legitimate ancient artifacts. I had long been a small dealer in special interest or topical postage stamps, so I already had a number of suppliers for those.

While I seldom make purchases for my displays on the internet auctions, I have been able to find several new reliable vendors to add to my list from eBay sellers. That list of vendors is my most valuable asset. While some are actually in direct competition with me, I have no problem with that. With the exception of that occasional item I acquire that does not lend itself to one of my displays, I do not sell individual items. My niche is giving "added value" to these relics by creating displays that incorporate the items. At the present time, among my vendors I have six professional and amateur Civil War relic diggers, my original fossil & mineral importer, two archeologists (one in England and one in Belgium), my retired archeology professor, a wholesale autograph dealer, and a military historian/author.

Setting Up Your Equipment...

You will want to set up your computer, ink-jet printer and label printer in a convenient place that has plenty of table space work area. You will also need a table to put together your displays. I use a heavy duty 8 foot folding table I bought at Sam's Club.

On my work table, I lay out my drill and bits, a plastic ZipLock container with my picture hangers and another with my screws, my centering rule, Sharpie markers, postage scale, a supply of picture frames, my Goop adhesive, brass wire, trimmer/cutter, seal press & seals, laminator, needle nose pliers, and diagonal wire cutters.

Organizing Your Inventory...

As my relics and other items arrive, I immediately sort

them out and put them in small plastic Ziplock or Glad food containers. As an example, let's say I receive an order of 200 shot and dropped bullets and a few other relics from my digger who works the Wilderness, Virginia area. I will put all of the shot bullets in one of the plastic food containers, then will sort the dropped bullets as to their type - putting each type in its own container. I will identify the other relics, sort them and put them in their own containers. If I already have similar relics from Wilderness, I will put the new ones in the appropriate existing containers.

Next I will print a label on my CoStar printer for each of the new containers. That label will have the location from which the relics were excavated (Wilderness), a description of the item (Shot Bullets, etc.), a stock number I have assigned to the type of relics in that container (i.e. CWB001). On a piece of paper I will write my approximate cost for each of those items and put it in the container. Today I handle the pricing a little different from when I started. There are only about 50 different types of Civil War relics I am looking for and I have set a maximum price I am willing to pay for that item. As an example, if the maximum I will pay for a particular bullet is \$3.00, on the label for that container I will show my cost as \$3.00 - regardless of what I might have paid for it. I then stick the label on the container and put the container on my stock shelf. My relics come primarily from the 26 different Civil War battle areas my diggers work. I have a few other containers that have mixed relics from other areas.

If I get relics in from Shiloh, I will do the same thing. A similar item that was assigned the number "CWB001" from my lot from Wilderness will be assigned that same number to the similar Shiloh relic but the container will be labeled "Shiloh."

Once I have all of my relics sorted and in their marked containers, I take an inventory of everything. I enter my inventory in a simple Excell file. If I want to create a display of Wilderness relics, I simply print an inventory of the relics I have from Wilderness and select the items I wish to use on that display. I pull those containers and put them on my work table and update my database.

Designing and Printing Your Backing...

If you do not have any experience in design and layout, not to worry. It takes many years of experience to become a competent layout artist, but for your purpose, this is not necessary. You do not have to learn how to handle customer's files; work arounds for complicated designs; etc. You only have to learn to do a couple of types of a layout and modify those for your different displays. It will take a few days to get comfortable with the layout program you are using. The programs I prefer are PageMaker and WordPerfect. I do all of my text in WordPerfect because I like their spell and grammar checker more so than I do others. I then copy my spell checked document and paste it into a PageMaker document. Both of these are high dollar applications, but often older versions can be found on eBay for very reasonable prices. You do not need the latest versions. PageMaker 5+ and WordPerfect 5+ will work fine for your purpose.

Before you start working on your layout you need to get as much information as you can that relates to the items you are going to have on your display. You will also need appropriate graphics to use. The graphics can be a map, photo, timeline, or anything else that is appropriate. These can be found in your research material.

If we are going to do a display of four different bullets and one other item from the Wilderness area, we can find many books in the public library relating to the Battle of Wilderness. The older the book the better. I prefer those that are pre-1940 because they will be out of copyright. Outstanding woodcut illustrations can be found in Civil War era copies or reprints of the illustrated newspaper, "Harper's Weekly." Maps of the battle areas are available from the National Parks service.

Once we have accumulated our material we start by writing our text and scanning our graphics. The next step is to set up a document in our page make-up software. If we decide to do a 5" x 7" display, we set our document size to 5" x 7" and if we decide upon an 8" x 10" display we set the document size to 8" x 10". For either size we want a .5" border on all four sides.

The first thing we do in our document is to place our

graphics and in the software set the text wrap for that graphic at 1/10". Once we have our pictures placed, we either import our text or copy it and paste it into our page make-up software. The text will automatically wrap around the graphic. If the text is too long, or if it is not in the type style you would like to use, simply block all of the text and change the type style or size and leading to where it fits, leaving enough room for the items you have selected to use in your display. If it is still too long, edit it in your page make-up software until it fits. If it is too short, simply increase the size and leading. You may also want to put a brief description under each of the included items. You will need to print a sample draft copy of your backing and lay the items in the selected location, marking those positions on your sample printout. Then go back in and make whatever adjustments you might need to make.

Once you have got the display looking the way you want it to look, in very small type (about 7 point) at the lower right part of your backing put your "credit line." The line I use is "From the Cy Stapleton Collection - Lufkin, Texas". Now you are ready to print your backing.

To cut down on the average time it takes to create a display, if I have enough similar items, I always try to make at least 5 or six similar displays at a time. I set printer to Premium Quality Film and in the print dialogue box set it to include "printer's marks" and print. Save your document so you do not have to re-create it when you are ready to make (or modify) more of this type display.

Once I have my 5 or more backings printed I trim them to size. On the 5" x 7" ones, the trim marks appear, so on the top copy I take a straight edge and using a pencil I will make a line that runs off all four sides, letting me know where to trim. On the 8" x 10" the printers marks will not show if you are using 8.5" x 11" paper, so I simply trim 1/4" off each of the 8.5" sides and 1/2" off each of the 11" sides - giving me the needed 8" x 10" finished piece.

My next step is to laminate each of the backings. I can get two 5" x 7" or one 8" x 10" backings in one 9" x 12" laminating pouch. Once laminated, I trim them to size.

Next I put the backing into the frames. Most of the items I use on my displays are 3-dimensional so I do not need the glass that comes with the frame. On my "flat" items, like postage stamps, I will not laminate the backing and I will use the glass. Often I will use the easel back that comes as part of the frame, but occasionally I will cut 3/16" Masonite to size and replace the easel back with that. I then put a CoStar address label on the back that notes "Hand Crafted by Cy Stapleton" and my full contact information. I save the unused 5"x7" and 8"x10" glass and periodically take it to a local frame shop and trade it for larger scrap pieces of their mat board or something else I might have a use for.

Once the backing and easel back are in place on the frame I will use my centering rule to determine the center of the top of the frame and will mark that with a small pencil mark. I use my drill to drill a pilot hole and will then screw the hanger in place. Once that is done I will turn the frame over and, depending upon the relics used, will either affix them with the Clear Goop Household Adhesive or with the brass wire.

I have tried many different adhesives and settled on the Goop because it is a very strong adhesive, but in case you wish to remove the relic for one reason or another, it can be twisted off without damaging either the relic or backing and the residue can be removed.

If I need to use the brass wire, I will remove the easel or Masonite back and drill small holes through the laminated backing. I will wire the relic in place, twisting the wire and trimming the twisted wire, leaving about 1/2" of the twisted wire. It does not show when the easel or Masonite is replaced. Twist the wire just enough to make it tight. You do not want it to damage your laminated backing.

Once I have completed the displays, I assign them a stock number and write that stock number on the back using a Sharpie marker.

Finally, I scan one of the displays, giving the scan the stock number as a file name, and post the scan along with a description in the appropriate area of my web site and on eBay. If I have made multiples of a similar display, my description will

note that the picture is “representative.”

I have included some pictures of my work areas and the described processes

Writing a Description for Your Display...

A good description and picture are two of the most important elements of marketing your product. Time spent on these two things will be repaid in the form of more sales at a higher dollar value. Give as detailed a description as you can - some background on the relics, a description of the items included, anything interesting you can think of.

Once your description is written, you want to post it on your web site and finally put the display in one of your foam pockets and using your CoStar label printer, print a 3.5" diskette label with this description and stick the label on your foam pocket. Your display is now ready to put on your storage shelf.

Pricing Your Displays...

I am in the process of changing my pricing structure and do not have a track record yet on the new method I am using, so I will cover both here.

The method I have used for the last five years did not take into consideration any sales to re-sellers. The customer base I was developing was end users. I charge \$15 for the design and printing of the backing, the frame, and the affixing of the relics. I then take the maximum I pay for the individual relics and double that price. Finally I add \$1 for packaging and the actual shipping charges. In other words, if I have a display that contains four different bullets - two costing me \$1 each, one costing me \$1.50 and one costing me \$2.00 and a saber hanger that cost me \$2.00, I would double that total relic cost of \$7.50 and double it to \$15. To that I would add my \$15 for the design and frame and \$1 for packaging, coming up with a sales price of \$31.00 plus shipping. This works fine for sales to individuals, but there is little profit remaining to enable a discount to resellers.

The new method I am working on using is to multiply my present price of \$30.00 by a factor of 1.25% giving me a retail price of \$37.50 for the display. From that price, I can offer

resellers a 20% discount. I need to get \$30 for my item to make my margin of profit.

When I post a display on an auction site like eBay, my starting price will be about 80% of my regular price - the \$30 price. That means my starting price would be about \$22.50. Even after listing fees and commissions I will make a little on the item even if it only gets one bid, but often I will receive a number of bids, driving the price up to well over the new price of \$37.50.

In looking at a six month auction sales history, I end up with an attractive profit after all expenses. Plus, every time I ship an auction item I include information noting that many similar items are available on my web site - more on that in the marketing area of this booklet.

Keep in mind that my customers are not collectors. They are individuals who simply want an interesting conversation piece to display in their home or office or, ones who are looking for a special unique gift for someone. A collector looking for \$15 worth of relics often is willing to pay for the added value I give these relics.

Marketing Your Displays...

We've got the "fun" part behind us. Now we need to get to the business end of your new home business. Unless you get some cash flow started, you are going to end up spending a lot of money that is tied up in displays laying on your storage shelving.

I put together a little 28-page booklet that describes what I do, where my relics come from, details on the major battle areas my relics came from, maps of the areas, and several pages giving details on most of the bullets I generally include in my displays. I print this booklet as needed on my duplexing (prints two sides) office copier. I then fold the sheets in half and staple them with a tabletop saddle stapler. I also do a Certificate of Authenticity, guaranteeing the authenticity of the items on my displays. I leave a space in the lower corner to affix a serrated gold seal and then emboss the seal with a hand embosser that has "The Cy Stapleton Collection - Lufkin, Texas" around the outside of the seal and my logo or printer's mark is in the

center. It makes a beautiful and professional looking certificate. I print the certificates on a 3-to-a-page gift certificate blank I get from the local OfficeMax.

I also have a one-page letter inviting the reader to visit my web site. On that letter I have the URL to each of the 11 major areas of my web site. That goes in every order that goes out of my shop.

I feel that a web site is an absolute must for this type of business. They are a lot easier to create than you think. I use Microsoft's Front Page for mine. After two years of working on improving my 200+ page site I still no nothing about HTML. With Front Page I don't need to. A few years ago I decided I needed a web site and after shopping around for prices it soon became obvious that there was no way I could afford to have someone else create mine. I trotted down to OfficeMax, looked over their various applications and decided upon Front Page (the same program several friends had recommended). Within a couple of hours I had my home page ready to post - but had no idea how to post it where anyone other than myself could see the fruit of my labor. I started making a few phone calls to internet providers and finally decided upon "iland.com" because their server had all of the "FrontPage extensions," whatever that means. I've been totally satisfied with their service and their \$27.01 per month fee. By this time I had 3-4 pages completed so with Iland's help, I got them posted. I then waited, and waited, and waited. Several months later no one had come to my party.

Posting a web site is the easiest part of a web site. Getting traffic is a lot more difficult. You have really got to work on that. I searched the web to find out how to get listed with the various search engines and began to send them the information about my site. The most important thing is the "key words" you use. You need to put a lot of thought in the key words people might use when searching for your site. This started paying off. As time passed my traffic started to build to the point that I have well over 1,000 unique visitors per month now. Total traffic to date (August 2002) has been about 45,000. But, all of that traffic did not come from search engines.

I have been active on several online auctions and occasionally participate in an art & craft show or trade days. I have business cards and flyers that include the normal info plus my e-mail address and URL. Those are passed out to everyone who will take them at the shows. The auction sites will not let you link to your web site, but I email each bidder that link. I have a 90+ page downloadable catalog in Acrobat format (www.hotlinecy.com/newcat.pdf).

In addition to the auctions and shows, I also will periodically take a small booth at a craft mall. These smaller booths cost about \$40 per month and I can display 20-25 of my items. I also keep a plentiful supply of business cards and flyers in that booth.

Also, when I come up with something new I will take a picture of it, write a news release, and send it to area newspapers. Occasionally I will write a 4-500 word article and submit it, along with a couple of photos, to appropriate special interest magazines - always including my URL and email address in the article.

Let's expand on each of these areas...

Search Engines...

Since the search engine info changes on a regular basis, rather than giving an address, I suggest you use your favorite search engine and look for - "search engines" +listing - which will give you a good start for places to submit your listing and suggestions as to what to include. Put "search engines" in parens, space, and follow that with +(no space)listing. This will search for sites with info on search engines that also include the word "listing." Also look for suggestions on what to include and what not to include on your various pages. Some of these services are beginning to charge to be listed. Many others are still free. In time "spiders" will find you and list you automatically. These spiders are programs that constantly surf the net looking for new sites. Somehow they figure out what keywords to use. I've submitted my site to maybe a dozen or so sites, but when I search for my name or my web site, I find I am listed over 500 times. My favorite and fated search engine is Google. Most search engines have a link where you can submit your site.

Meta Tags in your pages are also important but I don't know enough about them yet to talk about them.

Auctions...

Online auctions are the fastest way to start making sales. eBay.com, with all of its failings, is the Rolls Royce of all auction sites. I will occasionally place auctions on Yahoo and Amazon.com, but results are nothing to brag about. If you decide you want to try eBay, an absolute necessity is their Seller Assistant Pro (or SAPro) or the basic version, Seller Assistant Basic. This outstanding auction software is eBay specific and was developed by Blackthorne as Auction Assistant Pro (AAPro). Recently eBay acquired Blackthorne and changed the name to SAPro. Enhancements are added on a regular basis. Once you get your auction descriptions entered into the software, you can post them on eBay - along with any graphics - with the click of a button. I will list as many as 100 auctions a week and when I'm ready to post them I simply click on the "post" button and go fix me an adult beverage and wait until the software does its thing. The end of auction is just as easy. The software captures the details on your sales, and a click on the Correspondence Studio button sends notices to all of your buyers. You then can select the items that did not sell and do the free re-posting of those items. As the money comes in, you simply note the payment has been received and have the software generate a mailing label and send a shipped notice to your buyer. It also lets you print an invoice to send with your shipment. It really makes selling on eBay a breeze. A couple of really nice new features in the software is the ability to inventory your items. As an example, if I create 5 displays of CW001, I simply note that I have 5 copies in stock. As I post one, it reduces my inventory by one. If I accidently try to post a 6th one, I get a notice that I am out of stock. "Do you really want to post this item?" The other dynamite feature is the ability to automatically add something to your running auctions. As an example, if you have 50 auctions running and get called out of town for a week, it only takes a couple of keystrokes to add that notice to each of your running auctions. Also, the software will automatically post your feedback.

I have one bank of shelving to use for my running

auctions. As I post an auction, I pull that item and put it on the Auction Shelf. When my auctions close, I remove any unsold items from my auction shelf to my Stock Area - moving the remaining items to my Sold shelf

As my payments come in, I pull the item from my Auction Shelf and stack them on the floor of my office for my part-time helper to package and ship every Friday - my normal shipping day. I use USPS Priority Mail boxes for the vast majority of my items. While you can get small quantities from your local post office, I order a variety of sizes from the USPS web site (www.usps.com). On some smaller items like my collections of special interest stamps or books, I use either regular envelopes or stiff mailers. I stock two sizes of stock mailers - 6" x 9" and 10" x 12". I order these direct from the manufacturer - Calumet Carton at www.calumetcarton.com. The best supplier I have found for bubble wrap is Gatorack Shipping Supplies in Tampa, Florida - 813-496-9905 or www.gatorack.com.

I use Endicia (endicia.com) for postage. Their software calculates and prints labels for all of my non UPS shipments - using my UPS printer. It also keeps a tracking record.

As far as I am concerned, the major benefit to online auctions is the ability to drive potential buyers to my web site.

Art & Craft Shows, Trade Days, etc...

At 70 years of age I try not to do too many of these, but they are an excellent source for both sales and leads. You can set up a really nice display in the normal 10' x 10' booth space. I always try to get an outside booth if at all possible and I lay out my booth in advance. Most of these events will rent you 6' or 8' tables for a couple of bucks each. I will get two 8' tables for the sides and one 6' table to go in the back of the booth and have a set of table covers for this configuration. I also have a number of aluminum folding picnic tables for those shows who do not offer tables. I had a seamstress make covers for these folding tables.

Signs are important and I invariably have the best sign when I go to a show. The total cost of the sign and poles cost me less than \$100. I had a local sign shop make me a 3' x 6' vinyl sign - yellow with black and red letters. In huge black

letters is "Civil War Relics." In smaller type under that in red I have "fossils, minerals, ancient artifacts, postage stamps." Below that in black I have my company name, city and state. The vinyl sign has a loop at the top and bottom. My stand is made from 4' lengths of rigid PVC plumbing pipe with couplings to make it stand 8' in the air. At the top of the two uprights I have an elbow that lets me connect two more joined 4" pieces of the pipe. I slide the sign onto the cross piece and to hold the sign down, I slip in the final 4' joint of pipe. At the bottom of the two uprights I drilled two holes and got two large "C" clamps, which I drilled two matching holes. I bolt the "C" clamps to the bottom of the uprights with a bolt and wing nut. This sign will not work on my light aluminum picnic tables but it works beautifully on the heavier rental tables. To make it stand out even more, I drilled a 3/8" hole in each of the elbows and insert a horizontal "flagpole" into each. On these flagpoles I have a CSA Stars and Bars on one side and a US Flag on the other. You can use any type of flashy flag or banner. I have a diagram of my sign at the end of this booklet.

I have a number of inexpensive white plastic 13" x 32" break down shelves I bought at Target. The legs are 1.5" dia. x 15" long PVC tubing and they do not take too much space. I set them up on my tables 2-shelves high, which gives me significantly more display space. I use four of the legs and two of the shelves. That way I have the space under the shelves plus the two shelves.

At the front of my booth I have a take-one box that is filled with my flyers and a business card box. I also stand at the front of my booth and pass out business cards and flyers to everyone who will accept one. I always make enough sales to justify the trip and the booth space, but my real business comes in the next couple of weeks when people visit my web site and purchase an item or two.

I bought three lightweight plastic "footlockers" to store everything in and a lightweight aluminum 4-wheel dolly. That way I can carry everything except my sign in one trip. I had an upholstery shop make me a bag to store and carry my sign and poles.

If the show is several days long, when I shut down I

cover my tables with opaque plastic painter's drop cloths and then enclose my booth using white plastic picnic table cloths, clipping the ends of the cloth to the top of my plastic shelves using large spring clips.

At the end of the show, I can pack my displays, table covers and signs in short order and within 15 minutes have my car packed and am on the way home.

If you are working a show alone, you will want 5-6 little signs to set out if you have to leave your booth. On mine I have "Gone to Necessary Room! Back in 5 minutes." I also have several signs I put up when the show closes for the evening. They say "Booth Closed! Please come back tomorrow." I use spring clips and clip them in whatever obvious place I can find.

Take as much advantage of the show as is possible. If I am not talking to a prospect, I am at the front of my booth in the aisle passing out my flyers. I also have a "guest book" where I write the name and address of anyone who makes a purchase. I have gotten several large plastic candy jars from a local drive-in grocery store and have a supply of 3" x 5" cards for people to sign up for my free newsletter. At the end of each day I will have a child draw one of those cards and I will mail the winner one of my inexpensive displays. I post those winners for all to see.

Don't forget to bring along a chair a waste basket and a broom. I also carry what I call my "Show Care Box." It is basically a fairly large plastic tool box that has everything I can think of that I might need. Electric drill and other small tools, tape measure, adhesive back Velcro tape, masking tape, markers, Post-it notes, a small spiral notebook, digital camera, and even a WalkMan cassette player with a couple of audio books.

I will also often bring along a small cooler with drinks and a few snacks.

The most important thing is do not carry more than you will need - except for your product.

Wholesale Sales...

This is an area I am just beginning to get into so I do not have a lot of experience I can share. At the present time I have

very few wholesale accounts, but I am working to increase the number. My first accounts came from auction customers who purchased my items for resale in their stores. I worked out special pricing for them and several are purchasing a few displays on a fairly regular basis.

When I have a buyer whose address is near a Civil War battlefield or park, I ask if they would mind getting me the contact information for some of the appropriate gift shops in their area. That has resulted in some interest. Also, a customer will let me know that they are going to visit a battlefield. I ask them if they would mind sending me the contact on any gift shops they might run into. In my travels if I pass near a Civil War battlefield or park, I will pay a visit. While national parks cannot sell authentic artifacts, in every case where I have brought in some of my displays to show the gift shop manager, that manager has given me the contact information on some private shops that might be good prospects. Unfortunately in most cases when I visited those shops the owner was not in, but I do have the information to contact them later. Also, I am building a list of shops by searching several online "Yellow Pages." I have worked up a color brochure that I will be mailing to these shops. I do not intend to do a mass mailing, but rather will write a personal letter to each - mailing 3-4 each week. I have not started that yet.

Free Advertising...

Far to few craftspersons take advantage of the huge amount of free publicity that is available to them. Every month or two I will write a news release about something I have done and send it along with a couple of pictures to all of the newspapers in about a 50 mile radius of Lufkin. If I am going to participate in an out-of-town event, I will write a news release that tells who I am and what I do, along with a couple of photos and my contact info and will send it to the business or life style editors of the newspapers in the area of the event. Often those newspapers need something to fill space and they will run my release. On two occasions the last year or so a reporter came to the event to interview me and their paper ran a really nice feature on me after the show - giving my full contact info.

There are a huge number of special interest publications

- both printed and electronic on the net. It will not be long before you gain a lot of knowledge about your area of interest. These publications are always looking for new material. Many will not pay for your article, but they will give you credit along with your full contact info and web address. If you do not feel you are an accomplished enough writer, there is plenty of help available. I'll bet a local high school or college journalism or English teacher would love to help you compose and edit an 800 to 1,000 word piece. Be sure and include several appropriate photos.

Exchange web site links is another great way to build traffic. I exchange links with anyone who will exchange with me. Some sites like Paypal.com will let you set up a web store on their site if you are a subscriber. I get some nice and unexpected sales through my Paypal store.

There are a huge number of sites on the web offering free classified advertising. Just search for "free classified advertising" and you will find over 5,000 pages.

Payment Options...

You want to give your customers the widest range of payment options possible. Ideally you want your own credit card merchant accounts, but that is often difficult to get set up unless you have a brick and mortar storefront. Contact your banker to see if he might be able to help you get set up. I got my merchant accounts several decades ago when I owned my printing company and continued them after I sold the company and retired. There are some excellent online services. My favorite is PayPal (www.paypal.com). It is a very easy to use and secure site. I've run into sellers who have nothing at all good to say about PayPal, but my experience and the experience of many I have talked with is flawless. They pay me interest on the funds I leave on deposit with them and when I want to transfer some of those funds to my checking account, I can do it 24/7 with a few keystrokes. Plus you can easily set up a free web store through PayPal, linking to your site. There are many services on the web offering to set you up with a merchant account but I know nothing about these other than their rates are a lot higher than the 1-2% I pay.

More Sources

On my web site you will find the contact info on hundreds of different special interest clubs that may give you ideas of what type of displays to create as well as possible customers. An Acrobat pdf file of this list can be found at: www.hotlinecy.com/clublist.pdf. If when trying to contact one of the listed clubs and you get the message the number is not a working number, be sure to check the area code to see if it has changed. I am not updating this list. I had intended to include the list of clubs in this booklet, but it is far too lengthy - over 50 pages in itself. I decided to create a pdf file and post it on my web site where those purchasers of this booklet could download and print it if they so desire.

Books

I have been quite successful in selling books that loosely relate to my displays. I do not look for the books one might find in the retail book stores, but rather the more obscure ones. I especially like the smaller special interest publishers and those larger publishers, like Dover, who reprint old or rare books. I also go to every Friends of the Library library book sales that I can find. I can always find 20-30 books fit into my area of interest - most costing in the neighborhood of \$.25 to \$.50 each. On my home page at www.hotlinecy.com, I have a link on the left side to an outstanding book search. The search gives you access to over 50,000,000 used books that dealers around the country are offering. This is a great way to find books your customers may be looking for or give you an idea of what other booksellers are selling a particular book for.

Dover, by the way, is an excellent source for special interest copyright free artwork that you can use on your display backing. They can be contacted at: <http://store.doverpublications.com>.

Most book publishers will offer you a 40% discount once you are set up as a book dealer with them. Occasionally used book dealers will offer a small discount but most I have dealt with do not. You will have to pay their price and add your markup to the book. If you want to offer books, be sure to check out the Government Printing Office as well as other government agencies. They have some incredible titles covering almost every area of interest from Agriculture to Zoology.

In Conclusion...

That's about all I can think of that might help you get started.

I hope you have found this little booklet helpful. I would appreciate it very much if you would keep in touch with me and let me know how your efforts progress.

Picture Pages

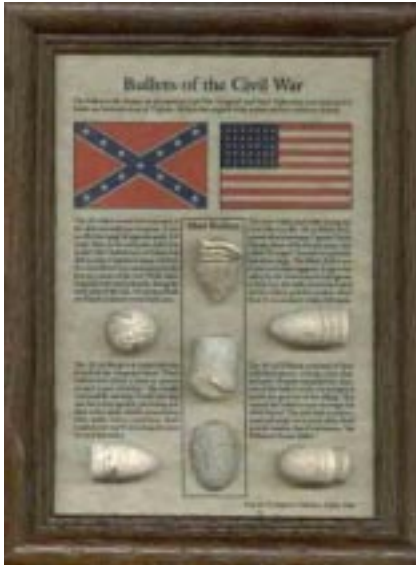
The next few pages illustrate some of the different types of displays I create. Most are either 5" x 7" or 8" x 10" frames, but I do a few larger ones that are mounted in old barnwood frames.

I do not sell very many of the larger frames. As I noted earlier, the market I have developed is that individual who is interested in a fascinating conversation piece. The price range that works best for me is the \$20.00 to \$100 price range. I have the larger displays just to show I do have some higher priced displays and also they make very nice exhibit items when I have a booth at a show. Most of the larger ones that I sell are custom displays - where an individual or an interior decorator selects the type of items they would like in their display. If I do not have those items in stock I will search my contacts for them. Often these custom displays may take a month or longer to put together.



My first marketable display - Dino Dung

Examples of some of my types of displays



4 dropped and three shot bullets from Virginia digs.



Medieval crossbow and longbow bolts - Germany



Ancient Roman coins - c100ad, UK & Europe



Berlin Wall fragment - Reagan Presidential Library



2000 US Presidential Election ballot chad



WWII Battle of Bastogne relics from famous "Davis" tank.



Woolly Mammoth Hair - Siberia



Fossils - Morocco



Gettysburg bullets & shrapnel.



Confederate stamp display - one authentic CSA stamp plus complete set of facsimiles.



Shipwreck coin from Admiral Gardner, sunk 1809



Set of facsimile Confederate coins.



Fragment of Andersonville, Georgia prison stockade. Souveniered shortly after war ended



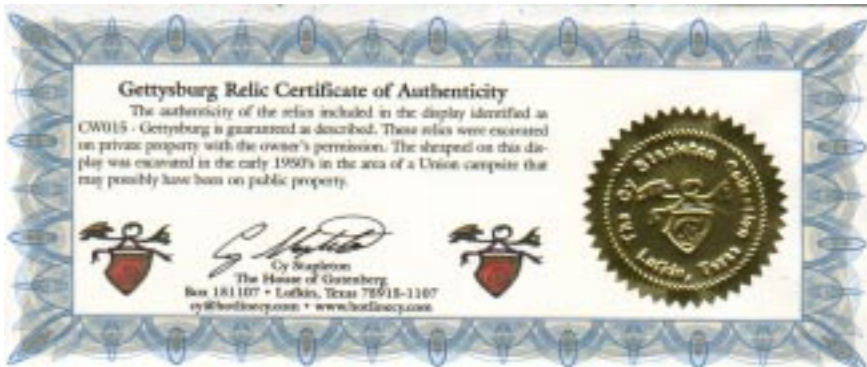
Musket ball fired by one of Oliver Cromwell's troops - 1642-42ad.



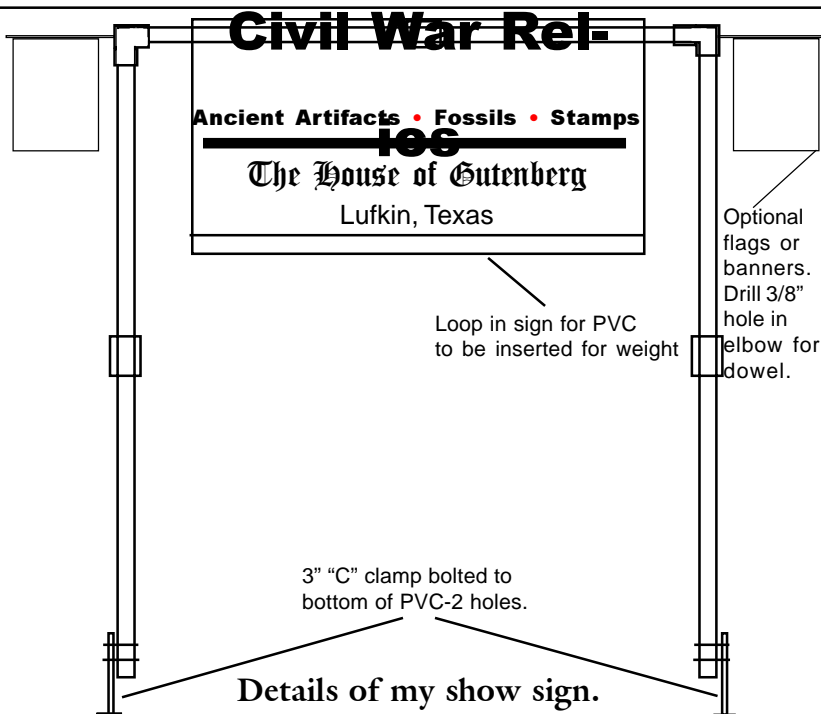
Leaf from 1854 Cherokee Indian Bible



Giant pre-historic fossil shark tooth



An example of my certificate of authenticity. Pictured in color on the cover of this booklet.



Details of my show sign.

- 7 pcs 1.5" rigid PVC pipe 4' long
- 3 pcs 1.5" PVC couplings
- 2 pcs 1.5" PVC 90 degree elbows
- 1 6'x3' vinyl sign w/loop at top & bottom
- 2 3" C clamps drilled with 2 3/8" holes
- 4 2.5" 3/8" bolts
- 4 3/8" wing nuts
- 2 3/8" x 3' wooden dowels (optional)
- 2 flags or banners (optional)

Bolt one C clamp to the bottom of two of your 4' sections of the PVC pipe. Using couplings, join 6 of the 4' sections making 3 8' sections. Insert one section through top loop of sign. Insert remaining 4' section in bottom loop of sign. Put elbows on top of each upright and insert the cross piece into each elbow. It will take two people to erect the sign. Simply tighten the C clamps on the edge of your table.

My work areas...

I basically have three work areas - half of my 2-car garage, a 20' x 20' home office that I converted from what was originally a storeroom, and a fairly new large storage building that is a little larger than my office.



This is where it all starts. My reference books are shelved above the computer. I have designed a display that will include one of about 20 musket balls I have that were fired by Oliver Cromwell's troops during the English Civil War. I found out a little

about the area where the musket ball was found (Newark Castle) and wrote the description from that research. I then printed 5 copies of the backing on my Epson 777 (I now use the R800)

My work table is pictured on the right. All of the tools I need are within arms reach except for my laminator, which I moved to my storeroom to give me more working area. You can see several displays I recently completed and set aside for the adhesive to set.



This is the area where I do most of my work after I've done the research and created the backing. On the right side you can see some of the completed displays that I have not yet put on my stock shelf. All of my tools are shown and the plastic tub contains my Cromwell musket balls. The computer at the upper right is my new Gateway that I am installing software on. It will replace my Dell when everything is loaded on it.



This is one of my stock shelves. The shelf pictured contains my Gettysburg relics. I have a similar area for my Shiloh/Corinth relics and another from my generic CW relics (most from somewhere in North Virginia. I've got the relics from other areas in my storeroom. The vast majority of my CW relics are from either Gettysburg, or the Corinth/Shiloh area, so they are kept in my garage. I pull the others when needed.

This is my “shop” area. I do not use it often. I use the table saw to cut and make the “barnwood” frames. The shelf under the work area you can see several of my tumblers which I use to polish stones and minerals for those displays. On the bottom, below that shelf



you will see a router stand on the right and a to its left is a saw that I can use to cut and polish slabs of things like petrified wood. I have done very little of that other than to cut a few small geodes. Not shown is a small drill press and a few other hand tools. This is in “my side” of our garage. My bride has drawn a line down the middle of our 2-car garage and, while she doesn't care how I use my side, I get severely chastized if my area infringes on the area where she puts her Buick.



This is my “ready to ship” area. When someone makes either an auction purchase or purchases an item on my web site, that item immediately goes on this shelf to await payment. I’ve got a similar shelf for items that I have put

on auction, but they are not moved to this shelf until I get a bid on the item. I update this shelf daily.

This is my “shipping” table. I’ve got an electronic scale, rubber stamps with my return address, etc. The bubble wrap shown at the left is not normally kept on this table unless we are in the process of shipping. It is normally in my storeroom.



This is where I keep a few of my completed displays. Most are kept in my storeroom, but these are the ones I put on auction or list on my web site, when I have time. I restock these shelves as displays are sold. These shelves are over my shipping table

About me, the Author

I entered the graphic arts industry in 1959 and for the next thirty-six years I owned and operated a trade bindery, typesetting company, a trade journal for the printing industry, and a small commercial printing plant.

I sold my trade journal in 1985 and in a weak moment the new publisher asked that I continue writing my columns - one "how to" column, an industry gossip column, and a source resource column where I help other printers locate difficult to find products or services.

I sold my printing company in 1995 and semi retired, but continue writing my regular columns and an occasional freelance how-to column for general interest or "how-to" publications.

I am a prolific writer and over the years have written scores of how-to booklets and other special interest booklets covering many different areas. "Creating Profitable Displays" is the latest of these booklets. I very rarely write about something I have not actually done personally.

While many have asked that I write full length books, I have done that only once. Although that 360-page book was a graphic arts industry "best seller," I prefer to keep my books in the 24-48 page range so I can print them in-house on demand.

My booklets are all self published and sales of individual titles have ranged from over 20,000 for my "Renaissance Gourmet Cookbook," to less than a dozen copies of a couple of "losers."

Unlike most publishers, I maintain no inventory but rather I print "on demand." All titles are stored as digital files and when he receives an order, I simply print and bind a copy and have it in the mail within 24 hours.

I am asked occasionally by individuals who are not familiar with my booklets, "How can you justify charging \$20 or \$30 for a 28-page booklet." After reading the booklet, most readers agree there is far more than \$20 or \$30 worth of information included. Sometimes great things come in small packages and that is what I attempt to provide in my how-to booklets.

I hope you find this booklet both interesting and profitable.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. M. Smith", is written in a cursive style. To the right of the signature is a small, stylized crest or logo featuring a shield with a crown on top and decorative flourishes.

NOTES



Copyright 1996-2003
Cy Stapleton
The House of Gutenberg
Box 151107
Lufkin, Texas 75915-1107
cy@hotlinecy.com
www.hotlinecy.com