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Jewelry From Ordinary Treasures

By MalaMaal.com

Jewelry From "Ordinary" Treasures

Almost everyone has a box of sparkling old buttons from Grandma's sewing chest to marvel at, or set of dominoes, checkers or mah-jongg pieces rescued from a flea market. Maybe they have a partial Scrabble game and perhaps even a collection of colorful, fifty-one-to-a-deck playing cards purchased at an antique store tucked away in a drawer. Gather your treasures together and start earning extra income now! Strap those buttons on a piece of elastic to create eye-catching bangle bracelets. Glue the dominoes, checkers, and Scrabble pieces onto earrings or pin backs for guys and gals. Whatever the material, mount your artwork on one-of-a-kind playing cards for good money in a rewarding home jewelry business.

In addition to having the satisfaction of creating fun gifts for family and friends out of "heirloom" materials, once the word is out, relatives will often send along their extra buttons and collectibles. This helps build your inventory, resulting in a minimal investment for supplies. The season for successful jewelry selling is year-round, since the pieces make wonderful birthday and Christmas gifts, as well as fun wardrobe accessories anytime. Men, women, and children can wear these buttons, domino, and checker pins and earrings, so the sky is the limit for profits. And this business can be worked out of your home part or full-time.

Bev Rice is one designer who not only models what she sells, but delights in the pleasure others have in purchasing her sporty art. She and her husband Jim started a home business called "Sport in Life" ten years ago with one imperfect mah-jongg set originally bought as a present for a friend. In the past five years "Sport in Life" has evolved from marketing craft-fair products to bona fide antique buttons sold at more expensive retail-quality level. With mostly word-of-mouth advertising, their jewelry has captured creative awards, been featured in the Image section of her local Sunday newspaper, displayed for sale in clothing and curio boutiques, and sold at jewelry parties.

GETTING STARTED AND BUSINESS SAVVY

Like most business entrepreneurs, Bev started out "needing to make a living," and she wanted to combine her love of going to flea markets with creative, artistic urges. She also had a curiosity about

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the ability to manufacture interesting game pieces. While she comes up with her signature creations, Jim perfects ever-sturdier ways of fastening pieces together and drills holes in the mah-jongg tiles for Bev to thread with elastic to make bracelets or neck amulets. She took her first product, a "rigger" domino with a tell-tale crack, to her husband, who polished the domino to sheen and bolted it to a pin back.

Earrings and pins can be made without drilling, however. Just purchase an inexpensive glue gun from the neighborhood hardware store, or sturdy "glue dot" stickers, as well as earring and pin backs, available wholesale. "What's more, anyone can do this," says Bev.

INVESTMENT. Bev estimates start-up costs can be less than \$500 because of "miracles and mitzvahs." Don't underestimate the value of trading services or receiving supplies when starting out. "People were inspired to gift us," she says. An artist friend created a simple but effective domino logo,

and another friend who was teaching a printing class made up 500 business cards as a gift. While Bev did read a couple of start-up books, such as *Working From Home*, and *Small-Time Operator*, (similar books can be obtained from the library) she advocates getting a business license from City Hall (if your area requires one) and an invoice book from a stationery store. Then just start-up.

The jewelry maker recommends that once you are in business, get a sales tax resale number from your state's taxation bureau to make quantity purchases at jewelry supply stores giving wholesale discounts. You will also be able to legitimately write off business expenses at tax time. Initially, Bev spent \$100 per month on supplies. That included game pieces, pin and earring backs, and glue. She notes that "the most interesting pieces can be found at thrift stores, flea markets, and garage sales."

BUYING SUPPLIES. Finding supplies can be time-consuming at first, says Bev, but all supplies can be bought in one's own neighborhood or ordered from supply catalogs. Her inventory is now built up, but when she first started out she went to stores three or four times a day to be the first person there and check on items arriving during the day. With vigilance and luck, "finds" can be snapped up as they get put on the shelves. Also, friends who peddle their wares at flea markets might bring her a mah-jongg set because they know exactly the kinds of things she uses.

While Bev's first mah-jongg tiles cost 50 cents, and were sold loose in a plastic bag, now sets might run \$300 in a big city where the game is popular.

To record money earned and money spent, and to keep track of what pieces are on consignment or out for a jewelry party, Bev recommends keeping an inventory sales book.

FULL OR PART-TIME SALES

The person who wants to make jewelry and sell their wearable art can make a part-time or full-time living at it. Bev Rice reports that generating \$10,000 per year part-time is possible, while she estimates \$30,000 to \$40,000 could be made full-time, depending on effort and expertise. The qualities of integrity, flexibility and enthusiasm are personal attributes that will make for better business, but being an artist is not a requirement. In fact, Bev remarks that a little business sense can really make or break

profits. "I think I would succeed better as less of an artist," she muses, "and more of a businessman."

Anyone who wants to get into this business has an intuitive sense that they can put pieces together uniquely. Or talents can be combined with a partner's help. Fortunately, Bev has a husband with a natural inclination to use a drill press, which can be purchased for under \$100. Meanwhile Bev says she has become a pro with a glue gun. Both are able to fill order for a variety of styles quickly.

BUILDING A NICHE. The designer has built a niche for herself by making pins out of the buttons and old mah-jongg betting sticks she loves. She enjoys making pins because "they are pieces I can do myself—drill holes, find buttons, and put them together." Bev relates that while she did not enjoy working for other people, she loves her current work, loves the jewelry pieces, and says that it has given her a personal sense of identity. "It is gratifying to build a business from a broken set of dominoes. Anybody can do it who has a set of buttons."

Most people have "secret stashes" of buttons, according to Bev, and should be encouraged to be creative.

She recalls that her mother had a beautiful set of buttons and her grandmother had lovely pieces of

mah-jongg set. And jewelry making "is a nice way to keep those collections alive." But if one is not ready to part with treasures, then items can be purchased at flea markets. Buttons of quality range from a penny to \$8 or \$10. The old glass and semi-precious stone buttons can be considered a study in texture from a jeweler's point of view. But ordinary plastic buttons, which comes in all shapes and sizes, make perfectly creative and whimsical materials, too.

WHAT TO CHARGE. Jewelry prices depend on time, materials, and what the market will bear. Simple Scrabble pins make great holiday stocking stuffers or children's birthday party favors and sell for \$1.50. Antique button pins that look wonderful on a blazer lapel can start at \$25 and well-made button bracelets can retail for between \$25 and \$50, depending on quality. Domino earrings and pins can run from \$16 to \$26. Vintage collectible mah-jongg and bamboo bracelets may wholesale from \$88 to \$250.

JEWELRY PARTIES. Although there is a variety of ways to sell jewelry, from craft fairs and festivals, at gift and clothing boutiques, on consignment or by personal referrals, the best methods really depend on individual preferences. There are benefits and pitfalls to each. For those starting out, Bev highly recommends holding jewelry parties as a fun, tried-and-true way to sell. Better yet, ask friends to hold them at their homes, serve a little something to eat and drink, and invite a group of about six to twelve people. In her experience, earnings of approximately \$300 to \$400 can be made from a home jewelry party.

NETWORKING. Another method is to network with a friend to find trustworthy places that will take a chance on your work. This includes consignment at clothing or gift boutiques and possibly museums or art gallery gift stores, where a percentage of the profits are kept by the store upon sale.

"Most rewarding," says Bev, "is when stores buy outright, because it keeps your cash flow going." She

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has refined her product line to where she can market it almost exclusively at the high–end retail level. But Bev avoids the large chain stores because, she says, "it can be heaven or hell." Mostly it takes a long time to get paid and a big store buyers can cancel on a whim an order that has been rushed into production.

CRAFT FAIRS. Craft fair profits are tied into the costs of entry fees, booth space rental, and transportation to the fair. Some fairs require the artist to be present to sell their work. Depending on regulations, this can pose problems for the jewelry maker who has hired a sales representative. Sales generally depend on the ability of the individual seller and the quality of the neighborhood crafts to help draw customers. Sometimes a percentage of sales goes for a worthy fundraiser. Also, many artists really enjoy displaying their wares in a festival atmosphere where they get a chance to meet and learn from each other.

FESTIVALS. "Game pieces make people smile," says Bev, "and are made to be touched." Unique designs, together with the touchables and playful qualities of the jewelry, are the strongest selling points at festivals and craft fairs. Although she now shies away from what she terms "the stress and the rat race," a small show may only charge a \$50 entry fee and net profit of \$200 out of \$400 gross sales is possible. "People like a chance to meet the artist," says Bev, which can help sales. For the person trying to get established, she notes that this venue – the chance to talk to other artists, trade, and barter back and forth – can be more lucrative than dollars and cents.

FASHION SHOWS. Bev is occasionally invited to display her jewelry as part of vintage fashion shows where a friend is already selling and the artists dress up in appropriate period costumes. Or she might

do a weekend show where she is given space to set up in a clothing boutique where a sale has been advertised. The store often sends out postcards notifying customers of the sale and perhaps a flyer noting an artist appearance. Bev says that she enjoys these, but points out that the store claims 30 percent of her sales. Also, selling all weekend can be very demanding.

PERSONAL REFERRALS. Since Bev has been in business ten years and knows her market, she understands how her pieces sell best, and certainly what is cost–effective for her business. Personal referrals now account for 30 to 50 percent of Sport in Life sales, and 30 percent in repeat business. Someone starting out may need to try all avenues to see what kind of customers are attracted to a particular jewelry style.. Besides word–of–mouth referrals by friends, and boosting sales by wearing the jewelry, a jewelry representative can bring up the bottom line of profit. Bev estimates that referrals from a rep who worked for her several years ago added another 10 percent to sales. "If you can find one who likes you and you like them – they can be a buffer zone between you and the public," says Bev. "That individual becomes the Mary Kay of jewelry."

Because Bev now handles the business herself, she advises taking it "one step at a time." She would like to teach people to gain self–esteem from their work and says she feels it is important for people not to underprice or undersell themselves. "Otherwise," she says, "they could just go get a job!" Because people are always buying. Bev remarks that the business is becoming more competitive. But she sees this as a good sign, one that breeds well–made designs, those made using good, non–toxic glues which are made to last. But don't be afraid to develop a niche, since every bracelet and necklace will be

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different by virtue of the material. "This is fun," enthuse Bev. "Buttons are really unusual and unique, and it feels good to make these things."

For example, just four stacked buttons can make an interesting earring Bev explains. "I was the kind of person who threw out earrings if they were broken and didn't know how to fix things." She remarks that making jewelry is wonderfully therapeutic and can be a way to teach children creativity by stringing elastic through buttons as a birthday party game.

In addition to belts, her new product includes a few glitzy patent leather handbags also festooned with buttons. A bag might retail for \$50 to \$125, according to the buying market. A developing product line is as individual as the person, and the artistic preferences will certainly add distinction. Bev states that she would like to inspire other people to start feeling creative. But working with buttons is not limited to women. Bev says she knows of one man who "makes fantastic bolo ties out of old buttons and belt buckles." "Whatever the material, her best advice is, "Only do it if it's fun: Sport in Life!"

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The Jewelry Box: a perfect companion to all your precious valuables

By Angela Davis

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A jewelry box is the perfect companion to all your beautiful jewelry pieces. You can use it not only for keeping your ornaments but also for storing those precious trinkets and items which you care for very deeply.

There are some things which cannot be evaluated in terms of money, these are small fragile things which in some way have touched your life and are of immense significance. A jewelry box is a safe haven for all those little things. A place where you can keep those small treasures which cannot be bought with money.

A good jewelry box is most often a beautiful handcrafted piece. It is available in various finishes and textures. Starting from warm mahogany wood, rose wood, to matt silver, there is a jewelry box in almost every conceivable material and color. Some of these materials used for the creation of your jewelry box include wood, glass, metal, and porcelain. The one that most are accustomed to is the wooden flip top lids with the musical song that lightly plays in the background. However, there have been changes and improvements in the making of a jewelry box, and there are now very beautifully made wooden jewelry boxes made from dark cherry wood, and there is now also style of jewelry box that is being made from carved and polished marble.

You can choose from a very wide range and pick one which suits your taste and pocket at the same time. The jewelry box has a soft lining of velvet inside, such that the precious things you store in it are not damaged in any way. Some are antique pieces, which have been crafted by master craftsmen and are collector's items. Others are made by established firms who specialize only in making these. Still others can be found at local stores made by individual craftsmen or by bulk manufacturers.

If you are to purchase a jewelry box for yourself, or as a gift for some body else, it is important to know what kind you want and what kind is out there on the market, and which one suits you the best to fulfill your needs.

A jewelry box is a wonderful possession to have and to hold your valuable items. It is a wonderful way to hold your jewelry and each box has the potential to be your own, personal piece in which not only can you store valuable items but also the memories associated with it. It is not just a place to house your treasured valuables; it is also a beautiful piece which can be passed on from one generation to another as a precious heirloom.

A jewelry box is available in various price ranges starting from those that are commonly available in stores to unique pieces which can be bought only in renowned auction houses. Whatever your choice, the jewelry box is a beautiful object to have and to give as a gift.

It is one of those unique pieces which bring to mind an old world charm. There is an intriguing sense of timelessness and a very rich heritage associated with a jewelry box. In a way it is the caretaker of our individual legacy. A place cherished and suffused with the warm glow of memories.

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