

Unusual Ways To Make Money

By Steve Gillman

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Introduction

I have always had a fascination with making money, and especially with the more unusual ways to make it. Over the years I have read hundreds of books about money. I have even made some (money and books).

As an employee I have been a process-server, blackjack dealer, car "repo man," vitamin packager and more (dozens more). I never did like having a job much, though, even the interesting ones, so I worked full-time for only one full year of my life (and that was actually two part-time jobs). I'm certainly glad to have avoided some of the weird jobs covered in Chapter Three.

In my businesses I have sold everything from walking sticks to magazines to cars and e-books. My wife and I were flea market vendors for a summer, selling stuffed animals, rocks and fish-scale earrings. Lately, as part of our internet-based business I am creating The Great Colorado Treasure Hunt, making money by sending people off to mountain tops and canyons to find treasure.

As an investor my tastes were beyond the usual too. I've bought and sold small lots, and rented rooms in mobile homes. I have played in the futures options markets, and been a loan shark. For more about the unusual investments I have made, be sure to read the chapter on playing with money.

I have also been a treasure hunter. In other words, I write from experience. This book will open your eyes to the many unusual ways in which people make money. Some of them are my own stories. Some are stories I have collected from others. Then there are the ideas, speculation - and that list of weird jobs. Enjoy!



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Treasure Hunting

Treasure hunting is not such an unusual way to make money any longer. Sales of metal detectors are at record levels, books on the topic are starting to appear, and there are even television shows about it. Why? Because it is fun.

However, I would like to retract that opening statement. It may be true that treasure hunting is common now, but it's still an unusual way to make much money. The dream of finding great fortune is there, but the reality is that you better enjoy the process. I've found hundreds of coins and a few interesting objects with my metal detector, but no one "find" has been worth more than ten dollars - and my metal detecting experience is probably the norm.

(Fortunately for those who want to make some cash while having their fun, there is more to this treasure thing than "coin shooting" gold panning and digging through the attic, as you'll see in Chapter Eight.)

Here is a look at some of the many ways of treasure hunting.

Hidden Treasure

Most hidden treasure is not in a pirate's stash, and there is no map to it. It is in almost ordinary places, left there by ordinary people. The bottom line is that hiding things is human, and money is one of the things hidden most often.

For example, a relative of mine hid cash in books. He had learned to mistrust the banks during the great depression, so this was how he saved his money. This was more common than you might think. It may still be a common practice.

He never told anyone that he was doing this, so after he died it was discovered by accident. As his things were being packed up and readied for removal, a relative saw a bill drop out of a book. That got her thinking, and soon she was taking the books back out of the boxes and leafing through them all. When she was done she had a pile of thousands of dollars in currency.

Now, you have to wonder what would have happened if she hadn't found that first bill. I don't know if all of those books were thrown away at some point, or ended up in a used book store somewhere. It does make me wonder if searching for hidden treasure in a used book store might be worthwhile.

Hidden Treasure Under The House

I once buried 100 ounces of silver and left it there for years. It was in a plastic container five feet from the south and west wall of the house, six inches underground. With silver approaching sixteen dollars per-ounce I wish I hadn't cashed it in at six dollars.

I also realized that until I dug it up I had told nobody about it. I had nothing written down about it either. That means that if I had died before removing it, not a soul in the world would have a reason to suspect there was \$1,600 worth of silver (today's price) buried under there. It might be discovered only a hundred years later when the house was torn down and even then perhaps only if someone hit the area with a metal detector.

I have read that there are billions of dollars of currency that are not accounted for in bank accounts, far more than we are carrying around in our wallets and purses. How much of that is buried under a house or stashed between the pages of books is anyone's guess. But these two examples from my own family makes me suspect that hidden treasure is a lot more common than we think.

I recall that I also once hid money in a space inside a wall for two years. It was accessed from inside a closet, and the hole was hidden behind a false-wall that slid out above the door. Again I am left to wonder how many years would have passed before discovery if I had died without telling anyone about it. There was \$300 or so in there.

Then there was a margarine tub we buried as children, as a sort of "time capsule" full of our little treasures. We tried to dig it up a couple years later, but never did find it. That was over thirty years ago. Under the old willow tree behind the house in Okemos, Michigan, in case you are wondering. Perhaps someday someone will find our plastic figurines and a few coins from our coin collections.

Why There Is So Much Hidden Treasure

People like to hide things. In fact, there is probably more out there than ever, for the simple reason that there are more people around than ever before. But why is it that so much is still hidden and waiting to be found? One basic reason: those who buried it cannot dig it up.

Sometimes the person forgets where they buried their valuables or cash. Remember that margarine tub full of coins and "treasures" we buried as children. We should have marked the location better.

Sometimes they are not able to get at it because they moved to another state or country. The person who buried a stash may even be in prison - possibly for life! This accounts for the buried cash that some treasure hunters report finding in or near rest areas along highways.

The most common reason treasures remain buried is the easiest to understand: The man or

woman who put it in the ground is also in the ground. Remember the story at the start of this chapter, about my relative who hid money in books. People die all the time with many secrets. Some of those secrets have to do with where they have hidden things.

Where To Find Hidden Treasures

Treasure hunters know things that most people don't know. They know the most common hiding places for money and valuables, for example. They know where things are commonly buried, and that people regularly die without telling a soul they have buried something. They know where to point their metal detectors when at the beach. In other words, they have developed special knowledge.

However, there is more to being a treasure hunter than knowing a few tricks and reading a few books. It also takes the right mind set. You have to have patience, for example, to dig up fifty almost-worthless coins just to find that one old rarity. You have to have the ability to mentally put yourself in the past and in the head of the person who buries a stash, in order to guess where to dig. You have habitually think about how to apply what you learn from one treasure hunt to the next.

With that in mind, here are some of the places you can find treasure. Each suggests lessons that can help you find other kinds of treasures.

Under Houses

In that same crawl space where I hid the silver I found a chest with foreign notes and coins. It had apparently been forgotten by a previous owner of the home. It makes sense that crawl spaces would be a good place to search for hidden treasures. This particular crawl space was accessible from the basement, making it a better hiding place.

Coin Dumps

It used to be that some treasure hunters found valuable old coins by kicking old gas tanks to listen for the rattling of coins in them? How did they get there? Back during the Great Depression people threw coins in their car gas tanks for safekeeping. Tanks back then were easy to remove for later recovery, and gas doesn't hurt coins.

I suspect that almost all the old gas tanks have been kicked and emptied by now, but it does get me to thinking about where else people might put coins. As children, my brothers and I used to throw pennies into a hole in the kitchen floor from time-to-time (but I honestly don't remember why). We never did know where they went, but into the ceiling space in the basement is a likely guess.

Now there might only be a couple dozen pennies there, and this was in the 1970s, so it isn't likely that this hidden treasure is worth much. But what if kids did something like that

in the 1920s, with some of the pennies dating back twenty years? Those coins would have some value to collectors. It's enough to make you look at the odd spaces in old homes differently.

I once overheard a woman saying she was throwing her spare change into a hole in the wall. She wanted the room remodeled, and this was her way of making sure her husband would eventually tear out the old drywall. Who knows how much money accumulated there before the wall was finally opened.

Or was it? Not to be too morbid, but what if the couple died before remodeling? Did they tell anyone else about the coin dump? Was the drywall then simply repaired rather than replaced by the next owner?

Treasures In Houses

It is natural to hide valuables in attics and basements. I once found a jar full of pennies in the attic of a house a family member had bought and was tearing down. I think I may still have some of the old coins from that jar. Other things I found up there brought me sixty dollars or so at a rummage sale.

The old man who had owned the house previously died shortly after selling it, and had no family. Are you starting to see the pattern here?

Many years ago I hid some magazines in the basement of my parent's house. They are probably still there, up in the rafters on top of the heating duct. They wouldn't be of much value yet, but maybe if someone finds them in another seventy years. It might make you wonder what was hidden in your own home if it is an old one. Why not take a look?

In fact, it is relatively common to find famous old books and valuable antiques in attics and basements. But don't limit the search to these places. Check spaces under stairs, garages, and sheds. Don't forget to look under loose floorboards too. That used to be a favorite hiding place for cash.

I saw on the news one night a story from Chicago about a lost treasure that made big money for a young couple. They had torn open the walls of their house while remodeling, and found them filled with thousands of old and valuable movie posters. They researched the history of the home and found that it had once been owned by a theater operator in the thirties.

Apparently this previous owner had been taking home all the movie posters home. He was either hiding them or, more likely, just using them to insulate his walls. At that time it was common to insulate houses with newspapers, magazines and almost anything else. In any case, time makes such things valuable, and the news story reported that the couple had sold \$200,000 worth of the posters, which was less than half of what they found.

Start the treasure hunt at home. If you find nothing, poke around the attic the next time you visit family members or friends with old houses. Look under the insulation (wear gloves and a mask) in the attic, check out the basement and crawl spaces, and poke around anywhere else you think something could be hidden.

Hidden In Rivers

As a child I saw bicycles in rivers several times, but I never guessed why they were there. Only later did I learn that rivers are easy places for criminals to hide things. The bikes were likely stolen and dumped there when the thief was done with them. As it turns out, criminals and kids throw things off of bridges routinely, because it is a way to get rid of incriminating evidence fast.

A treasure hunter (name withheld) who learned this secret early claims to make a living collecting this watery treasure. He uses magnets and other tools to retrieve guns, money, and other things of value from the bottom of murky rivers. He even designed a tube with a window and flashlight at the bottom, which he pushes down into the water to see clearly what is at the bottom. If you see a man with a strange reverse periscope floating in his rowboat, that may be him.

Now, if you have a treasure hunting mentality, or want to develop one, you should be thinking about where you can try this and what else you can learn from this. For example, perhaps a good waterproof metal detector could be used to locate valuables in the river (most are waterproof up to a certain point). Also, you might ask yourself what other things get dropped in water and where - whether on purpose or not. In the bottom of lakes near docks might be a good place to try.

Buried Treasure

It was common in the past, and probably still is today, to bury money and valuables. Where do you start looking? Here are some clues.

One old favorite was under the edge of driveways, sidewalks and other cement or asphalt surfaces. If you suspect such a stash, look for sagging asphalt. Cement usually stays firm, but the loosened soil will allow asphalt to sag, so dig under there and see what you find. But also look for areas that are out of sight. Nobody will bury a treasure in the front yard next to the road where they can be seen by all.

Where could you dig a hole inconspicuously? That's where you should start digging or scanning with your metal detector. Keep in mind, though that the scenery may have changed over the years. Is there evidence of some trees or bushes being cut down? A spot that is in the open now may have been out of sight twenty years ago.

Gardens are another favorite place to hide things. Money in a jar can be buried and dug up easily in the soft soil there. Look for old garden sites and try the metal detector there.

It's easy to forget where something is buried. For this reason, it is common to bury things close to easily-remembered landmarks. Near signs along the road used to be a common one for criminals. Many things could mark a stash, but in any case start with any of these possible "treasure markers" before searching an open area where a burial spot could be easily lost.

Irregularities in the surface of a yard often indicate that something was buried there. Soil that is leveled off after filling a hole tends to sag as it settles. Alternately, a mound may be there if all the soil didn't fit back in the hole with whatever was buried. Be aware, though that you might unearth a dead cat or dog this way. Try the metal detector first. Even currency is usually buried in something with metal on it, like the top of a jar.

You may know that it has been and probably still is common to bury things in coffee cans. But have you ever thought about how to use that knowledge? If you are walking around an old house or garage, look for empty coffee cans. That might indicate they were being saved to bury things in. Also, though paper money can't be detected with a metal detector, the cans it is buried in can.

Think of where you would bury a can if you had to. Where could you dig without being noticed? Where is the ground easier to put a hole in? Where can you easily remember the location? Think about these things as if you are the one burying the stash of cash, and you'll get an idea where to search.

Hotel Rooms

Hotel visitors sometimes put cash in hotel bibles to keep it safe while they are out for the evening. They then sometimes forget that they put it there (a night out can have that effect on memory). At least one treasure hunter claims to have found bills in those bibles.

Hotel owners also report that businessmen on out-of-town trips take off and hide their wedding rings in hotel rooms. Unfortunately this is probably a prelude to going out to the bar to meet women. Fortunately for those seeking hidden treasures, they sometimes forget about them until they are home. The next time you are in hotel room, notice all the places someone might hide a ring. Look in them. You never know.

Abandoned Buildings

You never know what you might find in abandoned house or building. I recall going into an old building as kids and finding old magazines. They were so old that they were boring to us and probably exciting and of value to a collector. Of course, not most abandoned buildings are on private property (although I found one the other day on national forest land), so you'll need to get permission to search them legally. You could offer a split of anything you find.

Above Ceiling Tiles

If the ceiling tiles are the removable type, they have probably been removed on occasion, perhaps to stash something there. A friend once confessed to me that he had carried many valuables into a store bathroom and hidden them above the ceiling tiles, planning to carry them out later. Fortunately he decided against a life of crime, but I wonder who found his stash when the mall was remodeled?

Wall Spaces

Sometimes there are places to access the spaces inside walls. Sometimes there used to be such access points. You can start by using a mirror and flashlight to peek into the wall where the washing machine drain hose or dryer vent goes. Try running a metal detector along the bottom of the walls as well. First lower a bag of coins into a wall and put the detector over it, to see if you can distinguish between this and the nails and wiring.

Under Floor Boards

As mentioned, this used to be a favorite place to hide money. Unfortunately the boards which used to be loose may be nailed tight now, or even covered in linoleum. However, you might get an indication that some money is there by using a metal detector. You have to figure out which way the joists run, because these will have nails in them. Then run the detector parallel to and between them. Fortunately most wiring is in wall, not floors.

In Heating Oil Tanks

When I sold real estate for a living, I saw more than one old fuel oil tank behind a house or even in a basement. Many people switched over to cheaper natural gas heat without ever getting rid of the oil tank. They have been known to be used as hiding places. Open them and look with a flashlight, or shake them to see if there is anything in there.

Under Sinks

This was another common hiding place in the past. Sometimes there is a space under the cupboard the sink sits on. Look in that if possible (if it's your own home, you might drill a small hole and peek inside before filling the hole with caulk). Also, false pipes have been used to hide things, so see if all the plumbing under there actually connects to the drain.

Behind Electrical Outlets

It is relatively easy to remove an electrical outlet and hide things in the wall through this access point, which explains why this is another common place to stash money, jewelry and other valuables. Some are nailed firmly to the studs, of course, but the drywall is often not cut tight around them, and only one screw holds most plate covers on. In other words, it would take just a minute to remove the cover and see if anything might be visible in the

wall nearby.

In Pump Houses

Pump houses are not as common as they used to be, but they were a common hiding place. In fact, some treasure hunters have reported that they have found more than one with a false pipe in it. Many years ago, such "pipes to nowhere" were pounded into the ground near other plumbing, after being filled with silver coins.

In Lamp Bases

Have you ever noticed that lamp bases are usually hollow? That makes them a good place to stuff some bills, or secret love letters. Take a look if you find an old lamp in an old house.

Old Cars

Cars are a second home for many, as evidenced by the food and clothing you see piled up in some. Like a house, a car presents many opportunities to hide things. For years I used to keep an emergency \$20-bill tucked into the springs underneath the driver's seat of my car. Hmm... Did I remember to remove that when I sold the car?

I also kept tools in the engine compartment of a car I owned, safely strapped out of sight. A car trunk can be a hiding place, of course. I have even heard that people will keep money and credit cards and clothing there to be used for secret affairs. Keep in mind that people die without telling anyone about these things.

One of the more fascinating stories I have read about treasure hunting involved \$6,000 of cash inside the back seat of an abandoned car. The man who found the money had actually trained a hound dog to sniff out old currency, training him for months with old bills. On a walk through an old junkyard one day (treasure hunters take such walks), the dog started to bark and circle an wrecked car. The man searched it until he found the stash.

Holes In Trees

This one is more popular with children. Adults tend to worry about what the squirrels and other animals might do to their treasure. But who knows? It couldn't hurt to shine a flashlight into any holes you see in trees. (Then again it could hurt - watch for those animals!)

Metal Detecting

I have mentioned using metal detectors for finding treasures in several different types of hiding places. Where else can you put it to work? Here are some ideas.

Where People Used To Walk

A coin shop owner told me once that he had paid a woman \$700 for an old coin she found in the ground (using a metal detector) where the city had torn up the old sidewalks for the first time in almost a century. Keep an eye out for any stories in the paper about the removal of old sidewalks.

Keep in mind that paved roads often used to be unpaved too. Some were even walking paths at one time, and dirt hides fallen coins pretty well. If you see that an old road has had the pavement torn out, try to scan the area with your detector.

Beaches

This is the obvious place that almost everyone with a metal detector hits, but for a good reason. There can be a fresh supply of "treasure" there every day in summer if it is a popular place. In fact, during festivals in one town I used to live in, the beaches were packed every day, and there were several treasure hunters there every night.

My friend who was one of them tells me that she and her husband have found a dozen rings and watches, as well as the usual coins. Things disappear fast when they fall into dry sand. They are found almost as fast if you have a metal detector. The other reason we all like going to the beach to "coin shoot" is that it's the easiest place of all to dig things up.

Swimming Holes

The most coins I ever found in one place with my metal detector was at a small lake a mile's hike from the nearest road. It was a popular swimming hole, with a rope swing and evidence of many parties. In a small sandy beach at one end, I dug almost 70 coins in an hours time. When a place is harder to get to, it's a good bet that it isn't searched as often.

Think of anyplace that people gather to swim, whether in river, lake, pond or old gravel quarry. The areas with loose dirt or sand are more likely to have hidden any fallen coins. Even better, see if you can discover a place that used to be a swimming hole, but hasn't been used much in decades. If its popularity ended before that of metal detectors started, their might still be some old coins there.

Low Water Opportunities

Good treasure hunters know a secret: Water hides a lot of valuables, and there are rare opportunities when they can be found. I had read about this technique years ago, and was reminded of it the other day, when my wife and I were walking in a local park near our house. We noticed that the duck pond was drained and almost dry.

The remaining ducks and geese were waddling around one side of their empty home,

complaining loudly. But the man who was working the dried bottom of the pond with a metal detector was in a good mood. I stopped to talk to him for a few minutes.

The city had drained the pond to dredge it out and make it better, he told me. He also said it had been eighty years since the duck pond was built, and as far as he knew this was the first time it was without water. As we talked, his detector beeped repeatedly, and he kept pulling coins out of the ground.

Over the course of those eighty years, people had been visiting the park and feeding the ducks, perhaps sometimes losing an occasional ring or other jewelry as they tossed their bread and crackers into the water. Coins were thrown in for good luck as well (I had seen this). There could be some pretty old coins in that mud, and who knows what other treasures.

I was talking to the man for perhaps five minutes, and during that time he dug up another six or seven coins to add to his bulging pockets. He had been there about an hour, and I would guess he had a hundred coins already. In fact, I found three laying on the surface as I was talking. I think I could have found another twenty or thirty if I didn't feel like I was "poaching" on his find.

He was using a decent \$300 metal detector which could distinguish between garbage and coins or other valuables. Lower-quality detectors (like the old one I have), will cause you to dig up a lot of metallic gum wrappers, bottle-tops, and other trash. With the good machines you can adjust the settings to make them more effective according to the types of items you're finding at the time.

This treasure hunter also had a small probe, for which he said he paid \$60, he said. Once you get a signal that something is down there you can push it into the dirt to pinpoint the location. It definitely sped things up. Without that, you'll spend time digging up a small area, and then pulling apart the resulting pile of dirt to find whatever is there.

Keep your eyes and ears open for metal detecting opportunities like this. Lakes are also drained, and reservoirs get low due to a drought or seasonal changes. Any time water receded or is drained, many years of accumulated things become accessible. Besides coins, bicycles and guns are also found. Watch the newspaper for any mention of low water levels or the draining of some local body of water, and go check it out.

Situations to watch for:

- * Drained or shrinking lakes.
- * Reservoirs lowered for repair reasons.
- * Streams and rivers diverted for construction purposes.

- * Any swimming areas at times of low water.
- * Ponds on golf courses that are drained to make improvements.
- * Agricultural ditches that dry up during droughts or seasonally.
- * Lake-bottom exposed near boat docks when the water levels are low.

By the coasts, you can also watch the news for any uniquely low tides that are coming. Amateur treasure hunters will have searched the easy, higher parts of the beach, but jewelry and coins also get lost in the water near shore. An abnormally low tide can be an opportunity to try metal detecting there.

Finding Gold

For less than \$10 you can buy a gold pan, and become a prospector, so this is a cheap hobby to start. I like the dark-green or black plastic ones best; they make it easier to see the gold. Most federal lands are open to prospecting without a permit, making that part easy as well.

The only place I've seen gold in my pan is in Canada. There isn't much gold in Michigan and I've only tried it a few times here in Colorado. Prospectors usually have the best luck panning for gold in the mountain streams of the southeast and the west, but whether or not you find any gold, it is always a nice way to spend an afternoon.

There are a couple stories I've collected about finding gold. In keeping with the theme of this book, they involve unusual ways to do it. The technique in the first story has been used to find gold next to mall parking lots!

Culverts Are For Prospectors!

It was a logical thought to one who had panned for gold and used a sluice. The metal culverts that go under roads might collect the heavier gold in the bottoms of their grooves, while the lighter sand and gravel washed away. They look like a sluice, after all.

The man who thought of this did find gold in there. Having confirmed his theory, he built a device using a power washer with an extra long wand. This was slowly pushed through a culvert to wash everything out the other side, onto a piece of carpet. He then panned through what had been caught in those grooves, and found enough gold to make this a regular source of income.

The next time you're in a known gold-bearing area you might want to scrape out a culvert or two and put what you collect in a bag. You can pan it out at home to see if it's worth pursuing. This makes you wonder where else gold might collect, doesn't it? It should, if

you are developing the right mind set for treasure hunting.

Hidden In The Moss

A man bought a property with an old barn on it, thinking he could store his RV and other things there. While cleaning out the barn he found piles of dry moss. He learned that the previous owner had regularly collected the moss from nearby streams to sell to garden-supply stores (there's another unusual way to make money).

When he burned the moss to dispose of it, he found small globs of gold in the ashes. The moss had come from a gold-bearing stream, apparently, and gold flakes and bits get trapped in the plants. After locating the stream it had come from, the man started his own regular harvests.

Try throwing some moss in that gold pan next time (break it up well to release any gold in it). Once again, this makes me wonder where else gold collects. Perhaps it would collect in a piece of carpet weighted down and left on the bottom of a stream for a season.

Hilltop Treasure

A decade ago, after the "El Nino" weather pattern, a lot of hills in the southwest had been eroded by storms. This uncovered gold among other valuable things. Using the latest metal detectors designed for gold, for a while people were finding more nuggets than had been discovered in a long time. Keep this in mind after a particularly rainy year.

Old Mines

As soon as metal detectors were easy to use and designed especially for locating gold, people realized there might be a lot of gold in old tailings piles. In the past the gold ore and rock was taken from mines, broken down into small enough pieces, and then processed. Those chunks of rock which didn't easily break were thrown aside into piles (tailings). Those chunks of rocks may have had a chunk of gold inside. Before metal detectors existed there was no way to tell without breaking them open.

That is why there is still gold at all those old mines out west. And boy are there a lot of old mines out here. Friends and I have discovered five abandoned mines just this year, during just six explorations of a canyon near where I live.

Unfortunately, it may be too late to find much. If you can get to a mine easily (many are on public land and near roads), so can others. Most of the tailings piles of these mines have probably been searched fairly well. If you do try this, find a mine that is miles from the nearest road, without any trails leading to it. Maybe - just maybe - nobody has been there yet with a metal detector. Of course, you still have to hope that the mine was abandoned because they ran out of gold, and not because they never found any.

Patience

Learn the secrets of treasure hunting (undoubtedly there are many more). But also develop the patience to keep searching. It took Mel Fischer sixteen years to find the \$450 million dollar treasure cache, the "Atocha Mother Lode." You can try for sixteen more minutes before setting down that gold pan or metal detector. Finally, consider what each search teaches you and how you might use it. That's thinking like a treasure hunter.

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Unusual Businesses

I've always had an interest in unusual businesses. I have four brothers, and as a child I used to sell my vote to the highest bidder for the which television show we would watch. I guess you could call that the business of politics.

I also collected and sold the spent paper-wads. These are folded and bent paper "bullets" fired at each other using rubber bands. I didn't participate in the battles, but just collected the ammunition and sold them back to my brothers for a couple cents each. I was a war profiteer in the great paper-wad wars.

I also sold candy out of a hollow book in school. I sewed pockets inside my jacket to be able to carry and hide from teachers more candy, snacks, pens and other things to sell (no drugs). I bought candy by the bag and sold it by the piece, with at least 50% margins always.

Perhaps I should be embarrassed, but I also sold pornography. My brothers and I found a public recycling bin where people threw out not only their newspapers but their Playboy magazines. I gathered a pile and sold them out of my locker in my freshman year of high school. I think I got a dollar each (I probably priced them too low).

My business activities became a bit more conventional eventually, but I still loved to hear about and read about the more unusual businesses. Here are a few that I have heard about, read about or been involved in.

Used Stuffed Animal Vendor

We met him at a campfire in the desert of southeastern Arizona. He had pulled into the hot spring area where we were camping in our van, and then began to unload his van. He took garbage bag after garbage bag out of it, putting them on the roof. It became apparent that he was simply making space to sleep inside, but what was in the bags?

"Stuffed animals" he told us once he had joined our little crowd around the fire. "I buy them used from thrift stores and sell them." We asked where he sold them. "On the side of the highway."

Do they sell well, we wondered. "I did \$3,000 in sales the first month," he told us. Since he sold them for two to three times what he paid, that was at least half profit. Not bad at that time, for a man living out of his van.

He sold them where there was traffic and a place for the cars to pull over. He continued in a location until the police stopped him. Then he would see what the regulations were, and whether he could get a permit for a reasonable amount. If not, he moved on and tried another place. The county he had been selling in that day charged him \$18 per year to sell along the public highways and roads - as long as he didn't create a traffic hazard.

That sounded better than the \$50 per day they charged kids who wanted a permit to sell pop in the northern Michigan town where we lived at the time. But *used* stuffed animals? We gave it a try a year later when we started working the flea market circuit in Michigan.

I wish I could say that we had the kind of sales he did, but we didn't. Fortunately we sold many other things, and the used stuffed animals, bought at thrift stores and hung with "adopt me" tags, were one of our better sellers.

Dead Deer Collection Business

My brother met a guy in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who collected the bodies of dead deer for a living. The county needed the deer carcasses off the roadsides for health reasons, and contracted with this guy for twenty-five bucks per buck (or doe). I'm not sure how he disposed of them. Maybe his other business was providing meat to dog food companies. Hmm...

Poop Collection Business

When I lived in Traverse City, Michigan, someone started a dog poop cleaning business. If you want the dog without the responsibility of cleaning the yard, call A-1 Pooper Scooper. I'm not sure if this would be better or worse than a dead deer collecting business. I also don't know if the business is still around, but it wouldn't surprise me, given that the new rent-a-pet businesses have proven that some dog lovers don't even want the responsibility

of owning a dog.

Fetal Greetings

I recently read the true story of a woman who has a business online selling "fetal greeting" cards. They have a picture of a fetus announcing his or her coming entry into the world. She got the idea while looking for a unique way to tell family and friends that she was pregnant. A friend drew pictures for her, and she liked the results so much that she decided to make a business out of it. Since her site has been online for seven years now, I assume she has had some success.

Used Underwear Business

You probably remember a few weird businesses from back before Ebay got all their rules. One woman was making thousands per month selling used panties to fetishists. She bought panties for her friends, who got them for free as long as they returned them to her unwashed, trading them in for the next new pair. The used and unwashed panties brought \$10 or more on Ebay auctions and sold fast.

Businesses In Other Worlds

You may have heard about the online fantasy role-playing game Runescape. It has millions of players now, whose characters interact in an online world. If you have played this or similar online role-playing games, you know that you can by real estate, earn gold coins, and do many of the things online that you might want to do in real life (we won't even get into what some people use these worlds for).

What you may not know is that the "virtual real estate" owned by your character, and the online gold pieces he or she has earned, can be sold for real cash. They are auctioned on Ebay and other sites regularly. My wife's brother says he could sell his character (comes with all powers and gold) for \$700, and that is in Ecuador, where half of that amount is a decent monthly wage (as of 2008).

There are Runescape entrepreneurs who sell their online houses in the game for hundreds of real U.S. dollars. I have read that some are making up to \$80,000 per year playing these games and selling the virtual goodies they collect. I think it would start to get confusing - what is real here and what isn't?

That's not the end of it though. Large companies are now buying advertising space on billboards in these virtual worlds. Real people will see them after all. Perhaps your character could set up and rent billboards in a virtual world as a real business, or to get even stranger, maybe someday you will be able to get paid real money for campaigning for political candidates from this world in virtual worlds.

Think about this one a bit. The fact that there is already virtual-world real estate, coins and advertising for sale suggests that there will be many more ways to make money with these online games someday. I hate to suggest it, but virtual brothels probably already exist in these "other" worlds. On the nicer side of things, perhaps they are a perfect place to have virtual classrooms teaching (for a real fee) people a language or how to invest in Runescape homes.

One last question? If real estate values keep rising in virtual reality, and rents are stable (yes you can rent your virtual home), will there eventually be mortgage loans to buy these properties. Who wants to be the first lender specializing in loans for homes that exist inside computers?

Pixel Sales

You may have heard about the young man in England who decided to finance college by selling one million pixels of advertising space on his web page for a dollar per pixel. You could buy a minimum of 100 pixels and have any image you want linking to anywhere you want.

Guess what? He succeeded within a few months. The hundreds of copy-cat sites that tried the same or something similar don't seem to have done as well. Novelty, and the publicity it generates, is by nature a short-lived commodity.

Bulletin Board Service

You may have seen bulletin boards in stores, apartment buildings and other places, which look more professional than normal. They are. They are placed there by companies which sell space on them. The property owner appreciates a neat board, typically available for his use as well.

This isn't a complicated business, if you are interested. You do have to buy the boards (or make them, as I read about one man doing), and they should have a plastic locking cover. Once you have say, eight of them placed around the city, you charge \$6 per month for a small ad on each, or discount it to \$50 for placement on all ten.

Advertise the service on the board, of course: "Your ad here for just \$6 per month. Call..." How much could you make? If you can eventually sell 50 spaces per board, eight boards would gross \$2,000 or more per month.

Professional Garage Sale Shopper

Do you like to shop at garage sales? Want to make it into a profitable business? You have undoubtedly heard about people buying things at garage sales that they then have sold on Ebay for big profits. I once met a man who bought some old jeans for \$2 and sold them on

Ebay for over \$250. I had to look that night and see the bids (some higher than that) to believe him.

The problem, of course, is knowing what will sell and for how much. But what if you have a laptop computer with a satellite internet connection? You could take it with you to garage sales, and buy things only after seeing that they are selling on Ebay - and seeing what the current bids are. This almost guarantees you won't guess wrong and lose money too often.

Want to make it even easier? There are certified Ebay Trading Assistants to do the selling for you. Some operate from home, others do this as a sideline to another business, and a few have offices set up for just this purpose.. To find one in your area, go to Ebay.com and search for "Trading Assistant Directory." You can enter your zip code and find the ones nearest to you.

What they do for you is photograph, list and and sell your things on Ebay. They manage it all and send you a check, minus their fees. You'll cut into your margins this way, but you can also spend more time locating saleable items and negotiating a low purchase price.

I cover this in more detail in the [Unusual Ways Newsletter](#), which you can subscribe to for free if you are interested.

Gas Station Target Practice

I recently visited a money-making blog and saw a hilarious idea. The author wanted to set up a gas station that gave away free gas. The catch? The gas came out very slowly, and mounted cameras with paintball guns attached gave people online the opportunity to shoot at the customers for a fee.

This may not work, of course, and he said that the city wouldn't allow him to do it. But the general idea of interactive cameras and devices for use online is full of potential. People might pay to see people walking by, for example, if they could also say what they wanted to them through a speaker as they passed. And there are certainly some better ideas than this out there, so put on that thinking cap.

Metals Recycling

I was dealing blackjack to a man one day (one of my many jobs), and he told me that he had a business exporting scrap metal. He was currently working on getting a load of steel to Russia. He didn't get many deals put together each year, he said, but when they worked there was big money. Of course he was doing big contracts.

On the other end of the spectrum is the handyman who helped me tear apart a house that my parents bought. I noticed that as he loaded the junk and scraps into his truck he was

carefully separating out the copper tubing and aluminum storm-door frames. He had a little bonus planned for himself. I wondered how much extra he made from this.

I got an idea of how much when a mechanic broke the aluminum wheel on my car. After he replaced it, he put the broken wheel in the trunk, and I went to the nearest scrap metals buyer. I got \$5 for it. This was many years ago, so I imagine I would get even more for it now.

Now the question this suggests, is how many people have junk items in their garages and basements that are made of aluminum, copper, and other valuable metals. If you learned the values well, and perhaps carried a small scale, you might make some money going to rummage sales looking for things, and asking about any scrap metal the home owner has.

Of course, this might just be training for later deals. Wouldn't it be nice to make ten-cent per pound profit selling 200,000 pounds of scrap metal? Especially if you could find a dozen such deals per year.

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