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The following is a short question and answer session from myself to someone asking if a repair career in horology was a viable option. Then followed by just about the same situation between a Clocksmiths list member and my response to the group.

>I'm considering a change of careers from electronics/aerospace
>to clock and watch repair.

>1. How viable a business is it?

Any self employed situation will give back exactly what you put into it. Clock/watch repairs are usually supplemented with sales because there always seems to be some one who will do the job at much less. Even though this job will probably be substandard, the public usually does not care about quality when it comes to their pocketbook. Even though they will always say exactly the opposite.

If you decide to sell as well as repair then you **MUST** have a completely separate sales department. If you get directly involved with sales then there will be little time for repair. Of course you could concentrate on one or the other but **NOT** both sales and repairs.

If you do decide to get into the business then by all means keep your repair prices high and do **NOT** get into repairs before you can "prove" to yourself that you are competent. This is the only way to command respect and honor the profession. What I mean by this is that if you charge substandard prices, sooner or later the work will reflect this pricing structure. The lower your prices are, then most likely the more work you will receive and if that is your goal then so be it. But lower prices will also bring in the customer who wants to pay only a fraction of what "our" time is worth and the word will get out that you perform a service at a substandard fee. This will attract more of the money tight and the "it only needs a ____", they will fill in that blank.

Those "only" jobs will be the one's that your competition would not repair or wanted more money than the customer was willing to pay. Once you are inundated with these "cheap" pieces and customers, the work will suffer.

There are always going to be people who will charge less for supposedly the same quality of work. Even though I doubt the quality will be the same, please do yourself a favor and let those "repairers" have the work. There is no sense in trying to match or beat someone else's prices if you plan on maintaining the highest quality. This commitment to quality will, in the long run, make you one of the people with all the work you can handle because of reputation.

>2. How much money to start up?

With school and tools and initial advertising about \$5,000.

But don't ask me to break that down its just a guess.

>3. Best way to learn (schools, etc.)

See my file schools.mcc and the Web addresses given in my salutation. You can directly FTP using "ftp://www.webcom.com/pub/z4murray/main/schools.mcc".

>4. Approximate. yearly income after a couple of years.

I can tell you revenue from repair runs between 0 to the sky's the limit. But that depends on a great many factors. Do you want to be a slave to the business? How much time do you want to put in? What customer are you going after? What are the demographics where you are located? And on and on.....

As I stated before you will get back exactly what you put into it.

>5. Can I run out of a apartment to start?

That's exactly what I did.

>6. Is it a growing trade, or a dying one?

Definitely the latter and that is exactly why it IS a good choice. Most young people equate watches and clocks. Since most modern watches have a throw away aspect to them, then the youth does not see much future in repairing these creatures. Based on that then there are not many entering the field and this would make an ideal circumstance for starting your own business. In ten years time, if you can survive, I can practically guarantee the at least 25% of your competition will not longer exist through attrition. Besides there are PLENTY of clocks and watches just waiting to be repaired. I am not aware of any established watch or clock repair person who does not have all the work they need or can handle.

See the file "ftp://www.webcom.com/pub/z4murray/main/orgain.mcc" for the organizations you should join.

>7. If I send you a SASE, would you send me a copy of the forms, >business card, letterhead, brochures, etc., that you use?

A while back the Watch and Clock Review did a business card survey and choose a top ten and ten honorable mention. Maybe they still have a copy or two lying around.

The Watch & Clock Review
2403 Champa Street
Denver, CO 80205 USA
303-296-1600 or Fax 303-295-2159

My card was chosen in the honorable mention but today I'm not happy with it. The most important thing to remember

in business cards is have plenty around and accurate information. Include shop hours, if known, all your phone and Fax #'s, location, E-mail and Web addresses, memberships, and spend the extra money to have multi-colored and thick stock cards.

Be sure to spread them around like manure. Go to watch repair shops, antique dealers, department stores that sell grandfathers and other clocks, and antique repair shops such as cabinet makers, porcelain repairers and the like.

>8. Do you give a client a time frame or specific date to expect >the clock's return?

I verbally state a range, usually 6 to 10 weeks, and write down on the customers copy the 10 week date. As someone stated before it's better to surprise them with an "early" return then make them sit and wonder.

>9. Do you give estimates over the phone?

Absolutely, the last thing I want is someone in my Clinic who will not pay the price I demand. I despise negotiating and if I can head them off before they come in and "haggle", the better for me.

>10. Is it practical to work from your home if you don't have a >separate shop area where you can receive clients?

Only if you do NOT see customers, which means that you pick up and deliver all work.

>11. What do you think about being an authorized factory service >center? What are the pros and cons? It seems that this would >give a new business a degree of credibility. How difficult is >it to obtain?

A great idea and it is exactly how I obtained most of my early experience. Just d/l my file manufact.mcc and contact each and every one through a form letter of your own design and most will take you ASAP. If work is what your after, then price you warranty work low because they have a tendency to use cost as their only determining factor. The reason for this is because they no longer want a service center to repair but act solely as a parts/movements replacer.

>12. If you were starting out now, knowing what you do, what >would you do differently? What would you do the same?

I'd spend much more money on yellow page advertising and increase my starting repair prices. One thing I did do, that I encourage others to do, is to visit all of the antique stores within a 25 mile radius and just chat and introduce yourself and leave as many business cards as they would like. Please be sure to ask them how many or little cards they wish and then do the same for them by asking to take the like amount of their cards and indicate that if you receive calls for the like items in their shops you will promptly refer the potential customer to them. If they mention a "kick back" of sorts turn

it down and state that it's not money that you are interested in but quality merchandise at a fair price for your customers.

This may be B.S. but you have to play the "game" especially when you are starting out.

>13. If you were starting out now, knowing what you do, would you name your business the same?

Use a name you can be proud of. There is a shop here in Los Angeles called "The California Clockmakers Guild". It sounds very official and business like and the proprietor is Clarence Crookshank. He is a fine Clocksmith but the name of the business is just a clever marketing ploy.

I like Mike's Clock Clinic because it's a tongue twister and automatically puts the customer at ease because when asked "Are you Mike", we are already on a first name basis.

>14. What other advice can you give me?

Know your limits!! If you want to learn off a complicated movement then find one at a flea market and work on your own before you tackle a customer's.

Establish a working relationship with a local glass supplier because we run into odd shapes and sizes that the material house doesn't carry.

Establish a working relationship with a local watch repair person because there are a lot of Swiss made clocks that are really large watches and he/she will be of great benefit. You could refer all of your watch customers to him/her and in return they will send you their clock customers. That person can hopefully make any balance staffs or small watch parts you may need.

Establish a working relationship with a reliable wheel specialist. My Web page "<http://www.webcom.com/z4murray/corepair.html> and my file [repair.mcc](#), which are both identical, are excellent places to begin your search for a reliable wheel specialist because there are fifteen (15) listed there. I have tried many and I am still looking for the "perfect" person who probably does not exist. A wheel specialist can make just about any part and still keep the authenticity of the piece if you provide the approximate age.

Just to toot my own horn, the most valuable thing you could have is most of my files. With these files you can find just about anything or anyone involved in horology. If I had these files when I started they would have saved me countless hours of searching.

The most important of these is the [repair.mcc](#) which is also a Web page called [corepair.html](#) because it contains, all of the know to me, repair people who will work for the trade. [Matclock.mcc](#), [matwatch.mcc](#), and [matother.mcc](#) contain all of

the horological supply houses.

Do your self a hugh favor and d/l as many of these a you can and store them. They will not use much disk space and will save you countless hours of frustration and headache.

Good luck and happy clock smithing!!

A service from, E-mail address: Mike@atmos-man.com
Mike Murray Founder of Clocksmiths

A specialist in Atmos and 400-day clock repair.
Also, I overhaul most plug in electric clocks.
In continuous horological service since 04/01/1982.

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My main Web site is located at "<http://www.atmosman.com/>"

Main FTP site is located at:
"<http://home.earthlink.net/~atmosman/earthftp.html>"

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