

Salvaging Building Materials: On-Site Auctions Put Green in the Environment and Your Pocket

There's treasure in them there houses, the ones that are about to be torn down! And if you look closely, you'll see that the treasure is not just what's in the buildings but the green business opportunities they represent.

Holding on-site auctions at houses that are about to be demolished can be a good business for enterprising individuals who enjoy treasure hunting and are passionate about preserving our natural resources. What's more, it doesn't require a big outlay of capital to get started.

In this type of sale, the owner of the about-to-be-demolished house allows a one-day auction to be held on the site where the reusable building materials such as kitchen cabinets, doors, woodwork, appliances and lighting fixtures are sold. Some auctions even include the plants growing on the property!

Here's how it works. First, the auctioneer locates a house that is slated for demolition, possibly through word of mouth or local records. He verifies that the house has materials of interest to local buyers and gets the owner's agreement for the auction. Then he starts promoting the sale.

Before the appointed time, the auctioneer numbers the items that he intends to sell in the house and provides an hour or so for potential buyers to see what's being offered. Since the buyers have to remove the items themselves and take them away on the same day, they bring their own tools and come ready to haul their treasure home.

It's a win-win situation for everyone involved. The auctioneer makes money from the sales. The owner may get a percentage and he also spends less on tipping fees at the landfill because there is less debris when the house is demolished. The buyers save money by using salvaged building supplies for their projects.

The other big winner is the environment. According to the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center, formerly the Waste Management and Research Center, the United States produces enough construction and demolition debris each year to fill a typical street four foot high with trash and run it from New York to Los Angeles six times. Reusing building materials not only reduces this waste, it lessens the demand for newly manufactured items. That means less energy consumption, the use of less raw materials and decreased pollution.

Although on-site auctions play a small part in this process, they can lead to bigger green business ventures. Some people who started as auctioneers went on to start deconstruction companies or opened stores where they sell salvaged building materials.

If the idea of growing the green in your pocket while helping to green the planet, appeals to you, check out the book *Unbuilding* written by Bob Falk and Brad Guy, published by The Taunton Press. It gives a thorough, step by step look at the technology of salvaging and reusing building materials and provides many examples of businesses in the industry.