Most questions that we receive through our Facebook page relate to starting a notary business. If you need help jumpstarting your business, you are going to love this no-nonsense special edition of The Notary Digest. Today, you will learn profit strategies that signing service companies and notary signing agent class trainers won’t tell you!

■ **Secret #1  It’s not all glamour.**  
Before we go forward, it is only fair to tell you that there is a dirty little secret about starting and running a notary business, one that you won’t learn from companies that derive the bulk of their income through selling notary signing agent training courses and certifications. The competition is stiff and it takes time to build a business. However, there are ways to get started and start profiting so that you are in a better position to choose good clients and negotiate better fees, but it will take patience and planning.

Still interested?  Fantastic! Let’s move on.

■ **Secret #2  Begin as a consummate mobile notary professional.**  
You do not have to start as a signing agent in order to have a profitable business. In fact, beginning your business as a mobile notary has benefits. As a mobile notary, you can gain experience notarizing many types of documents and following notary procedures in various settings. You will learn what it costs to travel and how to manage your time. Best of all, you will not be extending credit to signing services and will able to receive payment on the spot. In addition, neither extra training with loan documents nor spending money on certification is required.

Also, a new trend has emerged in which title companies and lenders send documents directly to the borrowers and tell them to find a mobile notary to take care of the notarizations. Sound interesting? Read this link: http://tinyurl.com/mailaway.

As soon as you start your mobile notary business, you would be wise to do the following if you want to plan for success.

- **Establish a website.** It takes time for websites to be indexed by Google and other search engines. Every day counts.
- **Purchase 500 business cards to promote your mobile notary work.**
- **Start saving a little each week toward equipment.**
- **Think outside of the box on how you’ll market your business to every possible client within a 15 miles radius.** Take a look at “Audacious Advertising on a Shoestring” for easy but powerful marketing strategies.

■ **Secret #3  Honesty is still the best policy.**  
Advertise in popular notary signing agent directories and do not state that you are a “signing agent.” Make it clear that you are a mobile notary professional. Even with that, hiring entities may be calling for signing agent work. There is not a problem with that as long as you are honest and the hiring party knows that it will have to provide guidance.

■ **Secret #4  Self-study and practice is key.**  
While you are building your mobile notary business, start studying and working on your technique as a notary signing agent. You will need to have a set of practice loan documents. PPDocs.com is the website of a legal firm with the primary focus of creating loan document packages for lenders. Go to the page at this link: http://tinyurl.com/studydocs. You will find a list of all 50 states. When you click on your state, you will be able to download a sample package of loan documents. Study daily and practice presenting each one to an imaginary borrower using introductory statements.

■ **Secret #5  Profile your talents.**  
Develop a profile of your talents. You may not have Continued on Page 2
Seven Secrets for Notary Business Success, Continued from Page 1

a thousand loan signings under your belt when you start getting calls for your notary loan signing business, but if you are taking advantage of the secrets revealed in this article, you will have an upper hand and will have familiarized yourself with loan documents.

So, rather than misrepresenting yourself and boasting that you have performed hundreds of signings, market yourself with phrases like, “Meticulous, dependable, and experienced mobile notary with thriving practice that encompasses working with all types of clients and documentation in various settings; familiar with notarized documents in loan packages. I am an expert problem solver.”

■ Secret #6  You are going to be flying solo.

You may have been told in signing agent classes that you should visit notary forums and ask for a mentor to help you learn the ropes or advice on how to jumpstart your business. Or perhaps an instructor said to call a local notary and ask to shadow him or her on appointments. Neither of those strategies usually works. Notaries generally do not want to train their competition.

For the most part, you will be a lone ranger, but that’s not necessarily bad. By starting out as a mobile notary, you will develop a sense of independence and that will be an advantage. Those who begin working as signing agents and have not freelanced as mobile notaries often fall into the trap of letting hiring entities tell them how to run their businesses.

Remember: You are the boss and you will decide what is best for your business!

■ Secret #7  How to price your services.

Establishing fees is difficult. It’s the hardest issue that new notary business owners struggle with. You don’t want to overprice yourself, but you also don’t want to find out at the end of the year that you didn’t make a profit.

As a mobile notary, you are providing the time that it takes you to travel and the use of your vehicle.

Some mobile notaries use $25 as a base time and travel fee for trips within a ten mile radius. Others have $30 or $35 as a base and cover more miles for that price. Some may charge more or less. Most notaries also add the fee for each notarization performed to their base fee and that is the amount on the bill that they hand to the client.

In mobile notary work, you can start with a lower travel fee and test the waters; you can raise your fees if you determine that your profit margin is too low. On the other hand, when you become a signing agent, starting low and trying to go higher may not work. Once you are noted in a company’s database that you will take a certain amount, they will not likely allow you to raise your fee.

You will be told by shrewd signing service schedulers that you are only working ONE hour! They will ask you to take $40, $50, or $75 for that one hour assignment. $40 per hour sounds like a great hourly wage? Right? Not necessarily. You must learn to think like a business owner.

You are running a business and you have costs of doing business. The example below is a more complete picture.

A loan signing appointment will take about 1.5 to 2 hours for you to receive and print documents, fax back a few pages, and drop off the documents at a courier location 5 miles away.

Travel time to and from the appointment will usually take 1 hour and let’s figure that at 20 miles for the round trip. The appointment itself will take you about 1 to 1.5 hours. So each assignment will actually take 3.5 to 5 hours of your time. Now, let’s figure the cost of electricity, phone usage, advertising, internet costs, printing documents, your mileage, and taxes that you will pay at the end of the year.

Suppose that you charge $100 for an assignment that requires you to print documents and travel ten miles — here is how that will break out.

Less printing and paper cost ($10.00)
Less estimated costs of equipment depreciation, insurance, advertising, electricity, phone, internet, etc. ($5.00)
Less 20 miles at approximately 56 cents per mile ($11.20)
Less 10 miles to drop off at courier at approximately 56 cents per mile ($5.60)
You are now down to $68.20, but wait. You will receive a tax bill for about 25% of your profit. ($17.05)

After subtracting the costs of doing business and taxes, you are left with $51.15. You are earning approximately $10.50 to $13.00 per hour. If you had taken this job for $50, you would have cleared less than $1.00! It goes without saying that your costs may be a little less or a little more, but these types of costs must be considered when setting a fee.

You are not in business to break even or to give away your time and effort.

Did you find these secrets helpful? If so, let us know on our Facebook page! Find us at Facebook.com/Notaries.

The other articles in this issue of The Notary Digest are full of notary business tips. Grab another cup of coffee and keep reading!

Ground Floor: Starting a Notary Business

The following are topics and tips for notaries to consider when starting a business.

■ Do research on types of business entities. Will you be a sole proprietor or will you incorporate your business?

■ If you are not going to incorporate your business, but will be using a business name rather than your first and last names, you may need to record an assumed name certificate (or something similar) in your county’s public records so that you have publically declared that your name and your business name are linked.

Check with your accountant, lawyer, or county clerk’s office.

Protect your SS#

Notaries are frequently asked to complete Form W-9s because they are contracting with companies and not employed by companies. Form W9 requests a social security number. Most notaries do not want to provide their social security numbers to companies they know nothing about. IRS.gov provides copies of Form W-9s. Look at page three of the form and note that you may apply for a taxpayer identification number (or employer identification number) to use so that you can protect your social security number.

Record Keeping

■ Keep a business journal in addition to your notary journal. Document all jobs you have done and the agreed upon fees.

■ Once you have completed the job, make a note in your business journal that says how many notarizations you performed during the signing and what you could have charged for them. Your tax preparer may need this information if you elect not to pay...
Audacious Advertising on a Shoestring Budget

Many aspire to run their own businesses, but few are committed to pulling out all the stops and promoting their business as much as possible. You have to believe in your business and that you have a great service that people need.

In the “Secrets” article, we discussed founding your business on mobile notary work, getting a quick cash flow started, and laying plans for moving into loan signing work. Unless you have several thousand dollars to promote your notary business, you will need an audacious marketing campaign and to be willing to stretch your imagination on how to make contact with prospective clients.

“Audacious” is the opposite of cowardly and “audacious advertising” means having a bold and daring marketing plan. For instance, an audacious marketer might run errands to the bank, the library, Wal-Mart, and other places wearing a collared golf shirt with the words “Mobile Notary” embroidered on the front and “Mobile Notary 555-555-5555” on the back. Audacious marketers will use magnetic signs or special paint jobs to assure that they are advertising their businesses wherever their cars are seen.

One audacious marketer purchased a very large old white utility truck for a very low price, had the paint job renewed, and hired a professional sign company to paint a bold ad on the sides and back. It’s not the most economical for going to appointments, but a drive through key traffic areas and parking the truck in strategic locations assures that his business information is seen all over town.

Audacious marketers do not miss any opportunity to promote their businesses. They leave business cards or fliers where people normally wait in line or wait for an appointment. If they are getting their oil changed, they ask if they can leave a few fliers where people wait for their cars to be serviced. Notaries cannot hope that putting one ad in a local newspaper will bring a flood of calls; they must hit the pavement and get the word out. Many notary businesses fail because notaries will not or do not know how to promote their businesses.

How it is done

Assuming you don’t live in an unpopulated area, things will happen if you use these ideas!

Consider how you will use your mobile notary services and how will you be able to reach them. If you follow the suggestions in the “Secrets” article, you will soon have a stack of mobile notary business cards and will be ready to start getting them into the right hands.

Start a prospect list and figure out how to reach groups of people who will likely need a mobile notary at some point. Put yourself in their shoes; know how to reach them when they need your services.

Hospital patients: Reach them by visiting the hospital administration offices and all the nurses’ stations on every floor.

Medical labs, hospital records office, ambulance services: Go door to door with business cards.

Doctors, dentists, and pharmacists: Go door to door with business cards.

Homebound and hospice patients: Go to all companies that provide nurses and home health care people; provide business cards.

Local attorneys may have clients who can’t drive: Go to all law offices and leave business cards.

Guests in hotels: Visit all hotels with cards and leave them with concierge or guest services.

Travelers: Visit local airports to see if there is an opportunity to leave cards or make a contact who can refer business to you.

Office buildings: You must go door to door and let the people know that you are in business and provide a convenience.

Once you have listed several prospects, ACT on it. Repeat monthly. Make them look forward to seeing you. Hand over a handful of bubble gum, candy, or even a box of donuts fresh from the bakery in the mornings. Be memorable!

Advertise online

In the “Secrets” article, you learned that you need a website; hopefully, you are planning to get your website up immediately.

Add your business to http://www.expresupdateusa.com/.

Put new ads on Craigslist every day; do it faithfully.

Claim your free Google Places ad.

Put your profile on notary directories. Which ones? Search the web for notary 00000 (where your 00000 represents your zip code). Invest in ads for the two websites that top your search results list. Check out Getlisted.org; it will let you know if you are listed on some of the most commonly used directories.

Blog and use Twitter and Facebook. “Like” all of your local businesses’ pages and follow them.

Ground Floor: Starting a Notary Business, Continued from Page 2

self-employment taxes on your notary fees. He or she can give you the proper information on whether or not you can use this election.

When a check comes in, note it on your list along with the date paid and check number. Some notaries make copies of all checks they deposit.

At the end of the year, any company that paid you more than $600 will issue a form MISC 1099. Check the amount reported on the MISC 1099 against your business journal records. Income that you do not receive on forms MISC 1099 also must be reported.

Keep receipts for all business expenses, all equipment purchases, and a record of all mileage to appointments, trips to the store to purchase supplies, and to drop off documents at the courier station. The IRS prefers a running list of odometer readings if you intend to take use mileage as a deduction or expenses that relate to your vehicle.

Document all income in your business journal that was paid to you from general mobile notary clients.

Accurate records are essential in running a business. Did you find this article to be helpful? Let us know at Facebook.com/Notaries. (Disclaimer: The tips shared in this article are for general interest only. Please consult a tax professional or attorney if you need advice about your business practices.)
In notary signing agent language, an “NBS” is a “non-borrowing spouse.” A spouse becomes an NBS when he or she does not add his/her name to the loan application. Married people do not always apply jointly, even though they may jointly own their homes.

If a wife has a bad credit history, the couple may apply for the loan based solely on the husband’s income and credit.

The wife, in this case, would become a non-borrowing spouse. Despite the fact that she is not actually mentioned on the loan application, she will almost certainly be required to sign certain documents if the collateral of the loan is the home in which the couple lives.

For clarification on this situation, we consulted with Alex Yvonou, Michigan notary and expert on notary signing agent procedures. Alex advises that hiring entities may refer to those documents as “spousal” or “dower” documents. He further explains that the documents that non-borrowing spouses generally sign are:

- The Truth in Lending
- The Mortgage or Deed of Trust
- Any Riders to the Mortgage or Deed of Trust
- The Notice of Right to Cancel (if applicable)

According to Yvonou, if an Itemization of Amount Financed is included in the package, it is usually also signed by the non-borrowing spouse since it is a companion to the Truth in Lending document. You will sometimes see additional miscellaneous documents for the spouse to sign. These are lender specific. Other documents can include:

- An I.D. Form
- The Compliance/Error and Omissions Agreement
- Limited Power of Attorney/Correction Agreement
- Title Documents
- Other Miscellaneous Documents