

Get paid to stage homes for sale!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Home Stager**



KIMBERLY M. STONE

Visit www.FabJob.com

Contents

About the Authors	9
1. Introduction	13
1.1 A Career in Home Staging	14
1.1.1 Why Choose Home Staging?	14
1.1.2 What is Home Staging?.....	15
1.1.3 Typical Tasks of Home Stagers	16
1.1.4 Services Provided by a Home Stager	17
1.2 Adding Value in Today’s Real Estate Market	19
1.3 Benefits of Being a Home Stager	21
1.4 Inside This Guide	23
2. What a Home Stager Does	25
2.1 Home Staging Specialties	26
2.1.1 Full-Service Home Staging.....	27
2.1.2 Home Staging Consulting Services.....	29
2.1.3 Other Specialties	31
2.2 Staging Equipment and Supplies	32
2.2.1 What You’ll Need	32
2.2.2 Where to Get Props and Furniture.....	38
2.3 How to Do Client Consultations	42
2.3.1 Meeting with Clients	42
2.3.2 Assessing a Client’s Needs	44
2.3.3 Assessing a Client’s Space	44
2.3.4 Presenting a Proposal.....	46
2.3.5 Client Contracts	49

2.4	An Overview of How to Stage a Home.....	55
2.5	Organizing and Decluttering.....	58
2.5.1	Identifying Clutter.....	59
2.5.2	Disposing of Clutter	61
2.5.3	Removing Personal or Offensive Items	62
2.5.4	Handling Collections and Hobbies.....	63
2.5.5	Storage: Closets, Garages, and Attics.....	64
2.6	Cleaning and Repairs.....	65
2.6.1	Identifying Trouble Spots	66
2.6.2	Masking Damage.....	67
2.7	Decorating the Rooms	69
2.7.1	Design Theme or Concept.....	70
2.7.2	Walls	72
2.7.3	Window Coverings.....	75
2.7.4	Flooring.....	76
2.7.5	Furniture	78
2.7.6	Room Shape.....	80
2.7.7	Accessories	83
2.8	Staging Vacant Homes.....	84
2.9	Creating Curb Appeal: Yards and Exterior.....	86
2.9.1	Yard Work.....	87
2.9.2	House Exterior	88
2.9.3	Additional Exterior Considerations.....	88
2.10	Creating Ambience	89
2.10.1	Lighting.....	90
2.10.2	Smells	91

- 2.11 Working with Contractors..... 92
 - 2.11.1 Types of Contractors 92
 - 2.11.2 How to Find Contractors..... 93
 - 2.11.3 Choosing Contractors 94
 - 2.11.4 Financial Arrangements..... 97
 - 2.11.5 Referrals 99
- 3. Developing Your Skills and Knowledge 102**
 - 3.1 Skills and Knowledge You Will Need 102
 - 3.1.1 Knowledge of Interior Decorating 102
 - 3.1.2 Business Skills 112
 - 3.1.3 Interpersonal Skills..... 115
 - 3.1.4 Other Useful Skills to Have..... 119
 - 3.2 Learning by Doing 121
 - 3.2.1 Find Home Decorating or Design Work 121
 - 3.2.2 Find Decorating-Related Work..... 122
 - 3.2.3 Volunteer Your Services..... 124
 - 3.2.4 Evaluate Home Design Locally 126
 - 3.3 Learning From Other Home Staging Professionals..... 127
 - 3.3.1 Information Interviews..... 127
 - 3.3.2 Mentoring 129
 - 3.3.3 Join Associations..... 130
 - 3.4 Training Programs and Workshops..... 134
 - 3.4.1 What a Program or Workshop Should Offer 135
 - 3.4.2 Home Staging Workshops and Seminars..... 136
 - 3.4.3 Online and Correspondence Courses..... 138
 - 3.4.4 Other Staging Related Courses..... 140

3.5 Resources for Self-Study.....	141
3.5.1 Staging and Design TV Shows.....	142
3.5.2 Books	142
3.5.3 Magazines.....	144
3.5.4 Online Resources	145
4. Starting Your Own Business.....	146
4.1 Getting Started	146
4.1.1 Creating a Business Plan	146
4.1.2 Choosing a Legal Structure	150
4.1.3 Naming Your Business.....	152
4.1.4 Franchising	154
4.1.5 Choosing Your Location	158
4.2 Financial Matters	163
4.2.1 Start-Up Costs and Operating Expenses.....	163
4.2.2 Start-Up Financing	169
4.2.3 Taxes	173
4.2.4 Insurance.....	176
4.2.5 Setting Your Fees.....	178
4.2.6 Getting Paid	182
4.3 Working with Support Staff.....	186
4.3.1 Employees versus Contractors	186
4.3.2 Finding Support Staff.....	188
4.3.3 The Interview Process	189
4.3.4 References.....	191

- 5. Getting Clients192**
 - 5.1 Planning Your Marketing Campaign 193
 - 5.1.1 Choose Your Target Markets..... 193
 - 5.1.2 Your Marketing Budget 195
 - 5.1.3 Your Marketing Message..... 196
 - 5.2 Marketing Tools..... 196
 - 5.2.1 Printed Materials 196
 - 5.2.2 Your Portfolio 202
 - 5.2.3 Your Website..... 207
 - 5.2.4 Your Elevator Pitch..... 211
 - 5.3 Marketing Techniques 216
 - 5.3.1 Advertising..... 216
 - 5.3.2 Free Media Publicity 224
 - 5.3.3 Networking 228
 - 5.3.4 Promotional Events 234

- 6. Success Stories 238**
 - 6.1 Meet Debra Gould..... 238
 - 6.2 Meet Ilyce R. Glink..... 241
 - 6.3 Meet Lori Matzke 243
 - 6.4 Your Own Success Story..... 245

- Color Section: Home Staging “Before and After” Examples 246**



1. Introduction

Welcome to your fabulous future as a home stager! According to *Entrepreneur* magazine, home staging is a “hot” business, so you’ve picked a perfect career for success. The demand for home stagers is growing steadily as more and more homeowners learn about the service and its benefits. You can be ready for this surge of continued interest in home staging by entering the field now.

You may have seen home staging on TV or read about it in a magazine, inspiring you to investigate how to enter this exciting field and leading you to this guide. During your research, you probably came across training programs that last only a few days but cost a few thousand dollars. However, many up-and-coming entrepreneurs cannot afford pricey programs like these when first starting out, nor can they wait

around for the next scheduled training session. If you want to get your home staging business off the ground now with little money up front, the *FabJob Guide to Become a Home Stager* will give you the information you need to get started, and much more.

1.1 A Career in Home Staging

1.1.1 Why Choose Home Staging?

From first-hand experience, I've discovered that working for yourself and building a business are far more rewarding than working for someone else ever will be. Not only on an emotional level, but also because your earning potential is not dependent on fiscal budgets or biased employee evaluations. Being the boss, you control your work schedule, how much your business grows, and how much income you make.

How many homes are listed for sale in your neighborhood right now? What about city-wide? Don't forget about the condos, apartments, and commercial properties. Chances are good that hundreds of homes and properties are listed for sale in your area, and many more are entering the market daily. All of these properties need to be staged before entering the competitive real estate marketplace.

Luckily, many homeowners and real estate agents have heard of staging and know how fundamental it is for moving a property faster and for more money. This is where you come in. As a home stager, you will work in beautiful homes and be paid quite nicely for it as well. You will work directly with homeowners or in conjunction with top real estate agents. And, because of the proven marketing techniques you will learn later in this guide, they will know about your service and know how to contact you.

Jason Maxwell of Equity Enhancers wholeheartedly believes that "home staging is about changing lives...one house, family, and real estate market at a time! If you are looking to help change the way America sells homes, then home staging is the business for you." This FabJob guide will provide you with all the insider information needed to launch yourself as a successful home stager.

1.1.2 What is Home Staging?

Home Staging vs. Interior Redesign or Interior Decorating

Home staging differs in a number of ways from interior redesigning and interior decorating. First, the primary task of a home stager is to help homeowners and realtors sell houses. This focus makes a home stager's tasks fairly specific and different from both interior redesigning and interior decorating, even though they do overlap to some degree.

For example, an interior decorator helps people to redecorate interior spaces. This might involve redecorating a single room or an entire house. The decorator might help a client to choose new furniture, create an entirely new decorating theme, replace window and wall coverings, add color or create an entirely new color scheme, replace flooring, and so on. Interior decorators are hired not just for homes, but to redecorate offices, restaurants, and any other spaces where decorating makes an impression on the people who use or visit the space.

An interior redesigner is essentially an interior decorator working without the big budget. Interior redesigners help clients to redecorate their living or working spaces using furniture and accessories they already have. Like interior decorating, interior redesign might also include coming up with a new color scheme, repainting walls, adding more accessories, and removing furniture and accessories that don't fit in.

Now, compare this to tasks typical of home staging. In a nutshell, home staging is the process of making a house buyer-friendly. The public at large assumes they can envision a space without bias, despite being presented with garish decorating choices or stark, empty rooms. In reality, they often have a hard time seeing a home's potential, no matter how good their imaginations may be. Homebuilders don't market new homes by showing an empty or cluttered model—they tastefully make each model home as enticing as possible to buyers. This is because a buyer must be able to immediately picture living in the home before they ever buy it.

The main ingredients in home staging include:

- Highlighting a home's best features
- Certifying a home's cleanliness
- Abolishing the clutter in a home
- Neutralizing the color palette of a home
- Seeing a home from the buyer's perspective
- Depersonalizing a home

Some in the industry use the term “real estate enhancement” as an alternate name for staging. This seems especially appropriate because that's exactly what home staging can do. It enhances the best features of a property while improving or downplaying the not-so-great features along the way.

With staging, any potential problems with a home's cosmetic appearance or basic functions can be addressed early in the selling process. Staging can prevent a house from sitting on the market too long and prevent a seller from lowering their asking price.

1.1.3 Typical Tasks of Home Stagers

Along with using your creativity to stage homes, you will also need some resourcefulness and organizational skills in order to tackle numerous tasks essential to managing your business. We'll look at the specific skills and knowledge you will need later on in this guide. On an average day, you may be involved to some degree with any or all of the following activities:

- Marketing and advertising your business, including website creation and updates.
- Returning calls to potential and existing clients.
- Making appointments with new clients and managing your daily schedule.

- Calling on clients in their homes for consultations.
- Drafting proposals or bids for your services.
- Presenting and selling proposals to clients.
- Writing up contracts or letters of agreement for your services.
- Staging homes.
- Managing work crews or assistants.
- Sourcing, ordering, and keeping inventory of all necessary supplies and staging props and materials.
- Collecting deposits, balances, and any unpaid amounts from clients.
- Keeping good business records, paying state and federal taxes, and maintaining business licenses.
- Establishing alliances with reputable service providers to use as subcontractors or to recommend to your clients.

1.1.4 Services Provided by a Home Stager

In the field of home staging, there is room for a variety of service offerings. Many homeowners have busy lives, and they need the help and knowledge of a professional in order to get a project completed quickly. However, some people are “do-it-yourselfers” who will want to carry out your recommendations on their own.

Here are some typical home stager service offerings:

Assessing Interior Spaces

The first step in any successful home staging project is assessing the space. Here you will do a walk-through with your client, inspecting the home room by room, checking for deficiencies, looking for ways to improve what you see and making notes. This service can either be a stand-alone service or incorporated into an overall home staging project.

Consulting

As a home staging consultant you will meet with clients to discuss their home staging needs. Rather than carrying out any work for the client, you will merely provide them with an analysis of their interior and exterior spaces. You will give them recommendations for how to stage the home, either on the spot, or in a detailed report delivered or sent electronically later.

Staging

This involves assessing the home and performing some or all of the tasks mentioned in section 1.1.2. The typical home staging project entails everything from removing over-sized furniture to decluttering to getting rid of unpleasant odors. Sometimes, you will be assisted in these tasks by the homeowners themselves, and other times you will be left on your own to complete the project without the involvement of the homeowner. You may or may not be working with subcontractors.

Additional Services

One way to increase your earning potential is to expand your service offerings and catch the attention of a wider customer base.

Home Organizing

Home organizational services would be a natural fit, because part of home staging is clearing the clutter in a home. You can help clients organize closets, cabinets, and entire rooms by working hands-on or suggesting products to optimize their organization.

Personal Shopping

Another practical service to add would be personal shopping. You will save your clients valuable time by doing the legwork for them. If a client has authorized you to purchase items, make sure there is a return policy or you'll be stuck with a piece if the client doesn't choose it from the presented options.

Interior Redesign

Many home stagers offer interior redesign services to clients. Interior redesign is similar to interior decorating, but there is less emphasis on adding brand new elements to the rooms (such as new furniture, window treatments, flooring, etc.). Rather, you will work with what the client already has and create a more organized whole. Like home staging, interior redesign often begins with a process of cleaning, decluttering and organizing.

Full Service Interior Decorating

Full-service interior decorating is another lucrative way to expand your business. This involves helping clients with an extensive assortment of items including: furniture, wall coverings, window treatments, bedding, upholstery, paint, flooring, rugs, lighting, and complete remodeling projects. As you can see, full-service interior decorating requires getting acquainted with numerous products and establishing contacts with a variety of specialty contractors.

1.2 Adding Value in Today's Real Estate Market

You may be thinking, "These are tough times, people are losing their homes, the real estate market has collapsed across North America; how will I ever find work in this kind of market?" Rest assured that even, or especially, in difficult economic times home stagers are a much needed resource for realtors and homeowners.

A poll conducted recently by Royal LePage Real Estate Services (www.royallepage.ca/CMSTemplates/GlobalNavTemplate.aspx?id=1045), highlights the fact that first impressions are everything in the real estate market. Actually, most potential buyers make up their minds about a house within the first few minutes of viewing it. The poll also found that while a majority of home buyers said they preferred to view a home without furnishings, an unstaged home lacking furniture and other décor tends to allow buyers to focus on the negative details.

According to Dianne Usher, senior manager, Royal LePage Real Estate Services, “A contemporary and minimalist space with neutral coloured walls and a limited number of personal items appeals to most buyers and ensures the best results when selling a home.” Creating this kind of space is exactly what a home stager does.

According to a May 2004 article in MoneySense magazine, home stagers have been proven to help sell homes quicker and for more money. The article reports that in a survey of nearly 3,000 properties in eight major U.S. cities by Coldwell Banker Realty, the average home sold in about a month, while staged homes typically sold in about two weeks. In addition, staged homes sold for 4.7% more on average than non-staged homes.

Of course, today’s real estate market is not what it was even just a few years ago. Still, homeowners and realtors continue to seek out home stagers to help them make their homes stand out in a buyers’ market. Staging a home depersonalizes it and helps buyers to imagine themselves living there, making it easier to sell by helping it show better and look its best in marketing photos. Both homeowners and realtors are also more aware of home staging thanks to television shows on networks like HGTV and are more likely to consider home staging as a way to help them sell a house.

Staging a home has other value, too. Consider that in order to sell their homes, many homeowners often must make the difficult decision to drop their price in order to sell their property. Given that staging a home has been proven to sell homes faster and for more money, making an investment of a few hundred dollars to stage their home can save homeowners thousands of dollars over dropping the price of the house.

Another related aspect is that, in selling homes in a buyers’ market, there is often more of a need for a homeowner to be willing to negotiate their asking price. If they already have a “rock bottom” price they are willing to accept, you can help them to stay above that price by making their home more enticing to prospective buyers. Obviously, there is great potential for a home stager’s skills and talents even in a difficult real estate market.

In addition to maximizing home selling prices in a tough real estate market, home staging also has a positive effect on a neighborhood or community as a whole. When a house sells, it influences the market value of surrounding homes. If the selling price is higher at a staged house than it would have been otherwise, the value of the homes in that area can be affected positively. Staging can create stronger real estate markets one property at a time.

1.3 Benefits of Being a Home Stager

Working in this industry has so many rewarding benefits, especially for those with a knack for decorating or the need for a flexible career. Aside from the customizable work schedule and unlimited income potential, it's such a joy to use your creativity on a daily basis. This work can also be heartwarming as you help clients tap into life-changing equity on the sale of their home.

Work from Home

Home staging is a career tailor-made for a home office. The primary reason is that the bulk of your work will take place in your clients' homes. Being less than sixty seconds away from your kitchen and bedroom can be one of the many benefits of working from home.

Obviously, this can also be very distracting as you try to write your proposals and handle an assortment of business details. You will need to be a self-motivator in order to stay focused. The best way to do this is to set aside a designated office space for your business. A spare bedroom or study will work great, but you can also use part of your living room, garage, or other free area separated by a room divider or tall folding screen.

Express Your Creativity

There are very few things in life as exciting and stimulating as generating imaginative ideas and putting them into practical use. This line of work provides endless opportunities to exercise your creativity and problem solving skills while getting paid for it in the process. Not only will you be finding resourceful uses for a homeowner's furniture and

accessories, you will also consult with them on color palettes, fabric choices, and much more.

Real estate enhancement specialist Diana Ezerins feels that “it is imperative to stay current on both real estate market trends and interior design trends because you straddle both industries.” When you actively gather new knowledge and inspiration, you’ll have more creative ideas to show your clients.

Help People Who Need It

Expediting the sale of a client’s property by staging to its full potential is a good deed in many ways. The most tangible way to see this is when a client receives more money than originally expected for their property. This extra money can be used to purchase a new home, pay off debt, send their kids to college, or help them to care for an elderly parent.

Staging can also help people’s lives in other ways. For example, a person who has recently lost a spouse may need to move to a smaller residence or apartment in order to make ends meet. They will be grateful for a quick sale and any extra equity that can be made along the way.

As well, it can be stressful when a family is temporarily split up because their current home hasn’t sold yet, and mom or dad must begin a new job in a different town. A decision must be made as to who will stay and get the house sold, so the quicker it can sell the better.

You Can Start Right Now

With low start-up costs, becoming a home stager is something you can start as soon as you finish reading this guide. The typical base amount needed to launch a home staging business is about \$500 to \$1,000. However, you can spend more or less than this, depending on what equipment and supplies you currently have on hand.

As with any new venture, it is smart to start small and test the waters. You may be able to do this while still employed by someone else and then transition to running your business full-time as your client base and revenues grow. Saving up three to six months worth of living expenses will help this switch go more smoothly and may keep you from needing a small business loan, but isn’t absolutely necessary.

TIP: There's not really a need for an elaborate office when you're first starting out. You should earmark most of your start-up money for marketing and promoting your new business.

1.4 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Home Stager* will take you step-by-step through everything you'll need to start out and succeed in your new career. Each chapter is full of important information, helpful advice, and useful tips from experts in this exciting and rewarding field.

In Chapter 2, we'll take you through the specialty service areas you might want to consider before starting your home staging business. Then you'll discover how to meet with clients and assess their home staging needs. We'll also show you how to assess the spaces you will transform for them and become their chosen home stager. After reading about the tools and equipment you'll need, you will learn "How to Stage a Home" using the design elements and principles you'll read about in this chapter. You'll find out how to organize and "declutter" the home, as well as how to hide blemishes before bringing it all together by arranging and decorating the space using a variety of props, artwork, furniture and accessories. Finally, in this chapter, we'll tell you how to find, hire and work with contractors you may need to fulfill your vision of your client's fully staged home.

Chapter 3 will help you to get ready. What skills and knowledge will you need? Where can you learn more about home staging? What training programs are available? What professional associations can you join to help you as you get started? How can you find jobs in related fields to prepare you for your new career? The answers to these questions and more are in this chapter.

Chapter 4 explains the business aspects of starting your own home staging company. We'll show you how to create a business plan, find financing and name your company. You'll also learn about home staging franchises that are available to you. We'll help you answer the following questions: What start-up expenses can I expect? Where can I get financing if I need it? What are some of the legal aspects I should consider? We'll also help you learn more about working with support staff and how to hire the help you need.

Learn about “Getting Clients” in Chapter 5. You will learn various strategies for marketing your business such as how to create your own website, types of advertising you can use and where to advertise, and how to get free publicity for your company. Discover the potential of networking with other business professionals and where to find others who can help your business to prosper.

Finally, in Chapter 6, you will read the stories of some people just like you who started out in the home staging industry and went on to create very successful businesses.

When you have finished reading this guide, you will understand the skills and knowledge you will need to succeed and where to go to find additional help and resources. By following the advice and using the valuable resources included you will be on your way to success as a home stager. Let's get started!