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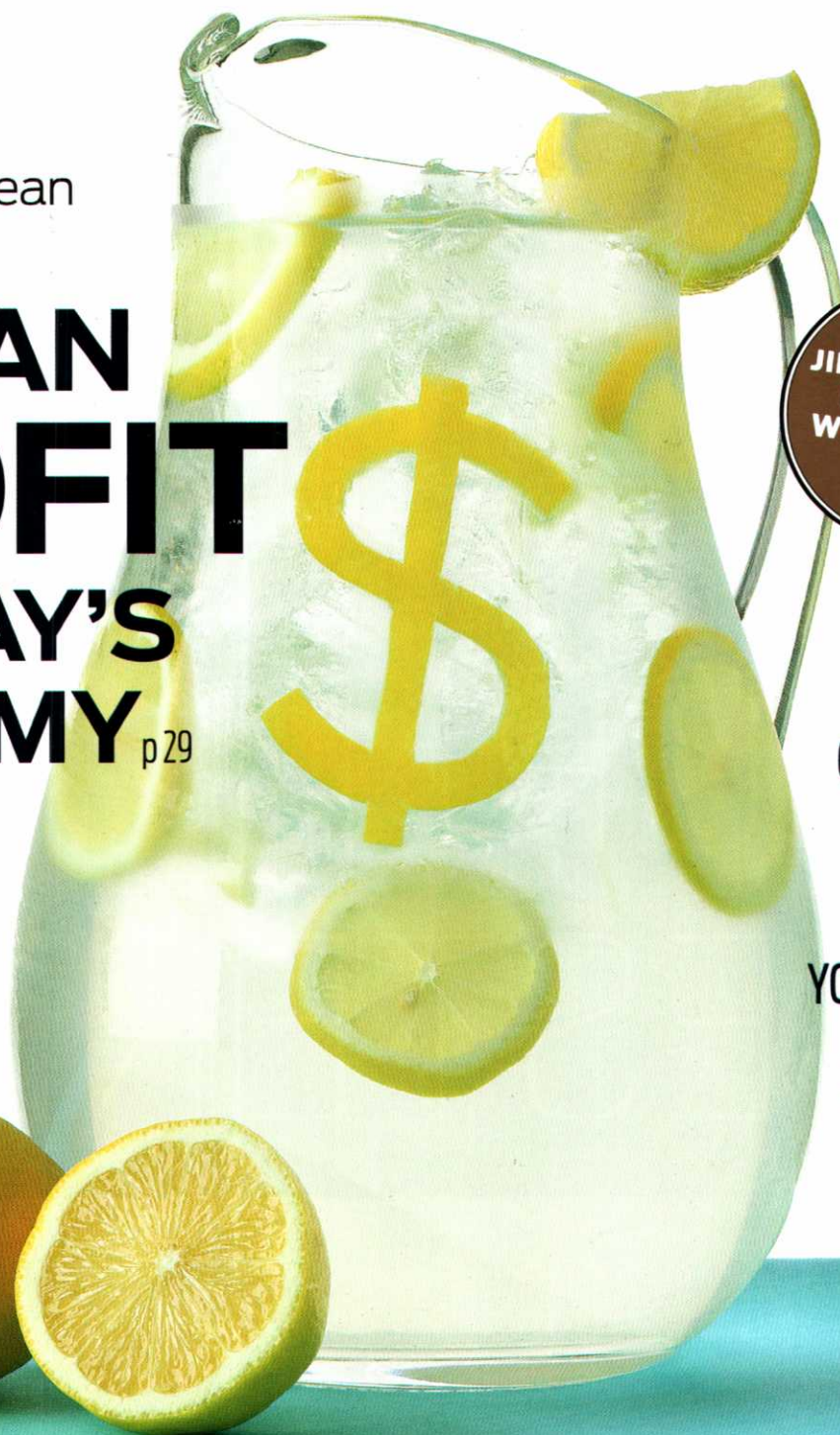
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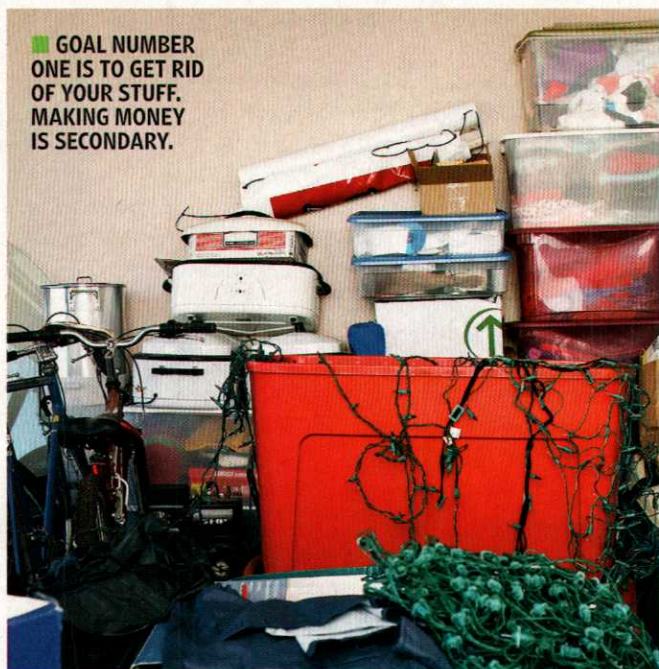
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■ GOAL NUMBER ONE IS TO GET RID OF YOUR STUFF. MAKING MONEY IS SECONDARY.



# Downsize Me

Declutter your basement or garage, clear your conscience and maybe make a few bucks.

BY PATRICIA MERTZ ESSWEIN

**PARTING WITH YOUR OLD** possessions is hard enough. But often it's more difficult to decide where to send your castoffs, says professional organizer Barry Izsak, of Austin, Tex. Paralyzed by inertia, people turn their garages (or basements or attics) into a purgatory for stuff that awaits a future garage sale, donation, or trip to the recycling center or landfill—but never quite gets to a final resting place. Lest your garage morph into a hoarding hell, we tell you how to declutter successfully, and even hire service providers who will do the heavy lifting for you.

## SELL IT

If you're serious about downsizing, goal number one is to get rid of your stuff; making money is secondary. You probably won't get as much as you think your stuff is worth anyway, says Izsak, and if you donate it, you may be able to take a tax deduction (see page 68).

**Craigslist.org.** Place a free classified ad that will run for a week in many large cities and 45 days everywhere else.

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** Before you bother, see how much competition you have in your

category. (For advice on avoiding scams, see [www.craigslist.org/about/safety](http://www.craigslist.org/about/safety).)

**EBay.com.** Conduct your own online auction for a listing (insertion) fee of up to \$2 per item—depending on the starting or reserve price—and, if it sells, 9% of the sale price, up to \$50.

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** To see how much buyers will really pay, check “completed listings” for similar items using the advanced search function. EBay can be labor-intensive, and it isn't a sure thing. Laura Leist, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers, says bidders may avoid you if you haven't earned a rating from other buyers.

## EBay trading assistants.

Services such as iSold It ([www.877isoldit.com](http://www.877isoldit.com)) will help you avoid the hassle of photographing, listing, shipping and arranging payment for your items. It's free to list an item, but if it sells you pay 33% to 40% of the sale price (with a minimum of \$5), as well as related eBay and payment-processing fees (charges vary by location).

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** If you have a houseful of stuff, iSold It will visit your home to help identify the items that are most likely to sell.

**Consignment shops.** They're best for clothing, household furnishings and decorative items. You typically get half of the final sale price. The shop will set the price and reduce it over time to move the merchandise.

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** Make sure

your stuff is seasonally appropriate and call ahead before you lug it in. Expect shops to be picky because they're as overrun with castoffs as you are. In Seattle, Leist says, clothing consignment shops typically take only designer-label clothes that are a year or two old and in mint condition.

**Garage sales.** You'll have to knock yourself out gathering, sorting and pricing the merchandise, as well as advertising and setting up the sale. How much bric-a-brac and clothing must you sell just to pay for a dinner out?

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** Don't bother with a garage sale unless you have numerous big-ticket items, says Izsak. You also need to find out whether your homeowners association will allow it. (See “Garage Sale Tips for Success,” at [www.tipnut.com](http://www.tipnut.com).)

**Estate-sale companies.** These are best if you have a tight deadline to dispose of a houseful of stuff. They will do the work, including having staff on hand to handle the sale. The usual fee is 40% of the take, although 50% is becoming more common.

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** To find a reputable company, ask for referrals—from a real estate agent or professional organizer—then ask the company for references. It should have a valid business license and provide a detailed contract with a simple explanation of charges and a marketing plan. To clear out a house very quickly, look for a company that will move the

**KipTip**

## DISPOSE OF TECHNO TRASH

**ELECTRONIC WASTE IS OFTEN CONSIDERED HAZARDOUS, BUT IT MAY** be reusable or recyclable. Many states prohibit tossing your gadgets' rechargeable batteries in the trash can. You can drop them off at Best Buy or Staples stores.



### CELL PHONES

**SELL:** Ship your old phone to [www.flipswap.com](http://www.flipswap.com), in Torrance, Cal., and within a few weeks you'll receive a check. The Web site provides instructions for erasing data and preparing the phone for a new owner.

**DONATE:** To search for a drop-off location, visit [www.recellular.com/recycling/donatephones.asp](http://www.recellular.com/recycling/donatephones.asp).

You can download a free data-eraser program.

**RECYCLE:** Find manufacturers' programs at [www.recyclewirelessphones.com](http://www.recyclewirelessphones.com), the Web site of CTIA—The Wireless Association.



### COMPUTERS

**DONATE:** If your computer is less than five years old, prepare it for donation by visiting [www.epa.gov/plugin](http://www.epa.gov/plugin) (search for "Do the PC Thing: Donate Computers" for lists of refurbishers and disk-cleaning software).

One refurbishing program, Reconnect, will accept any brand of computer equipment in any condition, as well as peripherals, accessories and Micro-

soft entertainment products, including Xboxes and Zunes. To find a drop-off location, visit [www.reconnectpartnership.com](http://www.reconnectpartnership.com).

**RECYCLE:** If the computer is more than five years old or broken, recycle it. First remove the hard drive (search [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for "How to smash a hard drive"). To find a recycler, visit [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com).



### ELECTRONICS

**SELL:** Gazelle.com will buy just about any type of electronic device, including computers and peripherals, game systems, MP3 players, digital cameras, satellite radios, and GPS devices.

**RECYCLE:** For a list of manufacturers and major retailers (Best Buy, Costco, Office Depot, Staples) with programs for mailing back or trading in electronics, visit the Web site of the National Center for Electronics Recycling ([www.electronicrecycling.org](http://www.electronicrecycling.org)).



### TVs

**RECYCLE:** To learn where you can recycle TVs by brand, go to [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) and search for "eCycle Televisions." Best Buy stores will accept any brand up to 32 inches

for a \$10 charge and will give you a \$10 gift card to offset the cost. You can bring in two devices per day, per household. For a fee, it will remove up to two TVs from your home, up to 36 inches.

goods and sell them at their own location.

### DONATE IT

Your belongings get a new home, and you get a warm, fuzzy feeling. Plus, you get a tax deduction if you itemize; the IRS lets you deduct the fair market value of donated items. (If your deduction for donated property for the year exceeds \$500, you must file Form 8283. Also, you need a receipt from the organization for every batch of items you donate.) Don't forget to make an itemized list of donated items; you can value them for tax purposes later with Goodwill's "Valuation Guide" (available at [www.goodwill.org](http://www.goodwill.org)) or "It's Deductible" (free at [www.turbotax.com](http://www.turbotax.com); look under "Tax Calculators and Tools").

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** Contact a charitable organization that will pick up your stuff (it'll leave a tax receipt) and put it to work in thrift stores. Two major players that will accept almost anything are **GOODWILL** (<http://locator.goodwill.org>) and the **SALVATION ARMY** ([www.satruck.org](http://www.satruck.org)). Veterans organizations that provide a similar service include **AMVETS** ([www.amvetpickup.org](http://www.amvetpickup.org)), the **MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART** ([www.veteranpickup.org](http://www.veteranpickup.org)) and **VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA** ([www.clothingdonations.org](http://www.clothingdonations.org)).

### JUNK IT

When you have too much debris or waste for trash bags—or for the municipal bulk-pickup service—but not enough to justify paying for a Dumpster, the Bagster

by Waste Management might do the trick. Buy the bag at home-improvement stores (it's \$29.95 at Home Depot). Set it up (it measures 8 feet by 4 feet by 2 feet), fill it to a limit of 3,300 pounds and schedule a pickup. Waste Management will collect the Bagster within three days. You can get an estimate of the collection fee by zip code at [www.thebagster.com](http://www.thebagster.com); the range of fees nationally is \$79 to \$159.

If you will gladly pay someone to simply cart it away, call a service such as 1-800-Got-Junk ([www.1800gotjunk.com](http://www.1800gotjunk.com)) or Junk King ([www.junk-king.com](http://www.junk-king.com)). They will take almost anything (except hazardous waste) and donate or recycle much of it. You pay by the fraction of a truckload that your junk occupies. You can get an online estimate of cost by zip code, but you'll need a home visit to confirm. (In northern Virginia, 1-800-Got-Junk would charge \$365 for half a truckload, \$598 for a full load.)

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** Let the junk companies remove stuff from your home's hard-to-reach locations, such as the attic or basement.

### RECYCLE IT

If you can't think of someone who might want your stuff, sign up with your local Freecycle group ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)). Once you've got a taker, just put it on your front stoop for pickup.

**TIMESAIVING TIP:** On the site, choose the "daily digest" or "Web only" options so your in-box isn't inundated with members' offers. ■