

Book Reuse



Basics of Book Reuse as a Business

Used book businesses come in many shapes and sizes, from a formal retail storefront, to an online marketplace, to a book salvaging operation. There is not a one-size-fits-all method and business models should be developed based on the community and the entrepreneur's interests and goals.

Models of Book Recycling Businesses

Below are a few different bookselling enterprises in order of smaller scale operations to larger endeavors.

- Collect books to send in to online organizations that sort them, pay postage and send a check for any items of value. Online endeavors like this include www.betterworldbooks.com and others.
- Collect books and scan them to determine their value for sale on Amazon.com. See www.asellertool.com. This has its limitations as Amazon takes a percentage of the sale. You need to enter in the right parameters regarding rank, price and whether it is fulfilled by Amazon (FBA) or merchant filled. FBA has the advantage of free shipping for Amazon Prime customers and it eliminates the need to store books.

Once you become an expert at determining the value of books via Amazon or other resellers, it is possible to consign books for other people or organizations (such as libraries discarding older books). The business would scan books, create an inventory and send them to resellers, keeping a percentage of the profits. A standard split of profits on consignments is 30% to the consigner and 70% to the scanning business.

- Establishing a retail store that accepts books from the public and businesses for resale, offering trade-in and cash sales to customers.



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Potential End-Markets

- Retail sales
- Online sales
- Donate non-sellable retail books to local organizations for fundraisers, book drives, literacy campaigns or book art-making groups.
- Serve as local artist feedstock for recycled art projects.
- Better World Books or similar online organizations that pay to have books shipped to them, sort what they can sell, pay for those books, and then donate the rest. www.betterworldbooks.com

Sources for Used Books

- Public donation drop offs
- Clearing out of libraries, schools, businesses or government entities book collections
- Yard sales or estate sales
- Collaboration with public recycling and solid waste handling agencies to collect books at local recycling drop off sites

“No book belongs in the dumpster unless they're moldy or badly torn.”

Start-Up Equipment

- Local Business License
- Computer
- Cash Register (for retail stores only)
- Bookshelves (for retail stores only)
- Book Seller Tool/Scanner (if needed to quickly determine book value)
- Storage space for books prior to shipment (if needed)
- Book Sleeves – these are important to help protect books and to retain their value
- Insurance
- Start up costs vary widely. Check with your local NM Small Business Development Center (www.nmsbdc.org) for assistance determining costs and fees

All information presented is for reference only. This organization, its affiliates and officers make no warranty as to the financial success of any recommendation.

Case Study of Existing Book Recycler – Op-cit Book Store

Op-cit Book Store opened in New Mexico in 2011 with stores based in Santa Fe and Las Vegas. The store specializes in new, used and rare books. The stores are owned and operated by Noemi DeBodisco, a self-described book connoisseur with over 20 years' experience selling books.



Op-cit sells new and used books via trades and purchases. The business also distributes books as a donation to nonprofits working to promote reading in northern New Mexico. Noemi's goal of, "no books in the dumpster," is achieved through a wide-range of creative methods, including: stocking their retail store with used books in excellent condition, understanding her community and customers, developing partnerships with local literacy and recycled-book making organizations and collaborating with other organizations.

Most of the books for sale at Op-cit are in excellent condition, which means that the book must be "giftable". If it does not meet this criteria then it must be interesting in other ways, such as a first edition, signed by the author or is a collectible. Many times, would-be traders or book sellers bring in a box of books and only a handful of the books meet these strict standards. The customer then donates the remaining books to whatever cause or outlet Op-cit decides. This generates a lot of readable and interesting books that the store can then donate to non-profits for book drives, fundraisers, literacy campaigns and more.

Across New Mexico, 46 percent of the population cannot read above a sixth-grade level, according to statistics from the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy. This fact is something that Op-cit is well aware of and is part of their business model and mission.

With an existing Op-cit store already in Santa Fe, in 2013 DeBodisco purchased Tome on the Range, a bookstore near the plaza in Las Vegas, NM. The community supported having a locally-owned bookstore and wanted it to remain open, with the wish of having a range of affordability. Op-cit listened to its customers and began selling used books at the Las Vegas store (which formerly sold only new books under the previous owners) and created a book-trading program. They also participate in the annual Literacy Fair in Las Vegas and donate books to that effort.

DeBodisco's background is in information technology. She has a lot of experience creating and using automated systems. With this extensive background in IT, she doesn't believe automation is necessary for success. If you do automate, you run the risk of spending all of your time with data entry instead of managing your business.

- **Where do you get your books?** Public donations, estate sales, governmental facilities that clean out their libraries and more. We've quickly earned a reputation as being willing to accept all books. We comb through books to see what's sellable on a retail level and donate the rest. We purchase book remainders, which are publisher overstocks that would be sent to the pulp mill if they weren't purchased by used book sellers. The books are in great condition and can be purchased either online or at remainder fairs. The bulk discount prices and excellent condition of these books makes them perfect for the used bookstore model.
- **How does your business make money?** There are small profit margins on books so ensuring you work with volume is essential.
- **What about shipping and logistics?** Op-cit personally wraps and mails all books ordered online and ships them via the US Postal Service's media rate. Only rare and collectable books are listed for sale on their website. General paperback and fiction inventory is solely for the retail stores.
- **How many employees do you have?** We have 4 employees in the Santa Fe store and 3 in the Las Vegas store. Book selling can really start as a one person endeavor.
- **A few best practice tips from DeBodisco:** 1) It is fine to start small and do a lot of the work by hand; 2) Partner with everyone you possibly can to make sure books are used and appreciated; 3) Welcome all customers at all price points; 4) Define your business' point of view, whether that will be donating books to local charities for fundraisers, donating books to literacy/reading campaigns or dealing solely with rare books; 5) Knowledge goes a long way and working in a bookstore is a great way to learn the business. Don't rely solely on book scanners to determine value – one of them passed over a first edition Pulitzer Prize winning book that sold for \$1,400; 6) Start-up expenses should be minimal. There's no need for fancy shelving or computer systems. Search online for used furniture or make your own simple bookshelves. A decent register and computer are needed but not an entire book management system. Start small and expand as you go.