

## SMALL BUSINESS REVIEW &gt;

## Modern alchemy: turning people's chaos into profit

'You have to be quite sensitive going through people's stuff ... You also have to be a great time manager'



Lissanne Oliver

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organising service of their business part-time, often alongside complementary services such as interior design or financial planning.

The market for professional organisers is quite varied, with many corporate clients calling on them to set up filing and paper management systems, manage spaces in corporate offices and train staff in time management.

Services for domestic clients is a growing market, perhaps because lifestyle shows have promoted interest in decluttering homes and managing spaces efficiently.

"There is a really diverse range of clients. Domestic clients are often mums who are overwhelmed trying to manage being mother, wife, taxi service and maybe studying or working while running a house," Oliver says.

Other people who hire organisers include those moving house, often downsizing, or families who need help to organise rooms for children.

Professional organisers bring solutions to everyday problems like managing papers and clutter and identifying unwanted items that can be donated, sold or scrapped.

"We often save people money by digging up Medicare claims, finding cheques and gift vouchers and other crucial paperwork," she says.

Carol Posener started her Get Organised business in 1993 and says she was Australia's first professional organiser. Working part-time at first, she built the business up by putting a lot of effort into marketing her services.

"I designed flyers and walked around business parks prospecting, knocking on doors and introducing the service ... I got lots of work that way," she says.

She wrote a book, *Get Organised: A Practical Guide To Organising Your*

*Home And Office*, which was published in 2001 and, together with various radio and press interviews, helped raise her business profile significantly.

The business now has a healthy range of income streams. She offers organising consultations, home styling, concierge and personal shopping services and training workshops and seminars.

The local industry has grown quickly, Posener says, so she is now offering training people who want to be professional organisers.

She says that the rewards are not just financial.

"For some clients, the process can be life changing. It just takes a bit of discipline to change the way they are doing things, but anyone can learn."

Decluttering and getting organised is like dieting.

"For some people, being organised has to be an ongoing thing that they need to manage in their lives."

She says getting organised can be like a diet for your house, office and paper.

"I've had a couple of very overweight clients who were hoarders and have actually lost a lot of weight in the process of getting rid of the clutter from their house."

The Professional Organisers Association says professional organisers' fees vary widely depending on their level of experience, the location, the type of service and the rates of the competition.

"Generally, fees can be anything from

\$40 to \$150 an hour, depending on the circumstances," Oliver says.

Building the business can take several years, she adds, so most professional organisers start their business part-time while doing other work.

But turning people's lives around is a very rewarding business service.

"No one's born with a gene to be organised or disorganised," Posener says. "It's a learnt trait and anyone can learn it at any time."

## GETTING STARTED

- **Join the Club:** Australasian Association of Professional Organisers (AAPO), see [www.aapo.org.au](http://www.aapo.org.au). The website includes a code of ethics, a location-based referral service and volumes of information about starting a business in the field.
- **Get Trained:** Australia's first professional organiser, Carol Posener, runs two-day workshops in Sydney and Melbourne for those wanting to start a business as an organiser, see [www.getorganised.com.au](http://www.getorganised.com.au).
- **Get Coached:** Former AAPO president Lisa Baldwin offers phone coaching for new organisers, see [www.divineorder.co.nz](http://www.divineorder.co.nz).

## GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

- **Letterbox drop:** send brochures around local homes and businesses.
- **Word of mouth:** offer to organise a few friends and ask them to spread the word.
- **AAPO:** join the Australasian Association of Professional Organisers.
- **Website:** Get a website listing your services.
- **Workshop:** offer to host a free workshop about getting organised for parents at nearby schools or at a local community centre.
- **Synergy Business:** offer to cross-promote services with a local cleaner or handyman.

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