

Select Page



# How to Find an Estate Sales Company

As an executor, trustee, heir, or a person moving, you have a full set of tasks and responsibilities to accomplish in a short period of time. Some aspects of your move or house clearing process are clear. You have moved before, you know what that entails. If you have ever sold a home, then you know how to hire a realtor, or contractor to fix it up. The one task most people have never done though is hire an estate liquidator.

At the point you begin to make decisions about how to sell your personal property, the services of a qualified Estate Sales professional becomes of vital importance. To assist and educate you towards making your best decision about which type of estate sales company you should hire, NESA has written this simple guide.

- Prepare for the Interview
- Search For the Right Company
- Determine Questions to Ask
- The Interview Process
- Commissions & Fees
- References and Credentials
- Post Sale Strategies
- Decide Which Company to Hire

## 1. Preparing for the interview

Before calling estate liquidators, clearly identify items in the home that are being retained by the estate. If you have items of significant value, get those items appraised. Personal papers, should also be removed.

Consider having an estate sales professional stop by before you begin throwing items away. Items you might throw away often times can be sold. You want to know the difference between these two. Professionals know which items are considered debris and which items can be sold to generate income.

*Prepare for the Interview:*

- Identify Items Being Retained
- Remove Personal Items
- Get Appraisals

## 2. Search for the right estate sales company

It is best to look for companies close to home, that are no further than 25 miles from where you live. Companies operating out of your area may be out of touch with local buyers, municipal ordinances and/or local best practices. Local companies have built solid relationships with their customers and it is their loyal customer base who attend sales in your community

- Search Online
- Ask Friends and Relatives
- Check in with Your Attorney
- Check with Realtors

Finding an estate sales company local to your area is as simple as searching the internet using the keyword search term, "Estate Sales" followed by the name of the city you live in. So for example, if you live in Indianapolis, you would search for "Estate Sales Indianapolis". This will give you a list of companies in your area.

When visiting a company's website look to see that the website is clearly written and adequately describes their services. Do you understand the services being offered? Does the site look thrown together or well-organized? Do they post photographs or other information about past or current sales? The time a company puts into its website, explaining its services and the marketing they employ to get people to attend their sales are great indications of how much effort they will make towards the success of your estate sale.

When calling estate sale companies, check to see if their schedules match your needs. Ask them when and where their next estate sales is going to be, and make plans to visit one of their sales. Also, let them know you're interviewing other companies.

### 3. Determine Questions to ask

Most estate sales companies offer a complimentary initial consultation. This is a good opportunity for you to avail yourself of their many years of experience managing and conducting estate sales. You can learn a great deal about the estate sales process by asking liquidators the right questions.

*22 questions to ask an Estate Sales Professional:*

1. How long has your company been in business?
2. Do you carry Public Liability, Property Damage and Theft Insurance?
3. Are your workers covered by Workers Comp?
4. How many estate sales do you conduct a month?
5. What are three ways your company is different from others?
6. How are your sales results better than other companies?
7. How long does your set-up and sales process take?
8. How do you advertise or market your estate sales?
9. How many online page views does your average sale get?

10. How many shoppers attend one of your sales?
11. How many shoppers will you allow into the house at one time?
12. What percentage of items will sell?
13. What types of security precautions do you make?
14. How do you handle high-value items?
15. What forms of payments do you accept, Cash, Checks, Credit Cards?
16. What is your sales commission?
17. Are there set-up or debris removal fees?
18. How long does it take to reconcile a sale and make an estate payout?
19. Do you have the right to retain unsold items?
20. What happens to items left after a sale?
21. How detailed is your accounting, will you give us a list of items sold?
22. Will your company leave our home in "Broom Clean" condition?

There are many right ways to answer the above questions. The three primary reasons to ask the above questions are:

- To give you information about how each company works.
- Reveal a company's style, and business management practices.
- To understand how commissions and fees assist financial results.

You want to find a company that has experience, high ethical standards, and who can get shoppers to their sales.

## 4. The interview process

As the client you want to make sure you can trust the company you're interviewing; that they can and will follow through on their commitments. The company you are interviewing will be determining whether the amount of time and work necessary to complete your project makes economic sense. The interview process consist of a verbal consultation, walkthrough of the home, and the presentation and explanation of their plan. Some companies

prefer to talk through the estate sale process before viewing the home, but most prefer to see what's for sale, so their conversations with you can be specific to your project.

### *Stages to the Estate Sales Interview:*

- Introduction
- Walkthrough
- Valuation
- Questions
- Plan Presentation
- Giving of References

**Introduction:** How were they dressed? Did they arrive on time? Did they give you a card? Were they pleasant?

**Walkthrough:** Did they take their time? Were they respectful?

**Valuation:** Were they knowledgeable about your items? Do they have access to outside expertise? Were their ideas about values consistent with yours? Did they seem to have a competent grasp about present market conditions?

**Questions:** Did they answer your questions? Were they impatient?

**Plan Presentation:** Were they attentive to your goals? Did their plan seem workable?

**Giving of References:** Did they have references? Did their references check out?

Your interview with the estate sales company's representative can conclude after the above six interview stages have been accomplished.

It is a wise practice to interview at least 2-3 companies and be sure to check out their references. Also, don't let yourself be pressured into signing

contracts before you are ready. Give yourself some time, engage in conversations with trusted friends or your attorney to ask them what they think about a company's proposal, and make sure you have any last questions or concerns answered and addressed before you choose to hire an estate sale company.

## 5. Commissions and Fees

There is no industry wide standard fee for estate sales services. Whether they are high or low largely depends on the extent of the services to be provided. A company's fees have to be an important part of your consideration when deciding which company is right for your estate.

To understand how fees and commissions relate to a company's service and sales results you'll need to ask them for details about their fee structure. Some companies have a one-stop all inclusive fee, and some have service fees plus commissions.

It is entirely possible by paying 5% or more in commissions you will dramatically increase the chances your sale will be a success. *Highly regarded estate sales companies often have higher fees.* Their fees are higher because their range of services are more comprehensive, their staffs have been trained, and their attention to detail is better than their competitors; which leads to elevated revenues. They have systems and safeguards in place to secure your site, competently organize your contents, and entice and manage shoppers on sales days.

*8 company qualities that directly affect Sales Commissions and Sales Results:*

- Business Insurance
- Well Trained Staff
- Workers Comp
- Marketing

- Photography
- Accepting Credit Cards
- Sales Tax
- Sales Documentation

Each of the above adds to the overall success of an estate sale.

**Business Insurance:** At a minimum we recommend hiring estate sales companies with active Public Liability and Property Damage Insurance policies. It is an added bonus towards your protection, if they also carry theft insurance.

**Trained Staff:** Companies with ongoing training programs better serve clients and customers alike. Ask company's you are interviewing if they have created employee handbooks or procedural guidebooks for their staff. Those that do, have greater employee retention, and generate higher sales results. Also a part of any great staff training program includes staff access to various premium price realized databases so their research about values can be accomplished easily.

**Workers Comp:** This type of insurance is a requirement of all employers who have employees. An employee is any worker whose hours are set by an employer. If a company informs you they have no "Employees" but instead have "Independent Contractors" this will mean. to shelter your estate from unwanted court actions, you need to ask for copies of each "Independent Contractors" Workers Comp policy.

**Marketing:** Today, estate sales companies employ a full range of marketing strategies. The very best of these at a minimum have large email lists, list their sales on multiple sites, have great websites and post public directional signs wherever and whenever possible. The more marketing a company conducts, the higher the buyer turnout and the greater their sales results.

**Photography:** A picture is worth a thousand words. Companies who take

extensive photos of their sales create a storybook of ideas about what to buy and where their shoppers should go the weekend of your estate sale.

**Accepting Credit Cards:** Companies who accept credit cards, sell more. It's a fact of a retailer's life. Most people don't go to a mall with their pockets stuffed with cash, they bring a credit card, and estate sales are no different. When shoppers know they can use their credit cards, they buy more, sometimes much more.

**Sales Tax:** Many states require estate liquidators to collect sales taxes from their shoppers and to remit those funds back to the state on a quarterly basis. When your state requires this, it is an absolute must that estate liquidators fulfill their state's mandate to the letter of the law. If an estate liquidator states they are not required to collect sales tax, ask them for a copy of the portion of your state's law that relieves them of this obligation.

**Sales Documentation:** Sales documentation starts with the cashier. Ask the estate liquidator you are interviewing how they transact a sale. Do they have a cash register, cash box or a fanny pack? How do they record a sale, do they write it down in a notebook, use a receipt book or use a point of sales system? The better and more detailed is the sales transaction, the more specific will the sales documentation be post sale.

Established companies providing clients with safeguards, effective marketing, and transparent transactions, have higher cost in order to bring you the best of service.

## 6. References and Credentials

Because there is not a single state in America with a licensing requirement regarding Estate Sales Professionals, companies stating they are "licensed" are solely referring to their holding of a business license. In parts of the country there are auction houses which term what they do as "Estate Sales"



and they may call their auctions “Estate Sales” but estate sales of this nature are in most ways different from the in-house fixed price public sale of estate goods sold from a person’s home that we define as an estate sale. If indeed your “Estate Sales” company is an auctioneer, and they state they are licenced, then that licensing comes out of a state statute governing auctioneers.

**In addition:** There a number of for profit organizations which offer estate liquidation training modules leading to designations, or memberships in their organization. But neither a designation from any of these organizations or a membership within them can or should ever be understood to be a license.

To be considered as a great company to hire, companies should be able to provide documentation of the following.

- Business License
- Tax ID# If Required
- Contract Examples
- Client Testimonials
- Proof of Insurances

By engaging the services of a company which can properly document proof of insurance coverage and can demonstrate their employees are in fact covered by workers compensation, you and your estate will be better protected. It is also a demonstration of their dedication to you and your concerns, as well as to their businesses, communities and employees.

NESA Members can amply demonstrate they conduct their sales in a thoroughly professional manner and that they follow the strictest standards in the Estate Sales Industry. Please see NESA’s 30 Point Code of Ethics.

## 7. Post Sales Strategies

Items left over after an estate sale are called “Remainders.” There are 4 basic ways your estate sales company can address remainders:

- Retain
- Sell
- Donate
- Landfill

A good estate sales company will sell a majority of the items initially found in your home. Houses with large accumulations of personal property that have sold 90% of all your personal property in an estate sale will still have 10% of the original contents left post sale. That’s enough to fill up one or more trucks.

In either case, whether your estate was large or small, there will be items left after a sale; choose a company that can take care of what remains after a sale.

**Retain:** Some families want the chance to go back to the house after a sale with an eye towards keeping various items. This should be okay with an estate liquidator. If you want this as a post-sale option, ask the company to put this into the contract as a condition. If you exercise this option and there are time sensitive elements in the contract to empty the house, then you will need to coordinate your post sale walkthrough very soon after the sale.

**Sell:** In some areas of the country it is possible to find a wholesale buyer for what remains after a sale. Ask your estate liquidator if they know of individuals or companies who do estate buyouts.

**Donate:** Many estate sales professionals have the ability to facilitate the donation of items remaining after a sale. If you want a company to donate your remaining items, ask them to please provide you with donation receipts.

It is fair for a company to charge a separate fee for moving your personal property from your home to a charity drop off point. If the company is willing to take care of this for you, ask them for a cost estimate and make sure this condition is added to the contract.

**Landfill:** Every estate has items that can be sold, or donated, as well as items that cannot be sold or donated. The majority of estate sales companies out there will provide a post estate sales clean out service. They do this as a service for their clients. Get a cost estimate for this service and get the conditions by which this task will be accomplished added to the estate sale contract.

## 8. Decide Which Estate Sales Company to Hire

After you have interviewed 2-3 companies, take time to compare their answers. What are the common denominators between each company? What is unique about each of them? Which one did you like? Which one explained their services concisely? Was the company on time for the interview or did they call to say they were running late, or not show up until you made repeated calls to them? How were they dressed and groomed? These questions are important.

### Estate Sales Company Comparison Checklist

**Use this checklist to compare the services of companies you are thinking of doing business with.**

#	(Enter Name of Company)	Check Box
1	Member of NESAs or other Organizations	

<b>2</b>	<b>Follows an Established Code of Ethics</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Member of BBB</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Has a Current Business License</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Has a Written Contract or Consignment Agreement</b>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Has Workers Compensation</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Has Insurance Policy Covering Property, Liability, and Theft</b>	
<b>8</b>	<b>Collects and Pays Sales Tax where Mandated by Law</b>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Has Strong Sales Records</b>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Provides a List of Major Items Sold</b>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Has a Well Tuned and Clearly Presented Website</b>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Markets Estate Sales Via the Internet</b>	
<b>13</b>	<b>Emails Sales Notifications to their Subscribers</b>	
<b>14</b>	<b>Uses Social Media</b>	
<b>15</b>	<b>Uses Premium Price Realized Databases for Research</b>	
<b>16</b>	<b>Has Separate Client Accounts and does not Co-mingle Funds</b>	
<b>17</b>	<b>Has Recent Excellent References</b>	
	<b>How Long Has the Company Been in</b>	

<b>18</b>	<b>Business?</b>	
<b>19</b>	<b>How Many Estate Sales a Month do they Conduct?</b>	

Take time, and gather information. By comparing one company services to another, you have a higher probability of success in aligning your goals with the services of the company you choose.

---

## Read More Articles:

Learn more about preparing for an estate sale, finding the right company, or discovering sales in your area.

[Estate Sale Info](#)

© National Estate Sales Association 2017 | 501c(6) Status Granted November 2015

[| Join NESA](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)