

How to get the best value selling consignment



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Who couldn't use a little extra cash for their RRSP or TFSA? Turn your "stuff" into savings with these expert tips for selling consignment.

You're staring at something you no longer use – whether you've replaced it, inherited it or simply don't need it anymore – and wondering *how can I turn this into cash?* You want top dollar, but not the hassle of advertising, fielding phone calls or shipping items.

What if someone could do most of the work for you, particularly someone with the time and expertise – and a store front? You've probably heard that more people are looking for good quality, used goods thanks to the rough economy. If you've never tried selling on consignment, today's market might just make it worth your while.

But is it really that simple? There are a few tricks to the trade. We spoke with Warren Hales, owner of Toronto's Around the Block, for some expert advice on selling consignment. Here are some tips for getting the best value.

Ask around. Not sure where to start? Talk to your friends, family and co-workers and ask for a recommendation. Many people return to the same store to buy or sell, and a good referral is often a good place to begin.

Look online. Let your fingers do some of the legwork: check the phone book to see what's in your area, but use the internet as well. You can learn a lot from store websites – like what the shops specialize in (clothes, furniture, etc), how to get in touch and what their preferred procedures are for bringing in items. Many stores also use their website as an extension of their store to promote or feature certain items.

Target the niche. Some consignment shops carry a wide variety of things but others cater to specific items like clothing, children's items or electronics. Knowing where to take your items will not only save you time, it will help you make more money in the end. For example, golf clubs will fetch a better price at a sports store, and yester-year's fashions should head to a vintage store. Some stores may not accept certain items at all, or have strict limits on age.

Shop around. Finding that perfect place may take a little time, but it's worth the effort according to Hales. Visit the stores and get a feel for the space, what they sell and who is doing the selling. Are items well cared for? Is the space clean? Do the people have "an eye" for the business and a passion for what they're doing? Keep in mind that staff members who are knowledgeable about styles and materials will be better able to sell an item – and determine its worth.

Also, consider your needs and schedule. Some stores require an appointment while others encourage walk-ins or emails. Many stores like Around the Block will handle estate sales and are willing to leave the shop to assess items on site. If you're selling large items or multiple items, ask if the store can help with the pick-up or delivery.

Get the details. What else should you look for in a shop? According to Hales, the whole process of selling – from when you first make contact to when you get paid – should be transparent. Ask lots of questions, such as:

- How do they price items? Do you get any input? Are antiques or jewellery appraised first?
- What is the commission rate? (i.e. how much do you get, and how much do they keep).
- Is the price fixed, or will an item be discounted after a certain period of time? (And will you be consulted on any changes?) Also, does the staff typically negotiate with potential buyers?
- Will the store contact you when an item is sold, or are you responsible for checking in? Who is responsible for keeping track of your items, and how can you stay informed?
- How and when will you be paid?
- What happens if an item is damaged or stolen at the store?

In short, there should be no secrets or surprises on either side. Take the time to understand the policies and make sure you're comfortable before you sign a contract.

Know before you go. Want to know if something is sellable before you cart it all the way to the store? Bring in a photo, Hales advises. It doesn't have to be a print out – it can be on your digital camera or cell phone. If the store allows, send a picture through email. The owner may not be able to give you a definitive answer, but it's a good way to start a conversation.

Keep an open mind. It's the nature of the business that many people arrive at a shop not knowing how much an item is worth or how it will be sold. Hales cautions that many people have to detach themselves from sentimental value and look at an item objectively – which isn't always an easy thing to do. Be willing to hear what the store has to say about price, and try to adopt the point of view of an impartial buyer instead. Some things may be worth less than you hoped, but other may be worth more than you thought. Don't be shy asking for an estimate and comparing it with others.

Also, be aware that sets may get split up. It may have been your grandparent's dining room suite, but a potential buyer may just want the table and chairs. Ultimately, pieces are sometimes worth more separately than as a group, and you can't control how someone will use your treasures once you've parted with them.

Consider the condition. Things that are in good shape will sell for more than ones that have some kind of damage. Items that are in less-than-ideal condition will be sold "as is" and priced to be attractive to someone willing to do a little repair work.

Additionally, be aware that while most items are safe changes to regulations over the years mean that some things aren't up to current safety standards – especially when it comes to appliances, children's toys, strollers, cribs and playpens. (For information on other potential hazards, see [How safe is second-hand stuff?](#))

Be patient. One of the benefits of consignment is that you don't have to accept less because you want to get an item out of your house in a hurry. However, unlike garage sales or auctions you probably won't see instantaneous results. While it's difficult to predict how quickly something will sell, it could be months before you see a cheque.

When in doubt, ask the store owners how long they think something will take to sell. Certain items generally take longer than others, such as upholstered furniture, art and light fixtures.

When it comes to jewellery, those "cash for your gold" ads might be tempting but those stores won't likely pay as much as selling consignment because they're paying based on raw materials, not finished pieces. If you can afford to "wait it out" you'll have a wider range of selling options to choose from.

Relationships matter. Price, storefront, commission – these are all important things to consider, but don't overlook the people involved in the equation. Sometimes it isn't easy to trust valuable items to others, so it's important to find a store where the people are sympathetic and willing to listen to your point of view. It's in everyone's best interests to build a good working relationship: You want to know your items are in good hands, and the store would like to have you back as a customer.

And above all else: "Work with someone you trust," Hales advises. "Go to a few places and talk to people. Go with your gut and ask yourself: am I comfortable working with this person?"

For more information about Around the Block, visit the website at www.aroundtheblock.com.

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