

Genealogical Service

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At some point in their lives everyone asks who their ancestors were, what they did, and where they came from. If these questions are strong enough in your mind you might decide to do a little research and compile a family tree. But you're not in school anymore and chances are you don't have the time for digging around in old records. Enter a genealogical service; a family history service specializes in researching and writing family history. If you enjoy history and have research experience, this is an exciting work at home business that is inexpensive to start and can yield a comfortable annual income, once you're up and running.

Before The Start-Up, Let's Not Get Ahead Of Ourselves

No qualifications are required; just experience researching family history and some insider knowledge of the field. As with many industries it's possible to gain experience first as a hobbyist, and then use that experience to turn professional. If you for instance enjoy history and research but have no experience in the genealogical field, you can get started as a hobbyist. Research your own family tree, once you've done that offer your services to close friends or work colleagues, if you have a daytime job. These free jobs not only help you to gain experience, but they also are the start of your portfolio which can be presented to potential clients.

The Start-Up

To run a successful service you'll first need to setup a home office, you'll need a workspace, desk, computer, high-speed Internet connection (this is essential as most of your research will be done online) and a phone line. You might consider purchasing family tree software to make your life easier, although this isn't essential and is something that can be purchased later. Other start up expenses besides equipment will include memberships to ancestry databases such as ancestry.com.

With your office ready you'll need to develop a brand for your service and a price structure. Develop a simple logo (some play on a tree with branches comes to mind) and put it on your business cards, invoices, letterheads and other [business stationary](#). If you have the budget, develop a small business website advertising your services and offering free research advice to attract customers (don't forget to put your web address on all your business stationary).

A standard price structure is important to develop as it ensures you accurately charge for your time. Average rates vary between \$30 - \$130 (USD) for a single search and \$200 - \$500 (USD) for a full family history and tree.

Most jobs will begin with an interview with the family or person who is hiring you, and the collecting of research materials and information. It might be very helpful to develop a questionnaire which you can ask each client to fill out. This will help standardize the initial interview process and ensure you can easily refer back to what people have told you.

Making It Work

Time management will be the biggest barrier to your financial success. It will initially be difficult to judge how much you should charge each client for a search or full family history. If you underestimate

the time it will take to do the research, you could be left working many hours more than you have been paid for. Try to develop a pricing structure that takes into account the expected difficulty of the research and charges accordingly. Your ability to accurately predict how much research is required for a job will improve as you become more experienced.

Finally consider charging a deposit at the beginning of every new job. This will improve the cash flow of your business and protect you against clients who are unable to make payment.

Marketing

Once you have developed a client base, most of your new clients will most likely come from word of mouth and referrals. Until you have enough work to keep you busy you'll need to market your services in local newspaper classifieds, direct mailers and other community advertising opportunities. If you did decide to have a website developed, consider learning to run a pay per click campaign with a service such as Google Adwords. Pay per click advertising can be targeted at a small geographical area, this makes it a very affordable advertising opportunity for small businesses, provided you learn how to use the service properly.

Don't forget

Don't forget to factor in the price of database subscriptions when calculating your fees.