

The **Ultimate** **Guide** *to* **Hiring an**

Estate Sale Company

Tips & Tricks from
the Pros at
ESTATESALES.ORG



Do you need to [hire an estate sale company](#)? If you're like a lot of people, you might even be wondering: [what exactly is an estate sale](#)? Estate sales are a lot like garage sales and yard sales in they're held to sell people's personal belongings. However, whereas garage or yard sales are held to get rid of things people no longer want, estate sales exist to get rid of items people can no longer keep, usually due to life circumstances. Another big difference is garage and yard sales usually sell only a portion of an estate, while an estate sale liquidates an entire estate. Someone might have several garage sales or yard sales over the years as they move and downsize, but generally, people only have one estate sale in their lifetime.

Ask yourself these questions to help determine whether an estate sale is right for you.

- Do you need to downsize due to aging, moving, separating or divorcing, or some other major life change?
- Do you own a house full of stuff? Do you own many valuable items, items that are still useful, or items with resale value in relatively good shape? Do you own collectibles, ephemera, or antiques?
- Do you have more stuff than you can handle?
- Do you need to live off the money you make from selling your stuff?
- Do you need the proper documentation of sales when it comes time for taxes?
- Would the expertise and perspective of an objective professional be helpful?

If you answered yes to any of the above, not only do you need to hold an estate sale, you should probably hire a professional estate sale company to handle it for you. However, even though most estate sales must be done quickly and under pressure, finding the right estate sale company is important. You don't want to hire the first estate sale company you find. You also don't want to take the first good recommendation you hear because your estate sale may be different in scope. Luckily, with the help of search engines, online reviews, and social networking, you can learn a lot about estate liquidators.

Researching Prospective Estate Sale Companies

Just like you'd research any big or important purchase, you'll want to research prospective estate sale companies in your area. Be thorough and widespread in your search, utilizing the Internet, your network, and beyond.

What are the estate sale company's qualifications?

Some people don't know there is no formal governing board that [regulates the estate sale industry](#). However, a few [estate sale industry organizations](#) exist to keep the estate sale industry kosher and to vet prospective estate sale companies. Organizations like [NESA](#) and [ASEL](#) are made up of industry veterans and are both great places to start your search. These organizations don't allow companies in bad standing to be members or display their official logos.

Since there is no formal governing board overseeing estate sales, there is no set education track or certification process for estate sale professionals. Liquidators come from all walks of life; however, many have industry-related backgrounds, like auctioneering, [selling vintage](#), or professional appraising in some capacity. If the prospective estate sale company comes from a related background, by all means ask about their certifications. (Professional auctioneers must be certified and appraisers must be accredited, for starters).

However, ruling out an estate sale company solely because they don't come from a similar industry is unwise. Holding an estate sale requires lots of expertise unrelated to pricing and appraisal, such as organization, marketing and advertising, customer service, accounting, and keeping a calm demeanor throughout in order to guide the process. An estate liquidator can still be great to work with even if they don't come from a related background. Things like pricing and appraisal can be learned on the job with experience, while integrity cannot.

Is the estate sale company bonded and insured?

Here's a reminder that should go without saying. During an estate sale, it's important that you, the homeowner, have a current insurance policy on the dwelling where your estate sale will take place. In the event something goes wrong, having a current policy protects you from liabilities and lawsuits.

Likewise, you need to make sure the estate sale company you hire is properly bonded and insured. Being bonded means they've licensed their business and paid money to a surety company for protection. In other words bonding ensures they won't run off with your stuff or your money. Having insurance means they can cover damage to their inventory (your inventory) or any damage to your property while in their custody. The [ACNA](#) is a popular insurance option for many estate sale companies.

Can anyone professionally recommend them?

Cast a wide net when getting recommendations for estate sale companies to hire. Of course, ask people whose opinions you trust, like friends and family. But go beyond your immediate circle. Getting professionals' opinions is also another angle. Consider anyone involved with services surrounding estate sales, like estate attorneys, financial planners and accountants, realtors, and even employees at senior centers. Often their expertise can provide another perspective your friends and family might not have considered.

More places to research prospective estate liquidators include your local Yellow Pages, and of course, the internet where Google and estate sale listing websites like EstateSales.org can provide you a list of estate sale professionals in your area.

Does the estate sale company have good references?

When you gather a list of prospective companies, look into what their past customers have to say. Often you can find reviews online via Google, Yelp or on their company website. Find out what past clients say about their experiences working with them.

A word on reviews: You might consider taking reviews from shoppers with a grain of salt. Consider that an estate sale company often puts the needs of their clients (the consignors) ahead of the shoppers, as they should. Because of this, shoppers might leave negative reviews when they feel they haven't gotten a good enough "deal."

That said, reviews are becoming the norm in the digital age and can offer another view of what to expect, including alerts to potential problems (a company with countless bad reviews probably isn't a good sign).

***Pro tip:** Other sites like RipoffReport.com and the Better Business Bureau may also give insight into any estate sale companies you plan to hire.*

Don't automatically rule out new companies, either. After all, everyone has to start somewhere, and newer companies often charge less. If the company is just starting out, ask if they can provide references from people who can speak to their work ethic and character.

Does the estate sale company have a following?

While judging a company's social media popularity may sound like something a Millennial might do, checking out an [estate sale company's online presence](#) can provide a sense of how big their following is. The bigger their followings, the more eyes they can reach when

advertising your estate sale.

When it comes to putting on an estate sale, it doesn't matter how great of a sale it is if people don't walk through the door. Getting customers is key. You might also check out the quality of their [estate sale photos](#), since better photos bring more buyers. The number of shoppers your sale will potentially attract is something to consider when hiring an estate sale company.

What estate sale services do they provide?

There are different types of estate sales: on-site estate sales (take place in your home), consignment estate sales (takes place elsewhere), clean-outs (where the estate sale company cleans everything out for a fee, to do with the contents what they wish), and buy-outs (like the preceding option, minus clean-out) - and different combinations thereof. There are also [online estate sale auctions](#), which opens up your sale to even more shoppers not in your area. In other words, estate sales can get complicated, as everyone's circumstances vary.

Make sure your needs line up with the estate sale company you hire. The most common type of estate sale is the on-site estate sale, and most professional liquidators accommodate them.

However, what happens to leftover or [hard-to-sell items](#) after the sale is up for negotiation. Who will be in charge of shipping and/or delivery? What about cleaning up and donating leftover items to charity? Another important service estate sale companies should provide are hard copies of accounting and itemized receipts for your benefit and for tax purposes.

Some estate sale companies work these services into their commission. Others charge a fee. Ironing out these important details during the prospecting part of the process saves heartache and confusion later.

How do they operate their estate sales?

All estate sales operate differently. Since there are several ways of conducting an estate sale, make sure your vision aligns with the estate sale company you hire. For example, some companies allow the homeowner to hang out during the estate sale. Other companies

have strict rules against this. If you know you want to be present, don't hire a company that won't allow this.

***Hint:** Any company you hire should have all their rules spelled out clearly in their [estate sale contract](#). That way both of you are on the same page and there are no surprises later.*

How many employees will be conducting the sale?

While you don't need to know every single detail of the sale, you do have a right to know how many people to expect in and out of your house leading up to, during, and after your estate sale. Estate sale staff can often cost more money. Some companies work this into the cost of doing business. Other companies, however, may pass this charge onto you, especially if there are special circumstances surrounding the size and scope of your sale.

How is the estate sale conducted?

Does the company use a number system? Is it first-come, first-serve? Again, knowing every single detail of the sale isn't necessary, but this question will tell you two things. First, how many buyers they anticipate at your estate sale. If they use the number system, it's a good indicator they expect large crowds to their sales and have a regular following. Second, if they waffle on this question, it might tell you they're not as experienced as they seem.

How do they handle with discounts?

This is another factor you deserve to know. After all, it's your items to be discounted. Ask [how the estate sale company applies discounts](#), if they automatically give discounts on the second or third days, and if so, how much. If they discount on a case-by-case basis, ask their reasoning. If there are items you don't want discounted under any circumstances, discuss it with prospective companies beforehand.

How Much Do They Charge?

Most estate sales charge by commission, taking a portion of the total proceeds. However, commission rates vary depending on region and experience. Research your area to find out what estate sale companies in your area charge, realizing it could be anywhere from 25%-40%, with larger cities on the higher end. However, what one company might include in commission, another might charge extra. When you're talking to prospective estate sale companies, ask specific questions about how they charge. This should also be clear in their estate sale contract.

Did you know some states charge sales tax? If your state charges sales tax, find out if the estate sale company you plan to hire includes this cost or adds it as another charge.

Another thing to ask is how they handle chargebacks, the fees credit cards charge for purchases; if they factor this into pricing or charge the client extra. This could be a big chunk of change you don't want to be surprised about later.

What Are Your Responsibilities?

While an estate sale company takes care of most details, ultimately, it is your estate sale, your stuff, and your money. Working with the estate professional will ensure success. Again, estate sale companies vary in how much involvement they prefer. Ask what tasks you will be responsible for before, during, and after your estate sale.

At the very least, you will need to gather all your items for sale ahead of time so they can properly assess whether or not the the estate sale is a good fit.

10 Red Flags to Watch Out For

Think twice before hiring estate sale companies that exhibit these questionable behaviors!

1. Companies without a web presence. We get that not everyone has time to manage [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) pages. But if you can't even find the estate sale company you plan to hire on google, how do you expect shoppers to find your sale? This goes for getting listed on the major estate sale advertising sites, like EstateSales.org or having your own website.

2. Companies who can't provide references. Not every estate sale company has been in business forever, but any business-owner worth his/her salt should be able to provide a few names of people who can vouch for them in a professional setting.

3. Companies with bad reviews from past clients. While shoppers often leave bad reviews when they feel they aren't getting a good enough "deal," pay attention to bad reviews from past clients, the people who hired the estate sale company. Their experience is more telling.

4. Companies who show up to the consultation without a contract. While asking you to sign right away may be jumping the gun, a professional won't waste your time by showing up empty-handed to the initial consult. Most will bring their contract to use as a selling tool, so you know exactly what to expect.

5. Companies who are overeager. Just like you need to feel out prospective companies before making any final decisions, estate sale companies should also be figuring out whether your sale is a good fit. A liquidator who says they can handle your sale without asking any preliminary questions about logistics or needs may either be too new, unprofessional, or desperate for business, none of which spells out an ideal scenario for you.

6. Companies who are overwhelmed. You also want to make sure the liquidator has the bandwidth to focus on your sale. These days, when hustling is valued over all else, some inexperienced companies or larger companies may take on too many sales to give yours their undivided attention. Signs to watch out for: missing or showing up late to appointments, mixing up your sale details with another's, forgetting your name, etc.

7. Companies you don't click with. Some people don't have chemistry. This is why in-person consultations are so important. You can't always get a sense of someone until you meet them in the flesh. If you have a bad or awkward feeling about an estate liquidator, for whatever reason, you're better off trusting your gut instinct and hiring someone else instead. Holding an estate sale is an emotional event and you want someone by your side you can trust.

8. Companies that don't provide itemized receipts. Documentation is important, especially come tax time. Any estate sale company unwilling or unable to provide you the proper documents for your record-keeping isn't worth hiring.

9. Companies that are too rigid. Every estate sale is different, and things are bound to happen that can throw off the original game plan. You want an estate liquidator who can roll with the punches and pivot if needed. If they have a ton of deal-breakers or won't explain any of the reasoning behind the clauses in their contract, this might be a sign of trouble later.

10. Companies that aren't bonded or insured. Preferably any estate sale company you hire should be both bonded and insured. Many items in an estate sale cannot be re-

placed. In addition, the money from these items may be all the money left. In the event something happens to your stuff before it's sold, you want to make sure you can be compensated.