



C'mon, Big Wheel!
Mama needs some new
Mercedes parts.

Make \$1,000 in five days

Annemarie Conte needs a lot of cash, fast. Too bad she sucks at game shows.

I drive a 22-year-old diesel Mercedes that I love and never want to see die, so I'm always on the lookout for an identical car I can use for parts. I'm psyched when I find a guy selling one on Craigslist for \$1,000, but there's just one problem: He wants the cash in five days. That means I've got less than a week to figure out some high-profit, low-commitment, under-the-table moneymaking schemes that require little to no skill. Looks like hustling is now my full-time job.

Day 1: \$1,000 to go I will not whore myself. I will not whore myself.

My goal is to make the most money I possibly can during every waking moment of the day, so I start my project by sending an enticing mass e-mail to my friends and family who have more money than time: "I'll wash and wax your car, input business cards into Outlook, plan your dinner party, proofread your essays and rip your CD collection into iTunes. See me. I'll make your life easier." I also offer to sell their crap on eBay for a mere 25 percent cut.

While some people balk at the markup (it's often the richies who are the biggest cheapskates), the truly lazy lap it up, and soon I'm listing items like old Dolce and Gabbana shirts (missing buttons and stains fully disclosed) and plastic Alvin and the Chipmunks merchandise circa 1984 (surprisingly profitable). After photographing each item on a gorgeous piece of silk fabric to make it seem fancier, I spend the rest of my morning in the office surrendering to eBay-speak, using words like *funky*, *groovy* and *wow!* to describe the 24 items piled in garbage bags at my feet.

Later that day my coworker Courtney D.

says, "You can dog-sit my Shiba Inu, Luna, while I run some errands." I readily agree, flashing back to my babysitting jobs in middle school, when I raked in 10 bucks an hour watching *Roseanne*, doing my nails and eating junk food all night. But after three hours of running around my backyard with Luna and my own dog, trying to break up their territorial toy spats and stop them from digging up my garden, I'm exhausted.

When Courtney returns and generously hands me \$40, I almost forget to thank her, as I'm already plotting my next scheme: I decide to play to my strengths continued

continued and stick to the kitchen, since every cash-in-hand job post on Craigslist seems to include terrifying phrases like *calculus tutor*, *closet organizer* and *foot-fetish ladies*. Definitely not for me.

So I spend the next six hours preparing for a bake sale, using tried-and-true recipes (which, ahem, may or may not involve my new best friend, Betty Crocker). On the menu: "ultradecadent, knock-your-socks-off" peanut-butter-and-chocolate-chip cookies (four for \$1),

Day 2: \$960 to go Everyone loves brownies—except the Details guys.

My alarm is blaring. I can barely make out the flashing "5:30" as I drag myself out of bed for a cosmetics test (\$120) that I signed up for by Googling "clinical study" and my location. The company wants to determine the longevity of its new

dramatically groans, "Ohhh, no. I couldn't possibly. I'm just too full." Whatever works for you, dude. Meanwhile, the staffers at *Jane*, *Brides.com* and *Women's Wear Daily* enthusiastically stuff their faces, and I sell out in three hours with \$60 in profits before I have to leave for my 2:45 makeup check.

Afterward, I'm off to a babysitting job, which somehow goes well—probably because it only lasts an hour



"majorly, massively, out-of-control fudgy" chocolate-chunk brownies (50 cents apiece), "mega-moist and flavorful" lemon cake (\$1 a slice) and "utterly delectable, blow-your-mind" pumpkin bread (\$1 a slice)—I figure the number of adjectives you use to describe your product is directly proportional to your volume of sales. I finally get everything out of the oven, cooled, bundled in pink plastic wrap and packed in a basket around 2 a.m. The baked goods look fantastic. I, however, am covered in more flour than that beleaguered woman from the old Rice Krispies Treats commercial.

liquid foundation, so I have to let someone spread two formulas on my face and then leave 'em there for the next 16 hours. I'm also required to return to the testing center at eight-hour intervals so they can check the progress. The first application makes my skin so matte and powdery, I look like an 80-year-old mime.

Thankfully, no one mocks me—to my scary face anyway—as I canvass the *Jane* office with my basket of treats for sale. It amazes me that each floor of our building has a completely different personality. One guy at *Details* looks at my basket hungrily, glances at his half-eaten salad, then puts both hands on his stomach and

(\$15). Next, I transcribe an interview (\$50—I looked for Craigslist ads from lawyers, doctors and nonfiction writers), but I have to rush through it so I can pick up my parents from the airport (they pay me the \$50 they would have spent on a cab—it's quite heartwarming how people will take pity on you when they know you're desperate for cash).

My final chore is to be back at the cosmetics testing center for the 10:45 inspection. A woman in a lab coat swabs my cheek with a Q-tip and clucks in disappointment as half the foundation slides right off. That's when my head starts to pound: I have a migraine from the brutal 18-hour day. But at least I've got \$295 in my pocket.

Day 3: \$665 to go I resort to gambling.

I spend the morning monitoring my eBay merch before borrowing my friend's brand-new Ford Excursion—which is *huge* but not as crazy to navigate as I imagined it would be—for my one-time-only furniture-delivery service. I've always thought it ridiculous to pay Ikea \$120 to ship a \$99 dresser that you then have to assemble yourself, so I charge half that and deliver orders in the evening, when people are actually home.

Shopping at Ikea on a weekday afternoon is delightful. I breeze through the store in about an hour (not including the time I spend blissfully eating poached salmon and raspberry Singoalla cookies—a bargain at only \$7) without having to wrestle anyone for the last Ludde sheepskin rug. As I make the deliveries, I chuckle to myself at the brilliance of my plan—until the fifth stop, when I'm confronted with an elevatorless apartment building.

"I thought these things were supposed to be light," grunts my client (a friend's cousin) while helping me haul his third Billy bookcase up a flight of stairs.

"They must be using thicker pressboard these days," I pant, nearly dropping the damn thing on my foot.

Once I'm done (with \$315, including tips), I deliver two \$30 homemade lasagnas to some friends who never cook. The cost of the mozzarella and ricotta cheeses leaves me with a higher overhead than expected, but I still net \$45. I return the Excursion to my friend, feeling a twinge of guilt for not gassing it up (but she can consider that half-tank a charitable donation to the Annemarie Conte Fund).

I get home in time to meet my boyfriend before Brewtopia, an all-you-can-drink beer festival that we've been looking forward to for months. When we get to the convention center, my friends start joking about how long it will take me to get drunk. "Why don't you bet on it?" I counter—and they actually start pulling out their cash. I get a \$10 cut for being the butt of their

amusement, and manage to guzzle eight cups before failing their hand-eye-coordination sobriety test.

Day 4: \$310 to go Don't look to greasy hipsters for cash.

I now know why so many people avoid listing their junk on eBay. It's time-consuming and annoying to deal with buyers' questions, only to have the final bid be \$9.99, a good chunk of which gets eaten by eBay fees. But I still manage to pull in more than \$100 for my troubles. Of course, that averages out to about \$2.50 an hour—but I'm in no position to complain,

**I return to the office and set up the adult equivalent of a lemonade stand: cider spiked with applejack brandy (\$2 a cup).
Cha-ching.**

especially since all that is nothing compared with the mental anguish I suffer from selling clothes at the trendy Brooklyn, N.Y., secondhand store Beacon's Closet.

Beacon's Closet is hell. No, wait. I take that back. It's worse than hell. They were all over my 14-year-old friend's H&M leftovers, but apparently, the fact that I deign to own clothes larger than a size 8 is a massive faux pas. "I'm sorry, we just can't sell those big, boxy clothes?" uptalks the skinny-jeans-and-tight-tank-top-wearing clerk.

This evokes the chicken-and-egg question. "Do you not sell normal-sized clothes because no one buys them or just because you guys refuse to stock them?" I ask. Of course, I already know the answer, which is why I always leave empty-handed when trying to shop at stores like this one. Then an oily guy wearing an outfit identical to the salesgirl's glides by. The only way I can tell them apart is that he has a mullet and a pencil mustache (both meant ironically... I think).

I return to the office with \$80 in cash

and a sour taste in my mouth, so I quickly set up the adult equivalent of a lemonade stand: cider spiked with applejack brandy (\$2 a cup). Get it while it's hot. Cha-ching.

Day 5: \$100 to go Time for wet T-shirts (minus the contest).

I knew a guy in college who screen-printed "official" beer pong T-shirts and made a killing selling them to the rugby team. So when I hear that New York Giants running back Tiki Barber is devastating his fans by threatening to retire, I spring into action and con a friend into screen-printing blue-and-red ONE MORE YEAR T-shirts for me to sell to drunk tailgaters for \$20 a pop.

I arrive at the game with the goal of making at least \$100 above my costs. But it's 42 degrees outside, with sheets of rain, and all I'm wearing is a long-sleeved T-shirt. Still, there are plenty of grill masters nearby slamming back Miller Lites and screaming "Go Giants!" Since I didn't waste time tracking down a vendor's license, I have to dodge stadium security, ducking behind cars. Then the wind picks up and one of the party tents blows over, but I keep my brave-face on and manage to make exactly six \$20 sales before I'm soaked through and miserable. I bail six hours before kickoff. (The tailgaters are still out there.)

As soon as I realize the T-shirt sales bumped me to the \$1,000 mark, the exhaustion of the week comes crashing down on me. I spent nearly 100 hours catering to everyone else's needs and totally neglecting my own—my back hurts, my hair is a mess, and my bedroom is a disaster zone. I doubt I'll ever do this again (I'd have to be really desperate), but I'm pretty damn proud that I hit my goal, and at least now I know that with a little creativity and a lot of energy, raising fast cash is possible.

I have only one more stop before I can go home and sleep. After I crawl into the backseat of my car, too tired to speak, my very patient boyfriend chauffeurs me to Craigslist Guy's house to buy the Mercedes. He doesn't even charge me for the lift. ♦