

27 Million Quilters in the United States Must be Right

A Report on Quilting in the US by Penny Halgren

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“Quilting? Are there *really that many* quilters?” is the most common exclamation of surprise when people discover how I make my living. Not far behind are the comments about how their grandmother, mother or aunt was a quilter, and they cherished the quilts left to them and other members of their family.

We all recognize that blankets and even store bought quilts are available and affordable. It’s not like it was decades ago when quilters made quilts because they couldn’t afford blankets. And, actually, some blankets are more serviceable and may last longer than quilts.

So, why quilt?

If you are a quilter, the answer to this question is fairly simple. Quilters make quilts not because they need to in order to keep their family warm, but because there is a tremendous feeling of love and satisfaction that goes into both making a quilt and seeing the look on someone’s face when you give them a quilt you made.

A quilt is not like a piece of clothing that will be worn, then outgrown or go out of style, and finally discarded. Quilts stay around for hundreds of years – sometimes even long after they are in shreds and other fabric items would have been thrown in the trash.

A quilt has always represented a tie to home and family. It’s easy to find a story or two about a newlywed pioneer traveling in her covered wagon with a quilt made by the women in the town she just left.

There are modern day versions of the same story where a newlywed couple flies across the country or around the world to settle in a new town with a treasured wedding quilt among their few belongings.

In the not-too-distant future, we will probably hear stories about newlyweds flying off in spaceships to other planets packing their wedding quilt.

Quilts hang on the walls of large corporate offices and hospitals making the connection between home and family in a very visible way, as they attempt to make the office or hospital seem more “friendly.” The quilters who craft these quilts are truly artists, using fabric as their medium. And the quilts replace paintings that would otherwise hang on the walls.

Quilting isn't at all like it used to be.

With the introduction of the rotary cutter, cutting fabric got infinitely easier and more accurate.

Fabric manufacturers are delivering interesting fabrics to quilt shops in a huge variety of colors – not just the pink, pale blue and light green calicos of yesteryear. The quality of fabric has increased to the point where you might reasonably expect a quilt that hasn't been abused by the dog or cat to easily last hundreds of years and remain in excellent condition.

Sewing machine manufacturers are now designing computerized sewing machines that meet the desires of quilters with stitch regulators, 1/4 inch presser foot and a walking foot frequently coming as standard equipment. In addition, there are now quilting machines for home quilters, not just industrial users, and many home sewing machines have been adapted for machine quilting.

Thousands of gadgets make our quilting easier – from custom cut acrylic templates for the most complex patches in a block to pencils to colored chalk to mark fabric with a quilting design, and many things in between.

Using current technology and devices, you might finish a quilt in just days or weeks working part time (depending on the size and complexity of the quilt), instead of the year or two it might have taken years ago.

Quilting is easier, more fun and offers a creative outlet not always available to those of us who can't draw or paint.

Who is quilting now?

In the three years between 2003 and 2006, the average age of a beginner quilter went from 54.7 to 57.8 years old. And the number of quilters in the United States has gone from **21.3 million in 2003 to 27.0 million in 2006** (the latest year statistics are available).

And what, exactly, does that mean? I suppose like any other statistics, you could interpret them in a number of different ways. One obvious way to look at it is that with the number of quilters increasing between 2003 and 2006, and the average age of beginner quilters also increasing, Boomers are becoming Quilters – at least in the US!

It just makes sense.

With retirees looking for something to do besides just sitting around watching “General Hospital” and game shows all day, already many have turned to quilting and other hand crafts – admittedly possibly for something to do as they watch TV.

The point is not what they are doing while they are quilting. The point is that they are quilting – in increasing numbers.

And are these quilters spending money?

You bet they are. I know I am doing my part, how about you?

The average household income for families with quilters increased \$6,000.00 between 2003 and 2006. And spending on quilting supplies increased 45.4% to \$3.3 billion in the US during 2006. Statistics show that the **average annual spending per quilter was \$2,303.00** during 2006.

And where are they buying? Quilters still show a preference for retail stores and quilt shows. However, in 2003 approximately 17% of quilters reported purchasing more than half of their quilting supplies online and through mail order; while in 2006 approximately 20% reported purchasing more than half of their quilting supplies online and through mail order.

The increase is significant – from 17% to 20%. Another significant increase is the percentage of quilters who now are online with high speed internet access (73% - a 12% increase since 2003).

The statistic that is missing is the number of quilters who purchase less than half of their quilting supplies online. I bet that number is huge!

It makes sense that as an increasing number of quilters retire, spend more time at home, and move to rural communities where good quilting shops are missing, opportunities for online quilting businesses will grow.

And the really interesting thing – quilting is spreading throughout the world. It wasn't that long ago when countries like Japan and Australia were hosting their first quilt shows. Now, not only have those shows grown, but it's not unusual to see quilt shows in Scandinavian, European and Asian countries.

So, What do all of these numbers mean?

To me it means that this is a **great time to start a quilting related business**. No, I'm not crazy!

I know what you are thinking. With the press reporting tightening credit, rising prices, and higher unemployment, now might seem like a really stupid time to start a business – any kind of

business. But maybe especially a business in something that might be considered a craft or hobby – or, even ART!

But, when you glance a little deeper, the picture may not be so glum. In many newspaper articles, the good news is buried or nowhere to be seen, but the facts are:

- First class cabins in airplanes are jammed
- Spas, cigar bars and children's clothing boutiques selling upscale dresses are thriving
- We have had 52 consecutive months of net job growth
- More Americans own homes *and are investors* than ever before
- Foreign businesses are investing in the US at a greater rate than at any other time in the last 20 years
- Farmers are enjoying record crop prices
- Disney parks are filled to the gills, even though it costs \$71 for a one day pass
- It is estimated that over half-billion dollars in timeshares per year are being purchased by the middle class

And more people are quilting!

This should all be good news to you, since you are already familiar with what quilters want – being a quilter yourself.

You already know a lot about quilting.

Why not share that knowledge with other quilters?

If you have been quilting for more than a month, you have already made some discoveries that will benefit other quilters.

Maybe you found a particular fabric line that you love and would like to share with other quilters. Possibly there are patterns that have become favorites. Maybe you have a talent for designing quilt blocks and quilts.

All of these items can be sold to quilters without opening up a shop or investing thousands of dollars purchasing inventory that will “go stale” after 6 months on the shelf.

Or it might be that you absolutely love machine quilting more than you like making quilt tops. Thousands of quilters would pay dearly for someone else to finish their quilt, because they don't have the right machine or patience to finish the quilt.

With very little investment, other than time, you can start earning money in a field you love within days.

If I can do it, you can, too.

I know that's easy to say, and it may be difficult for you to believe. But it is really true.

A little more than 3 years ago, in a budget cutback, I was laid off from the County of San Diego. Oh, I could have taken a job in a different department. Or found a job at another company. But I was getting tired of working for someone else.

My youngest child was in college, I was divorced, and my only responsibilities were to my dog and cat, paying the mortgage on my home, and visiting my mom and dad every week.

I knew nothing about starting a business, let alone an internet business. I knew very little about websites, writing newsletters, or designing quilt block patterns.

I've made a ton of mistakes along the way because I had nobody at my side to guide me. Yet, I took my business from **\$ZERO to more than \$220,000.00 in sales in 3 years.**

The same people who are amazed that there are so many quilters have asked how I accomplished that growth in my business. I always just shrug my shoulders. If they don't understand quilters, how could they possibly understand my business?

The bottom line is that **I have never shared any of the real inside secrets** of my business with anyone. Not even my accountant knows everything about my business. He knows just enough to keep my books and do my tax return.

Because I have been successful growing my business, and want to help other quilters build their business while preventing them from wasting their time and money on stuff that doesn't work, I have decided to share my business secrets with a small group of quilters who are interesting in starting their own quilting related business.

Will you be one of them?

I won't lie to you and say that with my help, your business start-up will make you a millionaire overnight. But, maybe it will!

I will tell you that with my help, your quilting related business start-up can be fun and rewarding, and you can avoid all of the expensive mistakes I made along the way. And you can make a bunch of money, just as I have.

You can do this on a shoestring, just like I did. No business bank loan, no house refinance, no begging relatives for money, no investment in inventory. Just some basic information and an investment of your time.

Stay tuned for more information about this fantastic opportunity.

In the meantime, if you want to be sure to get the latest, go to www.TheQuiltingCoach.com and **enter your information in the green form**. Nobody will contact you; it's just an email list where you can get updates and notifications.

Happy Quilting!

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Data gathered from The National Survey of Quilting in America, 2006, Primedia Consumer Media & Magazine Group