

Tool Rental Service: Does It Pay?

*"Ask about our do-it-yourself service and tool renting,"
Frank Willburn says in his 1/4-page Yellow Pages ad,
and in a \$4,000 campaign of radio spot commercials.
PHB's report tells why he's doing it, and how*



HE EXPLAINS—Contractor Frank Willburn (right) shows customer how mercury gauge works. Tool rents for \$1.50 a day. There's a \$5 deposit

• ABOUT 250 CUSTOMERS used Frank Willburn's do-it-yourself department, and a companion tool rental service, during the first six months after they were launched in October, 1959.

The over-the-counter sales, and the stimulating effect on his overall business, have encouraged Frank's Plumbing Co. of Amarillo, Tex., to promote both services more heavily. During the initial six-month period, advertising was limited to a quarter-page in the Yellow Pages. Now, Willburn plans \$4,000 worth of radio spot announcements, to be spread over half a year, emphasizing do-it-yourself and tool rental.

Willburn's all-residential business grossed \$295,000 last year, with about 40% in repair and service business and the remainder a combination of modernization and new residential work.

Thus, more and more, Willburn has been adapting his operation to the homeowner as the basic customer. He had noticed how homeowners flocked to a "rent-a-tool" service in Amarillo that rents everything from chain saws to lawn mowers. He figured he could capitalize on the same appeal.

Like many contractors who have done the same thing, Willburn has found that consumers like to experiment with do-it-yourself, but they tend to wind up having the installation work done by the contractor—that is, any work that goes beyond the minor repair category.



PARTS ARE EASY TO FIND—This corner of Willburn's store displays hundreds of parts and replacement items so each can be seen. Prices are plainly marked; the attendant helps customer find item he needs



not identify each item by name. Customers usually don't know the correct names anyway; they identify by looking at the items. Mrs. Juanita Nickelson, the attendant, has memorized the inventory so that she can help them.

As for rental tools, Willburn added about \$200 worth of hand tools to his inventory, plus some power tools. The customer must sign a simple agreement form providing that he will be responsible for all losses or damage to the rented tools. The tools are covered by insurance, and the customer is covered by liability insurance (\$25,000 to \$50,000).

In general, Willburn figures his rental charge for hand tools should run about 12% of the cost of the tool. He rents almost all of them for a one-day period. (For a sampling of what Willburn charges for individual tools, see chart below.)

So far the tools most in demand have been hand tools, those suitable for the small scale work that homeowners generally manage to do on their own. Only a few customers have attempted major roughing work.

Remodeling Sales Up 25%

Of course an important dividend Willburn expects from the do-it-yourself service is the opportunity to sell fixtures and major equipment to the homeowners whose confidence has been won by the service. The results have been encouraging. Thus far Willburn figures he's increased his remodeling and replacement sales about 25%, and he considers the do-it-yourself service a chief reason for this increase. Over-the-counter sales of parts and roughing materials have increased 50%; this also represents a substantial dollar gain even though the sales tickets are small.

"Our whole idea is to have what the customer wants when he comes in," says Frank Willburn. "If we do, he'll think of us when he needs plumbing and heating." **END**

"The usual procedure is that the amateur plumber tears things up; then we fix them up," said Willburn. "Once he gets started, the typical homeowner decides he'll have us do the job after all."

How the Department Operates

Physically, the Willburn facilities for "do-it-yourselfers" consist of:

(1) A complete stock of packaged repair parts displayed out in the open on walls and counters.

(2) A stock of rental tools that includes hand tools as well as powered equipment.

(3) A convenient setup for cutting pipe and gathering roughing compon-

ents for pickup in the store by the homeowner.

A large area in Willburn's store is set aside for the do-it-yourself merchandise. This section looks like a hardware store display. Larger items needed for repair work are displayed in many-sectioned counters. Small parts packages form a display on one wall, with transparent packages hanging from rows of hooks. Individual small parts are also visible, stored in glass jars, on another wall. A special display board features single-handle faucets.

The homeowner finds prices plainly marked on all of the hundreds of items, just as he would in a department store or dime store. However, Willburn does

How Willburn Charges Do-It-Yourselfers

For small tools, Frank Willburn figures tool rental rates to do-it-yourself users at 12% of the cost of the tool.

For power tools and special tools, the rate basis varies.

EXAMPLES:	Per day
Box of hand tools (wrenches, screwdriver, etc.)	\$1.00
Individual hand tools (caulking iron, wrench, etc.)50
Soil pipe tool kit	2.50
Steel sewer cable	1.50
Pipe-cutting machine	3.50
Mercury gauge	1.50

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PLUMBING & HEATING BUSINESS

AIR CONDITIONING

VALVES

FITTINGS

PIPING

KITCHENS

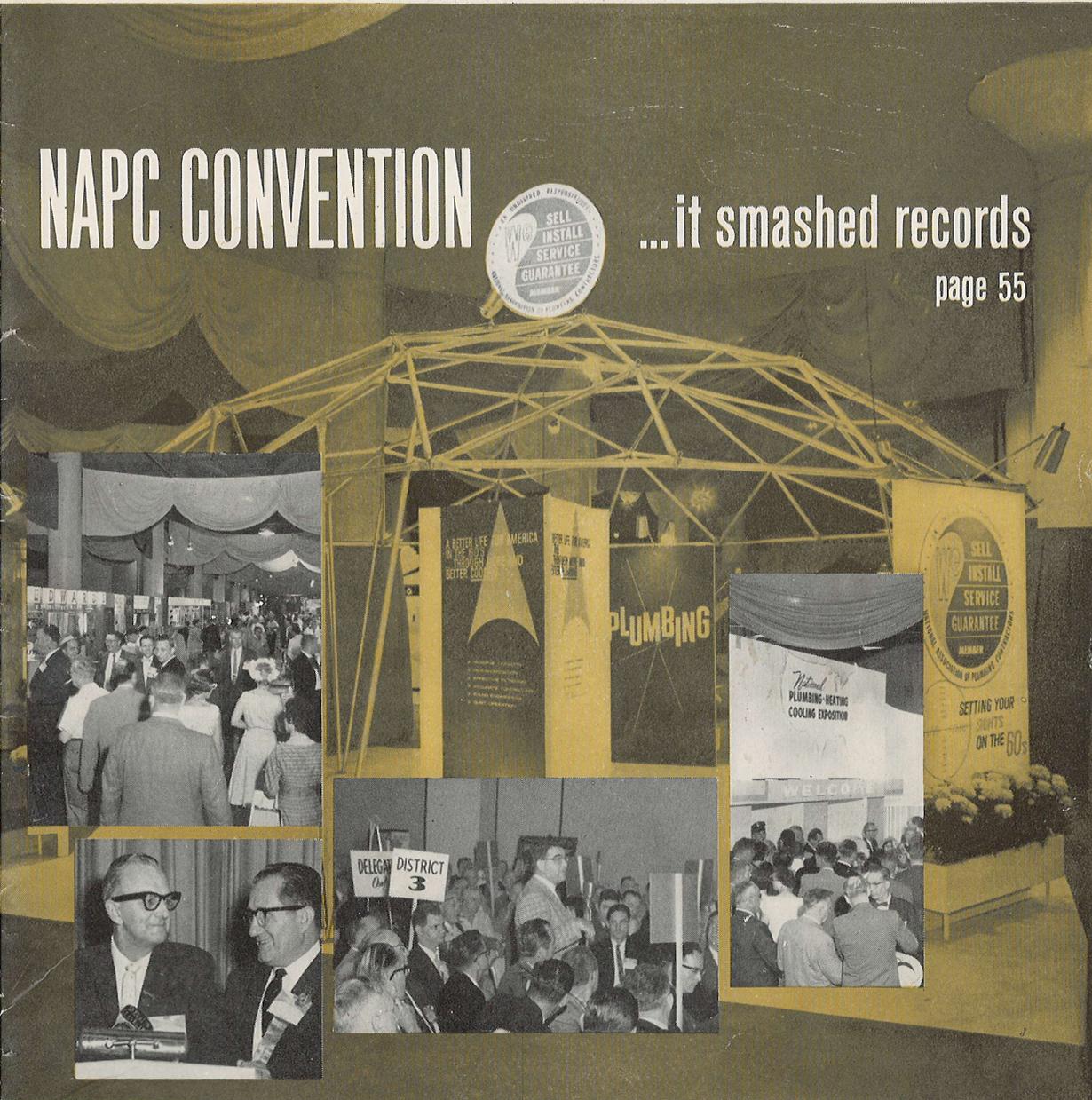
APPLIANCES

NAPC CONVENTION



...it smashed records

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