

## How to Have a Smooth Move

*Can't afford a full-service mover? Learn ten ways to save money -- and your sanity -- when moving yourself.*

By Erin Burt

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As I write this column, I sit surrounded by teetering stacks of boxes on my left and a growing Goodwill-donation pile on my right. Yes, I'm moving. Again.

I consider myself an unwitting expert on the art of moving. In the past ten years, I've moved five times, and this current move will be my third cross-country venture. Every time I head for the opposite coast, I vow to myself that I will never ever *ever* move myself again: "Next time, no matter how much it costs, I'm springing for a full-service mover!"

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Ah, but then moving day approaches, and I collect price quotes from the big guys. This time around: about \$6,500 to transport the contents of my two-bedroom apartment from California to Maryland. I don't think my stuff is even *worth* that much money. So I scrape my jaw off the floor and turn yet again to the budget-friendly arms of the self-service moving companies.

When you're starting out and on a tight budget, moving can pose a daunting expense. Although a do-it-yourself move can be a hassle, it's usually the cheapest way to go -- and it may be your only choice (unless you're moving for a job and your new employer offers a relocation perk.) But whether you're moving in-state or cross-country, even handling the packing, loading, unloading and transportation on your own can take a toll on your wallet -- not to mention your sanity. Here are ten tips to help you save money and pull off a smooth move when you're on your own.

### Move it for less

**1. Go truckin'.** Renting a truck may not be glamorous, but it can be economical. The big names for local and long-distance truck moves are [Budget](#), [Penske](#) and [UHaul](#), and their prices can vary widely, so it pays to shop around. For example, when I first started pricing self-moving trucks, I received quotes ranging from \$1,745 to \$2,514 for a 16- to 17-foot truck with unlimited miles. Don't forget to factor in the cost of gas. These beasts usually get between 7 to 12 miles per gallon. That means if I average 10 mpg and spend \$3.25 per gallon on my 2,900-mile cross-country trek, I'll spend an extra \$943. *Ouch.*

**2. You pack, they drive.** If you don't mind heavy lifting but you don't want to channel your inner trucker, you can rent space on a big rig or get your own free-standing moving container. Household-freight companies -- such as [ABF U-Pack Moving](#), [Broadway Express](#), [Door to Door](#) and [Pods](#) will do the driving for you. The company leaves a crate or trailer outside your house; you pack and load the boxes, then unload them at your new home.

Rates are fairly competitive, but make sure you shop around. Most of the quotes I received from such providers were within \$300 of each other. But the quote from the first company I asked was insane -- 150% more than the other guys were charging. I'm glad I didn't stop my search right there.

**3. Reshop your reservation.** Once you make a reservation, keep checking back to see if rates have dropped. When I reserved my Penske truck in April, I locked in a rate of \$1,745 including all taxes and discounts. Then, while writing this column two weeks before my move, I thought I'd plug in my info on Penske's Web site again for the heck of it. The price for my move had dropped to \$1,556 -- a savings of \$189. I called customer service and the company changed my reservation to reflect the lower price.

**4. Don't forget yourself.** When weighing your options, remember to factor in the cost of getting yourself and your family to your destination. Estimate gas expenses for your moving truck or car, as well as any food stops and hotel stays. If you hire a transportation company and plan to fly to your new city, calculate the cost of plane tickets and shipping your car, and arrange for a place to stay while you wait for your stuff to arrive. See [25 Best Travel Sites](#) for tips on finding a good deal on your airfare and accommodations.

**5. Sell your stuff.** After I received that \$6,500 quote from the full-service movers, my husband and I considered selling our stuff and starting over, keeping only what we could fit in the trunk of our car. After all, most of our furniture is hand-me-downs or thrift-store fare. We could use the money from the sale and the money we saved on the move to buy new things at our destination. Alas, my husband's library of books is too big and heavy for my car, and I couldn't bear the thought of selling my grandma's old piano that I inherited. And our 3-year-old would have a conniption if we sold off her bed and toys.

But if you don't have a lot of things or you aren't attached to what you've got, be pragmatic. Don't pay \$6,000 to move \$1,000 worth of stuff. And even if you plan to keep your belongings, hold a virtual garage sale for the few things you don't want anymore. While cleaning out my closets, I found some household and baby items to sell on [Craigslist](#), and my husband sold a stack of old textbooks on [Amazon.com](#). We've made about \$250 by downsizing -- money that is helping to offset the cost of our moving truck. (Learn more about [where and how to sell your stuff online](#).)

**6. Recruit help.** When it comes time to pack and load, friends and family members are prime candidates to ask for help. I've found that luring them to the scene with free pizza and drinks usually does the trick. Or, you can hire professionals by the hour to load your stuff into a truck or container. That usually costs between \$25 and \$60 an hour.

**7. Pack on the discounts.** Many self-serve moving companies will give you a discount for making your reservation online -- typically 10%. You should also go to Google and type in the company's name and "coupon" to turn up any codes for extra savings. When you change your address on the U.S. Postal Service Web site, you'll get some moving-related coupons too. In my batch was an offer for 15% off a Budget truck rental. Plus, consider getting a AAA membership. By spending \$54 on a one-year membership, I saved \$217 on my Penske truck -- and that was on top of the \$159 online-booking discount. I also saved at least \$100 on hotel reservations for my cross-country trek. The free maps and 24-hour roadside assistance that come with my membership are just the icing on the cake.

**8. Move midweek or off-season.** By planning your move during a moving company's downtime, you can save some serious cash. For example, Budget offers a 10% discount for Sunday through Thursday truck rentals. Rates at several moving companies drop about 10% in the off-season too, from about October to May.

**9. Save on packing supplies.** When you move yourself, you'll need to pack your own boxes. Sure, you can stake out your supermarket's night stock manager to get what you need. Or hit the net. You can probably snag free boxes through [Craigslist](#). With the summer moving season in full swing, the site turned up a few people in my neighborhood who had just moved in and were looking to unload their boxes. I got most of mine, though, when I casually mentioned to a friend that I was looking for boxes. The next week he showed up at my door with 25 boxes he had brought home from work. So make sure you spread the word among coworkers, family and friends about what you need.

If you plan to buy your own supplies, try an online store such as [Boxkits.com](#) or [BoxesDelivered.com](#). You can save 10% to 20% off what you'd pay at moving companies and office-supply stores.

**10. Unload the expense on the IRS.** If you moved to take a job, you can probably get an income-tax break on part of the cost of the move -- even if it is your first job out of college, and even if you don't itemize deductions on your tax return. If your new workplace is at least 50 miles farther from your old home than your old workplace was, you probably qualify to write off the expense of getting yourself, your belongings and your family to your new location, including the cost of gas, packing supplies, lodging and rental trucks. (You can't write off the cost of meals, however. See [IRS Publication 521](#) for more information.) For every \$1,000 you spend, you save \$150 in taxes if you're in the 15% tax bracket. So make sure you keep your receipts.

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