

Woodworking Piracy — and what you can do about it.

Have you bought woodworking plans online? Do you know where they come from and who is selling them?

You don't have to search long to find countless web sites hawking "thousands of woodworking plans on one DVD" for under \$50. Gee, what a bargain.

In the May 2010 issue of Wood Magazine, Tom Iovino wrote an article about this very subject. Tom shelled out 49 bucks to see what he would actually get on that DVD. First off, he counted around 6,000 project plans compared to the 14,000 advertised. About half aren't even full plans, but merely drawings without any instruction. Many are simply repeated.

It gets worse. Many are just copied directly out of magazines and books. Important elements of projects are missing. A number (okay, I'm going to guess most) are downloaded from reputable web sites and dumped onto the disc.

YouTube woodworking scams

Recently I've received a large number of "video response" requests on my YouTube channel. Normally, these are videos from people who have made something similar to the project in my video and want to show it off. It's a great way for people to get their stuff seen.

Thankfully, I have my channel set to require my approval on all video response requests. Lately, the requests have been nothing but spam. Quickie videos, with nothing but text, gaudy colors and poor font choices, trying to get people to buy \$49 DVDs containing "over 14,000 plans". There is no effort put into them at all. One guy actually has a channel set up that shows episodes of The New Yankee Workshop — titles and credits removed — and plastered with his web site address!

Strangely, I started to notice that all of these hack YouTube channels point to different web sites, yet the sites are identical. After a little poking around, it didn't take long to figure out what's going on here.

How it works

The web sites — which contain no woodworking info other than one long ad for the DVD — all have a link to their "affiliate program" explaining how you can sell the DVDs too. Aha...it's a "multi-level marketing" scheme.

I suspect the pitch goes something like this: *"No experience necessary. You don't even need to know anything about woodworking. We'll show you how to set up your own web site just like this one. You get to keep 75% of the profits. We'll even show you how to become a YouTube master seller! People will flock to your site!. Get others to become affiliates and make even more \$\$!"*

It's one thing for suckers to get drawn into pyramid schemes, but quite another when the core product is most likely comprised of stolen material. Look, designing woodworking projects is a creative endeavor that takes a lot of time, patience, money and testing. Coming up with detailed plans with accurate instructions, cutting lists, and technical drawings takes skill and hard work. It's akin to an author writing a book or a musician composing a song. They deserve to be paid and not have hacks stealing plans and reselling them.

How to detect plan scammers

1. **If the deal sounds too good to be true, yep, it is.** For sake of illustration, imagine that a legitimate plan goes for \$3.95. 14,000 should run you \$55,300. In the case of 14,000 plans for \$49, each plan costs \$.0035. And that's about what they are worth. Imagine that a real, legitimate woodworker was selling his plans for .0035 cents each. If he sold 10 a day, he would earn a whopping \$100 in, well, just a little over seven and a half years.
2. **Take a close look at the web site selling this stuff.** Does it offer any other woodworking info? Does it offer advice or tips? Are there articles? Is there discussion? Is there any level of user interactivity? Does it have links to useful woodworking resources? Does it have *anything* about woodworking on it at all, besides one long ad for the DVD? Probably not. In fact, most are simply one long page that seems to scroll on forever. Check out the domain. One sent to me lives on a .tk domain. That's the domain for Tokelau. Nope, I've never heard of it either. Plus, these sites really *look* cheesy, like they were designed circa 1999. And they use a lot of exclamation marks.
3. **Look for an offer to "become an affiliate".** This is a typical multilevel marketing appeal. By getting others to sell something, you get richer. It's not technically a pyramid scheme because there is an actual product involved, but you'll make more money by recruiting others and NOT selling the product yourself.
4. **On YouTube, plan scams are pretty easy to spot.** Of course if a user uploads Norm Abram videos, strips the credits and adds his own URL to the video, that's a pretty good hint! Some of these guys set up a channel and upload videos that look like nothing more than PowerPoint presentations. Screen after screen of text pitching the DVDs and directing you to a web site. I have a feeling most of these guys have no idea how YouTube works, but think they can make a fortune really quick. It's probably in the "affiliate" instructions. Check out the channel page of the video you are watching. It probably has little or no personal identity or flair. And for God's sake, if you are a plan scammer don't ask me to post one of your lame-o videos on my channel!

Fight back and spread the word. Things *you* can do.

Professional woodworkers are busy actually *creating* and do not have the money, resources or time to constantly battle this stuff. However, there *is* a way to fight back without lawyers and judges, and it won't cost any money. I am doing it right now by getting the word out and increasing awareness of woodworking piracy. It is nearly impossible to stop people from selling pirated material. Efforts to end scams need to need to focus on buyers.

1. **Buy from reputable woodworking plan sellers** who resell plans with permission and compensate the designers. If you are in doubt, ask.
2. **Buy individual plans at a time.** I mean really, can you make *14,000 projects*? If you want to do some fine woodworking, be prepared to pay an honest rate for plans.
3. **Buy directly from the designers themselves.** There are lots of guys selling their own plans on their own web sites. You'll get a fair deal. Plus, a lot of times you can talk directly to the designer if you need help.
4. **Design your own stuff!** Get involved in woodworking communities, online or off. Sign up with LumberJocks.com. If you need help with something and post your question, you'll get help from real guys all over the world in a few minutes.
5. **Most importantly, spread the message** that woodworking piracy is not acceptable. Spread it through your social networks. If you buy a plan from a reputable seller, reward them by Tweeting about your experience. Tell your friends on Facebook about the issue. Write an article on your blog. Post links to legitimate plan sellers.

Remember, woodworking plans are designed by real guys with skills far beyond mine who put a lot of time into creating and testing them. By purchasing pirated plans you are robbing someone of his livelihood.

Where to get legit woodworking plans

Do not buy woodworking plans, videos or DVDs sold on Ebay. I'm sorry to make this a blanket statement, but there is just too much pirated stuff to possibly weed out the good stuff. Ebay has become nothing more than a magnet for shady dealers.

At WoodworkingForMereMortals.com, I have compiled a list of reputable woodworking plan web sites. Prices will vary depending on the plan you want. Many are free. But think about it; if you want to build an armoire, you are probably going to spend hundreds of dollars on wood and supplies. A few bucks for a decent plan will go a long way. And the guy who actually did the heavy lifting designing and testing it will be compensated. It's a win-win situation. And *that's* a real bargain.

— Steve Ramsey, *WoodworkingForMereMortals.com*

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