

Purchasing Agents

What Do They Do?

Purchasing Agents buy the parts, supplies and services that factories and businesses need. Their job is to obtain the highest quality merchandise at the lowest possible cost. They identify sources of materials, select suppliers, negotiate the lowest price and arrange contracts that make sure the correct amount of the product or service is received at the right time.

Specific job duties and responsibilities of Purchasing Agents vary by employer and the type of commodities or services to be purchased. Purchasing specialists employed by government agencies or manufacturing firms usually are called purchasing directors, manager, or agents. Some purchasing managers specialize in negotiating and supervising supply contracts and are called contract or supply managers. Purchasing Agents and Managers usually specialize in certain items ranging from raw materials, machinery and office supplies to construction services and airline tickets. They also work in a specific industry like communication, construction, electronics, energy, automobile manufacturing, financial services, mining, industrial controls, primary metals and metals fabricating, chemicals, transportation or clothing.

What Do I Have To Do To Be One?

Educational requirements usually depend on the size of the organization. Large stores and distributors, especially those in wholesale or retail, prefer applicants with a bachelor's degree with an emphasis on business. Manufacturing firms generally require applicants to have a bachelor's or master's degree in engineering, business, economics or an applied science. Many upper level positions for purchasing managers require a master's degree.

To be a Purchasing Agent you should be able to know how to analyze technical data, be a good communicator or negotiator, have solid math skills and be able to make quick decisions. Some classes to take in high school to prepare you for this occupation include Communications, Computers, Economics and Math.

How Much Do They Make?

Salaries of purchasing managers and agents vary depending on the industry and experience.

Nationally, purchasing trainees had an annual average salary of \$39,062 in mid 2004. Purchasing Agents earned an average of \$50,000. Purchasing Managers averaged \$67,900, while high-level executives, purchasing directors or vice-presidents of purchasing, averaged between \$102,300 and \$155,000. In 2003, the median annual salary of most Purchasing Agents was \$40,768.

What Can I Expect From the Job Market?

Nationally, about 242,200 Purchasing Agents were employed in 2002. Employment of Purchasing Agents through 2012 is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. The use of the Internet to conduct business (electronic commerce) has made information easier to obtain and has increased the productivity of Purchasing Managers. In manufacturing and service industries, computers handle most of the routine tasks -- leaving Purchasing Agents to concentrate on other aspects of the job. Opportunities should be best for people with graduate degrees in purchasing management or with specialized expertise.

About 10,725 Purchasing Agents are employed in Michigan. Most worked in urban areas, with the largest number employed in manufacturing industries. Many were also employed by business services companies, government agencies, and construction companies.

For more information on this occupation, click here: [Purchasing Agent Career Information](#)

Factoid

Purchasing agents buy machinery, equipment, tools, supplies or services for their companies at the lowest possible purchase price. They may specialize in the purchase of particular materials or business services such as furniture or raw materials and determine what their company needs to buy to keep operating. They also apply and help determine general purchasing policies. They research sales records and inventory levels of current stock, find suppliers and stay current on any changes in the supply of or demand for products and materials.

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