

## **Home Improvement Corner**

*Making the most of your money without sacrificing too much of your time.*

**How do you get the most for your investment while preserving your sanity?** Many people fear home improvement for sake of having to endure the process of finding a contractor. Others' fears begin once the contractor has been chosen. Choices ranging from the guru to the scam artist exist in every mature industry. The trick is finding the professional that can meet your needs and validate your decision with professionalism. Like your doctor or accountant, a contractor should be selected carefully to ensure a lasting relationship of understanding and trust.

Nobody ever asks for poor design and poor workmanship, but we've all heard the horror stories. Next time you locate a company in the yellow pages, try substituting a competitor's name. Does it make a difference in which you choose? This exercise illustrates 2 things clearly: firstly, it is difficult to differentiate from one to the next, and secondly, a significant gap exists between a company's intent and their actual performance. In today's market, choosing 3 contractors and throwing out the high and low bids does not guarantee you an average job for an average price. It does prove, however, that price is not the most important consideration when selecting a contractor.

Because people generally gravitate to those with similar values, try committing some time to query neighbors, colleagues and other acquaintances for references to reliable contractors. With little effort, you'll soon develop a short list of names. From this list, you should spend some significant time to determine which is best suited for your communication style and project scope. The more time spent finding the right match, the less time and energy you'll spend struggling during the project.

Consult the web for additional information about choosing a contractor. The Consumer Resources section of my website contains a 10-Tips document with links to government and private resources.

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