

Home Improvement Corner

Getting The Most Mileage Out Of Your Mouse.

When the internet began catching on in the early '90's, remodeling contractors with the means to develop websites found a new way to capture the attention of consumers. The "cool" factor allowed homeowners to virtually make decisions in front of their home computers, before meeting their contractor in person. This was an exciting way for the contractor to differentiate from the paper brochure, and create a digital profile many pages long.

As the speed and graphic capability of the internet has evolved, the consumer demand for interactivity has increased. As a result, social media has become the fastest growing public service in the history of man-kind. Video content is now becoming the rule instead of the exception, as static sites lack the appeal they once had. Before long, consumer web habits will morph into personalized internet experience that allows products and services fitting your profile, to find you.

Most homeowners find contractors based on either direct referral or keyword web search. Once a short list has been selected, the final decision is largely based on price, availability, and ability to perform. In the interest of getting the most mileage out of your mouse, however, it would be wise to also see what other customers are saying. If reputation is the single most important aspect to any renovation company's business, wouldn't it be nice to know what it is?

It's been scientifically proven that bad news travels faster than good news. People like to complain so much, in fact that numerous subscription based consumer websites charge a monthly fee in exchange for a sounding board. Now when contractors market to consumers that they are "on budget", "on time", and "quality craftsmen", their customers can quantify the degree of service they received in comparison to what was sold to them. This form of social networking gives the shopper the power to choose based on real peer experience. Eventually, the contractor whose price is high, service is poor, and craftsmanship is mediocre, has no choice but to improve their overall performance, or their reputation will suffer.

AngiesList.com is a popular consumer rating site that charges fees for consumers and contractors to join. Psychologically, I find the model flawed because financial consideration alters behavior. **GuildQuality.com** provides the construction industry a 3rd party survey platform for a fee. Although effective as a way to receive unbiased customer feedback, it does not benchmark, nor track comparisons to other companies. To date, the best I've been able to find combines the concepts of these services with a completely different revenue model. Because **LocalLoop.com** is based on what consumers want from various service providers, the site establishes a minimum performance level. If a company does not meet the minimum performance level, it cannot "buy" itself above the performance minimum.

After all the clicking, there's still nothing to compare to a personal interaction with a prospective contractor. Look for my next column that describes 3 customer interactions that helped shape my success.

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