



## Consumer Guide to Choosing a Home Repair or Remodeling Contractor

21 questions to ask to make sure your project gets done on time & on budget

Dear Homeowner,

You can save yourself a lot of time and money by finding one competent handyman who can do several different projects instead of hiring a different person or company for each individual job.

If you haven't had experience with home improvement contracting, it's difficult to tell if someone can successfully complete your projects. You may feel uncomfortable taking someone's word when they tell you, "We can do anything—it's not a problem."

This report explains the things you need to know to get the best job done at the best price. It explains what you need to know, why you need to know it and the questions to ask to make sure you get the information you need to make an informed decision.

Our extensive customer surveys have identified certain issues that homeowners are most concerned about. **The first is...**

## How do I make sure the job gets done right the first time?

Since anyone with a tool box and a pick-up truck can call themselves a handyman, how do you know who's any good without being an expert yourself? Good craftsmen will clean up after themselves each day, understand and be trained in how to handle any potentially hazardous materials and use the proper techniques for all repairs and remodeling jobs.

Because anyone can claim to do all these things, and you might not know they lied until it's too late, check their complaint record with the Better Business Bureau (BBB). A contractor who does shoddy work, does not come back for any necessary repairs or leaves your home or yard a mess will get complaints with the BBB.

Many contractors do not have established systems in place that they or their employees must follow to make sure your job gets done the right way.

As an international company, each Handyman Matters location adheres

to the highest standards set by our home office. Prior to employment, all of our craftspersons must pass a stringent 118-point skill assessment before going out on jobs.

Additionally, each local owner provides their craftspersons with extensive continuing education to ensure they are expanding their capabilities. This training course is broken down into 212 sections covering everything between a home's foundation and its roof.

Ask anyone how long they've been doing repairs and how many jobs they've done. Handyman Matters has done over 310,478 jobs across the globe.

Another sign of competence is that a financially strong company with good workmanship will not ask for up-front payments on small jobs (typically one or two days). Handyman Matters will not ask for payment until the job is completed and you're satisfied. On substantial remodeling projects, material and progress payments are typical.

Also, make sure they take most or all major credit cards. You can always protest poor workmanship or incomplete work on your credit card bill, but you can't do that if you pay by check.

Most contractors that go out of business fail in the first five years, so longevity is another indication of being a solid company. Handyman Matters has been in business for eight years with new locations opening all the time. Each and every one of our units has access to the experience and expertise we have accumulated from our 310,478 jobs.

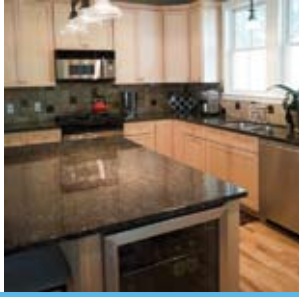
As an international franchise system, all of our locations abide by the standards set by our home office.

What this means to you is that we can offer quality work and consistent customer service across the country. Plus, you will always be able to contact a corporate representative should you have questions, comments or concerns about your local operation.

### Questions to ask:

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1. How long have you been in business?
2. Do you have complaints filed against you with the BBB?
3. What documentation do you have that proves you're qualified?
4. Do you require an advance deposit on all jobs?



Handyman Matters can provide over 1,162 services to customers at home or at the office.

## How can I be sure they can do the work I need?

When looking for a home repair or improvement provider, make sure they have experience performing the tasks you need done. Having someone say, "No problem, I can take care of it" is not enough. Anyone you call should be able to show you written documentation that they have the qualifications and experience to do the repair or remodel you need.

Handyman Matters can fix a broken window or completely remodel your bathroom. We can repair wood trim, doors, closets, patch concrete or paint your house – inside and out. Do you need an appliance installed, a shower replaced or just your caulk or grout repaired? We can repair or replace any type of floor or complete a small drywall patch. Whether it's a big job or just a small list of tasks, we can help.

*"Whether it's a big job or just a small list of tasks, we can help."*

Handyman Matters can provide over 1,162 services to customers at home or at the office. Since Handyman Matters has such experience with virtually all home repairs and improvements, you can make just one call and get all your repairs done. Call today for the list of over 1,162 different things we can do.

### Questions to ask:

5. What experience or proof do you have that you can do (whatever I need)?
6. How many times have you done (whatever I need) before?

# How do I know they'll be on time and won't cause me to wait around all day for them to show up?

One way to be confident with your home repair provider is with an on-time guarantee. Home repair contractors are notorious for arriving late... and sometimes a lot late. We're on time 94% of the time and our craftspersons are issued company mobile phones so they can call to notify you if they are running late.

We know you have better things to do than stay home from work waiting for a craftsperson to show up, only to have them be four or five hours late. We have a precise four-step system which takes into account your project's needs, estimates the time, and recommends not only the most qualified, but also the closest craftsperson to your home.

## **This system:**

1. Determines the scope of your project.
2. Generates an approximate budget for your project.
3. Determines the craftsperson closest to your property.
4. Determines the most qualified craftsperson for your project.

**Guarantee:** Our craftsperson will never arrive late without calling to notify you first.

## **Question to ask:**

7. What guarantee do you have that you will show up on time?

## How do I know I'm getting a fair price and my final bill won't exceed your quote?

Our customer surveys have taught us that pricing is a top concern. The National Association of Consumer Agency Administrators' most recent consumer survey said the home improvement industry received the highest number of complaints across the board. Many of the consumer complaints related to overcharging.

This is where you can get caught by scams and here's how they work: a contractor or repair company will give you a low-ball price to get your job and then do a poor job, use substandard materials, ask for more money after the project is started, or after getting your deposit, skip town and not do the project at all. You know a local company with no BBB complaints and advertisements in the phone book is not going to skip town with your money. Don't ever hire someone who comes to your door offering you a "deal" because they had a job cancellation or available time in their schedule they need to fill. They could be one of those operations that gets an up-front deposit and then disappears.

### So how do you protect yourself without being an experienced contractor?

If you are looking for a large-scale project, make sure you get a written quote on the letterhead of a local company specifying exactly what will and will not be done, get a written guarantee of performance and a guarantee the final price will not exceed the quote.

At Handyman Matters, we price our jobs on a "Time Plus Materials" (T+M) basis. This ensures you will only pay for the work we complete and any materials we purchase, and at any time you can stop our services. All of our craftsmen and employees are members of the local community and have been appropriately screened, tested and trained. Additionally, they are held accountable by the local and home office for their actions and measured by customer satisfaction feedback forms. To save money on all your projects, you should be aware of the pricing methods in the home repair industry and what they mean.

#### Questions to ask:

8. Do I get a written quote (for larger projects) & how is it calculated?
9. Will you help me make a materials list so I can buy my own materials to save money?

# Types of Home Improvement Quotes:

**Estimate:** This is an educated guess about the time and material costs necessary to complete your medium to large job. Usually, you will be provided a low and a high number that normally range within 20% of each other. The advantage is that you pay the actual cost and no extra mark up to cover contingencies. The disadvantage is that you do not know your exact cost in advance, but if you are comfortable with a price range then you can save money.

**Bid:** This is a firm quote on labor and materials for your job and will be the amount you pay. The advantage is that you know the exact cost up front. The disadvantage is that the contractor has to plan on unforeseen problems and your cost will be substantially higher than other methods because the contractor has to charge more to cover the risk of unexpected costs.

**T + M:** You are charged only for the actual time worked and materials purchased. Though most companies do not allow it, Handyman Matters will advise you on materials to buy and help you make a shopping list so you can buy your materials and do not have to pay us for shopping time or warranty markup on the materials you want.

The advantage of this method is that it is the least costly (estimates are always calculated at a higher hourly rate) and fastest way to have many small to medium sized projects done. Also, it is easy to expand your to-do list without changing any contracts. The disadvantage is that you do not have a firm price up front, but rather an approximate time frame.

**Price Not to Exceed:** This is like T+M but provides the homeowner with a price the project will not exceed. Typically, the contractor will quote you a price they are sure of, taking all unexpected problems into account. This method will be slightly more expensive than T+M, but it is your second best choice to keep your costs down on small to medium sized projects.

**Hidden Damage:** Damage discovered that could not be seen before starting your project is not included in any of these methods. Ethical companies will notify you of this and give you a written change order with any additional costs as a result before proceeding. Handyman Matters' policy is to stop work, inform you of any problems we discovered, and give you a written change order detailing all the additional costs for you to approve before continuing your project.

Depending upon the scope of your project, Handyman Matters can work with you in any of these ways, and we have found it's best for you to choose T+M for typical "handyman work", and the Price Not to Exceed option for larger projects.

# How do I know your craftspersons won't be rude, make a mess or have an appearance that could scare my family?

Handyman Matters considers the comfort and safety of our customers to be of critical importance, so we do criminal record searches for the last seven years in every area where a prospective employee has lived, a nationwide sex offender search, and a full traffic record search to make sure there are no DUI's or vehicular homicides on their record before we will hire anyone.

All of our craftspersons have a presentable appearance and are individuals your family can feel safe with.

Even though we know our employees don't have any of the serious problems listed above, we also train them to provide exceptional customer service.

## **Our employees will never:**

- Play loud or offensive music
- Smoke in your home
- Use foul language
- Leave a mess in your yard or on the job
- Leave your bathrooms or house dirty
- Improperly park their vehicles in your neighborhood

On top of that, if a repair or remodel will be messy, we will put down paper or plastic barriers to protect your carpets and make sure to cover any furniture in the area.

Our craftspersons also wear uniforms so you can identify whom you're letting into your home.

## **Questions to ask:**

10. What is your employee screening process before hiring (or if working with an individual, check his or her background)?
11. Do you have policies for how you or your employees will conduct themselves in my home? If so, what are they?
12. How will I contact my craftsperson before and during the job?

# How do you communicate with me?

Lack of communication between customers and contractors ranked high on our customer surveys. Often times when you are trying to contact your repair provider you end up getting voice mail and are in the dark about the status of your job. When will the craftsperson be in your home? For how long? And when is the craftsperson coming back?

## **Handyman Matters has several innovations you'll appreciate:**

- All craftspersons are issued mobile phones so you can always contact them during your job.
- Surveys show that 67% of the time customers call their repair provider they get voice mail and the typical return call is 18 hours—Handyman Matters answers the phone with a live person 90% of the time.
- Once they talk with you, many home improvement companies can take up to a week to get back to you about your project. Over 80% of the time Handyman Matters can provide a thorough consultation over the phone the very first time you call. And we can schedule your job right then. Larger jobs and remodels require an on-site inspection.

## **Here is our seven-step process for communicating with you:**

1. We will call the day before to confirm and review your project.
2. On arrival we will review the project and give you a time estimate in writing.
3. We will discuss your project with you step-by-step and explain the progress we've made each day.
4. We make sure you know when our craftsperson will be working, when he or she are getting materials, when he or she will be back and when he or she will complete the job.
5. In addition to the craftsperson working on your project, our friendly and professional office staff is available during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, to accommodate any schedule changes you may have.
6. We will immediately notify you if any changes are necessary to our plan.
7. We solicit feedback on our craftsperson's performance and guarantee to come back to fix any problems with our work for an entire year.

### **Questions to ask:**

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13. What steps do you take to communicate with me before, during and after my job?

14. Will you come back at no charge and fix any problems with your work that show up after you leave? For how long?



Handyman Matters offers a unique four-part guarantee.

## Do you have a guarantee?

Most home improvement individuals and companies do not have any guarantees other than they will cash your check. A guarantee is only valid if it is in writing.

### Handyman Matters offers a unique four-part guarantee:

1. If we find hidden damage or problems we could not see when we gave you the quote, we'll give you a written change order to approve before proceeding—no surprises!
2. All the work we do and materials we purchase are warranted for one year—any problems and we'll come back and fix it FREE of charge.
3. You won't have to wait—you will always receive notification if our craftsperson is running late.
4. You will never be asked for an advance deposit for small to medium sized jobs that do not contain specialty ordered items. You pay only for the work completed to your satisfaction!

### Questions to ask:

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15. What guarantees do you have in writing?



Test our company and get your money's worth.

## Are you available when I need you?

Most home improvement companies require a long lead-time in order to schedule their craftspersons. From the time you first call to get a quote, it could be five to seven weeks before they're actually on your job.

Also, it's typical to be charged a two to four hour minimum and often no quote is provided.

Handyman Matters operates differently. Our minimum is only one hour and in most cases you will have an idea of how long the project will take before we arrive. If we cannot provide you with a time frame over the phone, our craftsperson will provide you a time frame when he or she arrives. The craftsperson is there to work for that hour, so create a list, test our company and get your money's worth.

Generally we are able to start your project within a few days after you call, not five to seven weeks. How readily we can respond to emergencies depends on our schedule, but we can normally accommodate you quickly.

### Question to ask:

16. How long will it be before you can start work on my job?

## Is there anything else I should know?

Most people have no idea about the legal issues surrounding having someone do work in their home. Here's what you need to know and why you need to know it and the right questions to ask:

### Other questions to ask:

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#### **17. Do you have a current business license and/or contractor license (if your local government laws require it)\*?**

If they don't, beware. A valid business license is the most crucial item for any business owner, regardless of industry. If the service provider you're considering can't obtain this fundamental document, you might want to consider other aspects of their business practices.

Unlicensed contractors who only work in the summer to make extra cash probably don't invest as much in their own quality equipment as full time contractors do. Established contractors have credit accounts with their suppliers, but a non-professional may ask you to pay for his or her materials before he or she starts work. If a contractor does not pay a supplier, that supplier could come after you for payment.

Unlicensed contractors who run into problems on the job may not be experienced enough to solve them. Nothing stops them from walking away from a mess with your money. Even if they intend to be fair, cheap prices won't allow for any warranty work months or a year from now. If you hire a company and it utilizes independent contractors, each one should have liability insurance, otherwise you might be liable for injuries or mistakes made on their part.

#### **18. Do you have proof of insurance?**

If you hire an uninsured contractor and he or she gets injured while working on your property, you can be responsible to pay for medical and possible rehabilitation expenses and can be sued.

A legitimate contractor should be able to show you their current worker's compensation policy, their liability insurance and a dishonesty bond that covers you if someone steals anything from your home.

\*Many local governments do not require licensing for projects under a certain dollar amount, so smaller projects may not require a licensed contractor.



**Whether** it's a big job or just a small list of tasks, we can help.

**19. Do you have letters of reference from your bank suppliers to show that bills are paid and that you are in good financial standing?**

If a contractor goes out of business during your job, and they don't pay their suppliers, you could be responsible for covering the amount. Essentially you'll have to pay twice for work that may not have even been completed. For your protection, demand a "lien release waiver" at the end of the job.

**20. Do you have letters of reference from past customers that I can contact?**

One way to check a company's performance is to ask past customers what their experience was like. If someone cannot give you customer references, beware.

**21. Do you have a written safety program and follow safe work practice?**

Ask to see the documentation. The best safe work practice is to avoid accidents altogether, so insurance does not come into play. Handyman Matters has a 53-page safety manual that you are welcome to review.

# CONTRACTOR REPORT

For your convenience, here are all the questions you need to ask on one list to make sure you get your job done right, on time and on budget.	Contractor Checklist		
1. How long have you been in business?			
2. Do you have complaints with the Better Business Bureau? Make sure to check the complaint record.			
3. What documentation do you have that shows you are qualified?			
4. Do you require an advance deposit for all work?			
5. What experience or proof do you have that you are qualified to do my project?			
6. How many times have you done (whatever I need) before?			
7. What guarantee do you have that you will show up on time?			
8. Do I get a written quote for larger projects and how is it calculated?			
9. Will you help me make a materials list so I can buy my own materials and save money?			
10. What is your employee screening procedure before hiring (or if working with an individual, checking their background)?			
11. Do you have policies for how your craftsmen conduct themselves in my home? If so, what are they?			
12. How will I contact my craftsman before and during my job?			
13. What steps do you take to communicate with me before, during and after my job?			
14. Will you come back at no charge and fix any problems with your work that show up after you leave? For how long?			
15. What guarantees do you have in writing?			
16. How long will it be before you can start work on my job?			
17. Do you have a current business license and/or contractor license (if required by local government)?*			
18. Do you have proof of insurance?			
19. Do you have letters of reference from your bank and supplier and will you give me a lien release waiver letter at the end of my job?			
20. Do you have letters of reference from customers I can contact?			
21. Do you have a written safety program and follow safe work practices?			

\* Many local governments do not require licensing for projects under a certain dollar amount, so smaller projects may not require a licensed contractor.

Dear Homeowner,

Since 1997 we have been working towards industry change and community consciousness. We are embarrassed that our industry is the most complained about among consumers. We hope this guide will educate consumers and therefore reduce the number of complaints.

We need your assistance in asking the tough questions and helping eliminate the organizations and individuals that are tarnishing this great industry. Don't use repair and remodel companies or individuals that can't prove to you that they have answers for the questions in this guide. You will save money and time and have the peace of mind that you did everything you could to protect your family, yourself and your property.

As an international system we are setting high standards for the level of service and delivery of home improvements. The standards set in this guide are the minimum that all businesses in this industry should adhere to.

I hope this information has been helpful to you. Though our company meets and exceeds all the standards listed in this report and also on the checklist, we're not the only qualified and ethical home repair and improvement company.

Rest assured that if you follow the guidelines in this report you will end up with someone who does a superior quality job at a great price and does it on time.

If you would like extra copies of this report for any of your friends or relatives, give us a call and we'll be glad to send them out. When you are ready to have any repairs or remodeling done inside or outside your home, give us a call and we'll make the process painless and trouble free.

Sincerely,



Andy Bell  
*President and Founder*  
*Handyman Matters Corporate Headquarters*



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To find a location near you visit:

[www.HandymanMatters.com](http://www.HandymanMatters.com)



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