

# How to Find a Contractor

## Why Hire a Contractor

For homeowners who are selling their house and don't have the time, tools, or experience to complete a home repair or renovation project on their own, they have to hire a professional. A contractor is an independent expert or company who can design, install, repair, replace, remove, or build parts of or parts within a house. Because these services are done by independent contractors and companies, many do not know how to find a reliable professional.

Not sure you have the time to investigate the background of the general contractor and/or subcontractor? Consider this: In most states complaints filed by homeowners against contractors make up one of the largest -- if not *the* largest -- category of consumer complaints filed with the state attorney general's office. In other words, a surprising number of people end up very unhappy with the contractors they hire.

A million things can go wrong -- from poor workmanship to simply not finishing the job. Sometimes there is actual fraud, such as a contractor taking part of the money for a project up front and never returning. Sometimes the problems are less obvious, such as a contractor using substandard materials or neglecting to comply with local building regulations, both of which can lower the resale value of your home even if you decide to live with the substandard workmanship or materials.

However, it's also true that there are plenty of highly skilled, reliable, trustworthy contractors out there. And as a homeowner about to undertake a remodeling project, it's up to you to find one of the good ones.

## Finding a Contractor

There are **3 main ways to find a contractor** for an upcoming home improvement or repair project:

### Personal Referrals

Homeowners should talk to family, friends, and co-workers about reliable companies. It's a great way to get a personal testimonial from a trusted source. Also, keep an eye out for neighbors' projects that seem to be going well.

*Advantages of personal referrals:*

- Referring friend or family member may have already shopped around to find the best offer in the area
- Their opinion of the contractor's service is trustworthy
- Homeowners can view the quality of the work

### *Disadvantages of personal referrals:*

- Homeowners may not need same type of work done on their house
- Friend or family member may be able to afford a higher budget
- Friend or family member may have a different style of house or be in a different neighborhood

### **Phone Books/Directories**

Homeowners can use a local directory to look up a contractor. Yellow pages and white pages have anything from a basic listing, which has the company name and phone number, to a full-page advertisement, which lists the company's details and full range of services.

### *Advantages of phone book:*

- Homeowners can choose from companies at their own pace.
- Homeowners are able to call as many companies as they would like.
- Homeowners can review company details in advance to determine how close they are, possibly how big the company is, and what services are offered.

### *Disadvantages of phone book:*

- Homeowners have to call each company individually, describe their requirements, and answer the same questions.
- Homeowners tend to only call one or two companies. Receiving fewer bids on a project could mean the homeowner will end up paying a higher price.
- No direct referrals from trusted friends or family members to rely upon.

### **Online Referrals**

For online referrals, check with professional organizations such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, which has its own certification process for contractors. Zillow also offers a free professional directory where you can find the pro you need, where you live.

There are also host of online companies that provide contractor referral services. Homeowners can post their project on these Web sites and let a set number of contractors contact them. It's usually a free service for the homeowner. One excellent site to find local contractors, though be sure to look into references and liabilities, is Craigslist - this is one of many.

### *Advantages of online referral services:*

- Homeowners will receive multiple bids, which allows them to get the best rate on the work.
- Homeowners only have to post their project requirements once and answer questions one time, which saves time.

- Homeowners may be able to find additional online resources, such as financing and informational articles.

*Disadvantages of online referral services:*

- The Web site may not be a trusted resource. (Check if any complaints have been filed to the Better Business Bureau.)
- The online referral service may not have a contractor, in their network, close to the homeowner.
- No direct referrals from trusted friends or family members to rely upon.

## **Choosing the Right Contractor for You**

However you choose to find a contractor, please make sure you get several bids from several companies. And be aware that bids from different contractors may not compare apples with apples. For instance, Plumber Jones' bid to redo your bathroom may be attractively low compared to Plumber Smith's. But what you may not realize till the end is that Plumber Jones' idea of bathroom fixtures are the cheapest ones he can find at the home improvement center, whereas Plumber Smith uses elegant fixtures from an upscale supplier. Always be sure you understand what kind of materials will be used even if it means asking a lot of questions. Any contractor who won't take the time to answer your questions gets crossed off your list.

And now a word about money: NEVER select a contractor based solely on money. The lowest bidder may sometimes be a good choice. But the old adage that you get what you pay for is especially true in the construction industry. Contractors who do high-quality work hire high-quality subs and, because they're experienced and skilled, they charge more. They are also less likely to cut corners by using shoddy materials or slap dash construction techniques. Contractors can charge by the job or by time and materials according to the project's overall budget. If a contractor comes in with an especially low bid ask him how he figured the numbers. Does he pay his people a lot less than the competition? That's a red flag that his workers are inexperienced. Does he get a "good deal" on materials? Where? Why? All busy contractors get some kind of discount at the suppliers they regularly buy from. So if a contractor with a low bid says he gets a super-low price on materials, they are very possibly sub-standard in some way.

You should also select a contractor who is not only skilled and reliable but who is someone you can get along with. You may be on the phone with your contractor several times a day. You will be discussing money, how much of it you have, and what you want to do with it. You may have to work through disagreements over details. A contractor with lousy communication skills or someone who simply rubs you the wrong way is not the guy for you no matter how much your neighbor liked him.

Helpful Links:

<http://www.arkansas.local.com>

<http://contractors.buildingpros.com/build/state/Arkansas.html> - *Scroll to bottom of page to view the contractor you need.*