

The Consumer Guide

to Plumbing, Heating, Cooling, Electric, Drain Cleaning,
and Kitchen and Bathroom Remodeling Services

Life is full of choices. That is a good thing. But so many choices can quickly become overwhelming. We want to help you make the right choice the first time. That is why we created this consumer guide, to help you make informed choices when you hire someone to help you with your plumbing, heating, cooling, electric, drain cleaning, and bathroom and kitchen remodeling. Your home is your sanctuary, and whom you hire to help you maintain it is a very serious decision. We understand and respect that.

We hope that this guide will help you:

- save money.
- save time.
- avoid stress.
- know what to look for in a service provider.
- know what to avoid.
- know what questions to ask.
- get rid of misconceptions.
- avoid legal complications.
- get what you pay for.

Here are 18 things to think about when choosing a service provider:

1. **Relationship.** It is important to establish a relationship with a company that you trust so that you know that someone will be there when you need help, when there is an emergency. You don't want to be shivering in the dark and flipping through the yellow pages. A professional service company will be there for you when you need them. It may sound hokey, but look for a company that cares about you.
2. **Reputation.** Reputation is not everything, but it's close. You want to hire a company with a proven track record. Ask yourself, "Are these people beginners, or have they proven themselves?" While there's nothing wrong with supporting a newbie, that choice carries a significant risk with it. This is not a new blouse we are talking about – this is your *plumbing*. Or this is your *heat*. You probably don't have time to gamble. Choose someone who has been in the industry for a while (preferably decades). Has the company you're looking at been awarded for their services, or received any recognition from the media? If they have, that is a good sign. If they have not, you might wonder why!

3. **Research!** Ask for references. You should talk to real people who have recently acquired services from the company you're thinking of hiring. And don't just settle for references that the company provides. Ask around. Beware of written testimonies with no name attached – anybody could have written those. Someone who has never even met your service provider could have written those. You want to talk to real people. (This is a good reason to establish a relationship with a company before crisis strikes. When your pipes are leaking in the middle of the night, it might not seem like a good time to call around for references.)
4. **Licenses!** Please make sure that your service company has the appropriate licenses. Don't be afraid to ask for a provider's license number! (These should be available on a company's website.) You do not want an electrician with an expired license in your walls. If something goes wrong and your provider was not licensed, you will have no legal recourse and you will be stuck with the bills, and possibly fines. Sometimes people think they can save money if they go with an unlicensed service, but it often ends up costing a lot more money in the end.
5. **Bonded.** Make sure that a company is bonded. This means that should something go wrong, the company has money set aside. This money is under the control of the state, not the company. If you have a complaint against a company, you would file a claim, there would be an investigation, and then recompense would be made to you out of this bond. It is well within your rights to ask for proof that a company is bonded.
6. **Insurance.** Make sure that a company is insured. Heaven forbid, someone gets hurt during a job on your property. If his or her company is not insured, an accident claim could get filed against you, and you could be found liable. Obviously, this can be very costly. If the company has its own insurance, you are protected. If in doubt, ask for proof that a company is fully insured.
7. **Upfront pricing.** Expect to see a standardized price guide that shows you that you are getting the same price as your neighbors. Make sure you know how much something will cost before service starts, and get it in writing. Companies should not keep secrets from their customers. No secrets means no unpleasant surprises!
8. **Web technology.** Expect a company to have a web presence. This is the information age. Be very wary of a company that isn't aware of that. Expect a service company to have a current, frequently updated website that you can refer to for information. Expect a company to have a social media presence. If a company will communicate with you on Facebook and Twitter, that shows they care about both technology and their relationships with their customers. If a company does not bother to keep up with Internet technology, you might wonder what other technologies they are not up to date on.
9. **Real people.** While you want to be able to communicate with your company online, you also want to be able to talk to a real person when you need to. It

doesn't bring much comfort to talk to an answering machine when you are in an emergency situation. You want to deal with a company that offers real people who will talk to you on the phone. You don't want to deal with someone who outsources their phone calls to someone who has never heard of you.

10. **Questions.** True professionals know how to and take the time to answer questions. So ask them! Never be intimidated into silence. A service company that cares about you will *want to* answer your questions! That's what they are there for! Professional service providers will have the answers, and if they care about you, should be willing to provide those answers for you on the spot. This applies to the receptionist who answers the phone, and the plumber who shows up at your door. If you have a question, and someone doesn't want to answer it, then that is the equivalent of shady business. You are the customer – you deserve to know and understand what is going on!
11. **Continuing training.** Professionals care about their craft. They want to keep improving their skills and continue to educate themselves, so that they can keep up with the times and stay competitive in the field. You want to hire professionals who are involved in ongoing training, not someone who hasn't learned anything new in years.
12. **Character.** You have every reason to be prudent about whom you invite into your home, but true professionals will show up in uniform, with ID badges. They will come from a company that requires background checks on all employees. They will come from a company that drug tests all employees on a regular basis. You should be 100% comfortable inviting a service provider into your home.
13. **Respect for your home.** It can be infuriating when you hire someone to come into your home and then have to clean up after them. It shouldn't be like that and you shouldn't put up with it! A true professional will show up in a clean truck or van with clean clothes on. A true professional will take great care to protect your home and should use floor protectors. When you call a service provider, ask if they use tarps, plastic, or protective carpets. When a service person leaves your home, there should be no sign that he or she was even there.
14. **Fully-stocked truck.** Gone are the days of making multiple trips for tools and parts. A provider should show up in a fully-stocked vehicle, and not have to run errands, tying you up for days.
15. **Convenient Scheduling.** Flexible scheduling. You should be able to get the help you need around your schedule. A company that cares about its customers will offer services 24/7/365, and will treat a Sunday morning just like a Tuesday afternoon. If your furnace breaks on Saturday, it's not your fault, and a company that cares will not act like it is. If you need service on the weekend, you should be able to get it, without paying an arm and a leg! If your provider cannot accommodate your busy life, you should find one who can.

16. **Warranty.** You should expect that most parts and services come with a 3-year warranty. (That's *come with*, which means you don't need to pay extra for it.) This is the industry standard, and you should not settle for less! If a company will not stand behind its work, you do not want to pay for it. Do not believe anyone who tells you that you don't need a warranty, or that warranties are implied. You want to hire a service that uses quality parts. Some less-than-reputable service companies will install low-quality parts so that the customer will have to buy more parts in the near future. Don't let this happen to you. Request a warranty.
17. **Payment options.** Expect payment and financing options. If someone says they cannot accept credit, then that person is living in the past. Yes, a company will have to pay a small percentage of its earnings to the credit card company for credit card transactions, but that is no excuse for a company to deny its customers this convenience. And let's face it: sometimes emergencies happen. If you lose your electricity on Christmas Eve, you might not have the money in the bank account to write someone a personal check. We don't always have the money on hand when emergency strikes. You should expect your service company to work with you to get you the help you need. A company that cares will accept all credit cards and will have financing options for those in need. (Also, when you pay by credit card, you have the right to contest any charges you did not agree upon.)
18. **Satisfaction guarantee.** Expect a company to promise you your satisfaction guaranteed. If your company is not promising you satisfaction, then another company will. It's just good business. It's just ethical.

Thank you for reading our Consumer Guide to Plumbing, Heating, Cooling, Electric, Drain Cleaning, and Kitchen and Bathroom Remodeling Services. We hope this information is helpful to you. If you have any questions that this guide has not answered, please contact us at 877-287-8282. We are happy to answer your questions.

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