

# You WILL Regret Using The Internet To Find a Contractor

## What You Should Do Instead



**CONTRACTOR HIRING HELP**  
WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW WILL HURT YOU

Brought to You By [www.contractorhiringhelp.com](http://www.contractorhiringhelp.com)

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Problems With ServiceMagic and The Secrets Behind the Web Form</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The First Rule of a Web Form: Never Fill Out a Web Form!</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ServiceMagic and Microsites</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Oh No! I Filled Out a Web Form. Now What?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Second Rule of a Web Form: Never Fill Out a Web Form!</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Summary for The Problems With ServiceMagic and The Secrets Behind the Web Form</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 2: ServiceMagic Clones: Are They Any Better?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Clone Company #1</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Clone Company #2</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>One Last Trick Up Their Sleeves</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Just Don't Do It</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Summary for ServiceMagic Clones: Are They Any Better?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Will Blogs Help Me Find a Contractor?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>What It Is</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>What It Is Not</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>How To Know If a Blog is Reliable</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Reliable Blogs</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Unreliable Blogs</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>To Blog or Not to Blog, That is the Question</b>	<b>17</b>

Summary for Will Blogs Help Me Find a Contractor	18
<b>Chapter 4: The Myth of User-Rating Systems</b>	<b>19</b>
The problem is that this data is flawed!	19
Better Business Bureau	19
I'd Like to File a Complaint	20
Wrong!	20
Angie's List	21
Not so much.	21
Something Smells Fishy	22
Yelp	22
The Yelp Scheme	22
Diamond Certified	23
Finals Thoughts on User Rating Systems	24
Summary for The Myth of User-Rating Systems	24
<b>Chapter 5: The Reasons Individual Websites Are Unreliable</b>	<b>25</b>
Why You Should Visit a Contractor's Website	25
Summary for The Reasons Individual Websites Are Unreliable	26
<b>Chapter 6: Solution: When is the Internet Good for Hiring a Contractor?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Bios</b>	<b>28</b>

# Introduction

The Internet is a fascinating and wonderful tool for finding information and getting things done nowadays. Do you need to find a dentist in your hometown? A simple Google search can show you who is in the area. Perhaps you need a mechanic while on a road trip because you broke down in the middle of nowhere? Search engines to the rescue! Heck, you can even find a date on Match.com, research movie times on Fandango, and use Open Table to make restaurant reservations for the two of you for later that evening. By utilizing the search power of the Internet, basically anything and everything are right at your fingertips.

There is one major exception to the rule, however.

**When it comes to finding a contractor, you need to be extremely cautious about using the Internet!**

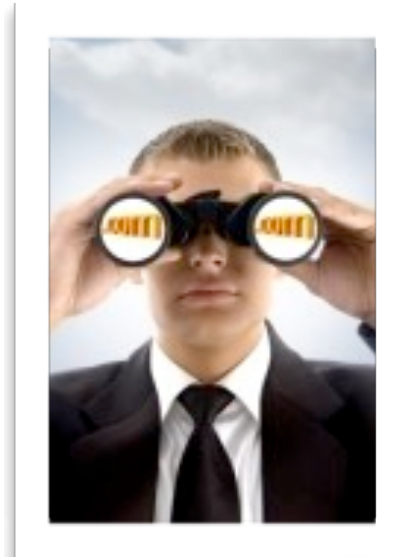
There is a habitual pattern for homeowners across the country when it comes to projects that have gone horribly wrong. If they could hit rewind, trace backwards to where their problems first came about, it's almost always because they found their contractor using the Internet.

Now look. We get it. We use the Internet all the time too. When it comes to researching on the web, it's the path of least resistance. It's just so incredibly easy to fire up the computer, sit at your desk or in your favorite comfy chair, and start surfing around. You think you're a good consumer. How could you not be? You're spending hours and hours on countless websites. You're bookmarking pages that look intriguing. You've got spreadsheets and Word docs and folders on your desktop just loaded with all kinds of contractor information. You're doing more research in one week than you did in four years of college!

But you're going to pay a dear price for using the Internet to find your contractor. There are just too many predators out there lurking within those online shadows. It's virtually impossible to determine the differences between the good guys and the bad guys.

**Therefore, if you remember nothing else from this eBook, please remember this one thing: it's nearly impossible to find a good contractor on the Internet.**

In this eBook, you are going to learn about the pitfalls of finding your contractor on the Internet. We are going to focus on the following online resources and



Searching for a contractor? Beware of the perils of the Internet

expose – for the very first time – why each of them are flawed. You will learn about:

1. ServiceMagic and the secrets behind the web form
2. ServiceMagic clones: Are they any better?
3. The problems with blogs
4. Myths of user-rating systems
5. Researching a contractor's website: The do's and don'ts

Not only will we show you the major problems with each of these online resources so you can make sure to steer clear of them, but also you'll learn how to use your precious time and energy to find your contractor the right way. The end result will be a home improvement project done efficiently, within budget, and one that doesn't make you pull your hair out in frustration.

Let's get started by showing you the first major pitfall when trying to find a contractor on the Internet: ServiceMagic and the secrets behind the web form.

# Chapter 1: The Problems With ServiceMagic and The Secrets Behind the Web Form

One of the biggest sites on the web that homeowners typically visit when searching for a contractor is ServiceMagic.com. During the spring of 2011, the

If you fill out the ServiceMagic web form, you might as well pay to have all your personal information thrown up on a billboard alongside a major freeway.

site averaged over 2 million unique visits each month<sup>1</sup>. Those are some staggering numbers. If ServiceMagic is garnering that kind of traffic to their site, then surely it's a reliable source of information, right?

Well, maybe not. There's actually an entire website (<http://service-magic.pissedconsumer.com>) dedicated to the company's shady practices.

When you visit their website, you are going to encounter their web form. **Do not fill out the ServiceMagic web form!** We can't stress this point enough.

You might be thinking, "But what's the big deal about filling out just one web form on a site that so many other homeowners frequent?" If you fill out the ServiceMagic web form, you might as well pay to have all your personal information thrown up on a billboard alongside a major freeway. We can almost see your billboard now:

Hi contractors. My name is Shirley Jones. My address is 555 Main St. and my phone number is 987-654-3210. Badger me day and night, no matter how skilled you might be.

Are you OK with total strangers having




By filling out web forms, contractor's eyes are upon you

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.quantcast.com/servicemagic.com>

access to your personal information so that they can hound you at all hours?  
Probably not.

Submit and Get Matched to Prescreened  
Wood Shake Roofing Contractors



**Install or Replace Wood Shake or Composite Roofing**

ZIP/Postal Code (Location of Request): \*

What is the nature of this project? \*

Completely replace roof       Install roof on new construction  
 Repair existing roof

What kind of wood roofing do you want?

Wood Shingles       Wood Shakes  
 Wood Shingles-Fire Resistant       Wood Shakes-Fire Resistant

Which special features would you like for your roof?

Ridge vent       Snow guards or brackets  
 Gutters and downspouts       Turbine vents  
 Skylight/Solar tube       Heat tape  
 Water diverters       Would like recommendation

How many stories is your home?

Select One ▾

Are you aware of any leaks or damage to the roof?

Select One ▾

Are you interested in learning about green alternatives for this project?

Yes  
 No

[Click Here to Continue](#) ➔

Step 1 2 3 - Describe Your Install or Replace Wood Shake or Composite Roofing Need

Never fill one of these out!

### **The First Rule of a Web Form: Never Fill Out a Web Form!**

So how do you know if you're about to fill out a web form versus something that might actually help and provide you with value, such as a newsletter or email series? Web forms usually ask for the following information:

- Full name
- Address
- Phone number
- What's your project?
- What's your budget?

If you were simply signing up for a newsletter or emails series, the only piece of information you'd be asked to enter is your email. Nothing else. But if specific

information is requested for your project then that's a **major red flag**.



If you encounter one of these web forms, stop everything you're doing and close that window. Shut down your Internet browser, turn off your computer, and slowly walk away.

Simply entering an email address to sign up for a newsletter? Totally safe

The second you fill out a web form and click "submit," you'll be funneled into an evil machine that will make your life miserable.

### **ServiceMagic and Microsites**

ServiceMagic microsites are cleverly disguised so that you don't know exactly what you're dealing with. The company probably has over a million web forms floating around the Internet on these various microsites. This means that while you think you're just reading about something like kitchen remodeling on a random blog that appears legit, you're really seconds away from getting snookered into giving away your personal information.

Yup, if you fill out the "More Info" or "Want to Learn More" form, you're really just falling into the trap.

It's all very tricky. You won't really have any way of knowing that you're on a ServiceMagic microsite. The site will share no resemblance to ServiceMagic.com. The content on the site will be very specific. Perhaps it addresses vanity installations. Maybe it only covers hardwood floor installations. And that's really the whole point. The company doesn't want you to know who's behind the microsite. They just want you to fill out the web form.

*Window* • **REPLACEMENT** • *Center*

FIND **LOCAL, CERTIFIED** CONTRACTORS

COMPARE **COMPETING** PRICE QUOTES & SAVE!

WINDOW STYLES | WINDOW ARTICLES | WINDOW FRAMES | MANUFACTURERS | SITE RESOURCES

### Compare Window Replacement Costs And Estimates

Replacing your home windows is an exciting but oftentimes daunting home improvement project. We've put together a wealth of information on home window replacement styles, the best frames and materials for your projects and tons of free site tools - including our [window replacement cost estimator](#).

We also make it easy to **COMPARE FREE PRICE ESTIMATES** from pre-screened, **LICENSED HOME WINDOW REPLACEMENT COMPANIES**. Take advantage of **AMAZING PROMOTIONS** - like this actual offer from one of our participating contractors!

- Receive 30% off from us, 30% off with tax credit, for a total of **60% OFF YOUR WINDOWS**
- Foam inject insulated frames
- Highest energy efficiency windows
- Most purchases qualify for federal tax credit
- Custom home installation
- Super competitive pricing.

### QUICK WINDOW CONTRACTOR SEARCH

1. How soon would you like to begin your window replacement project?  
 Immediately    Within the next 6 Months
2. Do you own your home?  
 Yes  
 No, but I am authorized to make improvements  
 No
3. Please enter your zip code

Filling out lots of personal information? Major sign of danger!

There are a lot of other sites on the web pulling the exact same web-form shenanigans. Reliable Remodeler, QuinStreet, CalFinder, QualitySmith, and more are all trying to suck you into their vortex. Don't let them. You have no idea who you're giving your information to. As we said before, you're basically putting everything out there on a billboard for the world to see.

The solution is simple: **never fill out a web form**

### **Oh No! I Filled Out a Web Form. Now What?**

Let's take a look at what happens if you do fill out a web form. Maybe you didn't mean to. Perhaps it was an accident. Like we said, many of these microsites are incredibly misleading. Perhaps you simply wanted to know more about the differences between hardwood and linoleum floors. Unfortunately, the form you filled out isn't what you think it is.

This is what happens when you fill out a web form:

- Your personal information is sold

- On average, it's sold to around five to eight contractors in your area
- These contractors pay ServiceMagic a fee to attain your information
  - This fee is determined by the project's budget that you originally entered into the web form
    - If you say your budget is between 5-15K, your lead may be sold for around \$35
    - If you say your budget is between 15-30K, your lead may be sold for around \$50
    - If you say your budget is 30K and up, your lead may be sold for around \$75

It's pretty scary, isn't it? And here you thought you were just going to get more information on floors or bathtubs. No doubt most homeowners would never dream of filling out a web form had they known their personal information was going to be captured and ransomed to the highest bidders.

### **The Second Rule of a Web Form: Never Fill Out a Web Form!**

The most compelling reason you don't ever want to fill out a web form – other than advertising your personal information to random people – is because the majority of the contractors purchasing your lead from ServiceMagic are doing so because they can't generate their own business. They don't generate their own business because they don't do good work. Because many of these contractors don't do good work, they don't have the revenue to do standard marketing and advertising. And since these contractors can't afford standard marketing and advertising, they have to purchase cheap leads from a third-party service, such as ServiceMagic.

Once a contractor like this pays for your lead, they'll use all their sales tactics to intimidate you to sign the bottom line.

So what exactly are you in store for? Well ...

- Because these companies have paid upwards of \$75 for the rights to your information, they will continue to call you (day and night) until they reach you
  - **They will be relentless!**
- Let's say that you've endured call after call. You finally booked an appointment with five different contractors. Now you get to deal with five knowingly desperate contractors that are willing to say or do ANYTHING to get you to sign a contract
- Of course these contractors are motivated for you to sign. You currently represent a loss to their business (remember the \$35-75 they spent to find you?) unless they can persuade you to buy.

Doesn't exactly sound like a solid way to find a reliable and talented contractor, does it?

In the end, contractors usually drop out of the ServiceMagic system on their own because contractors get tired of repeatedly calling homeowners and dealing with the whole convoluted process. This means that ServiceMagic must constantly recruit new contractors to fill these voids. How can they possibly keep refreshing their stable of contractors? Easy. They lower the standards and make the barrier to entry practically nil so that contractors – including the absolute worst of them – can purchase you as a lead.

Wondering what the solution is? Let's find out!

### **Summary for The Problems With ServiceMagic and The Secrets Behind the Web Form**

Pros:

- ServiceMagic is good for locating gardeners, maids, plumbers, a handyman, and any service that costing under \$500

Cons:

- Risky to use for most – if not all – remodeling projects
- You'll be harassed by 5-8 contractors that see you as just a lead
- Deceptive business practices (web forms disguised as an information source)
- Personal information is sold to multiple contractors without your permission

# Chapter 2: ServiceMagic Clones: Are They Any Better?

In this chapter we're going to examine some of the ServiceMagic copycats out there (CalFinder, Reliable Remodeler, and many more) that you'll be forced to deal with. While many are exact replicas of ServiceMagic, some companies slightly tweak their sales process to get you to buy. Let's examine them here in further detail.

## Clone Company #1

Let's look at the first ServiceMagic clone and how they utilize the web form to drive business.

Let's say you've filled out a web form knowingly or unknowingly. It doesn't really matter. Once you do, Clone Company #1 will search through your responses for specific keywords and look to see if certain criterion is met. This could include information such as your budget, what kind of remodel you're looking to do, where you live, and much more.

Here's where your troubles begin:

Once again your information has been collected and ransomed!

- Clone Company #1 calls to do a phone interview. During the interview, they act super friendly and knowledgeable
- They act like they are a part of the contracting company you'll actually be doing business with
  - **They aren't!**
- They are simply highly trained operators with scripts placed in front of them. These scripted questions help determine how serious you are about doing a project
- Surprise! Now they get to sell you as a lead to a contractor at a premium cost because you've been "prescreened."

Of course, "prescreened" in this instance means a whole lot of nothing. Clone Company #1 basically just hired some trained operators to ask you a few questions regarding the responses on your web form. But the reality is that this company can now go back to contractors and tell them you're "prescreened and serious about doing the project."

Once again your information has been collected and ransomed!

Now let's say you didn't pass the screening process conducted by Clone Company #1 and their operators. Perhaps during the call it's pretty obvious that you aren't ready to do a project yet, or your current budget consists of metal coins rattling around in a piggy bank.

You won't be bothered again, right?

Wrong. You'll simply be sold to a lower-end contractor. Your lead will be sold for around \$10!

Makes you feel cheap, doesn't it?

The image shows a three-step web form for window projects. Step 1, 'Describe your project', asks which best describes the project (window replacement or frame/repair), if interested in blinds/shades/shutters, and what help is needed (quotes, materials, products, or ideas). Step 2, 'Provide a few more details', asks for the number of windows, if the user owns the home, when they want to begin, and their zip code. Step 3, 'The last step', asks for first and last names, street address, email, and phone number, and includes a 'Click to See Experts >>>' button. The VeriSign logo is in the bottom right corner.

Beware when a web form wants more than just your email address

## Clone Company #2

Let's now look at Clone Company #2 and how they slightly tweak the ServiceMagic web form strategy.

Clone Company #2 has an elaborate tracking and reporting system set up whereby contractors can join, pay a monthly fee, and are then connected to homeowners that filled out various web forms.

The tracking and reporting system allows contractors to sign into a personalized dashboard to manage lead results. It even enables contractors to report a bad lead in an attempt to attain a refund. This could happen when a contractor tries calling you over and over and over, but you never pick up or speak with him. If this happens, the contractor is able to get a refund on you.

It's kind of like having a bounty on your head, isn't it?

One last thing to note: when contractors use the services of Clone Company #2, they can't get a refund on you once they speak with you over the phone. Even if you just say, "Stop calling me. I don't want an appointment. Ever!" The contractor can never be reimbursed the money he spent to buy you as a lead in the first place.

### **One Last Trick Up Their Sleeves**

Here's one more trick that's used by Clone Companies such as CalFinder and Reliable Remodeler. When you tell them you're thinking about doing a home improvement project, they will already have prepared questions aimed at figuring out the size and scope of your project. The dollar amount dictates what tier you fall into.

For example, let's say you answered the following questions for a kitchen remodel:

- What material countertop are you considering?
- What type of appliances are you considering?
- What type of flooring are you considering?

If you answered granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, and Brazilian mahogany hardwood floors then your project would be considered a top-tier lead and sold to a contractor for the highest amount possible.

Here's a typical breakdown of a per-lead cost for contractors:

- High-end kitchen remodel: \$75.00
- Mid-range kitchen remodel: \$50.00
- Low-end kitchen remodel: \$25.00

Once again you are sold to the highest bidder and NOT to the most talented and trustworthy contractor.

### **Just Don't Do It**

Now you've learned why you should never fill out a web form. Once you do, and a contractor buys you as a lead from either ServiceMagic or various Clone Companies, you represent a loss in revenue for that contractor. So of course he's going to hound you, call you day and night, and do everything he can to get inside your home to make that sale. He simply MUST get a return on his original investment.

The solution is simple: **if you never fill out a web form, you won't have to deal with any of this nonsense.**

And if you're still wondering what the right solution is for finding a contractor, we'll address that very soon.

### **Summary for ServiceMagic Clones: Are They Any Better?**

Pros (Same as Chapter 1):

- ServiceMagic clones are good for locating gardeners, maids, plumbers, a handyman, and any service that costing under \$500

Cons (Same as Chapter 1):

- Risky to use for most - if not all - remodeling projects
- You'll be harassed by 5-8 contractors that see you as just a lead
- Deceptive business practices (web forms disguised as an information source)
- Personal information is sold to multiple contractors without your permission

# Chapter 3: Will Blogs Help Me Find a Contractor?

In the previous two chapters, we've focused on ServiceMagic, its clones, and the horror of filling out web forms. Now that you know to stay away from those kinds of websites, let's turn our attention to blogs.

Many of you are already reading blogs on the Internet whether you know it or not. Blogs are incredibly useful websites for researching and attaining information on basically any subject. Before we talk about the pros and cons of using a blog to find a contractor on the Internet, let's take a quick second to define exactly what a blog is (and what it is not):

## What It Is

- A blog is a type of website or part of a website
- An individual or company regularly adds entries about current events, specific subjects, and more
- Blog entries are usually displayed in reverse-chronological order
- Blogs tend to be interactive; they enable readers to leave comments and have a dialogue with one another regarding the blog's subject matter
- A typical blog tends to run around 400-800 words
- [Here's an example of a blog](#) for the home improvement industry



When reading blogs, proceed with extreme caution

## What It Is Not

- A blog is not a static webpage, which basically means a page with content that never changes
- A blog is not a sales page pressuring you to buy anything, although you may see ads and promotional opportunities surrounding an article
- A blog is not a full-length article, such as something you'd see in the New York Times or USA Today

Now that you have a clear understanding of what a blog is and is not, it's time to discover how they can both help and hinder your quest for finding a contractor on the Internet.

## How To Know If a Blog is Reliable

When it comes to blogs, it's not always easy to tell right off the bat if it's reliable content. Let's keep it simple here and examine reliable blogs versus those that should make you leery:

### Reliable Blogs

- It's written by a fellow homeowner who has done a similar project
- Written by a retired contractor with no vested interest in your project - he's just trying to convey helpful information
- A site full of purely useful content, such as [Bob Vila](#)
- Blogs that give you free, unbiased advice

There's a ton of trickery and shady marketing below the surface of many blogs that appear legit.

### Unreliable Blogs

- While reading the blog, you realize the site has a vested interest in getting you to take an action that benefits THEM and not you
- Blogs disguised as article marketing tools aimed at funneling you down to a specific project, product, or solution
  - While the info on the site might be helpful, look for additional information from unbiased blogs verifying that validity of the site
- If you find yourself on a site that is very specific - and they claim that they are the ONLY solution - you know it's biased
- You end up on a blog by first reading content on an article-marketing site, such as Squidoo, HubPages, and Ezine.
  - By clicking on a link inside these articles, you've fallen pray to an unreliable blog.
- You're asked to fill out a web form. Any requested information beyond just your email address should raise major red flags.

## To Blog or Not to Blog, That is the Question

The overarching theme here is that blogs can certainly help you during the research phase. If you're simply generating ideas and gathering data, then have at it.

But be very careful. There's a ton of trickery and shady marketing below the surface of many blogs that appear legitimate. Use blogs to gather data; don't ever use a blog as the trusted resource for finding a contractor on the Internet.

So if blogs can't be trusted, where should you turn? Keep reading to find out.

### **Summary for Will Blogs Help Me Find a Contractor**

Pros:

- Great if written by another homeowner that did a similar project
- Only useful if written by a retired contractor
- Perfect if the blog isn't selling anything and is merely offering free advice

Cons:

- Hard to tell if they are self-serving traffic generators
- Information can be heavily skewed to the blog's solution
- Deceptive web forms

# Chapter 4: The Myth of User-Rating Systems

Arguably one of the most popular ways of attaining information on the Internet is through websites featuring user-rating systems. If you've ever used a site like Yelp to read restaurant reviews, then you're familiar with user-rating system websites. The popularity of these sites has exploded. This means that the amount of rating data is everywhere.

## **The problem is that this data is flawed!**

In this chapter we're going to show you the myth of user-rating systems. The reason these sites are flawed is because they're portrayed in the media as trustworthy resources. They're portrayed as reliable destinations that guarantee you won't get screwed over by a contractor. But that's just not the case.



User-rating system websites are garbage

All of the user-rated driven sites on the web have flaws in their philosophies; in some cases the sites are just plain biased.

You need to stay away from user-rating friendly websites. Really the only value you can possibly get from them is to simply find the name of a contractor and his direct contact information. Other than that, you really don't know what you're getting into when you visit these sites.

Let's examine some of the most popular sites on the web that have flourished by using user ratings.

## **Better Business Bureau**

By far the biggest rating system is the Better Business Bureau (also commonly known by its acronym, BBB). The BBB is the most respected user-ratings website and some homeowners will hire a contractor based purely on a BBB rating.

So what could possibly be flawed about the BBB?

Problems with the Better Business Bureau start with the way they're positioned in the media and through marketing efforts. They are held up as a consumer protection agency. They appear to be the voice of the people, for the people.

Here's the reality, however: if you're a business owner and you pay your monthly membership fee, it would be almost impossible to get kicked out of the BBB. This means a business could do years of damage and rip off dozens of consumers, but so long as they pay their monthly dues the BBB would need years to catch on to these dirty deeds. So while a business is conducting shady practices, and the BBB is taking years to figure it out (while still accepting the company's monthly fees, of course), you could end up hiring this inept company based upon a faulty BBB rating.

**If you're a business owner and you pay your monthly membership fee, it would be almost impossible to get kicked out of the BBB.**

### **I'd Like to File a Complaint**

Let's take a closer look at the flaws of the BBB. Pretend for a second that you, the homeowner, call the BBB to complain about a shady contractor. You're doing your duties as a good citizen to make sure fellow homeowners won't wind up hiring the individual that royally screwed up your project.

When you call the Better Business Bureau, they will ask you to write out your complaint. You'll then receive a case number. Next, the BBB will call the "offending" company to attain their side of the story. Seems pretty legit so far, right?

### **Wrong!**

Here's what really happens. The BBB proceeds to coach the offending company on how to – in the Better Business Bureau's expert opinion – appease this offended customer, aka the angry homeowner. But the BBB isn't really doing anything about the situation other than offering the shady contracting company some advice. If they don't help the contracting company deal with this dicey situation then that company could drop out. They've been paying their monthly fees for years so the BBB is going to do everything they can to rectify the situation. Their business model depends on it.

The Better Business Bureau is a pay-to-play business. The business model is structured so that if a company is booted out due to low ratings by a consumer, then their goes the BBB's revenue.

It makes you wonder how many companies you've trusted in the past who had no business being call a better business, doesn't it?

### **Angie's List**

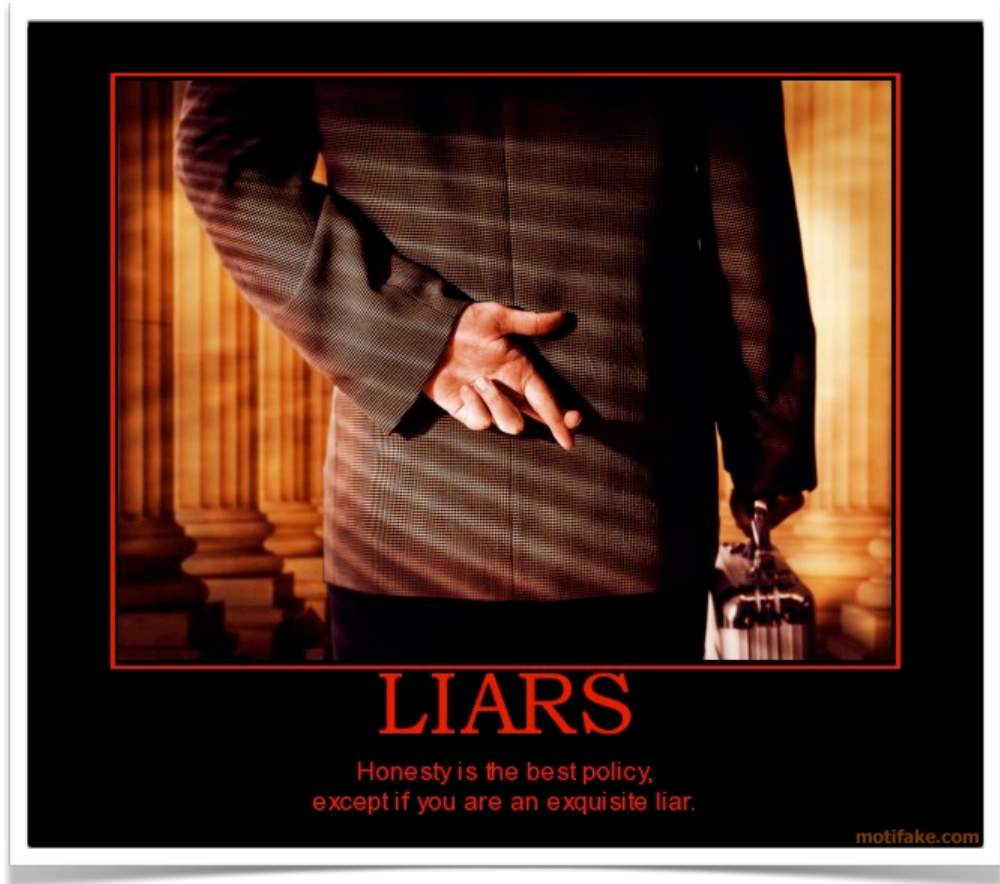
On the surface, the user-rating website Angie's List appears to be the ultimate tool homeowners can use to attain good and reliable contractor ratings.

### **Not so much.**

Angie's List has one critical flaw: the aging of the rating system. The system could rate a contractor as A-plus certified, and at some point in time he really could've been.

The major issue is that he may not be one right now. And right now is all you care about.

What you might notice is that the positive ratings usually all came from a year ago or more. Well, who knows what may have happened in the last year. Maybe he got divorced. Maybe he lost all of his good installers. Maybe he's currently dealing with bankruptcy.



I will not lie, cheat, or steal. Except when ripping off homeowners.

Therefore if there are no good ratings now it very well might be because he's not doing good work right now. Don't be fooled by those old positive ratings.

### **Something Smells Fishy**

Aside from the fact that old reviews on Angie's List are unreliable, the bigger issue is that there's no way to verify that the people who leave ratings aren't just friends and family of that contractor.

Do you really know that these aren't seeded reviews? Think about it: anyone can sign in and leave a rating. The reviewer can say whatever he or she pleases. Moreover, someone could create all kinds of different phony profiles, pay the monthly fee from different funds, and submit all kinds of reviews.

How can you possibly know which one is the truth and which is pure fiction?

Angie's List might work if you need low-impact stuff like a plumber to look at your clogged toilet or a handyman to fix your porch light. But for massive projects requiring a contractor, Angie's List is incredibly unreliable.

### **Yelp**

Yelp is a fantastic site for things like locating restaurants, checking movie times, and confirming business addresses. However, Yelp has major flaws when it comes to finding a contractor on the Internet.

Yelp is free and wide open, which means that any person with an Internet connection can write up multiple positive and negative reviews for a contractor. You may be looking at a contractor with all kinds of bad ratings simply because one person had a dispute with him and decided to have his friends bash the contractor on Yelp.

**Yelp's salespeople offered to remove negative reviews only if a company advertised with them.**

When this happens, a business is screwed. Whether the bad rating was justified or not, a business can't do anything about it.

Or can they?

### **The Yelp Scheme**

In early 2010, Yelp was [accused of running an “extortion scheme.”](#) The short story is this: Yelp’s salespeople offered to remove negative reviews only if a company advertised with them. Talk about extortion!

The bottom line is that with folks creating fake user names and posting phony reviews, combined with the shady practice of only removing negative reviews if you give them money, makes Yelp totally unreliable. You simply have no way of knowing how reliable any particular review is.

## **Diamond Certified**

California-based Diamond Certified surveys real customers over the phone to determine the amount of satisfaction they had while working with a particular contracting company. Based upon that feedback, that company can potentially be labeled as Diamond Certified. Most companies that attain this moniker use it in their marketing copy to prove a third-party has verified how awesome they are.

On the surface, Diamond Certified (and its clones that exist in geographies all over the United States) appears very professional. Their claim to fame is that they don’t just rely on a contracting company to toot their own horn in order to determine that company’s rating. Diamond Certified claims that all their ratings come from samplings of real customers. What could be more objective and thorough?

But just like the BBB, Angie’s List, and Yelp, Diamond Certified also is not what it appears to be.



Here’s what really happens: Diamond Certified has a policy that

“requires” their certified contractors to submit contact information for 25 homeowners they have helped in the previous quarter. This allows Diamond Certified to survey the results. But if the contractor ignores this requirement, there is no penalty.

Therefore, a communication between the contracting company and Diamond Certified can take years to actually happen. During this time, however, contractors could be performing awful work even though they can tout running a Diamond Certified business.

Diamond Certified simply doesn’t have the infrastructure to follow up with every homeowner and every contractor. This means that certain homeowners who had

BBB, Angie’s List, Yelp, Diamond Certified, and other user-rating system websites are all scams

either negative or positive experiences with a contractor won't get to express these thoughts with Diamond Certified. Then, because it's so easy to ignore Diamond Certified's surveys, contractors don't really have to worry about owning up to claims made by disgruntled homeowners.

It should also be noted that Diamond Certified takes a page out of Yelp's book by looking the other way regarding negative reviews for those contractors that give them advertising dollars. The more you advertise with Diamond Certified the more forgiving they are when a customer complains.

Once again you, the homeowner, are left with an unreliable resource.

### **Finals Thoughts on User Rating Systems**

We know we just went to town on user rating systems and tore them to shreds. We did this for one very important reason, however. **They aren't worth what you think they're worth.** If you're using them as a barometer for finding a contractor, you're simply wasting your time.

Are there good businesses in the BBB? Yes. Are there good businesses in Angie's List? You better believe it. In Yelp? Most definitely. And what about Diamond Certified? Yes, there are tons of solid businesses in there too.

But that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about using these website to find the reliable contractor that you need. And the bottom line is that once you question the integrity of the data, you really can't use it. You'll simply have to take all of this info with a grain of salt.

Don't worry. This will all make sense by the end of the eBook.

### **Summary for The Myth of User-Rating Systems**

Pros:

- Very useful for finding a new coffee shop or restaurant
- Fun to poke around on
- Useful tool to look up addresses of establishments

Cons:

- Unreliable data, including the sources for that data
- The old age of the reviews
- Most businesses can maintain their listing merely by continuing to pay monthly dues

# Chapter 5: The Reasons Individual Websites Are Unreliable

In this final chapter, let's take a look at what happens once you see an advertisement or otherwise find yourself on the website of a contracting company. How can you really know if this company is reliable or not?

You can't.

There's virtually no way to tell from looking at a website if a contracting company is trustworthy. It's like the cover of a book or a movie trailer: do you really know if it's going to be entertaining just from the marketing pitch? Quite often movies featuring the best commercials end up as the most painful to watch.

When it comes to a contractor's website, usually the flashier it is the more that company is trying to compensate for their inadequacies. A good craftsman doesn't care about fancy websites loaded with eye-popping graphics. A truly talented contractor just has his basic info. He has a website because he knows he should. That's about it. He doesn't rely on advertising or the web to attain customers because great contractors rely on repeat and referral business.

## **Why You Should Visit a Contractor's Website**

If an individual contractor's website is an unreliable way to find a quality craftsman on the Internet, then why should you ever spend your time visiting their web destination?

Well, there's still a lot of good information you can find, including:

- General industry-specific information
- Background information for a particular project, such as a new roof or windows
- Confirmation of the material supplier(s) the contractor is in business with and this could help you learn more about the brands available to you
- Confirming and matching a business address
  - You need to make sure this isn't just a satellite office. If it is, and this remote office goes out of business, then you may be stuck dealing with a contracting company whose business is totally out of your area.

The bottom line is that it's OK to use a contractor's website to find basic information and general content. Just don't ever use it as the means for finding your contractor.

So what's the solution? What **is** the Internet good for when it comes time to find a contractor?

### **Summary for The Reasons Individual Websites Are Unreliable**

Pros:

- Good general industry information
- Helpful for identifying the brands a company carries
- Confirming and matching a business address

Cons:

- Using the website to determine if company is viable or not
- Flashy websites are unreliable
- Poor resource for finding project-specific content

# Chapter 6: Solution: When is the Internet Good for Hiring a Contractor?

It's of extreme importance that you use the Internet cautiously when looking for a contractor. Think of it as a limited starting point that, in the end, should hold very little weight in making a final decision.

It isn't all doom and gloom on the Internet, of course. It's still a vast resource of information. But we caution you to use it wisely. Don't make it **the** way of finding a contractor. If you are going to use the Internet to assist you, use it for the following reasons:

- You can research a company's license information
- You can check a contractor's insurance coverage
- You can use a service such as BeenVerified.com to do a background check. Just make sure you have your contractor's updated information, which we mentioned in Chapter 5 as one of the reasons visiting an individual website can be a solid resource
- Go directly to forums to talk to real homeowners who have already used a contractor you're thinking about doing business with
  - Use local forums to discover information about contractor directly in your backyard
- Research any industry certifications a contractor holds
- Verify their ability to be bonded. A construction bond is pretty much like an insurance policy. It makes sure that the contractor in possession of the bond will perform certain work or else face financial penalties
- By visiting a contractor's website, you can see photos of prior work.
- Visit [Contractor Hiring Help: Finding Your Contractor](#) for detailed, trustworthy, unbiased information that will help you find your next contractor
- Stayed tuned for additional eBooks from [Contractor Hiring Help](#) where we'll walk you through every aspect of working with a contractor

The Internet has made all of our lives easier. It enables us to quickly access information to attain a better understanding of everything from making a peach cobbler from scratch to learning the nuances of how airplanes fly. If you want to learn about something – anything – the Internet is a pretty great place to find what you're looking for.

**Just don't use the Internet to find your contractor.**

# Bios

The [Contractor Hiring Help team](#) consist of Steve Miller, Aaron Garner, Kevin Bates, and Andy Coffaro. We are a group of sales and marketing professionals within the home improvement industry with a combined 30-plus years of experience.

As former home improvement sales managers, we got tired of the high-pressure sales tactics we were forced to use during in-home visits. The team now focuses all our time and energy on making sure homeowners are empowered when hiring contractors - from finding one they can trust to managing the entire project.



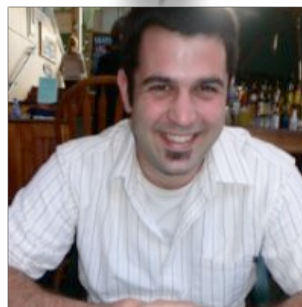
Steve Miller



Aaron Garner



Andy Coffaro



Kevin Bates