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New online service helps homeowners find qualified home-improvement contractors

When it comes to plumbers, electricians, roofers and other contractors, most homeowners don't know how to separate the good from the bad. This new service provides a simple solution.

For just \$24 per year, homeowners can become "online members" of the Home Owners Club® – which provides them with unlimited access to all the information, tools and resources they need to locate and select a trustworthy, qualified contractor for virtually any kind of improvement, repair or maintenance project.

Using the online resources provided, members of the Club will learn:

- The best places to search for a qualified contractor.
- How to screen, evaluate and select the best contractor for the project.
- When it's wise to get multiple estimates - and when it's not necessary.
- The best time of year to hire specific types of contractors.
- The specific resources available in their area for checking the qualifications and work history of any contractor being considered.
- The hourly rates charged by different contractors.
- Step-by-step help comparing the features of multiple bids.
- The best approach for negotiating a better price.
- Plus much more.

Whether it's a small repair job, ongoing maintenance tasks, a major remodeling project or an unexpected emergency, subscribers can turn to this online information resource at any time of day for advice and guidance not available anywhere else.

Unlike other Web-based information resources, this service accepts no advertising, sells no products and keeps its subscriber list strictly confidential. The only income generated is from member subscriptions. The only objective is to educate and inform homeowners.

The information offered is extensive. The sign-up process is simple. And the \$24

annual fee is a special introductory rate available only for a limited time. For more information, see homeownersclub.org.

NOTE: for a limited time, select reporters will be provided with exclusive access to this new online service. If you haven't already received your invitation and sign-in information, contact Matt Maury today.

Located in Seattle, Washington, the Home Owners Club (HOC) is one of America's oldest and most trusted contractor-referral services. Since its founding in 1959, HOC has helped more than 15,000 Seattle-area homeowners find qualified home-improvement contractors. Recognizing the need for a national presence, the Club founded its online membership program in the fourth quarter of 2006.

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Why Homeowners Need the HOC

10 facts for members
of the media

Provided by the
Home Owners Club®

Fact #1

A 2006 survey by Minwax Co. found that 74% of homeowners are planning to begin a home-improvement project in the next 12 months (or have already begun one).

How HOC Membership Helps

Subscribers to this new online service from the Home Owners Club (HOC) are provided all the information and resources they need to find a trustworthy, qualified contractor for almost any kind of project.

Whether it's a small repair job, ongoing maintenance tasks, a major remodeling project or an unexpected emergency, the resources provided will safely guide any homeowner through the search and selection process required to find a qualified contractor.

Fact #2

There are hundreds – if not thousands – of home-improvement information resources available online.

Unfortunately, most of them tend to be more focused on selling something rather than providing comprehensive advice and unbiased insight.

How HOC Membership Helps

Online members of the Home Owners Club are provided comprehensive reports that detail how to find, screen and manage almost 30 different types of contractors.

The information included in those reports is the culmination of almost five decades of real-world experience by HOC staff.

What's more, this service accepts no advertising, sells no products and keeps its subscriber list strictly confidential. The only income is from member subscriptions. The only objective is to educate and inform homeowners.

Fact #3

Every year, Better Business Bureaus from across the country receive more complaints about home-improvement contractors than almost any other type of business.

How HOC Membership Helps

Online members of the Home Owners Club are provided direct access to the "company reports" maintained by their local Better Business Bureau.

While the format for these reports differs from one BBB franchise to another, most include a listing of the complaints lodged against specific home-improvement contractors.

Fact #4

The majority of homeowners (64% according to one recent survey), rely on recommendations from friends and family when searching for a trustworthy contractor.

However, according to another survey, 34% of homeowners did not trust the service professional they hired, and another 48% would not rehire that same contractor in the future.

How HOC Membership Helps

As members of the Home Owners Club, homeowners not only learn where to search for qualified contractors (referrals from family and friends is one option), they also learn how to screen, qualify and assess the contractor to ensure a good match.

Fact #5

Contractors have some legitimate complaints, as well. According to a recent survey by Kimberly-Clark Professional, customers who keep requesting changes are considered a contractor's "worst nightmare."

Other types of clients that contractors labeled "nightmares" include those who don't pay on time, as well as those who talk too much or ask for work that doesn't conform to building codes.

How HOC Membership Helps

In addition to learning how to find, hire and manage contractors, online members of the Home Owners Club also get guidance on how to be the best kind of customer.

Among other things, Club members learn exactly what information they should provide during the bidding process, the keys for getting along with contractors of all types and advice on how to negotiate a discount without alienating the contractor.

Fact #6

When interviewing a prospective contractor, most homeowners don't know what to ask.

How HOC Membership Helps

Online members are provided specific interview questions for almost 30 different types of contractors.

Fact #7

In January of 2006, one of ServiceMagic's recommended contractors was found guilty of what is expected to be the biggest contractor scam ever.

In just two years, ServiceMagic contractor Craig John Oliver (a career criminal with a history of fraud dating back to 1982) jilted unsuspecting homeowners out of more than \$4 million.

How HOC Membership Helps

Online members of the Home Owners Club are given all the resources necessary to screen contractors for themselves. They don't need to rely on far-flung national referral services.

Fact #8

According to a recent contractor survey, if a client or project doesn't seem very appealing, many contractors will simply increase their rates.

How HOC Membership Helps

Any homeowner who follows the advice included in the online contractor profiles can expect to be treated as an ideal client and provided the best pricing.

Another source of savings: The profiles included also pinpoint the different times of year when a contractor might be willing to offer a discount.

Fact #9

Most homeowners are well aware that the contractors they hire should be licensed and insured. Confirming that, however, can be terribly confusing and time-consuming.

According to the construction law firm Thelen Reid & Priest, "contractor licensing is one of the most arcane areas of American law."

How HOC Membership Helps

Every contractor profile on the HOC Web site includes direct links to the state licensing and insurance requirements for almost 30 different kinds of contractors.

These valuable links are regularly monitored for accuracy, and, when necessary, updated with the latest information.

Fact #10

Every year, hundreds of homeowners nationwide wind up paying thousands of dollars in fines and penalties, all because they didn't know they needed a permit for their project, or they didn't understand how to protect themselves from liens.

How HOC Membership Helps

Online members of the Home Owners Club are told what types of projects require permits, and they're taught how to recognize situations that call for lien releases.

Information Sources

Fact #1

National survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of Minwax.

"Homeowner Survey: Americans Obsessed With Makeover Madness."

Distributed via PRNewswire, 4/25/2006.

Fact #2

Non-scientific online research performed by Home Owners Club staff.

Fact #3

Nevada state Better Business Bureau.

"Home Improvement Alert."

Distributed 9/11/2001.

Fact #4

Telephone survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of Kimberly-Clark Professional.

"Surveys Uncover Worst Nightmares, Bathroom Issues, Pricing and Other Concerns."

Distributed via PRNewswire, 5/17/2006.

Fact #5

Telephone survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of Kimberly-Clark Professional.

"Surveys Uncover Worst Nightmares, Bathroom Issues, Pricing and Other Concerns."

Distributed via PRNewswire, 5/17/2006.

Fact #6

The experience of Home Owners Club staff.

Fact #7

Article by Kevin J. Shay in Gazette.net.

"Contractor bilks customers out of millions, jumps bail."

Published 8/17/2006.

Fact #8

Telephone survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of Kimberly-Clark Professional.

"Surveys Uncover Worst Nightmares, Bathroom Issues, Pricing and Other Concerns."

Distributed via PRNewswire, 5/17/2006.

Fact #9

Report from Thelen Reid & Priest, LLP.

"U.S. Construction, Architecture and Engineering Industry: An Overview for International Investors."

Published 2/2/2004.

Fact #10

The experience of Home Owners Club staff.

Original source materials gladly provided upon request.