

Helping the buyer

10 KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY HOME IMPROVEMENTS SALES REPRESENTATIVE



Improving your home can be a complicated and time-consuming process. Choosing the right company to do the work for you is crucial to making sure it goes as smoothly as possible.

The aim of this guide is to help you compare different prospective companies and get the most out of any home consultations that you arrange.

It's not an exhaustive list, and you'll no doubt think of many more questions to ask as you go along, but it will be a good starting point.

Have a read through and then you can use the final pages to jot down any notes against each question.



QUESTION 1

HOW LONG ARE YOUR GUARANTEES AND WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR COMPANY STOPS TRADING BEFORE THAT TIME IS UP?

The home improvements industry contains over 12,000 companies at any one time. These range from national companies through to very small local ones with only a few employees. On average, between 2007 and 2014, over 1000* of these companies went out of business every year.

Under these circumstances, it's important to know what happens to the guarantees on your purchases. Knowing this can help you make the best decision as to which company to go with in the first place and ensure that you have peace of mind down the line.

SOURCE: The Stationary Office (TSO), Gazette Data for Insolvency & Bankruptcy – 7,493 companies, 2007-2014.

**OVER 7,000
COMPANIES FAILED
BETWEEN 2007 AND
2014. MAKE SURE
YOU HAVE PEACE
OF MIND.**



QUESTION 2

ARE ALL YOUR PRODUCTS MADE TO MEASURE?

Different companies have different approaches to supplying windows and other home improvement products. Some will manufacture your requested products from scratch, in order to make sure that what is installed will fit your home exactly. Other companies are simply resellers and may just order products in standard sizes from their suppliers.

This means that if your home requires non-standard sized windows for example, you may get a slightly smaller window fitted and then have the surrounding space filled with cavity filler or other material. Not only is this not as durable but it can also effect the thermal performance of your home and increase the chance of windows experiencing condensation and other issues.

Along with this question, you may wish to ask where your representative's products are actually manufactured. If they're being ordered from abroad then the cost of transportation may need to be factored into the price you pay for them.

**TAILOR-MADE OR
OFF THE SHELF? IT'S
VITAL TO MAKE THE
RIGHT CHOICE**



QUESTION 3

WHAT KIND OF ACCREDITATIONS DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE?

Like any big industry, home improvements are regulated and overseen by trade associations and bodies. Important ones to look out for are the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF), the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA) and the Energy Saving Trust. Membership of these will ensure your supplier is at least meeting the appropriate industry standards. You should also look out for relevant British Standard Kitemarks, which are another indicator of the quality of the products.

Further to this, you may find certain suppliers carry some more specific accreditations such as 'Secured by Design', which is a police initiative and grants recognition to products that meet higher security standards. If security is important to you then perhaps ask about this one specifically.

Again, you want to feel reassured with your decision so making sure the supplier you choose is independently accredited is a good way to achieve this.



**BE REASSURED
BY LOOKING FOR
BRITISH STANDARD
KITEMARKS AND
REPUTABLE
INDUSTRY BODIES**



QUESTION 4

WHAT TYPE OF GLASS IS BEST FOR MY HOME?

This is an open question which will allow you to hear what your sales representative recommends. Your home is unique in terms of its location and aspect and will therefore have unique requirements when it comes to the types of glass required.

For example, you may have heard of triple glazing and know a little about its properties. Generally, it's excellent for retaining the heat produced within your home but less good at harvesting the free heat energy provided by the sun. This means that if you have specific colder or north facing rooms you may want to think about triple glazing in those places. The rest of your home may be better suited to high performance double glazing as it can capture more free solar energy.

There are numerous other options to consider including sound-reducing glass, privacy glass, decorative glass and even leaded glass.

Asking your sales representative what they recommend can give you an idea of whether they've understood your requirements and the particular features of your home.

VARY YOUR
GLAZING TO SUIT
THE UNIQUE
ASPECT OF YOUR
HOME



QUESTION 5

WHERE CAN I SEE EXAMPLES OF YOUR COMPANY'S WORK LOCALLY?

Most home improvement companies will pride themselves on their local knowledge and customer base and should be able to point you in the direction of other homes locally that they have worked on.

Even if it's just to drive past and see the standard of work from the road, this is a good question to ask to establish whether they've done a lot of business in your local area.



A REPUTABLE
SUPPLIER WILL
BE HAPPY TO
SHOWCASE THEIR
WORK

QUESTION 6

WILL YOU HELP WITH PLANNING PERMISSION?

Most projects won't require planning permission, but for those that do the idea of preparing for it and submitting applications can be quite daunting.

However, good home improvement firms should be on hand to manage the process for you. From ensuring a qualified surveyor visits your property before any work starts, through to completing the paperwork, some companies can take all the potential stress out of it for you.

Make sure you ask your sales representative about what their company does to support customers, how much the service might cost and how much experience they have with gaining planning permission for projects.

PROFESSIONAL
ASSISTANCE CAN
TAKE THE STRESS
OUT OF YOUR
BUILDING PROJECT



QUESTION 7

CAN YOU SHOW ME EXAMPLES OF YOUR PRODUCTS?

A good sales representative should come prepared to demonstrate their product. This is most easily done with samples, which can show you things like glass types, window profiles and security features.

You'll want to visualise how the product will look in your home and be reassured about the strength of it and quality of the materials. The best way to do this is to get hands-on with it.

If a sales representative arrives without samples to show you, then you can't be 100% sure what you'll be getting if you choose to purchase from them.



GET HANDS-ON
WITH GLASS,
PROFILES AND
SECURITY FEATURES

QUESTION 8

WHY CAN'T YOU TELL ME A PRICE UP FRONT?

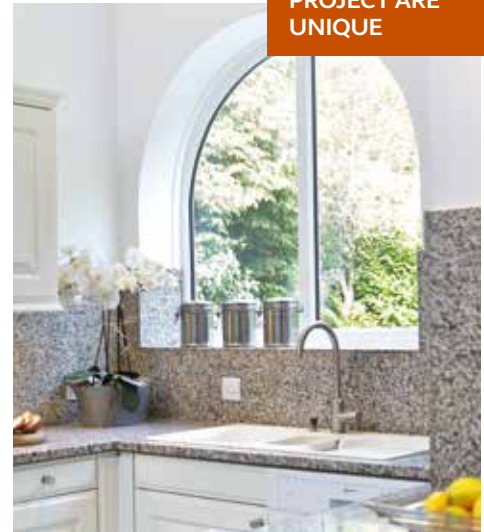
All homes are different, with different outlooks, histories and, most importantly, owners. Taking all this into account and coming up with the best solution is the job of the sales representative. They'll need to address your needs for things such as energy efficiency, security, ease of cleaning and looks.

In addition, they also need to take accurate measurements and assess things like property access and any planning or scaffolding requirements. This should make sure that the price you are quoted isn't later subject to unexpected increases.

If a sales representative provides you with a price without seeing your property, or with only minimal questioning then that should probably prompt you to question how thorough they have been.

Asking this question should allow you to judge how attentive they will be or have been to your requirements.

YOUR HOME AND
PROJECT ARE
UNIQUE



QUESTION 9

WHAT IS YOUR COMPANY POLICY RELATING TO ASBESTOS?

Asbestos was widely used in construction from the 1950s through until 1999, when it was banned. It can often still be found in the fascias and soffits on homes from this period. If disturbed, it can release dangerous fibres into the air.

If any window in your property abuts the soffit, under no circumstance should a company be willing to replace it without first testing for the presence of asbestos.

Where it is found to be present, the windows should not be replaced unless the fascia and soffits are also fully replaced. This is to ensure your safety.

By checking with your sales representative, you'll get a good idea of whether this is an issue they are aware of and what their likely approach is going to be.



ASBESTOS MAY BE
PRESENT IF YOUR
HOME WAS BUILT
AFTER 1950

QUESTION 10

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER NATIONAL AND LOCAL COMPETITORS?

If you intend to get quotes from several companies, you'll likely hear some similar pitches as you go along. It's important to establish beforehand what's most important to you so that you get the right outcome from the process.

Whether you prioritise product quality over price, time to install over customer service or a combination of different factors, you should ask this question to get an idea of what the relative strengths are of each company. Your views may even change as you hear from each of them.

You can then follow up with some research of online reviews to see whether what they've said matches up with customers' real experiences.

PRODUCT, PRICE, AFTERCARE, PEACE OF MIND. WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?



Capture the answers

COMPARE THE RESPONSES OF THE COMPANIES YOU HAVE PRESENTATIONS FROM

1

HOW LONG ARE YOUR GUARANTEES AND WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR COMPANY STOPS TRADING BEFORE THAT TIME IS UP?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

2

ARE ALL YOUR PRODUCTS
MADE TO MEASURE?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

3

WHAT KIND OF ACCREDITATIONS
DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

4

WHAT TYPE OF GLASS IS BEST
FOR MY HOME?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

5

WHERE CAN I SEE EXAMPLES OF YOUR
COMPANY'S WORK LOCALLY?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

6

WILL YOU HELP WITH
PLANNING PERMISSION?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

7

CAN YOU SHOW ME EXAMPLES
OF YOUR PRODUCTS?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

8

WHY CAN'T YOU TELL ME A PRICE
UP FRONT?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

9

WHAT IS YOUR COMPANY POLICY
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COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2

10

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY
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AND LOCAL COMPETITORS?

COMPANY 1

COMPANY 2