

7 Critical Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Painter

Are you thinking about hiring a painting contractor to paint your home or business?

Choosing a painting contractor can be confusing unless you have some reliable guidelines.

The contractor's most important qualification is its professional painting status and reputation. It has probably been in business in your community for some time and can prove the quality of its previous work with satisfied customers.

Experience shows you are probably better off in the long run choosing a well-known and reputable contractor with a good reputation. A slight increase in cost for this will be worth the extra cost over the years.

So you can be reasonably sure of the quality of your upcoming painting job, you should know a little about what is required.

Here are seven questions you should ask before you hire a painting contractor for either your home or business

1. **What is the contractor's experience?**

Your contractor should have been in business a minimum of five years and preferably ten or more. It's probably obvious that a contractor that has been in business this length of time is established in the community and has proven its business and painting abilities. Also, a contractor that has been in business at least ten years is more likely to be in business more than ten years from now (important to you if you have issues or problems with the original job several years down the road).

2. **What are the contractor's professional qualifications?**

Look for these at a minimum:

1. Contractor's License Number
2. Proof of Public Liability and Property Damage Insurance
3. Proof of Workman's Compensation Insurance

4. Better Business Bureau listing and good rating
5. Physical location – tied into this is the contractor's having an office phone number. Be wary of a contractor if the only way you can reach it is through a cell phone.
6. Excellent product knowledge

3. **How large is the contractor?**

You will be better off choosing a contractor of some size. A larger contractor will most likely have a larger insurance policy (do not consider a contractor with little or no insurance). A larger contractor will also more than likely provide the necessary Workman's Compensation Insurance (see questions 2 and 7).

Included in this question is the number of jobs the contractor has completed within the last several years. This not only ties to the contractor's experience but its ability to use the most qualified people for your job. You don't want to employ a contractor for which you are his only or one of only several clients.

Last, a larger contractor will probably have lower overhead costs than a smaller contractor. Its overhead costs are able to be spread over many jobs, giving you a lower overhead cost for your job.

4. **Does the contractor market and advertise in the marketplace?**

Newspaper advertising, Yellow Pages advertising, and other forms of "offline" advertising were for years the only way to verify a contractor's legitimacy. That has changed dramatically in a short period of time with the growth of the Internet.

Today all professional painting contractors use the Internet to primarily advertise their businesses.

Along this line:

1. Is the contractor's website professional looking? You can do a lot of preliminary research before you actually contact a contractor. Its website is a good place to begin your research.

2. Is there good and valuable information (not just “sales speak”) on its website?
 3. Is the website clean and well laid out?
 4. Is it easy to find the information you’re looking for?
5. **Does the contractor have an excellent reputation?**

Again, this is very easy to find out online today.

Simply by searching in Google for (contractor name) (reviews) you can easily find what other customers say about the business. A word of caution here: just because someone says something negative online doesn’t mean that it’s necessarily true.

If you find negative reviews online, it’s more than appropriate for you, when you call the contractor, to ask about the specifics of the negative review or reviews and what the contractor did to rectify the situation.

Some detailed items for you to cover include:

1. Are there a large number of positive reviews online? For most contractors, getting positive reviews from customers is an ongoing process, but be wary of any contractor that does have not a large number of reviews relative to its competitors.
2. Does the website have both written and video reviews?

With the explosive growth of online video in the past several years, it just makes good business sense for a contractor to have both written and video reviews. Although both types are important, watching video reviews will give you a good sense of what “real people” say about their experience.

3. Are there pictures of previous projects?
4. Are you able to contact previous customers?

6. Is the contract thoroughly detailed and fully descriptive?

It goes without saying that you need a written contract.

Information which should be included is:

1. A specific description of the job to be done, listing all preparation to be done beforehand. Review to see the details of the level of preparation which will be done for your job.
2. A specific price for the job and terms of payment.
3. A specific list of brands and types of paint and other materials to be used.
4. A statement of the number of coats of paint to be applied to the surfaces, including priming, if required.
5. Description of how changes to the contract will be handled.
6. Projected completion date (with allowances made for unpredictable weather).
7. Detailed description of the cleanup to be done by the contractor when the job is completed.
8. Warranty and guarantee – see question 7.

7. How are you protected?

Probably the most important protection (and risk reduction for you) to get from the contractor is its written warranty and guarantee. At a minimum require a three to five year warranty. If the contractor offers a longer warranty and guarantee all the better for you.

And review the details of the warranty and guarantee. If a problem occurs, what will and won't be handled by the contractor?

As noted in several places above, your verifying the contractor has the proper insurance is a must. Reputable painting contractors are properly insured for their and your protection.

The contractor must have Workman's Compensation and Employers' Liability Insurance, Public Liability, and Property Damage Insurance. Lack of proper insurance by the contractor could expose you to liability for accidents occurring on your property.

In summary, taking the time to get answers to these seven questions will probably take you a little time. However, given the investment you'll be making for your paint job, whether it's residential or commercial, you want to insure you get the best return for your investment.