



## Choosing the Right Electrical Contractor.

Online Bidding For Electrical Work.

Bidding on electrical contractors for a project can be just as daunting as choosing a colour scheme for your home. You need to have the confidence in the contractor to achieve the task in hand and be satisfied that the work has been completed to the highest electrical standard.

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Selecting the right [electrical contractor](#) isn't as easy as picking someone out of [the Yellow Pages](#). The ramifications of hiring the wrong contractor can be financially disastrous and even dangerous.

First and foremost, it's imperative to know if the contractor you're considering hiring, is licensed, bonded, and has adequate [general liability](#) and [workers compensation insurance](#).

Then, you need to determine if they are experienced in the type of work you need performed, and if they are generally considered good, honest and reputable.

The best place to start answering some of these questions is at the Department of Fair Trading / Division of Consumer Affairs and you may of course search via NECA. Not all Electricians are members of NECA as there is an annual Tariff attached to retain membership.

Now let's pretend [for a moment](#) that you have an [electrical job](#) you need done.

Not an emergency -- perhaps it's just fixing a light that stopped working.

What would you do?

Would you call a few contractors and get multiple bids online? You can, but I wouldn't necessarily suggest it.

Most people think that they should get multiple bids for every job. This isn't the case, and in actuality, putting to bid every little job may in fact backfire.

Good contractors are few and far in between, and asking for multiple bids for a small job will only alienate them the next time around. Try looking at this from their point of view. Their time is worth probably \$65 to \$100/ hr, and yet, he or she makes the time to come to your residence and provide you with a free estimate for whatever work you may need.

Typically, a good contractor will try to provide you with an "extra-competitive" bid, especially the first time around, just to make you a customer.

But how can you tell if the first contractor walking into your house is **THE RIGHT** contractor? Some simple rules may apply here, but remember there also are exceptions to every rule.

- A good contractor will typically **look the part**. In other words, if he or she looks messy and disorganized, then it's probably indicative of the type of work he or she does. Someone who takes pride in their work usually takes pride in their appearance. Some contractors may argue this point, but remember we're talking generalities here and not the exceptions. He or she should have some type of company identification (even a shirt with a logo would do).
- A good contractor will **have company cards** with their company name and / or their name, telephone and license # on it.
- A good contractor **will respond to your calls quickly** and provide you with a free estimate (for most jobs) the same day or within a reasonable amount of time, and will take the time to explain what they will do and how they will do it.
- A good contractor will **never offer to do the job without taking out permits** and may even walk away from a job if the homeowner insists on not taking them. Remember, permits are additional insurance for the homeowner guaranteeing (through inspection) that the job was performed safely and correctly.
- A good contractor will **never cut corners and do something unsafe in order to accommodate your budget**. They will, instead, offer suggestions on how to modify your plans to meet both their code and safety requirements, and your budget. If these two cannot meet, then they will wish you good luck and walk away from the job.

- A good contractor will be happy to **provide you with copies of their insurance certificates and references** when asked. Try not asking for them unless it's a decent size job.

Suppose a homeowner would like to make a minor alteration or addition to their electrical system. If the electrical system is old, then that part of the system may need to be brought up to current code standards before they can add to it or modify it.

In order to circumvent this regulation, the homeowner may insist that the job be done without permits and possibly even hire someone unlicensed to do the work.

What he or she doesn't realize is that if their house burns down, they will very likely **NOT** be covered. Your homeowner's policy probably states (very clearly) that anyone doing work on the residence has to be properly licensed and all building, plumbing and electrical codes must be followed, and work performed with permits wherever required.

If you hired someone whom you thought was licensed, but ultimately wasn't, it still may NOT be covered because you didn't take out permits for the work, and as far as [the insurance company](#) is concerned, it was done illegally.

If and when you decide to put a job out to bid, make sure that the work is properly specified (in minute detail) so that all the contractors are bidding on exactly the same things. Otherwise, there's no way of telling who's bidding apples and who is bidding oranges. Not properly specifying a job is probably the most common mistake homeowners make.

Why? Let's assume you need to have **10 power points, 4 lights** and **2 dimmers** installed in a room. Without specifying the exact types such as (Standard, Decor, other), amperage (15/20), location and method of use (this is used by good contractors to determine how many power points to put on a single circuit), types of lights, bulbs (fluorescent, halogens, etc.) and trims standard, eyeballs, etc., wattage of bulbs (determines type and rating of dimmers used), there is no way of telling who is bidding what. And these are just some of the variables used for a fairly simple job!

- A good contractor always uses first-class, contractor-grade materials and never uses anything else, regardless of budget. They will usually price and give you the higher grade items automatically. This is where they get in trouble when bidding with other contractors. Someone else may be using approved but inferior materials, which would enable them to come in considerably lower than the good contractor. They probably know that you'll have problems with the items installed sooner rather than later, but don't care because it falls beyond their warrantee period (if they even have one).
- A good contractor will take into consideration how the power points are being used (such as computers, entertainment equipment, vacuum cleaner, etc.) and automatically factor in (price) dedicated circuits for these items, even though current codes may allow all of the receptacles to be wired on a single circuit.

Other contractors won't, and will therefore be able to do the job cheaper. Of course, when you start tripping circuit breaker because the new power points are overloading the circuit, there won't be anything to do about it, because it didn't violate any codes at the time, and more importantly, you didn't specify it.

But how could you specify it? You're not in the electrical field, and you assumed the contractor would know better and factor this in.

Well, you're right. **The good contractor already factored it in, but you gave the job to the other one.**

Are you starting to [get the picture](#) about the dangers of multiple online bids? Very often, you don't end up with the good contractor.

That's a pretty typical bidding scenario, and it is obvious why people are intimidated dealing with contractors. Make the wrong move and it can spell big trouble.

Example: Let take the Government Insulation Scheme as an example. It was presented and advertised as a fantastic opportunity for households to participate in doing their part in reducing the energy consumption cost and ultimately reduce unnecessary green house gases. What was hidden unknowingly is the potential risk associated with foil insulation installed over poor and unsecured electrical wiring which led to trade people loosing their lives for a quick buck.

Prior to the installation of the foil insulation a compulsory electrical audited by a qualified electrician would have determined the quality of the home wiring and report whether the foil insulation could pose a risk not only for the installing contractor but for the safety of the domestic consumer. "Makes very good sense". [Applying a Risk Management Audit would have saved lives.](#)

Anyway, if you do bid the work, try to have it properly specified perhaps by a builder or electrical engineer. A good rule of thumb would be, if you get multiple bids, always pick from the middle up, and never, ever pick the lowest bid.

When you've finally selected a contractor, ask them for a copy of their [insurance policies](#), and make sure everything (including start and end dates on larger jobs) is in writing. Very often smaller contractors work out of their own house or garage, and many do not carry workers compensation insurance. This may or may not be a factor. If they have a helper with them or send someone else to your house to do the work, it becomes a huge factor.

Without this insurance policy, you (the homeowner) are 100 % liable for any accidents their workers may incur. Additionally, many contractors have only enough general liability insurance to satisfy state regulations, but nowhere near enough to pay for your house if it burns down.

Finally, a last note of caution; as with everything else in life, **"you get what you pay for "**.

In other words, don't let price alone be the determining factor when hiring an electrical contractor. Remember, if a plumber messes up, you'll have a flood, if an electrical contractor messes up you'll have a fire or perhaps even worse.



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