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# How to avoid rogue tradesmen and cowboy builders

By Caroline Cassidy | Jan 21st 2013 | Filed under: [Property](#)



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Consumer watchdogs and TV shows such as Cowboy Builders have done a fine job of alerting householders to the potentially disastrous, not to mention expensive, problem of rogue tradesmen.



Pic: Getty Images

If you are looking to have work done on your house, finding a reliable tradesman to take on the job is essential if you are to avoid getting ripped off or, worse still, left with a dangerous property.

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Thankfully, there are thousands of highly professional, skilled and genuine tradesmen across the UK - here's how to find them.

### Ask around

A personal recommendation, preferably from a friend or relative, is the ideal way to find a trustworthy tradesman. Many of the best are incredibly busy and often they rely solely on word of mouth to book jobs in, so ask friends, family, neighbours if they have had any similar work done recently. If they have, not only will you get a reliable contact, but you can go and inspect their previous work to make sure it's up to the standard you require.

### Check them out

If you're struggling to find a recommendation from someone you know, it is often a good idea to start your search with the relevant trade body. From the Federation of Master Builders to the Painting and Decorating Association, most industry bodies require members to provide evidence of a certain level of competency or training, and some will insist on references and public liability insurance. At the very least, if something goes wrong, you have somewhere to complain.

Should you have any work done that involves the gas supply, the tradesman must be registered with Gas Safe (previously CORGI). And don't just rely on their ID card - call 0800 408 5500 to check that they're genuine.

As well as trade bodies, it's worth checking online review sites to see whether a tradesman has been reviewed. Websites like Checkatrade.com and Ratedpeople.com require paid-for listings and you will be able to check customer testimonials. Trustmark - a government-backed scheme designed to protect the public against rogue tradesmen - is also worth a visit as those who sign up commit to a code of practice.

### Shop around

Even if you've fully checked out your tradesman and feel confident that he's not a cowboy, it is essential to get more than one quote, ideally three.

Shopping around will give you a good sense of whether you're getting value for money, but do make sure you get a full written quotation, detailing works to be carried out, an estimated time, and a breakdown of the costs. This will enable you to compare quotes more accurately.

Do remember, however, that the cheapest quote isn't necessarily the best - an unusually low figure could mean you end up with cheap materials or a botched job and you'll spend twice that sum putting the work right.

If anything changes prior to or during work, make sure you get a revised quote in writing, just to be on the safe side.

### Who to avoid

Cowboy builders are well practised at appearing genuine, knowledgeable and professional, which can make spotting them tricky.

But one thing that's a dead giveaway is a cold caller or anyone using the hard sell. Genuine and respected tradesmen rarely have the time to go door-to-door, so be wary of anyone who turns up on the doorstep, pushing you to sign on the dotted line. Ask to take a business card and say you'll think about it - that will give you plenty of time to check their credentials.

Anyone seemingly unwilling to provide details about their business, credentials or provide references or a written quotation is also best avoided, as the chances are they don't want you delving into their shady dealings. Though most tradesmen will give out a mobile number once they've started a job, a refusal or inability to provide a landline number could also signal trouble.

Lastly, if you feel pressurised and uncomfortable, either because the tradesmen is pushing you to make a decision to start the job straight away or because they are asking for an upfront payment, beware. The trustworthy tradesmen have accounts with suppliers so they won't need any money upfront for materials, and the genuine good guys will be only too happy to have you check them out.