

ARE THE BIG BOX STORES THE BEST PLACE FOR REMODELING?

We're often asked "how can you compete with the big box stores?"
Not a Problem!

People who "do it themselves" or those who are looking for the lowest price products known to man frequently find exactly what they're looking for at box stores. But mostly we have found our clientele would not entrust the box store to remodel their homes. 70-80% of our work each year comes from happy satisfied customers or their referrals. They don't want to drag home a toilet themselves or skim coat the shower base before the tile gets laid. Mostly they don't want to devote 8 weekends to remodel a bathroom. So why does the public think they're the best bargain? Many others have come and gone -Heckingers, Builder's Square and others? Some professional remodelers have been in business 40 years, you can't put a dollar sign on that expertise.

Home centers have aggressive advertising programs promising complete bathrooms for ridiculously low prices. If you plan to purchase exactly what the flyer shows - their prices may seem hard to beat! But if you really expect to shop at the big box store, find and purchase these items, you may be in for a surprise. Even though a name brand appears somewhere on the ad page, don't assume all items included carry the name brand. Most homeowners don't like the quality of those bargain items if they can find them. Many switch over to another product (more expensive which is exactly what was intended from the start). The ad shows "loss leaders" - items sold at cost and purchased in huge quantities. Anything else is probably available elsewhere at a better price. You may find a big Kohler sign on their bath fixtures selection wall. but you'll see that 90% of the products underneath are NOT Kohler. They love to display the major manufacturers because they're known for quality. But you have to special order Kohler nonstock items and that certainly eliminates the bargain price. The same goes for Pella or Andersen windows - they sell them, but they're really hoping you'll buy the off brand - which they buy cheaply and sell at a better profit. Your local Pella Certified Contractor buys at a discount and will probably be a better value.

The cheap prices advertised rarely indicate the actual cost of "complete bathroom remodeling". It is so unfair to the public to be lured into low prices when they are anything but complete. There are so many other costs and responsibilities involved. They range from procuring building permits when required, coordinating materials so they work efficiently and correctly together, abiding by county codes, plumbing, electric and the required inspections, heating costs, all the way down to painting

and getting rid of the debris. Remember, most communities will not let you put building materials out for garbage pick-up. It is also our responsibility to warrant our work and provide our customers with the best job available. It is not in your best interest to employ an installer who is being paid a minimum wage and can only turn a profit if he does the installation quickly without regard to quality. Jobs done at record pace invariably create needed service calls. Who does that?

Lets talk about quality. What difference does it make, you ask? Kohler, for example, has been around since 1873. They have warranties, customer service, they actually get replacement part for older commodes and are often free. Good commodes last 25 years, don't you want to ensure yours is longlasting? When you purchase a Kohler faucet, you get the whole thing –cheap faucets frequently need more parts (at additional cost). They have few, if any, plastic parts. They meet the codes that have been established for our area – something you should be concerned about if you purchase off brands online. You may pay more but you won't have to replace that faucet in several years. The finishes are warranted too. Every single part is actually in the box and when you're paying the plumber \$60 an hour – you don't want him to come back because of missing parts. The big box stores are notorious for putting things back on the shelves that have been returned (or worse, partially returned!). I've seen people drop packages of light bulbs on the floor and set them back on the shelf. I've seen an Andersen window in a box that you guarantee has never been opened, but inside was a product that was clearly installed before. Many manufacturers sell products to the box stores that are manufactured strictly for them – of lesser quality. For example, ceramic tile has more flaws and defects than that distributed to the local tile supplier. Off brand faucets have plastic parts; laminate is often thinner; lumber has more knots and flaws, crooked – more waste.

Very frequently it is difficult to find a knowledgeable person to ask your questions at a big box store. We had a customer who wanted an exterior door with a big glass oval. The big box quoted her a cheap price – but she didn't want them to install it. We knew our supplier didn't make the big glass oval in the size she needed (32"). She had her heart set on that style, so we told her to purchase it and we would install it. The store clerk gave her incorrect info – they couldn't provide it either because of the smaller door size. The glass was too heavy for a smaller door and not enough frame to carry the load. So how did he price the door – it wasn't even available??

Other items to consider: If my product has a defect, are the box stores going to help you get a replacement product – particularly after it is installed? Who warrants the installation? Why do I have to pay ahead to get an estimate? Why can we install stock size Pella windows in a home – when the big box estimator said they didn't fit? Could it be because they want to sell you the vinyl windows they sell at more profit? The customer didn't get her \$50 estimate charge back. Why? By

adjusting an opening slightly, we are able to install the better windows and that adjustment doesn't mean we must order "custom sizes". It also doesn't mean exorbitant costs. Do you really want to pay for and install windows again in 10 years because the cheap ones didn't last or were installed in record breaking time?

Regarding big box installers - Who is going to install your products? How do I know that he is capable of doing what I specified? Pennsylvania requires contractors to be registered with the state. Is he? Did the store salesman write down exactly what you discussed and does the installer know all the details? What happens if he doesn't? Remodeling is always "adaptation & changes" because none of us can see behind walls ahead of time. What happens when there is an unexpected heat run in a wall that you paid to have removed? How does that get quickly worked out and at what cost? Who provides the trim around the new front door? Is it an extra? What kind is it? We overheard a big box employee tell a kitchen customer the entire cost must be paid ahead for a granite top. Don't do it! What type of edge and seams will the top have, thickness, a slab or pieces? How long before installation?

Can they beat our prices? Possibly, if you don't care about quality, expert installation and a proven track record. But you must compare apples to apples. Are you always paying ahead for something that hasn't been completed yet (always a bad idea)? Once the job is done and paid, if a problem develops -how will I get service? What if the installer damages my property? Does my insurance have to cover that? Who pays and will it be handled quickly and without grief?

In our opinion, there are bargains at big box stores on light bulbs, extension cords, door knobs and paint rollers but do yourself a favor and leave remodeling to the professionals who are licensed and educated. They are knowledgeable about products and what is best for your home and about running a successful business. They are anxious to give you the best possible job that you deserve. It's their responsibility! Their reputation depends on it. Sue Clark Clark Construction Co.