



NORTHSHORE

CLIP

HOME IMPROVEMENT



If you're in the market for a home service contractor, let's cut right to the chase: the worst place to find one is in the phone book. There are, of course, good contractors listed in the phone book. The problem is there are bad ones as well, and since phone books categorize contractors by their specialty — plumbing, electrical, roofing, landscaping — and not by their quality — good, bad, criminal — homeowners can get a painful lesson in Latin. Two words: caveat emptor.

Three guides offer ways to find good home repair companies

BY MARY MAGUIRE

The Franklin Report
www.franklinreport.com

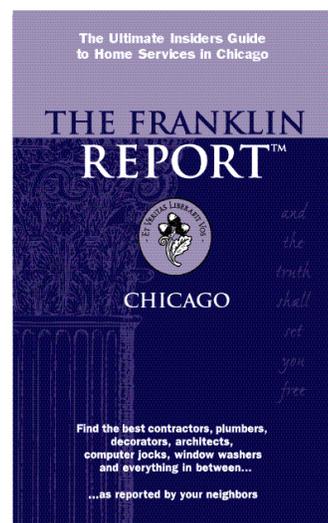
A kind of cross between The Home Improvement Network and Angie's List, The Franklin Report relies on input from clients as well as peer recommendations to determine who gets listed and how they get

ranked. The book, a spin-off of a similar New York guide, began when Elizabeth Franklin, president of The Franklin Report, asked 20 of her friends in the city and on the North Shore for their Christmas card lists—their handymen, plumbers, rehabbers and roofers.

The Chicago edition lists hundreds of companies with specialties ranging from air conditioning and audio/video design to swimming pools and window washers. "We keep asking questions until we hear common themes about companies and their workers," Franklin says. "Let's face it, if a housewife doesn't get along with a particular architect, that can distort their rating, but, if a colleague or a competitor can say something good about them, however, it can help to put a different perspective on the company.

"We don't just present the positive," Franklin says. "We'll do the negative as well." Information about various companies is updated regularly on Franklin's website: www.franklinreport.com.

"When we first started the report, we couldn't get some of the service providers to even return our calls," says Franklin. "They were not as cooperative as they are now. What they've come to understand is that we



are the ones who will decide which companies go in and which ones don't."

Everyone knows that researching contractors is a time-consuming and often painful process. The value of a service guide is that it takes away some of the guessing and hopefully some of the pain. Anyone who has commissioned any sort of home improvement probably knows that there are never any guarantees. Still, using a service guide is better than doing an "eenie, meenie" through the Yellow Pages any day.