

Pool Companies/Selecting your contractor

Choosing and hiring a contractor for any major home improvement is unfamiliar territory for most homeowners. A pool purchase is a major investment for most homeowners and should be treated as such. Learn the differences between pool companies and ask questions so you can make an intelligent and informed decision.

Pool Companies:

Whether local or national, pool companies' fall into certain categories.

1. National Pool Companies:

These companies generally work out of centrally located sales offices, sub-contracting all the work associated with your pool installation. The homeowner's only point of contact is the sales representative or their sub-contractors. These people have no interest in an on going relationship with their customer and will generally refer you to a local pool company for your aftercare needs. These are generally mass merchant establishments that provide absolutely no personal contact for the homeowner.

2. Local Contractors:

Common sense would tell you that a local company should provide its customers with a more personal service than a national company. Local pool contractors fall into several categories.

A. Pool Installers:

A pool installer is generally a company that installs the pool only. These installers are different than your local pool company. These contractors generally do few pools on their own with the majority of their work coming as sub-contractors. In this scenario the homeowner becomes the general contractor of their own pool needing to provide and pay for their own permit application, excavation, grading, electrical, and plumbing and masonry work. Your only point of contact is the installer's phone number. They provide no retail store or service department and the homeowner is usually on his own to procure such services. Homeowners, who choose this option, should be well versed in local township ordinances, experienced in contracting and know the ramifications of insurance and other liabilities.

B. Local Pool Companies:

Local Pool companies will have a retail store and service department. Whether your local company is large, small, or a Mom and Pop establishment, they will fall in certain categories: Companies that do none of the work, some of the work, or all of the work in house. Most pool companies in our area use sales representatives and sub-contractors exclusively for the installation of their pools. This is done for several reasons. One, it insulates the company from its customers by leaving your only point of contact, the sales rep and their sub-contractors. Most likely, you will never know or meet the owner of the company. Second, a lot of area companies don't do the volume of work necessary to maintain their own equipment and personnel. These companies hire out all the work associated with your pool installation and share sub-contractors with several local companies. Poor scheduling, confusion, inconsistent work and no accountability, just to name a few, are the problems that arrive from this approach.

So, how do you as a consumer make an intelligent choice? Experience and common sense suggest the following:

1. A local company rather than national should be more personal and responsive.
2. A full service company should provide and assist its customers with better service during and after the installation
3. A specialized *owner-run* company with their own equipment and personnel where all work is done in-house. They will have the experience and expertise to provide its clients, if they chose, with a complete backyard, working hand in hand with its customers. This choice will always provide a homeowner with better customer service, a personal touch, with a more coordinated, timely, cost effective sales and service relationship.