

Amazon veteran launches home-improvement site

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It's not quite a cluster, but Seattle now has several tech companies targeting the home-improvement space.

The screenshot shows the Pro.com website interface. At the top, the Pro.com logo is on the left, and the phone number 1-800-597-4776, a link to 'Ask a question', and a 'Sign in' link are on the right. The main heading reads 'Get a price. Get a pro. Get it done.' Below this, a question asks 'What's on your home to-do list?'. A list of four items is shown: 1. paint living room, 2. get the junk out of my garage, 3. fix hole in playroom wall, and 4. install closet organizer. An orange button labeled 'INSTANT ESTIMATE' is below the list. To the right, a blue map of the United States shows a location pin in the Pacific Northwest. Below the map, a table titled '- B&C's Guest House in 48108 -' provides a 'TOTAL PRESTIMATE' of \$269 - \$312. The table lists three items: 'Install Washing Machine' (\$64 - \$68), 'Replace Lightbulbs' (\$30 - \$60), and 'Replace Toilet' (\$175 - \$184).

- B&C's Guest House in 48108 -	
Install Washing Machine	\$64 - \$68
Replace Lightbulbs	\$30 - \$60
Replace Toilet	\$175 - \$184
TOTAL PRESTIMATE	\$269 - \$312

The latest entrant – Pro.com – is emerging today with top-shelf investors and a particularly ambitious business plan.

Pro.com aims to simplify the process of pricing home-improvement projects, finding a contractor and scheduling an appointment to get the project started. The goal is to get this all done with a just a few clicks, making the process easier and more transparent for customers.

Homeowners click on the projects they need done, enter their zip code and a few details and are presented with a menu of typical labor costs - dubbed "Prestimates" - for each project. They also receive a list of vetted service providers, with moderated ratings, and available dates and times when the work can be scheduled. Contractors can list their services for free but pay a commission on completed jobs provided through Pro.com.

For the last five months the company has been operating in stealthy test mode as SeattleHomePro.com. Today it's launching nationally – though still in beta mode – as Pro.com. In regions where it doesn't yet have contractor listings, the company offers to gather a list of possible service-providers, a service that's done by employees in Seattle. So far the scheduling feature – which it calls "direct booking" – is only available in a small group of cities, including Seattle.

The company's customer-centric approach is heavily influenced by Amazon.com, where Pro.com Chief Executive Matt Williams worked for 12 years and first began exploring ways to simplify the purchase of local services.

Scheduling a pro for:
Paint a Room

Based on your requests, we recommend this Pro:

Report: Drywall or Sheetrock
\$200 - \$275

Remove Trash, Junk, or Debris
\$200 - \$250

Install Closet Organization System
\$100 - \$125

Screening Service
\$100 - \$125

Total Possible Cost
\$400 - \$575
(Estimate only)

Dave Crompton
Master Home Services
10+ years experience
GENERAL CONTRACTOR

5.0 reviews
"Thick, smart, understanding providers of quality."

Not available
NOV 12 - 14th

SCHEDULE NOW
(This cost is just an estimate)

Other matches:

Dave Ford 10+ years experience GENERAL CONTRACTOR	89% positive reviews	SCHEDULE NOW
Bill Babin 10+ years experience GENERAL CONTRACTOR	86% positive reviews	SCHEDULE NOW
Dyane Kelly 10+ years experience GENERAL CONTRACTOR	85% positive reviews	SCHEDULE NOW
James Agnew 10+ years experience GENERAL CONTRACTOR	85% positive reviews	SCHEDULE NOW

Source: Pro.com/Seattle, WA. © Copyright 2014, Pro.com

Williams said the platform for pricing, selecting and scheduling services may be extended in the future.

"The vision of this company is to price and book reliable local services in under a minute and that goes beyond home improvement," he said. "Long term we want to build this out across many categories."

In the meantime Pro.com will face off against a new wave of companies trying to digify home-improvement, a huge but unwieldy market that's been repeatedly targeted by online ventures since the dotcom era.

The current generation includes Seattle's Porch.com – a fast-growing startup that's also building off a database of project and contractor details – and Zillow, which offers pricing estimates and referrals on the "Digs" service that it launched in February 2013.

Williams said this time around there's a better chance to automate the industry because smartphones are ubiquitous. Owners of service businesses can run complex applications and schedule on the fly, moving their companies toward an "on demand" model.

As for his cross-town rivals, Williams said he has "a ton of respect for the team over at Porch" but his company is "playing in a very different space" with its pricing approach.

"It's a little bit different but the bottom line is the space is enormous," he said. "Any of us will take years to make any kind of a dent or inroad in this industry. But I think the right customer experience will lead the company down that path."

Pro.com may also benefit from Amazon fairy dust floating around South Lake Union.

More than half of its 30 employees are Amazon veterans and the company deliberately chose an office in Amazonville, to be close to friends and former co-workers. It's temporarily working from the former Enterprise car rental office near Whole Foods, behind covered-up windows and chipped paint that belie the presence of a home-improvement venture.

Pro.com has \$3.5 million in seed funding from Jeff Bezos and a handful of venture capital firms, including early Amazon investor Madrona Venture Group plus Andreessen Horowitz and Redpoint Ventures.

A chunk of the funding was spent acquiring the Pro.com domain from a Belgian tech company that reserved the name awhile ago but hadn't been using it, Williams said.

Williams – who comes from a family of Seattle-area entrepreneurs including a father who started KUBE radio, left Amazon in 2010 to become chief executive of Digg.com. After the online news and discussion site was sold in 2012 he became an entrepreneur-in-residence at Andreessen Horowitz before starting Pro.com.

For now Pro.com is working behind the covered-up windows of a run-down former car rental office just south of Whole Foods, between Amazon's current and forthcoming headquarters sites. Williams said it will move into new offices nearby when the building is demolished to make way for more new construction.

The company provided screenshots, including this one:

The screenshot shows the Pro.com website interface. At the top, the Pro.com logo is on the left, and the phone number 1-800-597-4776, a link to 'Ask a question', and a 'Sign in' button are on the right. Below the header, there's a section for 'Scheduling a pro for:' with a list of services and their price ranges: 'Paint a Room' (\$545 - \$577), 'Repair Drywall or Sheetrock' (\$259 - \$295), 'Remove Trash, Junk, or Debris' (\$88 - \$107), and 'Install Closet Organization System' (\$985 - \$1220). A 'Summer Chores Total Prestimate' is shown as \$1877 - \$2199. To the right of the services list is a profile for 'Dave Crompton Monet Home Services' with a 'Select Date' button. Below this, a calendar view shows the next available dates from May 12 to May 16. The calendar has columns for Monday (12), Tuesday (13), Wednesday (14), Thursday (15), and Friday (16). Time slots for 9am, 11am, 1pm, and 3pm are shown. The 9am slot is highlighted in orange for all days. The 11am, 1pm, and 3pm slots are highlighted in orange for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, but are greyed out for Monday. At the bottom, there are links for 'Terms of Service', 'Privacy Policy', and '© Copyright 2014, Pro.com'.

Pro.com 1-800-597-4776 Ask a question Sign in

Scheduling a pro for:

- Paint a Room \$545 - \$577
- Repair Drywall or Sheetrock \$259 - \$295
- Remove Trash, Junk, or Debris \$88 - \$107
- Install Closet Organization System \$985 - \$1220
- Summer Chores Total Prestimate: \$1877 - \$2199

- Costs are for labor only -

Dave Crompton Monet Home Services Select Date

Add your contact information Add details (optional)

Showing next available dates. Select a time to schedule.

May 12 - May 16 →

Monday 12	Tuesday 13	Wednesday 14	Thursday 15	Friday 16
9am	9am	9am	9am	9am
11am	11am	11am	11am	11am
1pm	1pm	1pm	1pm	1pm
3pm	3pm	3pm	3pm	3pm

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