



Celebrating Today's Trades and the Value of Professionalism



As TrustMark enters its tenth year, we went out to ask tradespeople and experts from within the industry and consumer protection bodies: what defines a true professional today in the home repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) market?

Here you will read the results. A snapshot of the many thousands of smart, motivated and very hardworking men and women steadily changing the reputation and the public's experience of an entire industry. I hope you will feel inspired by what you read.

TrustMark is proud to be part of this story. For 10 years we have worked with industry and consumer groups to raise standards and to signpost the public to reputable firms across a wide range of trades to do work on our homes and gardens.

The scheme has changed significantly in recent years, and continues to develop new services and added value for registered firms and their customers. If you've not been in touch with TrustMark recently, take a fresh look.

Of course the work to tackle rogue traders is never over, and I still see a future full of new opportunities to improve the way the RMI market operates.

But TrustMark has helped many millions of people over the last 10 years, so today it's right to celebrate the local firms who do so much to support homeowners and build a £27 billion economy. They epitomise a new era of professionalism across a wide range of trades.

Liz Male MBE, chair, TrustMark



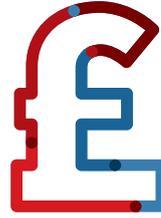
What the UK's tradespeople do



Contribute to the UK economy

Just under a fifth of all SMEs operate in construction, accounting for over **10%** share of all SME employment and turnover

(Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2015)



More than **148,000** local firms working on **28 million** homes - the vast majority are sole traders or businesses with fewer than 8 employees, but vital to the local economy

(OFT, 2011)



Productivity is very high - almost half (48%) of tradespeople report working over 40 hours a week

(Direct Line, 2012)

The total value of the UK's home repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) work is estimated at

£27bn a year

(Construction 2025)



80-90% of all jobs are completed without giving rise to a complaint... but incompetent tradespeople cost UK homeowners an estimated

£1.9bn a year

(OFT and TrustMark)

Deliver the dream home

Rather than moving home, **29%** of homeowners see their current home as one for life, with households spending

£23,000

on average on home improvements over a lifetime (Age UK, 2012)

The average household invests



of its total annual household expenditure on home alterations and improvements

(OFT, 2011)

About 60% of home improvement jobs cost

£1000+

(OFT, 2011)



of homeowners spent more than **£5K** on improvements over two years

(Anglian Home Improvements, 2013)

42%

of homeowners are planning to carry out home improvements in the hope of making their home worth more

(Zoopla, 2014)

Good home improvements add value to our properties, some adding as much as **21%** to the value of a typical home

(Nationwide, 2014)

Carry out essential repairs and maintenance

The average household spends

4%

of its total annual household expenditure on essential home repairs and maintenance

(OFT, 2011)



of home maintenance and repair jobs cost less than **£500** (OFT, 2011)

21%

of homeowners say their properties need minor repairs

(TrustMark, 2012)



There were more than **446,000** handyperson services' details given to people searching for help on the TrustMark website in 2015 (TrustMark, 2016)

Insurance claims for weather damage, escape of water, fire and subsidence damage to homes reached over **£1.3bn** in 2013 (ABI, 2015)

that's

£3.5m

repair work needed every day

The value of trade professionalism

The UK's 28 million existing homes form its most precious built asset, more than £4 trillion of that in owner occupiers' hands. For these consumers, a home represents the biggest purchase in a lifetime, their biggest asset, and a safe and secure place to raise a family.

The 148,000+ home repair and improvement (RMI) businesses working across the UK are together responsible for safeguarding the condition of our homes. These tradespeople and their small businesses carry out improvement works to realise a homeowner's dream, undertake routine maintenance tasks and 'handyman' services, restore essential services and provide critical support at times of emergency and stress.

When floods, high winds, snow and other events cause damage to homes and gardens it is good tradespeople who make property safe and sound again and help families and communities to recover. This role is becoming increasingly important as volatile weather conditions and a changing climate pose greater risks for our built environment.

Britain also has the oldest housing stock in Europe, and the challenge of repairing, maintaining and improving these homes only gets greater every year.

With a somewhat subdued housing market which tends to encourage more of us to improve rather than move, yet a steady decline in consumers' interest in and time for DIY, we can see just how reliant we are on an army of reputable local tradespeople to help us ensure our homes remain our castles.

The economic impact of low consumer confidence

When looking at the true value of professionalism in our trades, it is worth considering its financial worth also.

The joint industry and Government industrial strategy for construction, 'Construction 2025', identified domestic RMI work to be worth an estimated £27 billion a year to the

economy (based on Office for National Statistics figures from the Family Spending report).

Unfortunately though, there are also signs that low consumer confidence may be holding back a significant market from reaching its full economic potential.

Research by YouGov for the HomeOwners Alliance in 2014 indicated that 58% of homeowners said they found it difficult to find a tradesperson they trust to help with home repairs or improvements, with one in five (21%) saying that it is "very difficult."

Of those homeowners who have had difficulty in finding a trusted tradesperson, 28% admitted that they end up using tradespeople they are not certain of, 27% said they did essential work only, 26% said they delayed works and 12% said they did not undertake projects or repairs at all.

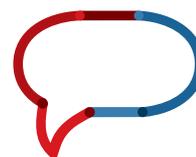
There were similar indications in the Office of Fair Trading research in 2011, which showed that some homeowners would postpone or cancel home improvements and non-emergency repair work until they could find a recommended firm they felt they could trust.

Consequently, the price we are paying is an ever-deteriorating housing stock and the financial burden of £1.9 billion a year spent on fixing botched jobs.

Subsequent initiatives to encourage improvements in the energy performance of our existing housing stock are similarly hampered by consumer doubt and procrastination.

This is a ridiculous situation, when we know there are so many tradespeople out there who are totally committed to doing quality work and excellent customer service.

TrustMark estimates that a £27 billion market could be closer to £40 billion if homeowners had greater confidence and improved signposting to reputable local firms. The question is: how do we unlock this value? >



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The value of trade professionalism

Building trust

The key to success must lie in public trust and awareness of the many good firms in the market, and the safeguards provided by schemes such as TrustMark.

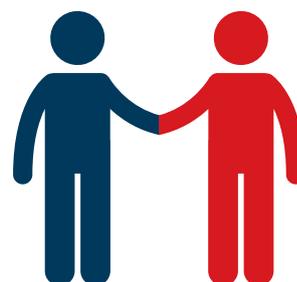
'Cowboy builders' and rogue traders are a minority in the market, but they get disproportionate publicity and have a serious impact both on the homeowners who fall victim to them and on the broader industry. They can ruin people's lives and homes, damage the industry's reputation, take work away from reputable firms and are a continuing source of consumer concern.

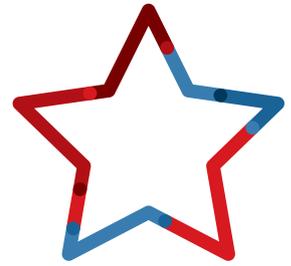
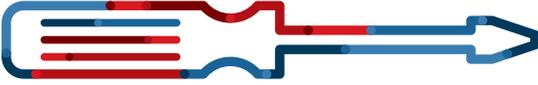
The industry's tradespeople and allied organisations are working hard to raise standards across the sector, and clearly differentiate the reputable businesses from the cowboys. They are putting in place a range of measures to help consumers to recognise value, avoid rogue traders and collaborate with their tradespeople with greater confidence.

They also understand that the professional reputation of the sector rests not just on tradespeople's technical skills and workmanship, but also on the way in which they work with their customers. The latter encompasses a host of business activities and behaviours, ranging from the quotations and contracts that lay the foundations for a successful partnership with the homeowner to basic courtesies like keeping a workspace clean and tidy.

This report is published to coincide with TrustMark's tenth anniversary. It brings together a collection of views on what professionalism means in today's industry, highlighting some of the ways in which tradespeople are developing their skills and businesses to delight their customers.

Above all, it profiles 10 of the tradespeople who are demonstrating the values of modern professionalism through their work with UK homeowners. They are today's industry and our ambassadors.





About TrustMark

The home repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) sector has been the focus of various public and private sector initiatives and interventions over the last 20 years in the search for a solution that will build confident consumers and a strong economy.

One of those initiatives was the creation of TrustMark in 2005, developed against a difficult background of the failure of Quality Mark, a predecessor scheme.

Quality Mark had very high standards, but also very high costs. It was ultimately found to be unsustainable. Consequently, Government, consumer groups and a group of pioneering trade associations worked hard to create a new co-regulation scheme that had better balance between effective consumer protection and affordability for businesses.

TrustMark was launched to the public in early 2006 as the Government-endorsed quality scheme that signposts consumers to reputable local tradespeople to do work in and around the home. It is currently a registered social enterprise, a not-for-profit organisation covering the whole of the UK.

TrustMark's services are increasingly in demand. More than 8.1 million search results were provided to homeowners in 2015 who used TrustMark's website and telephone helpline to find local firms and expert tradespeople to carry out their home improvements and repairs – up 12% compared to the same period in 2014 and an 55% increase since 2013.

What good looks like in consumer trust schemes

Research published by the National Consumer Federation has identified six criteria for a good consumer trust scheme, all of which are met by TrustMark:

- Initial assessment of businesses (bona fides, technical competence, insurance etc)
- Detailed codes of practice to deal with specific trades that address key consumer issues
- Well managed consumer feedback, based on codes of practice
- Fair, transparent, low cost and accessible to all
- Regular monitoring and assessment, review by an independent body and proper complaints handling and redress
- Involvement of consumer and public interest bodies in the development and management of the scheme

The new trade professionalism

What is 'professionalism' in this very diverse market? Through our research, we collected many views and examples of what good looks like.

Carol Brady, chair of the board of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and a director of TrustMark, defines professionalism in the trades as, "Someone who puts the customer first, who knows when they can and can't meet the customers' demands, and has the right skills, knowledge and experience. They're capable, competent, responsible and do what they say they will do." This definition encompasses a broad range of competences and behaviours, outlined here and practised by the tradespeople featured in this report.

Corporate image

A scruffy tradesperson in an unmarked white van – that is the popular perception of the trade business. In reality, tradespeople are getting smarter about the way their business looks and presents itself. Building trades and working in the garden may be dirty work, but the tradespeople featured in this report routinely wear uniforms and care about how they are perceived by their customer.

A professional image means:

- **Branding:** Business material carries consistent, professional branding and business logos, alongside those for accreditation and membership schemes
 - **Uniform:** A simple polo shirt with company logo may set the tone. Baseball caps and hoodies are often banned
 - **Transport livery:** Vans are equipped with the business branding, and kept clean and neat
 - **Digital tools:** The website is a business shop window, and showcases accreditation scheme logos, customer testimonial videos, and a wealth of useful guidance and information. Social media routes such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are also popular tools
- for displaying testimonials and photos of completed work, while others are turning to text messaging to let customers know when their tradesperson will be arriving, or even just to send Christmas greetings
 - **Traditional marketing:** Well-known tools like postcards and signboards still have a part to play, particularly in keeping neighbours informed
 - **Engaging with the community:** Tradespeople are playing their part in their communities by supporting local charities and initiatives. This approach also makes good marketing sense, tapping into the 'buy local' relationship that exists between consumers and suppliers.

Tradespeople are getting smarter about the way their business looks and presents itself



Managing the business

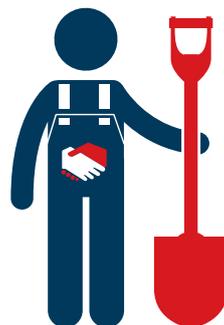
A trade business is often small and lean, with many comprising only one person or a husband and wife team. However, that doesn't mean that they need to rely on the back of an envelope when giving a quotation – an iPad is fast becoming today's business management tool of choice on site. The versatile tablet is being used to showcase previous projects on initial customer visits, generate quotations and paperwork, and help provide a photographic record of every project.

Managing the business professionally means:

- **Handling initial enquiries efficiently:** The first response can make or break a business relationship. Some small businesses use the first response as a time-saving filter for projects, while also providing advice to the consumer on areas such as need for planning approval. Reputable tradespeople can offer a wealth of advice and guidance that can help consumers to make key decisions on their project
- **Having processes in place:** This begins with the initial enquiry form and extends through to final sign-off, payment and the customer satisfaction form, and covers key activities including contract changes and complaints. Tradespeople are increasingly adopting a 'digital first' approach, relying on software packages or bespoke designed apps for customer relationship management and back-office functions such as supplier orders. At the same time, a letter to the customer remains important, being both inclusive and a means of personalising communications in a digital world
- **Industry Memberships:** A survey carried out by the Office of Fair Trading in 2010 found that almost half of traders (43%) are members of a trade association, with almost a third (28%) being members of approved trader schemes. The auditing processes of schemes like TrustMark help businesses to promote their standards, and are seen as a key point of business differentiation in a market where rogue traders continue to operate.



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Growing workforce and competence

The UK construction industry struggles to attract young recruits and is facing a significant skills shortage, largely because of its poor public image, working conditions, and history of undervaluing qualifications. Reputable trade businesses face challenges in training and then retaining their small teams, and yet many are investing significantly in their people, and boast personnel that have remained loyal to them for decades. Trade organisations are playing an important role in supporting their members and raising competences in their sectors. However cold, wet or dusty the working environment is, the reputable tradesperson is increasingly likely to be highly trained.

Growing the workforce and their competence means:

- **Training the workforce:** Qualifications have not traditionally been required in some trade sectors, eg, window installation and general building, but many organisations are now working to build recognisable expertise
- **Developing business skills:** Some of today's trade businesses employ their own chartered office managers and software developers; smaller firms are building their own skills with the help of their trade bodies. The Property Care Association, for example, offers training in using social media, as well as how to organise an office. GGF Training is developing a training programme based on how to engage with the consumer, covering such areas as the sales process
- **Showing a commitment to the industry's future:** Trade businesses may have small staff teams but they make an extremely valuable contribution to training the industry's future workforce. Trade organisations have a range of initiatives to support apprentices. For example, TrustMark scheme operator the Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) provides a managing agency for apprentices, matching apprentices to companies, and facilitating funding and mentoring. It matches some 400-500 apprentices every year. While BESA is established in the field, the Property Care Association has recruited the first batch of 10 young people to its first apprentice scheme in preservation. A number of the tradespeople profiled in this report are providing opportunities for apprentices, with some providing individual mentoring. Many of the tradespeople featured in this report are directly giving back to the industry through their representation on industry committees and as trainers and assessors for trade organisations
- **Keeping knowledge up to date:** Regulation and technology are both evolving rapidly, so tradespeople have to work at staying abreast of technical and customer service developments. Most trade organisations provide CPD, with some like the National Federation of Roofing Contractors offering E-learning modules, which provide flexible learning to smaller businesses.

Trade organisations are playing an important role in supporting their members and raising competences in their sectors



A partnership - Working with the customer

For customers unused to building, home repair and improvement projects can appear daunting – so daunting that some homeowners can be reluctant to undertake projects. Helping the customer to realise their dream can often result in a delighted client extending the project or undertaking a second, and so continuing their relationship with the tradesperson. The reputable tradesperson guides the customer by setting out their processes and activities at every stage of a project. Some businesses have developed their own tools and processes to do this, and TrustMark and its scheme operators offer a wealth of advice for homeowners.

Collaboration with the customer means:

- **Providing a detailed quotation:** This often stems from a survey of the property, which should be carried out for all major works. A standard quote or estimate may not give the customer confidence or provide an accurate basis for the work, giving the potential for misunderstandings or additional charges later in the project. A detailed and transparent quotation lays the foundations for collaboration between customer and tradesperson. Lee Goodwin of Dagenham based Oakleafe Property Services, profiled later in this report, says the company's quotation for a £100,000 home extension could run to 65 pages. "It minimises the chances of miscommunication," he says
- **Selling with integrity:** Television programmes on rogue traders have rightly made consumers wary of the sales techniques of tradespeople. Codes of conduct govern reputable tradespeople's behaviour, and under TrustMark rules must be brought into line with new consumer legislation and enhance consumer protection. Many scheme operators also provide specific guidance to members on dealing with vulnerable consumers
- **Agreeing a contract and timings:** The contract marks the commitment to the project by both tradesperson and customer, providing clarity and security to both partners
- **Being transparent and giving honest answers:** The professional tradesperson lets the customer know what they can do and also what they cannot
- **Guiding the customer throughout the project:** Reputable tradespeople are experts and can help customers get the best end result. Early explanation of simple points like, for example, the need for access to electricity and water, help to facilitate the tradesperson's work. Tradespeople can also direct potential customers to useful sources of information, often provided by their trade associations
- **A clear payment process:** This benefits both the tradesperson and the consumer, building trust between parties. Escrow services maybe used for complex, high value projects
- **Operating a clear and fair procedure for handling complaints:** When a customer raises a concern it is important that it is logged and taken seriously. The tradespeople featured here stress the importance of a swift response
- **Communicating at every stage:** Complaints and dissatisfaction often stem from poor communication between tradesperson and customer. Communication can nip potential concerns in the bud and allay clients' fears.

The reputable tradesperson guides the customer by setting out their processes and activities at every stage of a project



Respecting the customer's home and neighbourhood

Customers may look forward to their boiler being repaired or their lounge getting a makeover but they seldom welcome the presence of a tradesperson in their home. Having work done is traumatic; it's often seen as an invasion of privacy. Consumers associate bad tradespeople with inconvenience, loud conversations about last night's pub session over loud music from their radio, and mess. It might not be possible to prevent all of the dirt, dust and noise of the work itself, but many trade businesses now have behavioural policies in place and a host of practical ways of minimising disruption.

Respecting the customer's home and neighbourhood means:

- **Keeping the home and its surroundings as clean and tidy as possible:** Kent based heating and plumbing firm, A.C. Wilgar, sets out its stall by equipping its installers with doormats, which they set down when they arrive at a home. The doormat has the slogan: Heating Homes With Care. The tradespeople featured here routinely carry their own cleaning equipment and remove waste swiftly from the site
- **Showing courtesy to home occupants and neighbours:** The tradespeople featured in this report don't take the customer's home or neighbourhood for granted. For example, decorator Steve Dove of Steve Dove & Co in Hampshire, featured later in this report, will not clean paintbrushes and rollers at a client's house, unless given permission. As well as being generally courteous, there are numerous ways in which tradespeople are being helpful to customers while they are in their homes. A recent survey by AXA Insurance found that more than 80% of tradespeople are helping customers with good deeds including feeding a pet, taking in a parcel delivery or making extra time to chat with an older householder
- **Keeping home occupants and neighbours safe and well informed:** This is enshrined in good business processes, starting with setting out the work to be done and introducing the team who will be doing it
- **Minimising any disturbance caused by vehicle movements, deliveries and work:** Disturbance is an inevitable part of many building works, but its impact is reduced – and good relationships maintained – by communicating with residents and neighbours and managing the work with the customer in mind.

As well as being generally courteous, there are numerous ways in which tradespeople are being helpful to customers while they are in their homes



Managing the project

Toolbox talks, risk assessments, waste segregation – these are among the key features of all building-related projects, both large and small. Reputable tradespeople are conscious of their responsibilities and are working hard to keep themselves, their staff and homeowners safe and sound.

Managing a project professionally means:

- **Minimising waste and managing its disposal responsibly:** Responsible tradespeople remove waste from the customer's home quickly, often to temporary storage facilities at their own premises. Recycling is a routine part of the waste management process, and many manufacturers now help by collecting waste while delivering new product
- **Limiting security risks to the home and neighbouring properties:** Customers are often at work or living away while repairs or improvements are carried out, so the tradesperson can be a temporary custodian of their home. Reputable tradespeople are aware of security and leave a property secure at the end of every working day, taking steps to minimise any potential risks posed by weak points such as scaffolding
- **Embed safe working practices:** Many tradespeople go beyond the basics of health and safety, providing additional training and equipment to minimise risks
- **Collaborating effectively with fellow tradespeople, sub-contractors, suppliers and Building Control:** Tradespeople don't work in isolation or have all the skills needed for every job. Reputable tradespeople have their own networks of trusted tradespeople, who they can call in when a job is too big or demands a skill they don't have. They understand and comply with all the relevant regulatory and other processes to ensure good work is properly recorded, approved, certificated and warranted for when the homeowner needs to sell the property.

Converting good practice into good business

Small businesses do not have the finances to spend heavily on business development and often operate within relatively limited geographical areas where one piece of negative feedback could quickly be commercially damaging. Satisfied customers, repeat business and personal recommendation are therefore the lifeblood of reputable tradespeople. The tradespeople featured in this report all have customers who they have been working with for many years, and some have grown their businesses significantly as a result.

Converting good practice into good business means:

- **Leaving a positive impression on customer:** This enhances reputation by generating positive feedback and testimonials, and generates further work through personal recommendation
- **Winning awards:** Some top tradespeople are receiving the recognition they richly deserve in local business, trade association and media awards.

Some top tradespeople are receiving the recognition they richly deserve in local business, trade association and media awards



What difference do trade bodies make?

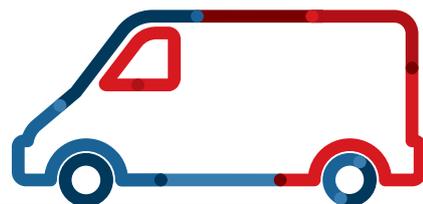
TrustMark has always worked closely with different parts of the home improvement industry in a very successful model of co-regulation. This includes working with many trade associations and industry bodies who have a particularly important role in engaging their members and encouraging higher quality across their sectors. Every trade organisation has its own processes. Here are two examples of how TrustMark's scheme operators are working to establish and raise standards.

Association of Professional Landscapers (APL)

Independent consultants oversee the entry process for would-be members, who also have to provide six references and undergo a rigorous inspection process. Following this an annual inspection ensures members remain covered by correct insurances and comply with current legislation, as well as assessing professionalism. APL checks the way members present quotations and invoices, follow up enquiries and if necessary handle complaints. It also takes an interest in the way they train and treat staff and that they are making the right checks on sub-contractors. In addition, site checks are carried out to ensure quality of work is consistent, members continue to observe health and safety regulations and that they operate with courtesy. The APL has its own complaints procedure, taking information from both parties and offers access via TrustMark to an alternative dispute resolution procedure if needed. It can also recommend independent experts to look at work and give judgments on complaints.

Federation of Master Builders (FMB)

The fact that anyone can call themselves a general builder can make it difficult for professional builders to differentiate themselves from the rogue operators. Over the past few years the FMB has been working hard to define what it means to be a Master Builder and what it takes to make the grade. The FMB has revised its entry criteria so that all new and existing members will be independently inspected - a key requirement of TrustMark. It has also strengthened its members' Code of Practice to cover such factors as the need to have insurance in place, the need to brief the client on progress to date, and critically the need to have a contract in place. "We have also set up a National Standards & Conduct Committee to ensure the FMB standards are applied consistency across our UK wide membership," says FMB chief executive Brian Berry. "These moves have been well received by our members because they recognise the need for them to stand out from the crowd. Better still consumers can now be confident that Master Builders are the best when it comes to having building work done."



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Richard Bickler, Arbour Design & Build

Arbour Design & Build is a garden design, landscaping and maintenance specialist company. Richard started working with his mother who was a garden designer whilst studying for his National Diploma at Capel Manor College. The company is still a family affair with his wife running the administration, whilst Richard focuses on the day to day running of the business. Arbour Design & Build covers work in the home counties and North London with projects ranging in size from the small day jobs to projects which can take up to six months. And there are also the maintenance clients to consider, some of whom have been with Arbour Design & Build for up to 20 years.

People

Like many small businesses, Richard runs a tight ship. He started out on the tools, but now has a dedicated team of landscapers and designers, which leaves him free to concentrate on new business and client relationships. His team have been with him for many years and he ensures the work always meets his high standards on which his reputation is based.

Business

Richard says around 90% of the firm's work comes through personal recommendation. Accreditation is integral to this, he adds: "It's 100% valuable to us because people can see we have gone through the process of being vetted and tested and therefore believe that we are a trustworthy company."

The business is a member of The Association of Professional Landscapers and a registered installer for a number of suppliers. "We've been very loyal to around 15-20 suppliers for many years and in turn they are loyal to us," states Richard.

Arbour Design & Build does not need to advertise, but does have branded vehicles, along with boards which are outside each job. The company also uses traditional postcards to advise clients of impending site visits, and uses leaflets to advise neighbours of impending works. Arbour Design & Build is also very active on social media, making the most of Twitter and Facebook.

Customer service

Every enquiry is logged on the firm's customer management list and the potential customer receives a questionnaire, asking for information about their project, any restrictions, budget and timescales, as well as photographs. This questionnaire provides an initial filter for the business, says Richard. "Because time is limited, this helps to sift out unsuitable projects. We then visit prospective customers within 7 to 14 days and an estimate will follow." A pre-start letter outlines the work for the client, and any requirements, e.g. for access to water or electricity. Richard introduces his clients to their work team and has his own blanket policy on site behaviour. "As a result of this we've never had a behaviour issue or complaints from the client," he says.

Any ensuing changes to the project are set out in writing and signed off by the client. Once the project is finished the client will sign off the completed work. This is important for both the client and Arbour Design & Build as unfortunately issues such as weather or inappropriate care and maintenance can affect the outcome even months after the project is finished.

If there are any complaints or issues they are dealt with immediately and so both parties are satisfied. Arbour Design & Build often has longstanding relationships with many clients, some of whom will return years later for another project and some who become maintenance clients. This can only be the result of the high standard of work Arbour Design & Build adheres to and the reputation Richard has built up over the last 20 years.

"We've been very loyal to around 15-20 suppliers for many years and in turn they are loyal to us."



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Steve Dove, Steve Dove & Co

Steve Dove went into the decorating trade on leaving school at 18 and has been running his own business since the late 1980s. His firm's activity has expanded from painting and decorating into domestic refurbishment work, but remains small in size. Steve prides himself on operating within a small geographical area of Hampshire, saying, "I'm a very local business working with local people."

People

Steve works alongside his right hand man and relies on sub-contractors to supplement his skills, particularly on domestic refurbishment projects. He says, "I work with other local people who I've been working with for more than 20 years so we have established relationships. It's all about being fair."

Business

Steve has expanded the range of his business by taking on a project manager role for refurbishment works. "I hold the design brief, provide the liaison and am a one-stop shop, being paid directly by the client. It's a model that is working well," he says. Most of his work comes through recommendation.

He sees accreditation as adding value to his business.

"I like TrustMark because you continuously have someone looking at tradecraft and business skills."

Customer service

Many of Steve's customers want to achieve the dream home, so Steve's role is to make that dream come true. "I'm completely service orientated. People buy me as much as what we do," he says. The liveried vans are kept clean and tidy inside and out, workwear is branded and Steve arrives at a home to do a quotation armed with information. New customers receive a pack containing a welcome letter, highlighting the benefits of using a reputable contractor, and his TrustMark accreditation and membership of the Dulux Select Decorator scheme. Alongside the letter, Steve also provides paint colour charts or information on wallpaper sources. "All of this gives a sense of confidence. I also explain things like deposit protection," he says.

A quotation for decorating can include a specification of around four pages. Terms and conditions are set out in detail. "I've given a lot of thought to how to make things clear. The system works really well."

Steve says his service is the trade equivalent of the kind of service his customers would receive in a luxury hotel: "We empty a room of furniture and put it back. We take photos of the room beforehand so that we can put things perfectly back into place. If a carpet is being replaced, we'll remove it. We think about the things that distress people, like mess." In order to minimize dust, the company not only tapes and isolates work areas, but also uses extraction equipment. This approach is good for both customer satisfaction and for workers' health and safety.

Any waste is brought back to the company's own skip on a daily basis, and equipment is cleaned at the company depot if customers prefer. "We want to excel," says Steve. "There should be a wow about one of our jobs."

"I'm completely service orientated. People buy me as much as what we do."



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Wendy Ayers, W A Electrical Services

Wendy Ayres set up W A Electrical Services 17 years ago and has grown her customer base considerably over the years. Wendy got her first taste for electrical work whilst employed at a local hospital as an electrical assistant. After five years of studying and attending evening classes and day release covering electrical theory, installation, engineering, and inspection and testing, Wendy qualified and has never looked back. The majority of Wendy's time is spent doing electrical work for customers, across Leicestershire and surrounding areas.

People

Appointments, meetings and administrative work can mean days are long, despite the business being small. Wendy benefits from being a member of NAPIT and the Institute of Engineering and Technology, and is TrustMark registered as an electrician.

Wendy attends training courses to continually develop her skills and knowledge, which she can then pass onto her customers. NAPIT meetings also provide a valuable insight into proposed regulation and legislative changes to wiring regulations. Wendy strongly believes that "all electricians should be certificated and show traceability for their work."

Business

For a long time, Wendy got most of her business through word of mouth and personal recommendations. In recent years, she has received referrals from the TrustMark website. Wendy's company van also features the logo and contact details, which acts as a mobile advert in and around Leicestershire.

Wendy turns up to every customer with her branded uniform looking clean and tidy and always takes off her shoes at the front door. "Clearing up after the job is just as important as the job itself," says Wendy. "You must always remember that you are only as good as your last job. Never take anything for granted." This has obviously paid off as a large percentage of customers are repeat business, with some having been with her since the start.

Building a good relationship and providing a personal touch is something Wendy does for her customers. It can be anything from looking after a customer's dog to cooking an elderly customer's supper. Wendy is very perceptive to her customers needs, particularly the elderly, and she will ensure she works at their pace, at a convenient time to suit them and always with a smile. Even the business cards have emergency advice printed on the back.

Community links play an important role for Wendy and her business. She has helped many organisations with electrical related work, including the Scouts Hut Community Centre and Victim Support, as well as financially supporting many local Leicestershire charities.

Customer service

Before W A Electrical Services is able to provide a quotation, Wendy visits the customer's home and takes photos of the area where the work is required. Having visual proof helps her prepare a detailed estimate with risk assessments for the larger work. The quotation or estimate has the materials required and a start and finish date. By being transparent at every stage, customers know what to expect. Any unforeseen circumstances or a customer's additional instructions are met with a positive attitude.

Depending on the size of the job, Wendy will use a contract for the larger jobs, but for the smaller ones, the quotation acts as a safeguard for both parties involved as it will be a useful record of what has been previously discussed and agreed. She is always ready to pass on new information and advice to her customers on all aspects of her job, including guidance on their consumer rights.

Wendy wants to leave a lasting impression with her customers, so makes sure that every home is left immaculate when she leaves, taking all waste with her – including anything the customer needs taking to the tip too. The trust and reputation that W A Electrical Services has built up with its customers over the past 17 years is a true testament to the business's work ethic.



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Lee Goodwin, Oakleafe Property Services Ltd

Oakleafe is a general building business, with a significant share of its business in the popular home improvement works of loft and basement extensions, as well as insurance-related repairs. It is based in Dagenham, serving London and surrounding areas. The building industry is in the family's genes, Lee Goodwin says. "I'm the eighth generation running a family building business, with my brother – we've traced the family back to the 1700s in the business. I have been around builders' lorries since the age of four and have been working in the business for 18 years." A decade ago this was a three-person family firm, but today it has a staff of 117.

People

The company has Investors in People accreditation "to ensure we have the processes to make us do things properly," says Lee. Every member of staff has an annually updated training plan, with skills being boosted across the board – the office manager has gained chartered manager status. The diverse workforce includes tradeswomen and around 15 apprentices. Past apprentices have included a homeless youngster who is now one of the company's star tradespeople and a trainee carpenter whose aptitude for numbers saw him move to quantity surveying.

Lee and his brother have also raised their qualifications, having recently completed building surveying degrees. "It has given us credibility among our peers," he says.

Business

The company provides a wealth of information for consumers on its website, and has branding on staff uniforms and the 30 vehicles in the company fleet. "We ensure that everyone turns up to a job looking tidy and keeps the site clean – things like that can make an average job fantastic for the customer," says Lee.

Community links are also key to this business. It sponsors local sports and community initiatives and has won a string of East London business awards, often against formidable competition from other industries. Lee explains why: "We try to give something back, but it also helps to market us."

The firm is not an approved supplier for any particular product or supplier. "It's something we tend to shy away from because it could suggest to a client that we're getting a kickback," says Lee. "We say what products are good without pushing them."

Customer service

The company invites customers to its premises and has a wealth of guidance on offer. "If you're having a bathroom we'll take you to see some of the suppliers, so you can see the quality of products in reality rather than a catalogue," explains Lee. "It actually often means people spend more. But if they need to spend less, like substituting natural stone, we will help source a product that is cheaper."

Instead of standard quotations of several pages, the company has worked with software estimating specialist HBXL to come up with a more detailed tool. For a £100,000 extension project, a quotation could run to 65 pages. "The quality of our paperwork is so good it wins us work," says Lee. "It minimises the chances of miscommunication."

Staff on site are equipped with iPads as workflow is managed digitally, with photographs taken at the end of every working day and posted to a customer's personal web page. "We're transparent about what we do. It gives a collage of a job for clients and is very popular for those who are overseas or away," says Lee.

All of these aspects give the customer confidence, Lee explains: "We are forever trying to justify why we're not like the guys people see on the telly. The lack of regulation in the UK means there are people who try their luck. We ask the customer to look at our premises and our work, speak to our clients – it's all about building trust."

"We try to give something back, but it also helps to market us."



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Reg Harris, Urban Forestry

A spell of work experience with the National Trust while still at school led Reg Harris to a career in arboriculture, which to date has lasted just over 30 years. He set up Urban Forestry Bury St Edmunds with a business partner in 1992 and the pair has grown the company to a team of 60, serving domestic and commercial clients across East Anglia, the Midlands and the North of England. The company provides tree surgery and landscaping services.

People

For some 20 years the company has been making a significant investment in training, and that is something both clients and staff value. A number of staff have been with the company for around 17 years or more. "We have a five year training programme. If staff are climbing trees they will average two to five courses a year over the five years," explains Reg. "We spend some of our business profit on training, but it pays dividends." Reg is an Arboricultural Association lead assessor for its approved contractor scheme and is a board member on the Ancient Tree Forum, as he leads work on some of the country's oldest trees.

Business

The company proudly showcases the logos of its accreditation and membership schemes on its website, as well as on its headed notepaper and emails. "We sell these to the client so that they know what they mean. They won't necessarily be familiar with them," explains Reg. The company has some very longstanding clients and wins much of its work through recommendation. Reg adds, "We have worked at keeping customers' business by giving good service."

Locally, however, the company's best advertisement is its fleet of 40 liveried vans. "They are so well known. People are used to seeing them around," Reg explains.

As a provider of environmental services, the company tries to work sustainably, so uses battery operated chainsaws when working at height and a fuel that is cleaner than ordinary petrol for machinery. Any cut branches from projects go into a wood chipper and are sold for use in a local farmer's chicken sheds or are re-used in the company's own projects.

Customer service

Customer enquiries are logged on the company's own intranet, and followed by a visit to site. When giving a detailed quotation, the company provides accompanying information to customers including the project risk assessment, as well as leaflets on the benefits of using reputable traders. Reg says, "Often customers have worked with someone who is disreputable in the past, and then have come to us."

The firm is an Arboricultural Association approved contractor and at its last assessment, passed without a single fault, which was a major achievement. "It was an accolade for the team," says Reg. "We're always working to stay ahead of the crowd. It makes a massive difference when tendering."

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Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Graham Stone, Stonehouse Property Care

Stonehouse Property Care has grown from a husband-and-wife, one secretary, one operative start-up to an 18-person team in 15 years. The Henley-based company is now a leading expert in the specialist field of waterproofing, flood control, damp-proofing and timber decay. It operates within an area from the South Coast to Birmingham, although if a project requires their expertise they travel further afield and even abroad. The company works both as a sub-contractor and directly for homeowners. Graham himself has a BSc in Timber Technology and 30 years' industry experience.

People

The company has a number of loyal long-serving employees. When recruiting new staff, Graham looks for key qualities: "We will take a person through our in-house training process, but we also look for personality. Our HR consultant or my wife Lucy will meet them – the priority is, would they work to our high standards, fit in with our company ethos and would we be totally comfortable with them representing us in front of to every property owner."

Alongside its own in-house training, the staff regularly attend Property Care Association courses. It also develops individual staff expertise, with one foreman taking a surveying qualification and earning the Property Care Association 'Student of the Year' award in the process. In 2015 the firm won the Property Care Association award for National Contractor of the Year.

Business

The Stonehouse logo isn't the usual corporate emblem. Instead, a child's drawing of a bright pink house was adopted giving the message that they are approachable and that every property has its uniqueness. Graham's graphic designer wife worked on the company's branding, but enlisted the help of their then four-year old daughter to draw the house. It proved to be a simple but effective solution, says Graham. "It worked well for us because it gave us impact straight away. We carry it on our vans and uniforms. I believe the image has helped us greatly – when a customer asks about it, we can tell the story behind it."

Graham is selective about accreditation schemes. He says, "There are so many accreditation bodies around, many unselectively raising money from the internet. We believe TrustMark does the best job of any in filtering the most reputable contractors because it is independent, it is not a commercial organisation and genuinely offers help to the customer."

The company's website, which is currently being updated, predominantly serves to reassure customers. Graham says, "We get most of our work through reputation and recommendations – we have stopped advertising."

The company has evolved its business systems from those Graham has used in the past, with processes being increasingly digitized. The company is about to introduce iPads on site for operatives. "That will be the next step forward, it will improve communication between the office and our customers" says Graham.

Customer service

Stonehouse's fully qualified and experienced surveyors visit the property, inspect, diagnose and formulate quotations in full consultation with the customer. Once accepted, a dedicated Contract Administrator handles the timing and progress of each project. All operatives are directly employed and arrive at site with the instruction to treat each property as if it was their own home. Disruption is kept to a minimum with the emphasis on courtesy and efficiency. "Details like punctuality, floor protection, freshly washed dust sheets make a difference to all households undertaking structural works." The company takes a very firm line on the use of radios, with no smoking or poor behaviour on-site. Any waste from the firm's activity is returned to its own office skip for responsible recycling and disposal. Waste plastic waterproofing membrane is collected from the office by manufacturers when they make deliveries as part of an environmentally conscious commitment.

The company's feedback procedure rectifies any concerns swiftly. Graham says: "We do not leave customers with any doubt that they have been treated fairly and professionally. Very often people come to us after having a bad experience elsewhere. I know our honesty and quality of work is the foundation of our reputation." Customers receive a 10-Year Guarantee as an industry standard, so the company is in a continuing relationship with its clients.

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Karl Terry, Karl Terry Roofing Contractors

Traditional Kent peg tiling is the specialism of the Wittersham-based business of Karl Terry. Some 90% of his workload involves working with listed homes in the county. Karl followed in his father's footsteps, joining his business in 1984 and learning on the job, before setting up his own firm nine years later.

People

Karl works with his wife, who does the administrative work, plus a 12-strong roofing team who are all directly employed. "It is more expensive to have directly employed staff, and so harder to be competitive on cost, but with my own team I know what work to expect and how I expect customers to be treated," says Karl.

Business

Many of Karl's customers are long-standing and come to him following personal recommendation, but he still regards his website as a key business tool. "It contains a lot of information and details of our work and what we do," he says. The website features customer testimonials and case studies, as well as outlining Karl's credentials, business guarantees and insurance, and accreditation schemes.

The website also directs visitors to a company Facebook page, where viewers can see photos of projects in progress and at completion.

Safety is an extremely high priority in the roofing sector and Karl produces risk assessments and method statements for all projects. His team undertakes working at height and first aid training.

"It is all about having integrity and being trustworthy."

Customer service

Like many of today's trade professionals, Karl relies on his iPad to produce quotations during site visits. Quotations – sent to the customer by email and hard copy – come with a list of his last 50 customers. If prospective customers want references, Karl provides random names from that list, rather than hand-picking the most satisfied. Quotations are made on a fixed price basis and have their costs itemized down to the last nail, with the customer making stage payments during the project.

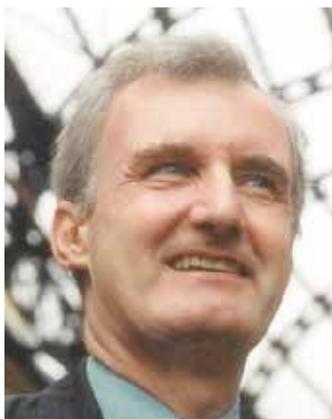
On his initial visit, Karl talks customers through the project and alerts them to any potential inconveniences, such as a loss of daylight while scaffolding is in place. Project preparation also includes asking homeowners whether they would allow site workers to use a radio and where welfare facilities and skips should be located. When Karl's uniformed team and their liveried vans arrive on site to carry out the work, they are armed with this vital information on the job sheet and so the potential for misunderstanding is minimised. This customer care continues throughout the project, with the contractor ensuring all scaffolding is covered with polythene to limit mess.

The company takes steps to ensure the security of the home is not compromised during roofing works. It is becoming increasingly commonplace for scaffolds to be alarmed, but where they aren't, the company ensures they are not accessible, including removing ladders from the site at night.

Attention to all the right details has won Karl a string of awards. He says the secret of trade professionalism is simple: "It is all about having integrity and being trustworthy."



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Greg O'Donoghue, Just Windows and Doors

With a 30 year track record in business, Just Windows and Doors is a well-established and familiar name in its Hertfordshire and Middlesex operating area. The company was founded by former teacher Greg O'Donoghue, working with a business partner. "Originally, there were two of us with a lock-up and I was building windows," says Greg. From that simple start the company has grown and today has two showrooms, in Ickenham and Rickmansworth, alongside a factory in Watford.

People

The 20-strong staff includes long-serving team members, one of whom has worked at the business for 28 years. Fitters on the team include sub-contractors who work exclusively for the company.

The firm looks to the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF) for training support, as well as manufacturers. Greg has served on the GGF's training committee, and is also an ex-president of the GGF, as well as a founder chairman of FENSA, a competent persons scheme for the window and door sector.

Business

Greg describes the firm's business development approach as "micro-marketing." It advertises in local publications, including parish magazines, and supports local activities like school fetes. "We try to do as much as possible," he adds. "We sponsored a school trip to Canada. The parents of one of the children came to us for windows." Around 65% of the company's work comes from personal recommendation. "Sometimes a homeowner will come to us via three sources – they will see an advert, find a connection through a school and get a recommendation from friend or family. That's the best marketing."

The company's biggest marketing asset is a 27-year filing system of testimonials. The testimonials come from cards given to customers on completion of every project, and are checked each week by a secretary who adds the contents to company literature and advertising. "It gives us a list of comments for every area that we cover," explains Greg.

The company highlights TrustMark and the GGF when promoting its services to potential customers, along with the energy efficiency licences it holds for several window products under the British Fenestration Ratings Council. "For the majority of people these are very powerful," says Greg.

Customer service

Honesty is central to the company's service, says Greg: "We don't artificially inflate prices so we can look like we are giving a discount later in the sales process. We try to give people as much information as we can. We are upfront and frank – to the extent that we will turn away a job if we cannot do it to the level we require." He says the company has lost out to less reputable competitors willing to cut their prices by working without the scaffolding demanded for safety.

Customers must sign quotation paperwork, in line with GGF requirements, so that they have ample opportunity to read small print. "It's very much a no-pressure quotation. We are very firm on that," says Greg. The company gives would-be clients a list of former customers. "That list is highly likely to include someone they know. Everything is personalised," he adds. "Often people don't realise we have done so many jobs in their street until we provide the list."

Work is undertaken by a team of uniformed fitters, equipped with vacuum cleaners, dust sheets and shoe covers. When a project is complete, the customer is given a personalised card asking for their views on their installation, fitters and their van, along with an invitation to leave a comment. In this way, the 27-year resource of personal feedback is continued, to help win future customers.



"Honesty is central to the company's service, we are upfront and frank."

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Billy Wilgar, AC Wilgar

Billy Wilgar's family had a background in the construction industry in Northern Ireland, so it was the only career for him. When work in the sector dried up in Northern Ireland, 19 year old Billy came to the UK and within a year was employing two carpenters as sub-contractor for a kitchen company. He established his heating and plumbing firm AC Wilgar 30 years ago and now has multiple branches in Orpington and Beckenham in Kent.

People

The company has a 31-strong workforce and uses no sub-contractors now. "We want to be in control of everything," says Billy. The team includes five apprentices, including two set to qualify soon. Past apprentices are now valued members of the team, with top installer turned supervisor Paul Connelly having been with the company for 21 years.

Business

Billy is clear about his target market: "We only carry out domestic work and it is all for individual customers. We could have quadrupled our firm by working in commercial buildings, but that is a different type of customer. All of our engineers arrive at the home with branded doormats saying: Heating homes with care. We work in homes, not houses or properties." Billy picked up the doormat idea from a company in Florida, USA, 25 years ago and it still differentiates the business, he says. "It sets out our stall before we do any work." Needless to say, its engineers and 19 vehicles all sport the company branding.

Almost half of the company's work is repeat business. Accreditation is useful: "We work to high standards and so for us TrustMark has been great. It is important to our company to have our name registered with the scheme so consumers know that we are a reputable, quality firm working to Government-endorsd standards."

"We work to high standards and so for us TrustMark has been great."

Customer service

Unusually the company employs two full-time software developers. Customers can track when their engineer is on the way, clicking on a text link to see the engineer's qualifications. With the help of the digital team the company sent out 17,600 greeting texts to customers at Christmas, while office staff also helped mail 6,400 paper Christmas cards.

The IT team developed the company's web-based customer relationship management system. Quotations are generated by surveyors during their appointment with the help of an iPad – "our software queries prices on site so there are no delays," adds Billy. Quotations are then provided via email and hard copy letter, sent in a hand-written envelope "because people appreciate that," he says. Quotations, orders, stock control, and more are all managed digitally using home-grown systems.

Every step of a job is recorded digitally, with a photographic record. The customer acknowledges that dust sheets and doormats are in place by ticking off the items on the commencement form on the installer's iPad. Billy explains: "The customer effectively polices their own job. Process is everything." At the end of the job the client fills out a similar completion form, which records customer satisfaction. Billy says, "97% of our customers are extremely happy, the top rating. Where people are not happy, which is very rare, that is investigated in an internal report."

The company has won numerous CORGI awards and has been named business magazine H&V News' top UK heating installer five times with 15 shortlistings.



Meet the industry's new ambassadors



Pawlo Woloszyn, Bright and Fresh

When Pawlo Woloszyn started working in the carpet cleaning business in the 1990s he got an unpleasant surprise. It wasn't the customers or the work that worried Pawlo, but the shoddy business practices of the company he found himself working with. Undaunted, he paid his way through training with the National Carpet Cleaners Association (NCCA), walked out on his employers and set up the family business of Bright and Fresh. Having had first hand experience of rogue traders, Pawlo became passionate about professionalism. Within three years he was a director of the NCCA, and he promotes quality both within his own Reading-based carpet, upholstery and curtain cleaning business and across the sector.

People

Pawlo is the sole tradesperson, with his wife playing the vital role of administrator. He carries out mainly domestic work, but can also handle larger projects. He explains, "If I do get a large contract, like a conference centre, I'll share it with other NCCA members, as I know they are fully trained and they have the correct insurance in place."

The business may be small, but Pawlo has a list of training courses and Master Cleaner credits to his name. He is also raising sector standards and sharing his skill and expertise as a teacher for the NCCA.

Business

Bright and Fresh's logo features on the company van as well as Pawlo's uniform. The liveried van promotes leather cleaning on one side and carpet cleaning on the other, and has the company's phone number on the roof, an addition that pays dividends. "I think I generate about £3,000 of business a year from having that phone number on the roof," says Pawlo. "It's a talking point. I remember working in an office and looking down out of the window at the traffic." As well as the van, the company gets its work via its website and personal recommendation.

Pawlo does not work with a single supplier, instead relying on his experience and knowledge to assess the right product for the job.

Customer service

Pawlo guides his customers through the cleaning process, right from the initial enquiry: "Often they ask for a price for carpet cleaning over the phone. They say, 'it's only a carpet', and I have to explain that it depends on what the carpet is made from and numerous other factors and that I need to come and see it." During that first visit, Pawlo outlines his services and credentials, including his TrustMark registration and takes a range of details including carpet measurements, age, and soiling, using a template to produce a quotation. He talks the customer through the cleaning process, and explains how furniture is put back into place, when the carpet can be walked on and what post-cleaning ventilation is needed. "I like to do the job properly," says Pawlo. That is reflected in the fact that he retains loyal customers even when they move from the area.

"I like to do the job properly. That is reflected in the fact that I retain loyal customers even when they move from the area."





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