



The Smart Buyers Guide

Purchasing Windows, Doors & Conservatories

This guide has been written to help answer questions that you might ask when considering purchasing new PVC products for your home.

I understand the dilemma you are in when every company tells you their product is the best, they all have conflicting opinions and as a consumer it is an impossible task trying to wade through the ambiguous claims and advice presented to you.

I have written this in the hope that we can de-mystify some of the information you receive and by committing this to writing and creating this publication I hope you realise that I stand behind the information I provide to you as being truthful and accurate at the time of writing it!

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GETTING 3 QUOTES

It has become a deep belief for people that when purchasing home improvements it is sensible to get 3 quotes so that you can compare the products the companies and the services they provide and then you would be in a position to make an informed decision.

Some people choose the best product and highest price believing that the most expensive is the best.

Some people go for the middle price, as long as they believe the product provides value for money.

And, some people go for the cheapest – I can assure you that the company providing the cheapest product will tell you that their product quality and service is just as good as the others. And, a lot of people will want to believe that, so they convince themselves that it is true.

Gathering 3 Quotes is of course a sensible approach but unfortunately could have disaster written all over it...

For example, what if the 3 companies you choose are all extremely expensive, not because their products are good - but because of the massive overheads and marketing costs in their businesses?

In this instance, regardless as to whether you choose the most expensive, the middle quote or the cheapest, you could end up paying more than you need to!

What if the 3 companies you choose to quote are at the other end of the market, small businesses, low overheads and marketing costs and because they are scratching around at the lower end of the market and they need to be providing the cheapest quote to win the business, they buy the cheapest products they can, and they design out of the business any unnecessary costs so that they can make a profit.

In this instance, regardless as to whether you choose the most expensive, the middle quote or the cheapest, you might not be getting the product quality or service that you want or are expecting!

So, what is the solution?

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

The best way for you to make an informed decision is to look a little deeper than the surface of the image that the company is projecting.

The first research we would recommend is to do a google search on the companies that you are thinking of purchasing from.

Some popular ways to search could be as follows;

(company name) reviews

(company name) bad reviews

(company name) problems

(company name) complaints

You can also check out local reviews on Facebook in exactly the same way.

GETTING YOUR QUOTES

Ok, you have done some research and found out about the companies you are going to invite to your home to provide you with a quote.

Some companies will want both people there for the visit, assuming of course that there are 2 people living in the home that are the decision makers. It goes without saying that the reason they want both decision makers there is so that you can make a decision!

A professional company will not make this request and would be happy to see just one person and would provide sufficient information to the person so that they could inform their partner about the quotation.

If, however you are requiring advice regarding design and specification you might find it more useful for you both to be there at the design stage so that all the design issues and your requirements can be taken into consideration.

BEWARE OF SALES TACTICS

There are still many businesses that use sales tactics when they are providing you with a quote. They might dress it up in a believable story but it is still a tactic to reduce the price to provide you with a discount so that you feel compelled to say yes, in order to receive the discount.

Beware of these types of tactics; just remind yourself that if they can suddenly offer you a cheaper price then they were trying to leverage more of your hard earned money out of you than they needed too!

There are of course some companies that do have genuine reasons why they may offer a customer a discount, especially when a customer is coming back for more work time and time again

The MAIN difference with this type of offer is that it is discussed upfront and there are genuine reasons and it is not a tactic brought in at the end to leverage a sale!

Over the next few pages we are going to reveal to you some of the industry topics that we feel you might find useful in your process of collating information and understanding of purchasing new PVC home improvements.

FUNDING YOUR NEW HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Most people purchasing home improvements think that the best way to fund them is by using their hard-earned cash.

So, when they are gathering quotes unless they are one of the lucky ones that have an abundance of cash in the bank, they end up having to compromise on the quality of the windows or conservatory in order to fit their budget.

New home improvements such as PVC windows, Doors and Conservatories are part of the STRUCTURE of your home. They have to last for many years and if you choose the right quality then you will only have to do it once!

Typically your new windows and doors make up about 20% of the structure of your home. They are the most used items in your home because you, all your family members and all your visitors use your door to get in and out of your property and your windows to see through and ventilate your home.

So using your hard earned cash to pay for products that are part of your structure and then having to compromise on the quality to meet your budget AND, compromise on other things in your life, like cars, holidays, going out, new furniture or decorating, just doesn't make sense.

What does make sense is to fund your home improvements using a low rate, flexible plan, this means that you spread the cost of the home improvements, you don't have to compromise on the quality and this FREE's up your savings to spend on the more enjoyable things in life.

You only live once, so why not enjoy it?

Most companies will offer you some type of package to fund your home improvements but be careful because some schemes are less beneficial than others.

For instance, Interest Free or Buy Now Pay Later schemes are called promotional finance and the company providing it has to pay a premium to the finance company for the ability to use the scheme. The reality is that this means you could be paying more for the products than you need to!

Some companies use a low rate flexible plan, which doesn't cost the company any money so they can keep your price as competitive as possible and you have the flexibility of spreading the cost to suit your budget.

It works just like a credit card, but you don't get an actual card. Each month you pay a minimum payment, but you can pay more if you want which reduces the term and the amount of interest you ultimately pay.

If you want information on this, I will be able to advise you and explain the plan in greater detail.

GLASS IS JUST GLASS ISN'T IT?

In April 2002 the double-glazing industry changed forever. The introduction of tougher building regulation standards (revised part L) in England brought with it the advent of a new age of glass product development within the window industry.

FENSA was given responsibility to oversee the double-glazing industry to make sure that all windows fitted from 2002 onwards met the new stricter standards. In the main this meant the policing of the installation of low emissivity glass – known as 'low e' glass.

WHAT IS 'LOW E' GLASS?

'Low e' glass (low emissivity) is made up of a standard piece of glass which then has a hard coating applied to it. When installed, the 'low e' glass is installed on the inside of the room and acts as a thermal barrier.

It helps to keep heat inside the room as heat radiation is reflected back into the room and is not allowed to escape to the outside. There are many different brands of 'low e' glass; Pilkington and Guardian are two of the most popular ones.

Pilkington K is the most commonly used low e glass, it has however a varying tint from batch to batch so it could mean that different panes of glass on the same window have a slight colour variance. Most people might never notice but it's one of those things that once you do, it can be forever frustrating to you. We do not use Pilkington K for that very reason!

When the BFRC (British Fenestration Rating Council) rating label scheme came along in 2008 the standards expected by the double-glazing industry were ramped up again.

Windows that featured 'low e' glass were typically rated D under the new rating scheme. This is pretty poor as I'm sure you'll agree. How many people would buy a D rated washing machine or Central heating boiler?

So, in an attempt to attain the coveted A-rating certification the glazing industry responded by developing new, better performing glass products.

The new glass units were further supported by warm edge spacer bars and argon gas filling and then the fun really started!

THE BEST OF THE BEST

The best, A-rated, modern double-glazed windows feature ultra-high performance sealed units. The sealed unit is made up of 4 specific components that all have a special role to play in the overall thermal efficiency of the window.

1. The inside pane of glass
2. The outside pane of glass
3. The spacer bar
4. The air gap between the glass

1) **The inside pane of glass.** The thermal performance of standard 'low e' hard coat glass just won't cut it anymore. The old brands like Pilkington K glass have been superseded by 'soft coat' technology like Planitherm and Climaguard. In principle they work in the same way as traditional hard coat 'low e' glass. They still reflect long wave heat rays back into the room, but they do it much more efficiently than their older hard coat relatives did.

2) **The outside pane of glass.** This pane – once ignored in the early days is now just as important as the inside pane. Modern A-rated windows feature low iron glass on the outside. The whole point of the low iron pane is to maximise the amount of energy and heat that is allowed to pass through the glass from outside into the room. The sun's heat is free so why not allow as much of it as possible to heat your home?

3) **The spacer bar.** The spacer bar is the piece of material that separates the inside and outside panes of glass. Before 2002 it was common for windows to feature silver coloured aluminium spacer bars. The problem with this type of bar is that aluminium is a good conductor of cold and heat. Therefore on a cold day, the cold temperature is quickly transported from outside the window, across the aluminium spacer and into the inside of the room. Similarly, if the room is warm, the spacer bar will transport the heat from inside the room to the outside. The solution to this problem is to replace the aluminium spacer bar with a better performing one. Modern A-rated windows will commonly feature a 'warm edge' spacer bar which acts as a thermal barrier. Warm edge spacer bars are extremely poor conductors of heat so they allow less heat to escape from inside a room.

4) **The air gap between the glass.** Size matters here. The size of the air gap has steadily increased over the years. A 20mm air gap is now commonly believed to be the optimum gap required. The overall performance of the unit can be greatly enhanced by filling the air gap with argon gas. Argon gas is clear; it serves a great purpose in that it acts as another barrier to heat loss. Think of it as an extra, invisible blanket that works 365 days a year to keep more heat inside your home.

CONDENSATION ON DOUBLE GLAZED WINDOWS & DOORS

The topic of condensation is one that is important to many customers. Generally, it seems that many people have experienced the phenomenon of condensation in one way or another in their homes.

We find that there is often a common misconception; many people perceive the problem of condensation as one that has been caused by their double glazed windows and that by upgrading their windows then the problem will go away.

Unfortunately, this is not always strictly true.

What is Condensation?

Firstly, it is important to state exactly what condensation is: Condensation is the water/moisture, which results from the conversion of water vapour in the atmosphere. It is a fact that the air that surrounds us in all our homes contains water vapour.

In general, the more people that live in the home – the more water vapour there is likely to be in the air. This is because there is more likely to be increased everyday activity that creates water vapour i.e. cooking, washing, showering, even breathing creates water vapour.

When the air comes into contact with a cold surface it sheds its water vapour and this is when mist and condensation appears. Given that this is true, it is now possible to examine why and where condensation forms on a window or door and what can be done to reduce or eliminate this problem.

Where is the condensation forming?

1. On the glass surface on the inside of the room
2. In the cavity between the two panes of glass
3. On the external glass surface.

If you are experiencing condensation **on the glass on the inside of the room** which then drips down onto window sills etc., it is likely that you are also experiencing black mould growth too. The way to reduce this problem is to introduce heat and ventilation.

If possible, make sure that there is a constant daily exchange of air in the room. This can be done by either leaving a window slightly open (if practical) or by having a trickle vent fitted into your window (call me for further information).

The theory being that air laden with moisture must be allowed to escape the room before it comes into contact with the cold glass surface and condensates. By adding heat, you greatly reduce the likelihood of condensation occurring because the air is less likely to be holding excessive water vapour and the temperature of the glass surface is raised slightly so condensation is less likely to form on contact.

How can an A-rated window help?

Well, firstly we use a product called 'Super Spacer' instead of a traditional aluminium spacer bar. The super spacer is a very poor conductor of cold therefore the inner pane of glass remains relatively warm because the cold from outside is not conducted to inside because the super spacer acts as a barrier to the cold.

Secondly, the inside pane of glass is made from a brand of glass called Planitherm.

Planitherm glass is a high specification insulating glass with a special 'soft' coating on it that greatly reduces the amount of heat that escapes from your home through the glass. By using Planitherm we ensure that the inside pane of glass remains as warm as possible – thereby reducing the likelihood that condensation can form.

Thirdly, we fill the cavity between the two panes of glass with argon gas. Similarly, to the theory behind Planitherm, the argon gas acts as a further layer of insulation, helping to keep the inner pane of glass warm.

If you are experiencing **condensation in between the two panes of glass**, there is a problem with your sealed unit. It is likely that the air-tight seal that keeps air moisture from seeping into the cavity has been compromised. The only way to solve this problem is to replace the sealed unit.

How can an A-rated window help in this scenario?

All windows and doors come with a ten-year guarantee as standard. This guarantee includes the quality of the sealed unit. If you find that you are getting condensation between the panes of glass just call us and our service team will change your sealed unit as quickly as possible at no extra cost.

If you are experiencing **condensation on the external glass surface** then this can be seen as positive proof that your windows are doing the job they were designed to do. External condensation will only occur if the temperature of the outside face of the glass is low.

By investing in ultra-high performance glazing you are ensuring that very little heat escapes from your home. This means that there is very little heat transfer from inside your home to the outside and therefore the temperature of the outside pane of glass remains extremely cold.

The side effect of this is that any moisture that is in the air outside will naturally be drawn to the coldest surface it can find. If the coldest surface happens to be your glass then mist will form on your windows externally – much the same as it will form on your car on cold mornings.

It is important to note that the formation of condensation on the outside of windows does not mean that the window is defective – quite the opposite, it means that the window is performing well at keeping valuable heat where it should be, i.e. in your home. We traditionally find that the phenomenon of external condensation is likely to occur in the early mornings of winter months.

LIVING IN AN ICEBOX

Do you suspect that most of the heat in your home leaks out through your inefficient, draughty windows & doors? The fact is that most homes in the UK are draughty and terribly inefficient when it comes to insulation. The result is that many families live in cold, uncomfortable homes and as a result suffer high heating bills year after year.

You will not need reminding that the good old English Winter is just around the corner. No doubt you're toying with the idea of switching the central heating on already - and it's only the start of autumn!

Well the good news is that there is plenty you can do to combat this problem and sometimes the simplest remedies have the biggest effect. Heavy curtains, draught excluders, carrying out essential repairs can all play their part in reducing the amount of heat that your home loses.

In order to combat this problem, the first thing you need to do is find out where you are losing the greatest amount of heat. It may well be the case that most of your heat loss is actually being caused by one or two gaps that require urgent attention.

The tricky part is that it is not always obvious to pinpoint the exact areas where you are losing the most heat from your home. This is where we can help. We have invested in thermal imaging technology and we would be happy to conduct a survey of your property free of charge to help inform you as to the problem areas in your home.

Once you know where your problems lay you can make decisions as to the best remedies for your property.

If you are dreading the big freeze and you would like some advice on the best way to combat the draughtiness of your windows and doors then don't hesitate to call us, we would be delighted to help.

Don't shiver in silence; take control of your heat loss problems before the winter bites.

THE VALUE OF A GOOD FRONT DOOR

It all begins in the mind and is a thought-process recognised from 400BC Athens, Greece by classical philosopher Plato.

“Building your house should be a requirement of life. We reveal our belief system by the choices we make.” Plato

Human existence can be separated into needs and desires, there is a strong requirement for us all to find shelter, place a roof above our heads and have living space.

Reports suggest,

- The average adult spends more than 50% of their lives in the home
- 42 per cent of families in the UK have dependent children and
- 20 per cent of families consist of four or more people

All cultures express a desire for identity; it's what separates us, makes us unique and expresses who we are and what we stand for. The home is a window to self-image, lifestyle and more importantly, a sanctuary for those you care about, that will play a great role in shaping their attitudes and personality.

Doesn't it make sense that the home, the most important asset for your family, is of a standard to be proud of?

Our philosophy;

We appreciate your identity, your individuality and design doors that stand tall as the gatekeeper to everything you hold so dear.

5 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING A FRONT DOOR

If you are looking around for your perfect front door you will no doubt have a picture in your mind as to the type of door you would love to have. Your front door is a statement about you as a homeowner. It is the first thing that people see when they come to your property and as such it holds a particular significance for most people who are seeking to improve their homes.

But with such a wide choice of door styles how can you possibly decide what to have? Never fear, this handy guide will help you understand the important points you need to understand to help you make the best choice for your home.

1) Security

A good front door should be strong. It should be of a construction, which can withstand a prolonged attack by a would-be thief. Your front door is the barrier between your family and the outside world so a solid door with a reliable, multi-point locking system is an absolute must.

2) Noise reduction

There's nothing worse than hearing traffic noise or noisy neighbours through your door. You only get a few opportunities to improve the sound insulation of your home, changing your front door is one of them. Even the most solid of doors can become useless at keeping noise out if it doesn't fit into the frame snugly. So look for doors that have been designed to overlap at all points where the door meets the frame. This ensures that noise cannot travel freely around the edges of the door.

3) Warmth

When you return home windswept and freezing & you want to shut out the best of the British Winter you want to close your front door with a resounding 'clunk' & feel the benefit of the warmth of your home. A good front door should keep out howling winds & make your 'novelty draught excluder' a thing of the past.

4) Longevity

A correctly specified, fitted & maintained front door should last for at least 20 years. Don't forget that your front door will be used multiple times a day every single day. Not many items in the home will be subjected to the type of continual use & force that a front door will have to endure. Buy a flimsy door and expect to be replacing it within a few years. Invest in a solid door of exceptional quality and expect it to serve you well for decades.

5) The Looks!

Ultimately when it comes down to it you have to be 100% happy with the way your door looks. Your front door can reflect your personality in many ways & as it is the focal point of your property you need it to do you justice. First impressions last so make sure that your front door gives the right message to onlookers. A beautiful front door will give your property some serious curb appeal.

In short, your ultimate front door should be secure, provide sound and heat insulation, last a lifetime & look great!

We provide a wide variety of doors; each one is carefully specified & matched to the homeowner's requirements. We have a selection of doors available to view in our factory showroom and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss your requirements. Don't hesitate to call us; we would be delighted to help.

HOW MUCH DO PVC WINDOWS & DOORS COST?

This is a question I have been asked literally thousands of times. By looking through the search phrases that people have typed in to land on our website I can see that this is a question that many people want to know the answer to. It is obvious that the answer to this question is always going to depend upon the type and size of window or door in question.

However, I'd like to offer a more in-depth look at how the actual price of a window or door is derived. Knowing and understanding the price of a window or door is important for any customer so if this is important to you in your search for a double-glazing installer then please do read on.

The price we charge for a window or door reflects the quality, expertise, care and attention to detail that goes into each and every installation. We strive to deliver an excellent product and service at the very best price we possibly can. Delivering real value for money for every window & door is what we live for. When deriving a price, we take the following into consideration:

The nuts and bolts....

The actual sum of all the parts involved in making a double-glazed window or door. This is the most straightforward bit. It's a relatively simple thing to do to add up the cost of the UPVC extrusion, the area of Low E glass, the area of Low iron glass, the cost of the Super spacer bar, the volume of argon gas it takes to fill the cavity in between the two panes of glass. It's simple to then add on the cost of the shoot bolt locking mechanisms, hinges and handles, the steel reinforcing and the screws.

The sum of all these parts and many more is added to the labour cost it takes for our skilled fabricators to spend time welding and assembling the product.

And hey presto, we have the first element of our window & door cost.

However, this is only one part of the total equation. We have to also consider the value of the expertise it takes to deliver a high-quality installation.

The expertise....

The value we attach to the price of a product in terms of expertise is equally, if not more significant. It's true that a large proportion of any businesses cost is the staff costs and we are no different.

The calibre of people we employ to fulfil our work is second to none and this is crucial. We truly believe that the reason we have been successfully trading for over three decades is because our staff are exceptional.

They are vastly experienced, and they are dedicated to our customers. All the way along the customer's journey there are multiple points at which our staff add real value to our products.

To illustrate the value of expertise, consider the basic preliminary process of window quotation, survey & manufacture. Before a window even leaves our factory, it will have been through a series of important considerations, which can all, make or break the value of the product for our customers.

The designer has to be experienced and understand the product inside out. A working understanding of the fabric of buildings is a pre-requisite as is the importance of interpreting a customer's specific design & aesthetic requirements.

There's no point having a beautiful, new, A-rated UPVC double glazed window that you find you can't open because the designer didn't consider the opening handle couldn't be reached across a kitchen work surface for example.

The survey process is vital because it serves as a double check to ensure the customer is getting the exact product they require, and that all relevant building regulations and fire escape requirements have been fulfilled. An excellent surveyor will not only ensure all the technical aspects of a window have been addressed, they will use their craft to ensure a tight fit, which eliminates draughts and unsightly large silicone sealant lines.

There is nothing worse than a window that has been measured badly which has to be fitted with excessive packers and trims to fill the aperture. The quality control process in-built into our manufacturing system ensures that each window has been thoroughly checked and is fit to bare our name.

All these processes and checks are designed to add real quality to our products. The skill and craft applied are as important as the sum of the physical parts and add to the value of the windows we produce. This commitment to quality runs through the installation and after care side of our business too.

Our fitters are instructed to find ways to make the installation experience a pleasurable one for our customers. We try to add value by working with our customers to work around their schedules. Sometimes something as simple as starting in a particular room can make all the difference to our customer's experience.

We strive to accommodate any wish our customers have because we know it's the small things that can make all the difference to our customers. Regarding after care, every customer knows from experience that your guarantee is a most valuable asset to possess.

We have over £25 million pounds worth of products installed under our care and guarantee at any given point and we take our responsibility to service this work extremely seriously. Our ability to serve our customers and attend to their needs during the ten-year guarantee period has won us many friends and even more repeat orders.

So, in summary there is no 'one size fits all' answer to the question how much do UPVC windows & doors cost. We provide no obligation quotations and all we ask is for is some time to learn what you are trying to achieve with your window or door installation.

I will assess the site and give you our best recommendations as to the products you require and an accurate quote there & then. Hopefully by reading this you will gain an insight into the values and expertise we pour into the mix when calculating your proposed price.

NOW YOU HAVE MORE WAYS TO STYLE YOUR HOME

Every home is unique and will take on a character of its own as your flair and creativity takes form, whether it is the wallpaper you choose, the carpet you lay or the lampshades you fit.

However, have you thought about your windows?

We believe windows are an integral part to making the most of your home. Their presence welcomes light into your house, inviting the sunshine to make itself at home. Not to mention their ability to transport you into your mind's eye as you gaze upon the big wide world.

Casement Window

These are windows that are attached to a frame by multiple hinges on both the left- and right-hand side. Windows that are hinged at the top of the frame are called **Awning windows** and those hinged at the bottom are called hoppers.

Awning windows are a great way of letting hot air escape when positioned at the top of a wall and are usually opened on an inclined angle allowing them to be left open when it's raining.

Pro: The casement windows we manufacture are market leaders, A-rated for energy and virtually impenetrable to intruders. They also offer excellent ventilation as just a turn of the crank handle allows the window to become wide open.

Bay or Bow Window

This style of window needs to be exceptionally strong, as they have to be able to support the roof and are a critical factor to the structural integrity of your room.

These windows often include a combination of styles, typically using casement windows to surround the central **picture window** as a central feature.

Pro: In general, this type of window gives you more interior space, as their nature is to protrude from the exterior of the siding of your home. This distinct feature also adds a unique touch of character to the shape of your home.

Picture windows are great for brightening up a staircase or opening up your home to its beautiful surroundings. They can come in various shapes and sizes and are completely draught-free.

Double-Hung Window

This is a classic window amongst UK homeowners and is the most common type of window containing two panes of glass, one on the top and one below.

Pro: As these windows open from the bottom, they allow cool air to flood into the room, while keeping the hot air from entering as it's blocked from the top pane.

Transom Window

In architecture, the word transom refers to a transverse horizontal structural beam or bar. A transom window then is a window that runs horizontally, usually across the top of a doorway or another set of windows.

Pro: These windows are a great way to help natural light enter a room that may otherwise be blocked by a shut door, usually used to fill surplus space above the doorframe. This type of window can also be deployed for architectural detail, complimenting the style of your home in a contemporary fashion.

What's your favourite colour?

We're seeing more and more of customers opt for not just a variety of stylish windows but a move away from the conventional white frames to a selection of different colours.

Incidentally, this week is a record breaker as it's the first week that we haven't installed one white window. Instead, homeowners have opted for such colours as brown, black or cream.

This is great news, as it means there are more options for you to choose from and ultimately allows you to tailor your home to the style you've always dreamed of.

DOOR SECURITY - LEVER PAD OPERATION

Are you locking your front door properly?

If your door features a traditional “Pad handle” like the one in the picture below, then you must make sure that you understand how to lock your door.



Traditional “Pad handle”

With this type of door handle, it is true that when you close the door behind you then you cannot get back in without using the key. **HOWEVER, this does NOT mean that the door is fully locked!**

If you leave the door in this position without then proceeding to push the handle up and turn the key your door is not fully locked and is not secure. It is extremely important that when leaving your property, you push the handle up to engage the multi-point locking system and then turn the key.

If you do not do this is it relatively simple for a burglar to gain access to your property.

Please call us if you wish to confirm that you are doing this properly. We are happy to visit you to talk through the correct way to lock your door. You have invested in an extremely secure door but unless you use it properly you are risking making your property susceptible to burglary.

Please don't hesitate to call if you have any concerns relating to this or any other aspect of home security.

UPVC DOOR LOCK SNAPPING AND BUMPING

What's the problem & how can your new door withstand these forms of attack?

You may have heard of the terms 'lock snapping' and 'lock bumping' and you may be worried if you are at risk? These terms have been reported widely in the press and were the subject of a recent phone in show on BBC Radio WM (31st Jan 2013).

Evidently the show has re-ignited the subject of door security and in particular the problem with UPVC and composite door cylinders. (The door cylinder is the part you put your key into).

Lock snapping and bumping are both methods that have been hijacked by burglars in recent years to unlawfully gain entry to people's homes. Both methods have actually been around for decades but until recent years they have been closely guarded secrets of the locksmith trade. Unfortunately, (perhaps in part due to the digital age we live in) these methods are shared daily and are now widely known in the criminal world and therefore incidences of attacks using these methods are growing.

We have known about this problem since 2006 when the issue first came to prominence. As soon as we learned about the potential problem, we took the decision to find a solution – since 2006 we have been fitting the Mul-T-Lock door cylinder as standard on all doors that leave our factory.

The Mul-T-Lock is designed specifically to give protection against snapping and bumping. We are delighted to say that since 2006 we have had not received a single report of forced door entry from any of our customers.

Sadly, the vast majority of our competitors have not followed our lead and are not taking steps to protect people's homes against such attacks. Hence the problem remains.

If you are reading this and have any doubt as to whether or not your door has been fitted with a Mul-T-Lock cylinder the easiest way to check is to look at the key. All Mul-T-Lock keys are blue in colour and have the distinctive Mul-T-Lock logo on them.

If you are uncertain in any way or if you have doors in your home (not fitted by us) that you are worried about then please don't hesitate to call me. I'd be happy to advise what can be done to improve your security. I'd also be more than happy to go through the safety features built in to the Mul-T-Lock should you be interested in how this device is protecting your home.

YOUR SECURITY

Nothing upsets me more than visiting families in the aftermath of a burglary.

As you can imagine, in our line of work we see our fair share of this type of thing. I am proud to say that 99.9% of the time, burglars fail to gain access to our customers' homes. Our windows & doors are specifically designed to withstand the most determined professional burglar.

Nevertheless, it's clear to see that even a failed attempted burglary leaves an indelible scar on the victims, the homeowners. It is sad to report but perhaps easy to understand that the number of these types of incidences that we have had to attend to has been rising throughout the recent recession years.

I found one recent incident particularly difficult to cope with and in the interest of prompting everybody to review their home security I'd like to share it with you. The victim of this burglary was an elderly widow who lives alone

(who shall remain anonymous for obvious reasons).

I visited this lady a day after the crime. Various aspects of this burglary are worrying:

- 1) it happened in broad daylight at approx. 4:00pm in a relatively busy street.
- 2) after the burglary the neighbours reported they remembered that they had heard banging noises from their neighbour but had not thought to check on her, luckily - she was out at the time of the incident.
- 3) this brave lady spent that whole night after the burglary, sat by her window with a broom in her hand to protect herself just in case the burglars decided to comeback!
- 4) amongst other personal items the burglars made off with her late husband's Wedding ring.

It's easy to feel desperately sorry for this lady. As a company we have tried to help by upgrading some security aspects in her home (free of charge of course). There are some very easy things you can do to bolster the security of your ageing windows & doors. 'Sash Jammers' are extra security devices that can be retrofitted to existing UPVC windows. Window and door locks can often be upgraded.

We believe that everybody has the right to feel safe in his or her home. The key to home security is to be prepared. There's plenty of things you can do at little cost to deter would-be thieves. This is a link to a good summary of sensible things you can do to your property to help avoid becoming a victim of burglary.

If you would like us to review your current home security measures we would be more than happy to do so. We would be delighted to replace all old windows & doors with the latest, most burglar proof designs; but we also advocate that much can be done by simply adding extra devices to existing ones.

Obviously, we can give excellent advice on beefing up window & door security but we may also spot other weak points that you have not considered. There's nothing like a fresh pair of eyes to give you a different perspective on things you may have become blind to or have not considered.

WINDOWS AND DOORS IN CONSERVATION AREAS

We often get asked to carry out work in areas that are in conservation areas. Not surprisingly, many people that live within conservation areas would like to upgrade their properties but do not know whether or not they need to seek permission.

As a general rule of thumb, we always advise that the first port of call should be to your Local City Council Planning department. It is quite surprising how many conservation areas there are within Birmingham so it's worth checking first. If you are within a conservation area you will be directed to the specific planning authority that you need to apply to.

If you find that you do in fact require permission to replace your double-glazed windows or doors or to build a conservatory then there are a few things that you need to consider.

1) **Design:** When designing the new installation it is likely that you will need to closely replicate what you are replacing. E.g. If you currently have windows that feature a Georgian bar design then it's often the case that this will be a requirement of the new installation too.

2) **Finish:** It's also likely that any new installation will have to match exactly or closely resemble the original finish. i.e. if you currently have wooden windows then it's likely that a standard white UPVC window may not suffice as a replacement. The good news is that there are a number of excellent replica UPVC and composite materials on the market today which can replicate the original finish of wood and tick all the right boxes as far as the planning authorities are concerned!

3) **Functionality:** It is crucial to remember that modern windows are designed so that they offer excellent means of escape in case of fire and also feature excellent security and energy efficiency features. Sometimes these modern features are not in line with the planning authorities wishes but it's often the case that a compromise has to be found that satisfies both parties.

We see it as our responsibility to play our part in the conservation of the history of the Buildings in the local area, but also wish to provide our customers with the best products in terms of aesthetics, security and warmth!

Therefore we are always on hand should you require advice about the best way to approach your replacement window or door project. We can take care of the planning process for you and ensure that the best solution is found for your property.

QUOTATION TO SURVEY PROCESS

1) Quotation

Once you contact us, we do our utmost to tailor our service to your requirements. If you need an evening or weekend appointment, it's no problem. If you need to visit the showroom after hours one of our designers would be delighted to open up especially for you to show you the products we have on offer.

If you give us the opportunity to quote for work on your home, we undertake a thorough assessment of your current windows & take time to understand your particular requirements.

As part of the process our designer will undertake a health and safety risk assessment as they have all been certified to undertake the assessment.

Our designers are equipped with a computer tablet that allows them to individually design your windows, doors and conservatory, in the comfort of your own home. The software will also allow you to view the new window designs on a picture of your home so that you can visualise the changes before you make a decision to buy.

The software automatically prices up the work so there is no mystique to the pricing and you know that you will be provided exactly the same price for the job as your neighbour would.

The designer will print out the quotation for you there and then so that you can consider in your own time. We will not pester you for a decision. After all, it's your home and your windows so you decide when you are ready to make a decision where to spend your hard-earned money!

2) Contract

If you decide you would like to use us to undertake your work we then our designer will re-visit your home so that we can draw up an accurate contract which describes in detail the scope of work that has been discussed.

In this way you can be sure that all your requirements have been met and that your windows will be exactly as you anticipated. We request a 15% deposit upon signing of contract and the balance is not due until all work has been satisfactorily completed.

3) Survey

Once we have a contract in place we then make a further appointment with you to undertake a manufacturing survey. At this point our surveyor will revisit and take accurate measurements so that we can then proceed to fabrication of your windows. The survey stage is a great opportunity to go over all the fine details

of the job to make sure that every detail is correct. Everything is made to measure by us in our double-glazing factory to ensure your installation works perfectly for your home.

4) Installation Proposal

Our surveyor then feeds all the information into our system and your windows are allocated a slot in our manufacturing schedule. In the meantime, we write to you to propose a date and time for installation. We ask that you get back in touch at this point to let us know if the proposed date is convenient for you. If you would like to re-arrange the installation to a more convenient date, we work with you to move our schedule around to accommodate your wishes.

We take pride in the pre-installation process and we are often told by our customers that it is this part of the service that sets us apart from our competitors.

At each stage we have our customer's wishes at heart. Our approach ensures that your windows are correctly specified and costed, accurately measured, double checked and installed at a time that causes least disruption to your home life.

INSTALLING YOUR NEW PVC WINDOWS

This is what you can expect when you instruct us to fit your windows.

Our process through installation to a decade of care.

The day of installation

On the day we arrive to fit your windows we will bring dust sheets with us and our first job upon greeting you will be to cover your carpets and furnishings paying particular attention to the area immediately around the windows or doors being removed.

Our fitters are punctual and normally like to get an early start if possible. It is common for us to be on-site at your property by 8:30 / 9:00. However, if you prefer us to delay the start time then please let us know and we will work around your schedule.

We appreciate that you may want us to start after you have completed the school run – or maybe you prefer us to start even earlier so that you can meet us then leave us to install while you get away to your working day? Whatever your requirements please let us know, as we are keen to work with you to help if we can.

We normally like to start upstairs and work downwards, leaving the ground floor till last. This is because it is better for any dust created from removing upstairs windows to fall on old windows rather than newly installed ones. We clean up as we go along and aim to leave each working area in immaculate condition.

We regularly receive requests from customers to follow a pre-defined route around the property installing windows in a particular order to best suit their wishes. This is easy for us to do and we would be delighted to accommodate if you need us to do this so please just ask.

Taking care of your home

We know that having tradesmen in your home is a worry for some people. This is why we only employ the friendliest, most skilful fitters we can find. Most of the installers working for us have been with us for a couple of decades and they understand and appreciate the ethos that we all share within our company.

A DECADE OF CARE

When you invest in an installation you receive a decade of care as standard.

Every customer knows that a 10-year guarantee from us is a very valuable thing to own. We take our commitment to service your installation very seriously.

If you find something that is not to your satisfaction within the 10-year guarantee period, our service team is on hand to provide a swift remedy. We have a dedicated team at the ready to handle your call and organise a solution.

Our reputation has been built on the back of our dedication to service our customer's work and we will always strive to be known as the company that provides the best service back-up in the business.

Our full-time service engineer will visit your home at a time to suit you to rectify any issue you may have. It is very common for an installation to require a service on a couple of occasions during the guarantee period.

Any product that is subjected to the full force of 10 freezing, blustery winters and 10 (sometimes) scorching Summers will need the occasional tweak to ensure it is functioning to its best over time. That is what we do best and that is why we are considered to be superior to our competitors.

TOP TEN TIPS TO THE PERFECT CONSERVATORY

1) Planning permission and positioning

You will not usually require planning permission but it's always important to consult with your local authorities before proceeding with the build of a conservatory.

We're highly knowledgeable in constructing conservatories and have over 3 decades worth of experience. Give us a call if you'd like any advice or guidance with making this first step.

2) The right glass

Carefully consider the type of glass you're looking for. We offer heat retaining solar control glass that protects your conservatory from greenhouse effects that can spoil the summer fun. This type of glass also provides the best in energy efficiency to ensure heat doesn't escape during the winter.

We understand that your conservatory is there to be enjoyed and not to be forever maintained and cleaned. This is why we provide self-cleaning glass that breaks down organic dirt during the day, which is then washed away by rain; a dual action process that means you can let Mother Nature do the hard work.

3) All-year-round

A conservatory should be for every season, not just for summer – so make it so.

Roof window shades are an effective method of retaining heat whilst providing a sufficient level of privacy, if you're concerned about any neighbouring eyes.

We can also supply and fit under floor heating to bolster your defence against the winter bite. In contrast, an air conditioning unit can also be installed for when you need to cool off because you never know when the British sun will put its hat on so be ready to make the most of it.

4) Ventilation and condensation

Ventilation is important when battling condensation, which can be the root cause of black mould growth and other unsightly problems.

Traditional installers utilise an aluminium bar, however, we install windows with a Super Spacer. Our modification is a very poor conductor of cold and thus the inner pane remains relatively warm, as the Super Spacer acts as a protective barrier to the inside of the window and greatly reduces the risk of condensation.

5) Ensure safety

We have a range of security locks that ensure the safety of your loved ones and precious possessions, our security cylinders are anti-snap, anti-bump, anti-drill, in short, they are a burglar's worst nightmare.

We only use Police approved 'Secure by Design' locking systems and we consistently seek to stay up-to-date and improve the technology we engineer into all our doors. With break-ins from cylinder attack on the increase our range ensures suitable measures for all door types.

6) What do you want to use the extension for?

Conservatories can constantly evolve; imagine throughout the year the many different ways you will utilise your new extension;

- *Entertaining friends and family*
- *Relaxing with a loved one or catching up on some 'me-time'*
- *A safe and contained play area for your children or grandchildren*

Keeping your new living area fresh and full of life is important. We seek to build relationships with our clients, get to know you and what's important in your life.

Our design and construction of your conservatory will factor in how you may wish to change the interior design during its lifespan, such as how much space or furniture you need.

We build for the future that you're building.

7) Choose your materials wisely – ask us what we're using and why

We consult with you on your long-term ambitions, whether you wish to establish an extension to your home for the foreseeable future or to invest in what is a temporary residency.

Practicality, lifespan and usage are important considerations. We ensure UPVC frames and corner posts are fully reinforced with steel. The framework of the conservatory is responsible in holding up the weight of the roof so it is absolutely crucial that the weight is transferred accurately and efficiently to its base.

8) Call us – ask the experts

We think the best way to express our expertise is to let others do it for us – Take a look at our testimonials, which are totally uncensored.

We don't plaster our website full of logos that mean probably nothing to you, but we do associate ourselves with 4 organisations in particular; CERTAS, WHICH, CHECKATRADE.

9) Decoration that changes

Remember, the conservatory is an extension of your home. Focus on neutral furnishings that can be modified throughout the various seasons allowing for you to customise your furniture with seasonal throws or scatter cushions for example.

Add a touch of personality and make the conservatory individual to you, with décor that ties in with the rest of your home.

10) The Perfect View

*“Plants do not grow merely to satisfy ambitions or to fulfil good intentions. They thrive because someone expended effort on them” – **Liberty Hyde Bailey***

Don't let your garden go to waste. Install folding doors, and while you relax in your newly crafted conservatory, you'll truly bring the outside indoors connecting your home and garden effortlessly.

PLANNING POLICY RELAXATION FOR CONSERVATORIES

A few weeks ago, we published a document relating to proposed changes to permitted development rights in England. As predicted, there have been some major developments, which we would now like to share with you.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

As of 30th May 2013, it is now possible to build significantly larger, single story extensions to the rear of properties in England.

In fact, it is now possible to build a conservatory, which is 2 x larger than previously allowed. The maximum projection that you can now build to is as follows:

Terraced or semi-detached property: 6m projection (previously 3m)

Detached property: 8m projection (previously 4m)

According to Birmingham City Council's Planning Department these new rules will apply for a period of 3 years and will end on 30th May 2016. If you wish to take advantage of the new rules and you intend to build a conservatory which is larger than previously allowed, but within the limits set out above there is now a fast track process to go through which is summarised below. The entirety of this process is completely free of charge (the council no longer take a fee) and is designed for speed above all else:

- 1) You must notify your local council's planning department before work commences. (Including a description of the conservatory and a drawing).
- 2) The council will then notify your immediate neighbours only to inform them of the planned extension.
- 3) If your neighbours do not object within 21 days, you will be free to commence work.
- 4) If a neighbour objects, then a council official will be dispatched to assess and make a decision on your individual case.
- 5) The council are tasked to provide you with a definitive yes or no within 42 days.
- 6) If the council fails to provide a decision within the 42 day limit you will automatically receive permission to undertake the work.

Why the Change?

As you can see, the new changes are designed to help kick-start the construction industry that has been badly affected by the recession.

The new process will provide a faster, zero cost way to enable homeowners to add much larger conservatories to the rear of their properties. The emphasis is clearly on removing red tape and stacks the odds in favour of homeowners who are keen to improve their properties.

The overriding impression I have gathered from the Local City Council Planning Department is that the philosophy going forwards will be to facilitate as much work as possible. In the case of a disputed build the officer responsible to make a decision will be working on finding ways to facilitate a build that satisfies both parties rather than decline permission altogether. I feel that this marks a significant shift in thinking which is refreshing to see.

As was the case before the changes, if you only wish to build to a projection of 3m on a semi-detached / terrace or 4m on a detached, there are no procedures to follow – you are free to build. Restrictions within conservation areas apply as per the rules pre-30th May 2013.

If you wish to read more about this topic the following is a link to the official guidance from your Local City Council.

APPROVALS AND ACCREDITATIONS

If you are looking around for a quality installer of windows & doors there's a good chance that you will have been subjected to a whole array of logos, badges and various stamps of approval all relating to double glazing and conservatory companies.

No doubt everywhere you look the installer has pointed out how many logos they have got and that you should choose them because they have the most badges. There's a good chance that you will now be utterly confused and have been left thinking, "what on earth am I supposed to do with all this information?"

Well, if this is true I completely sympathise. It has long been the case that many double glazing companies have plastered their vans, web-sites and letter heads with as many logos as they could physically cram in to the space available.

There's only one reason why they do this, to make prospective clients believe that they are a credible business. The more badges you have the more credible your business is right? WRONG.

We believe that the strength of a company should be judged by the number of satisfied customers it has rather than the number of badges it crams on its web site.

BECAUSE WE CARE

We hope that you found this e-book useful and informative. We care about you whether you become a customer or not. If by understanding some of this information you are better informed as to how to purchase your new home improvements, then we will be pleased that we were able to provide you some value.

If you have any questions that you would like us to answer, then please feel free to contact us directly and we will be more than happy to help you in any way that we can.

If you are about to embark on purchasing some new PVC Products, we would hope that you would consider providing us with the opportunity to provide you with a no obligation quotation.

We wish you every success

Best Regards

Paul J Spencer