



Britain's Home Truths

June 2019

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Background to the project

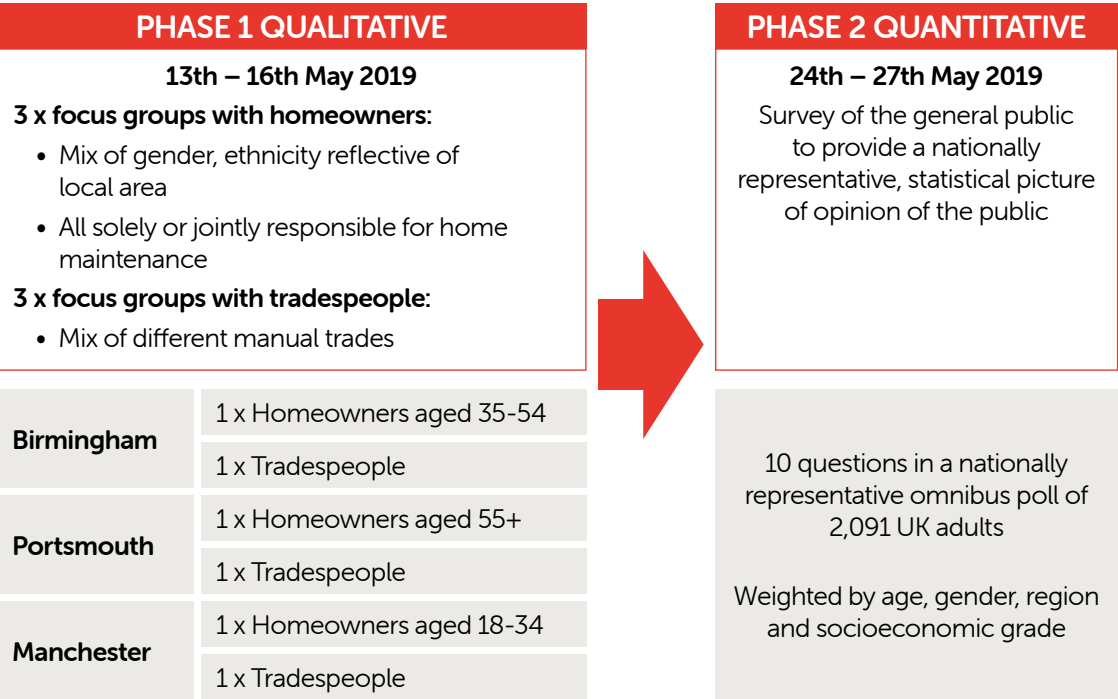
Background

As a world-leading home emergency repairs business, HomeServe wanted to understand the state of the home in modern Britain. To address this, HomeServe partnered with BritainThinks, an independent research agency, to conduct research among both the general public and tradespeople.

The research aimed to:

- Understand the importance of the home
- Explore how the public approach fixing, maintaining and improving the home
- Understand the public's and tradespeople's views on working with each other.

Methodology



Executive summary

A well-maintained home is a top priority for the public.

70% of us rank 'having a well-maintained home that is comfortable for me/my family' as one of our top 3 priorities beyond life's essentials.

We have mixed feelings towards fixing, maintaining and improving our homes; while the end result is highly rewarding, many of us find the process itself stressful.

Most of us are currently living with home repairs, maintenance or improvements that we need to do.

More than three-quarters of us (77%) have at least one thing that we want to fix, maintain or improve about our homes.

30% agree that 'there are lots of things that need fixing in my home'.

We would often rather not 'do it ourselves'.

52% of the public agree that they often worry that if they try to fix, maintain or improve something in their home they might make it worse than it already is.

Recommendations from friends and family are the most common way that the public find tradespeople, but having an online presence is increasingly important.

47% of the public say that asking a friend or family member to provide a recommendation would be the first thing they would do when beginning a home improvement job.

50% of the public say they would trust a tradesperson more if they were online.

59% of the public say that they 'always' look up a tradesperson online before using them, even if a family member or friend has recommended them.

69% of the public say it would make the process of fixing, maintaining and improving the home easier if there was an online tradesperson directory they could trust.

The views of millennials are strikingly different from older generations.

Millennials are far more likely to call in help to do jobs round the house than the public as a whole – from unblocking a pipe (24% vs 43%) to rewiring a plug (20% vs 60%).

Tradespeople say that members of the public often take on jobs that they are not qualified or able to do. But on the plus side, their customers offer them an average of between two and three cups of tea a day.

Detailed findings

Section 1: The home

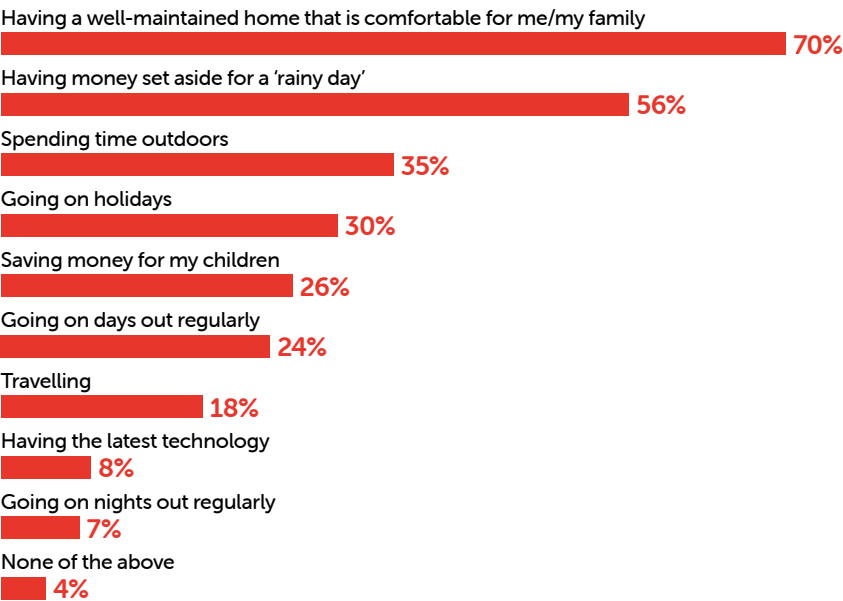
A well-maintained home is a top priority for the public.

In modern Britain, we attach huge importance to the upkeep of our homes. In the public survey, we asked respondents to rank a list of things that the focus group participants had told us were important to them in their lives, beyond life's essentials. From the list we tested, 'having a well-maintained home that is comfortable for me/my family' is the public's top priority, with 70% ranking it in their top three. The second most commonly selected priority is 'having money set aside for a rainy day', with 56% ranking it in their top three.

Women are more likely than men to select 'having a well-maintained home that is comfortable for me and my family' as something that is important to them. Almost three-quarters of women (74%) rank it in their top three compared to 66% of men.

Important things in life, beyond the essentials

Showing % of public who selected each in their top 3



'Having a well-maintained home that is comfortable for me/my family' is the public's top priority, with 70% ranking it in their top three.

It's your house at the end of the day. You want to make a house a home.

Homeowner,
Manchester, 18-34

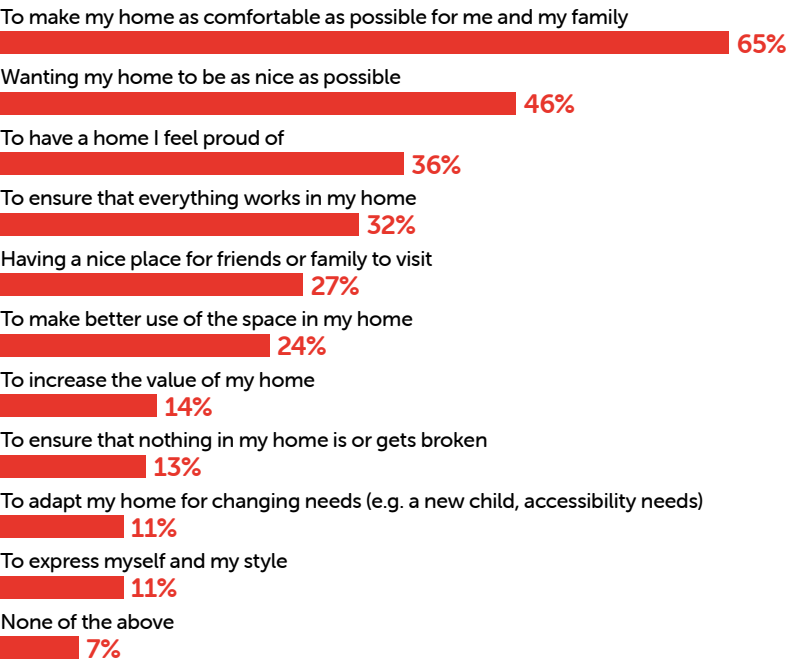
In the focus groups, members of the public outlined the importance of the home in terms of quality of life, mental health and wellbeing, and maintaining relationships with friends and family. Keeping the home in good condition was seen as an essential part of this.

Making the home as comfortable as possible is the most important motivation for fixing, maintaining or improving the home. In the survey, we asked people to rank different potential motivations for fixing, maintaining and improving their homes. Two-thirds of the public (65%) place 'to make my home as comfortable as possible for me and my family' in their top three reasons to fix, maintain and improve their home. The next most common motivations for doing work were 'wanting my home to be as nice as possible' (46% ranked in top three) and 'to have a home I feel proud of' (36% ranked in top three).

Women are more likely than men to rank 'to make my home as comfortable as possible for me and my family' as one of their top three reasons for doing DIY and home improvement, with 69% of women ranking it in their top three compared to 60% of men.

Reasons for fixing, maintaining and improving the home

Showing % of public who selected each in their top 3



[Improving the home] is an improvement in quality of life. It's about what makes your life easier.

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

Detailed findings

Section 2: Fixing, maintaining and improving the home

We have mixed feelings towards fixing, maintaining and improving our homes; while the end result is highly rewarding, many of us find the process itself stressful.

For most of us, fixing, maintaining and improving the home conjures up very strong emotions, both good and bad. In the survey, we asked people to select up to three words that focus group participants had said they associated with fixing, maintaining and improving their home. A majority (51%) selected 'rewarding' as one of their top three words. Homeowners are more likely than renters to select the word 'rewarding', with 54% selecting this in their top three words compared to 46% of renters.

In the focus groups, homeowners highlighted the strong sense of achievement and satisfaction they feel upon completion of a home improvement project (regardless of how big or small it was). Often the sense of achievement is heightened when we do the job ourselves.

I did all of it [myself] and it's great. When people come round and ask, can I use the loo, I can say: 'Ooh, yes, I decorated that, actually.' There's a lot of satisfaction in doing that.

Homeowner, Portsmouth, 55+

However, while a majority associate fixing, maintaining and improving their home with being 'rewarding' the next most commonly selected words were 'stressful' (31%) and 'hassle' (28%).

How we feel about fixing, maintaining and improving the home

Word cloud based on % of public who selected each in their top 3 word associations



Regardless of whether or not we do the work ourselves or get a tradesperson in, the process of fixing, maintaining and improving the home often causes us worry and frustration. Generally, the bigger the DIY or home improvement job, such as a renovation or extension, the more stressful the experience – due to the high expense, the fear of something not going to plan, and the risk of delays resulting in long periods of disruption.

Having to make important decisions was seen as a particularly stressful part of the process. Often the stakes feel high; we might make a decision that we later come to regret, which could be costly to rectify.

Detailed findings

Section 3: The state of our homes

Most of us are currently living with home repairs, maintenance or improvements that we need to do.

Almost a third of the public (30%) agree that 'there are a lot of things that need fixing in my home'. Focus group participants told us that it feels like there is always something that needs to be done in the home and that it can be challenging to keep on top of it all.

There is an endless list of things to be done around my house.

Homeowner, Portsmouth, 55+

In the survey we tested some of the most common things that people need to fix, maintain or improve about their homes. Over three-quarters of us (77%) have at least one of these types of work we need to do in our home, and three in ten (29%) say there are three or more of these types of work we need to do in our home.

We often put off doing home repairs, maintenance and improvement jobs for long periods of time. In the survey, we asked those who said they had a DIY or home improvement job how long they had needed to do it. Of the jobs we tested, the ones that people are most likely to have needed to do for a long time are:



30%

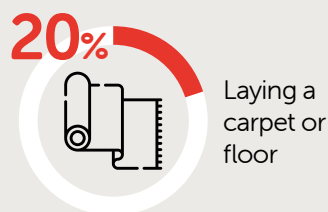
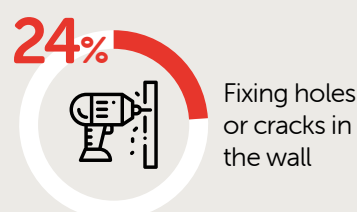
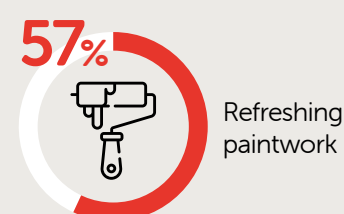
of the public agree that 'there are a lot of things that need fixing in my home'.

I have quickly learnt that there is always something you need to do with your house. A mark on a wall, a chip on the skirting board...it's all wear and tear.

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

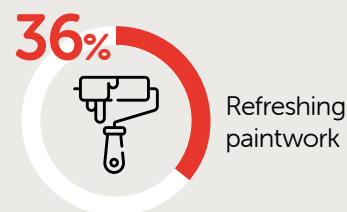
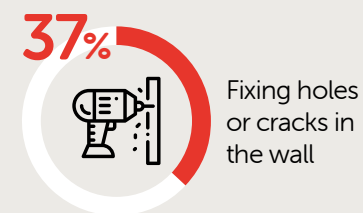
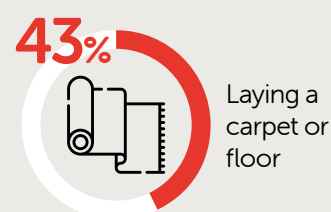
Pending DIY or Home improvement jobs

Showing % of public who need each done in their home



Overdue DIY or home improvement jobs

Among those who need to do each of the jobs, showing % who have left job for more than 1 year



Seemingly small jobs are often deferred – in the focus groups, the DIY and home improvement jobs that people tended to leave for longer periods of time were often small and seen to be 'non-essential'.

Detailed findings

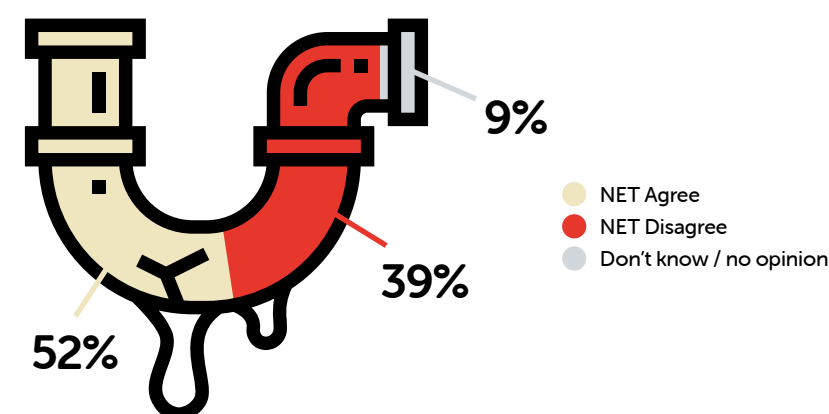
Section 4: Doing DIY and home improvement

We would often rather not 'do it ourselves'.

Doing DIY is seen as a risky endeavour. Over half of the public (52%) agree that they often worry that if they try to fix, maintain or improve something in their home they might make it worse than it already is.

Fear of a DIY disaster

Showing % of public who agree with the statement 'I often worry that if I try to fix, maintain or improve something in my home I might make it worse'



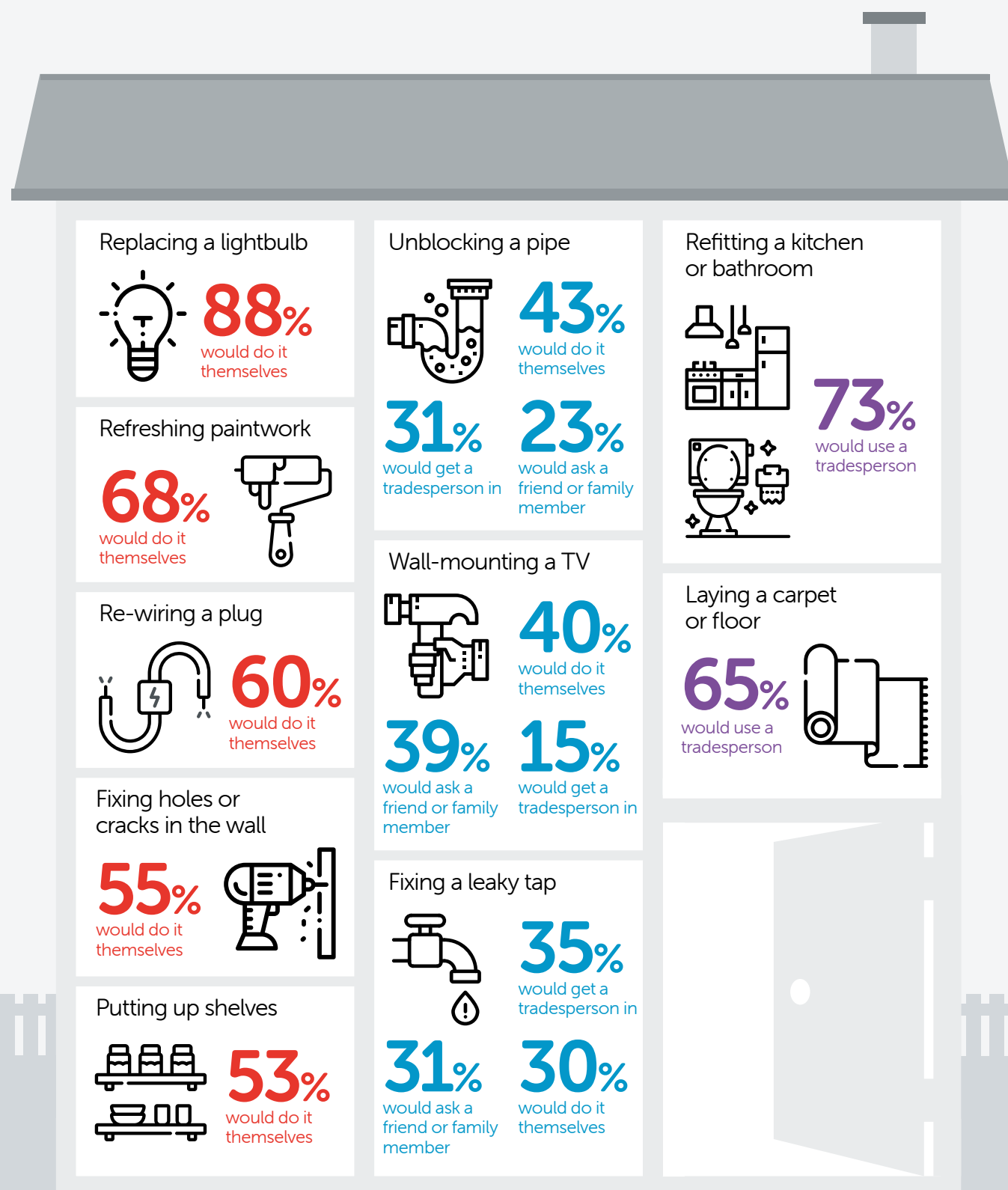
In the focus groups, many homeowners had experienced a failed attempt at a DIY or home improvement job.

I decided to paint my hallway and I had a go at papering - it was a complete disaster. I had more paint on the carpet and the paper started peeling off so I ended up taking it all off.

Homeowner, Portsmouth, 55+

We were decorating the living room and started off stripping the room ourselves to save on the cost. I asked my husband to take down the curtain pole and he pulled down the whole ceiling.

Homeowner, Birmingham, 35-54



We asked the public who they would get to do ten types of DIY of home improvement jobs asking them whether they would do it themselves, get a friend or family member to do it or get a tradesperson in. For half of the jobs we tested only a minority of the public say they would 'do it themselves'.

In the focus groups, participants generally said they would not attempt DIY or home improvement tasks that involved heating, plumbing or electricity. There were two main reasons for this:

- 1. Lack of knowledge:** Tasks that involve heating, plumbing or electricity are seen to be more complicated, and may require specialist knowledge
- 2. Safety risk:** Doing this type of work could be dangerous, and there is a risk of making the home unsafe (e.g. poor electrical wiring in the home)

I'll do pretty much anything that doesn't need sign-off, so your gas or electric work – I won't touch that.

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

I wouldn't even know where to start with electrics. I have no knowledge of electrics. I can only change a lightbulb.

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

The tradesperson's view

In the tradespeople focus groups, tradespeople generally agreed that tasks relating to heating, plumbing or electricity should be left to a professional.

Tradespeople also stressed that the public sometimes over-estimate their ability to do home repairs and maintenance work, resulting in them starting something and being unable to complete it or even making it worse. Tradespeople report that they are often brought in to rectify a DIY disaster.

The rise of online instructional videos, such as those available on YouTube, is bridging the DIY knowledge gap and driving some members of the public to attempt jobs they wouldn't have previously tried. In the focus groups with homeowners, some participants told us they used guidance videos as a way to gauge whether they are capable of doing a DIY or home improvement job themselves. However, participants report that they sometimes found themselves out of their depth after starting a job and had to seek help from a tradesperson.

“Nowadays you have to have the certificates, you can't just be tapping away at the gas, we all have liability insurance.”

Tradesperson, Birmingham

“A lot more people these days are up for having a go at DIY until it goes wrong. A lot of times I have to go and fix their problems.”

Tradesperson, Birmingham

“I recently tried to re-sand my floors. I hired a sander because I thought it would be easy-peasy, I went and looked at YouTube, people told me it was really easy and that there would hardly be any dust. So, I hired it and I made a complete hash of it – the floor was uneven. In the end, I had to replace the floor because it just looked so unsightly.”

Homeowner, Birmingham, 35-54

“If they have made a mess of something, it just makes it harder for us to sort it out after!”

Tradesperson, Manchester

Spotlight on Millennials

The views of millennials towards fixing, maintaining and improving the home are strikingly different from older generations.

Millennials are more likely to rank 'to have a home I feel proud of' in their top three reasons for fixing, maintaining and improving the home.

47% of 18-34 year olds ranked it in their top three, compared to 39% of 35-54 year olds and 26% of people who are 55+

Millennials are also more likely to rank 'to express myself and my style' in their top three reasons for fixing, maintaining and improving the home.

18% of 18-34 year olds ranked it in their top three, compared to 11% of 35-54 year olds and 7% of people who are 55+

In the qualitative research, expressing yourself and your style was identified as an important driver for DIY and home improvement by younger homeowners. Online platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest are increasingly used for home improvement inspiration; seeing something online was often a motivator for changing something in their home.

“I enjoy thinking about the style. I follow home Instagram accounts and it really motivates me to get going.”

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

Millennials are less likely to say they would replace a lightbulb, unblock a pipe, rewire a plug, fix a leaky tap or fix holes or cracks in the wall themselves than older age brackets.

Millennials are more likely to look up a tradesperson online after receiving a recommendation.

67% of 18-34 year olds say that they 'always' look up a tradesperson online before using them, even if a family member or friend has recommended them, compared to 60% of 35-54 year olds and 53% of people who are 55+

While half of the public (50%) say they would trust a tradesperson more if they were online, millennials are more likely to agree compared to older age brackets.

58% of 18-34 year-olds and 57% of 35-54 year-olds agree they would trust a tradesperson more if they were online compared to 38% of those aged 55+

Millennials are more likely say that checking online reviews is an important part of choosing a tradesperson for a job.

63% of 18-34 year-olds describe reviews online as 'essential' or 'very important' compared to 55% of the general population

“We use Checkatrade online. I check the reviews, look at the personal page. I might even go on their social media to have a real look!”

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34



Detailed findings

Section 5: Working with tradespeople

Recommendations from friends and family are the most common way that the public find tradespeople, but having an online presence is increasingly important.

Finding the right tradesperson for the job can be a time-consuming process. In the focus groups with homeowners, three broad stages to finding a tradesperson became apparent:

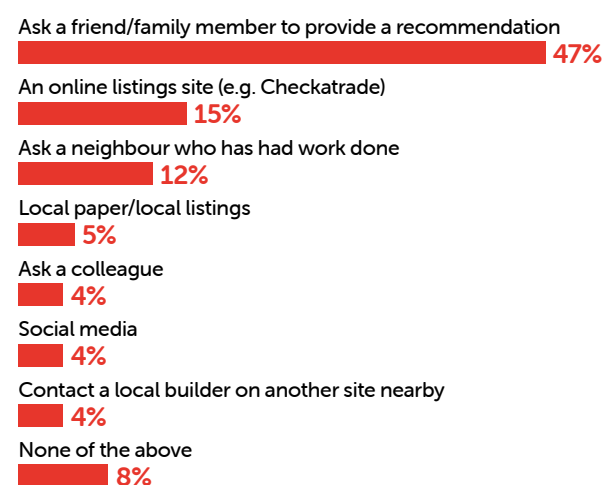
- 1. Identifying:** Finding a relevant tradesperson with the skills to do the job
- 2. Checking:** Conducting due diligence and checking costs
- 3. Choosing:** Making a final decision

1. Identifying

Getting a recommendation from friends or family is the most common way that people find a tradesperson, with just under half (47%) of the public saying it would be the first thing they would do when beginning a home improvement job.

Ways to find a tradesperson

Showing % of respondents who selected the following as their first way



“I’ll listen to advice from people I know. Ratings from friends are useful, and neighbours could be having a job done so I’ll ask them who they used.”

Homeowner,
Birmingham, 35-54

“Majority of builders live on word of mouth. It’s the easiest way and they’re not going to be shoddy. There are cowboys out there, there always will be.”

Homeowner,
Birmingham, 35-54

Homeowners told us in the focus groups that this is the best way to avoid a rogue tradesperson because they have been vetted by someone else.

Homeowners’ view is that tradespeople often work through ‘informal’ networks dependent on word-of-mouth, and that they could miss out on good tradespeople by not tapping into this.

The tradesperson’s view

The importance of recommendations was also reflected in the focus groups with tradespeople, who felt that the majority of their clients find them through word-of-mouth.

“I’ve never had any trouble [finding clients] – it’s all through word of mouth.”

Tradesperson, Birmingham

2. Checking

After finding a tradesperson via word-of-mouth, most will still check the tradesperson online. 59% of the public say that they ‘always’ look up a tradesperson online before using them, even if a family member or friend has recommended them.

Having an online presence is an important marker of legitimacy for tradespeople. Half (50%) of the public say they would trust a tradesperson more if they were online and over two-thirds (69%) say it would make the process of fixing, maintaining and improving the home easier if there was an online tradesperson directory they could trust.



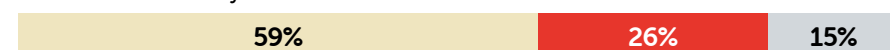
59%

of the public say that they ‘always’ look up a tradesperson online before using them, even if a family member or friend has recommended them.

Looking up tradespeople online

Showing % of respondents who agree and disagree with the following statements

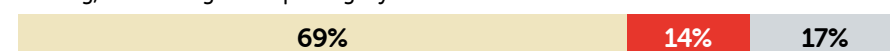
I always look up a tradesperson online before using them, even if a friend or family member has recommended them



I would trust a tradesperson more if they were online (e.g. had a website, had a profile on another site)



If there was an online tradesperson directory that I could trust, the process of fixing, maintaining and improving my home would be much easier



NET Agree
NET Disagree
Don't know / no opinion

In the focus groups, homeowners told us that reviews available on online tradespeople directories were particularly helpful when choosing a tradesperson. After getting a recommendation, some checked online to validate the recommendation, though there was some concern around the trustworthiness of online reviews.

It's like TripAdvisor – you don't always know what you're going to get, you can't always trust reviews and have to make sure they're up to date.

Homeowner, Portsmouth, 55+

While tradespeople predominantly said their business came through word-of-mouth, many recognised that customers are increasingly going online to find tradespeople and check the quality of their work.

It's all word of mouth really, and also social media, I stick [photos] online so that potential customers can have a look.

Tradesperson, Manchester

83% say they always get more than one quote if they are looking to have work done in their home and just under three-quarters (74%) say they always ask for a written quote from a tradesperson.

Shopping around to get a good price, verifying quotes and confirming costs up front are important to the public. In the survey, over four-fifths of the public (83%) say they always get more than one quote if they are looking to have work done in their home and just under three-quarters (74%) say they always ask for a written quote from a tradesperson. Whilst most shop around, many have a tradesperson that they know and have used for a long time. Over two-fifths (41%) of the public report having a tradesperson they have used for a long-time.

3. Choosing

Once we have identified a tradesperson, we look at a number of characteristics and behaviours of a tradesperson which we feel are important. For a majority of the public, it is essential that a tradesperson seems trustworthy and knowledgeable, as well as giving them a clear quote.

- How trustworthy they seem – **90%** say this is 'essential' or 'very important'
- How knowledgeable they seem – **89%** say this is 'essential' or 'very important'
- How clear the quote they give is – **88%** say this is 'essential' or 'very important'
- The overall cost they give – **87%** say this is 'essential' or 'very important'

The importance of trust was also reflected in the focus groups with homeowners. Participants felt it was important to establish a good rapport with a tradesperson, as we need to feel comfortable letting a tradesperson into our homes.

I've had a few quotes now and the cost has gone from £40,000 to £18,000.

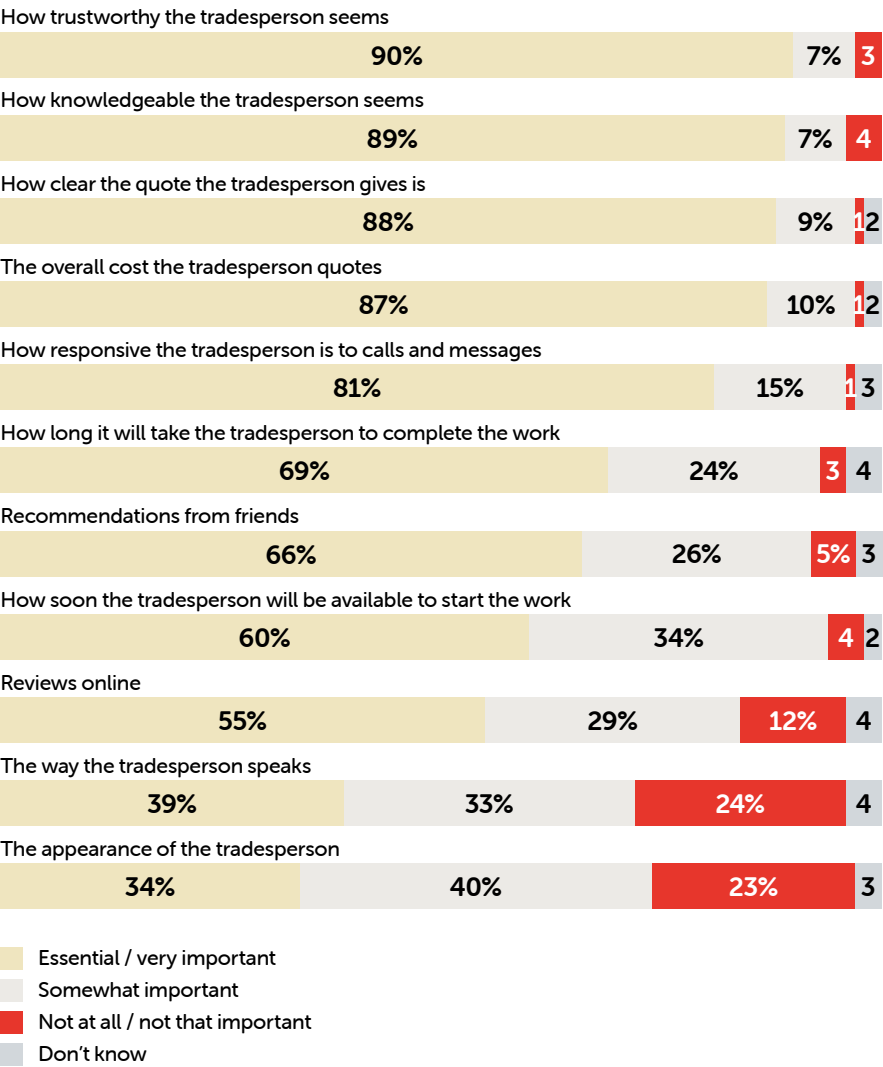
Homeowner, Birmingham, 35-54

I have given [a tradesperson] the keys to my home so I don't have to let them in. If I didn't trust them, I would not be leaving them in my house. You need to trust them.

Homeowner, Manchester, 18-34

Top characteristics and behaviours of tradespeople

Showing perceived importance of difference characteristics/ behaviours



“We decided to have the loft converted into a room. The job should have taken a couple of weeks but dragged on for a few months because they were delaying it, they weren't showing up on time and stuff like that, so it was a nightmare.”

Homeowner,
Birmingham, 35-54

Finding a reliable tradesperson is important as negative experiences of tradespeople are widespread amongst the general public. Over a quarter of the public (27%) have experienced a tradesperson leaving without finishing a job. A fifth (20%) have had a tradesperson do something they didn't ask them to do when doing a job. Homeowners in the focus groups also shared experiences of being let down by tradespeople in the past.

The tradesperson's view

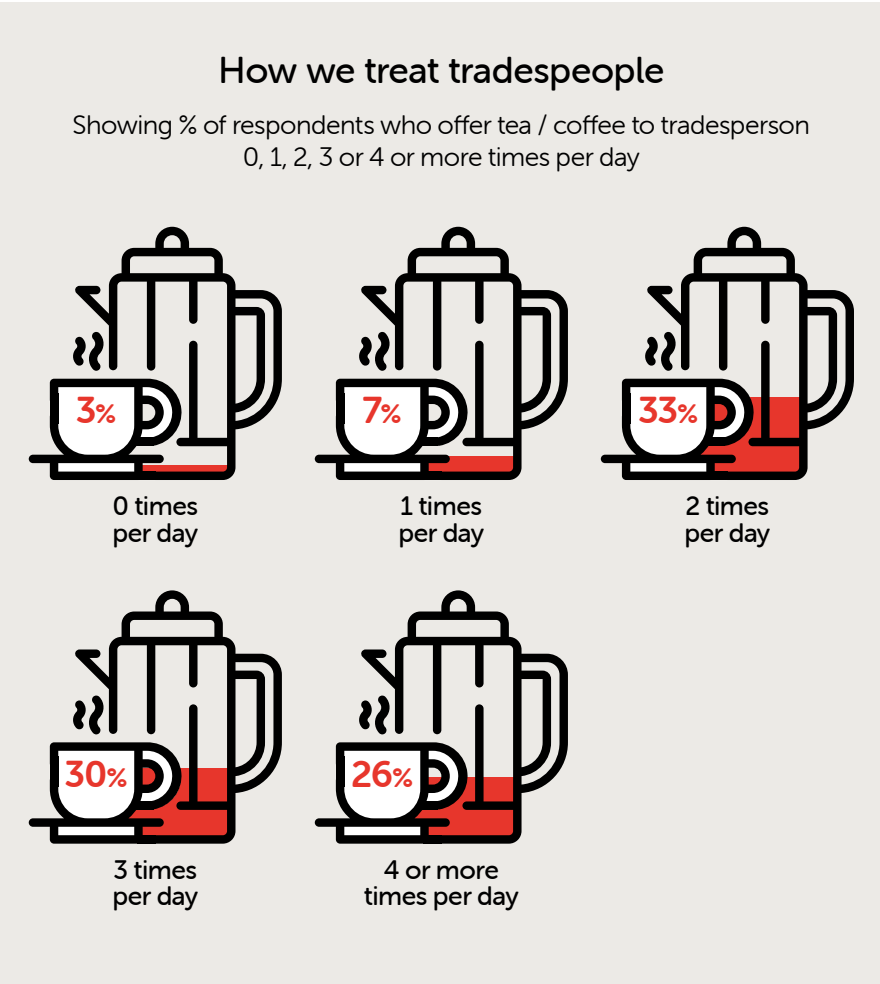
On the flip side, tradespeople also stress the importance of trusting their customers. Focus group participants were particularly concerned about customers not paying them, or a customer trying to negotiate costs down after the work has been done. Some tradespeople admitted to raising their quote in instances when they felt a customer could be particularly tricky or risky, in order to deter them from asking them to do the work.

“How do you know if the client has the money for the whole job? I worry about that if it's a big job so I might ask for proof of funds.”

Tradesperson, Manchester

Builder's tea

The public say they offer tradespeople working in their homes on average between two and three cups of tea or coffee a day. Women are more likely than men to say they offer tradespeople more cups of tea or coffee a day – 63% of women say they offer three or more cups of tea or coffee a day, compared to just 50% of men. Older people are also more likely to say they offer tradespeople more cups of tea or coffee a day – 64% of those aged 55+ say they offer three or more cups of tea a day, compared to just 48% of those aged 18-34.



Response from HomeServe

Britain's Home Truths confirms what HomeServe hears every day from our customers. Our homes are very important to us, but looking after them can be stressful as well as rewarding. HomeServe's reason for being in business is to make home repairs and improvements easy.

The fact that three quarters of us have something we want to fix, maintain or improve in our homes right now represents an enormous opportunity for HomeServe, and particularly for our online home repairs and improvements platform, Checktrade. While 47% of jobs start with a personal recommendation, 59% look up a trade online before using them. 69% said that having an online trades directory they could trust would make the whole process easier. Checktrade is the obvious solution, particularly as we carry out 14 checks of Trades before they can be listed, and we verify customer reviews.

Richard Harpin, Founder and CEO of HomeServe



Contact details

Ben Shimshon

bshimshon@britainthinks.com

Tom Clarkson

tclarkson@britainthinks.com

Max Templer

mtempler@britainthinks.com

Isabel Gill

igill@britainthinks.com

+44 (0)207 8455880

BritainThinks

West Wing

Somerset House

Strand

WC2R 1LA