

Working RE Home Inspector

Fall 2017, Volume 5

History of Home Inspection

**Business Key:
Answering the Phone**

**War on Radon: What
You Need to Know**

**Soot, Ghosts and Ugly
Stains**

Meth Testing



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From the Editor

White Hat Guys (and Gals)

by Isaac Peck, Editor

This issue looks back on the origins of the home inspection profession—its roots and what it means to be a “home inspector” then and today.

The first home inspectors were motivated by the same desire to help others that many of you reading I’m sure share, combined with a drive to make an opportunity work.

Here at *Working RE* and OREP, we’d like to take a moment to salute the pioneers of the profession, while also applauding all of you who continue to push the industry forward. Since the very first “home inspection,” the home-buying public has depended on the home inspector to provide an unbiased, independent, and accurate assessment of a property’s condition. This has resulted in a more educated consumer, a safer and higher quality housing stock, and greater transparency and protection for millions of homebuyers throughout the U.S.

In this issue, as always, you’ll find many opportunities to expand your business and your knowledge base, including with home warranties—which will help you grow your business and shrink your headaches (pg. 24)!

Working RE Home Inspector has had the privilege to publish valuable information to home inspectors for over 15 years. This issue our circulation expands to over 20,000 home inspectors nationwide, making it the largest circulation print publication serving home inspectors in the country. WRE also has a digital edition that you can opt in for free at WorkingRE.com.

Working RE Home Inspector is published by OREP.org, one of the leading providers of E&O/GL insurance for inspectors in the country (See Inside Front Cover). Thanks for reading! **WRE**

"Here at Working RE and OREP, we'd like to take a moment to salute the pioneers of the profession, while also applauding all of you who continue to push the industry forward."

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Industry News

Kentucky Considers Bill Requiring Inspections on All Purchases

The Kentucky State Legislature is considering adopting a bill (HB 97) that would require that “Any home that has a valid offer of acceptance between a seller and a buyer shall be inspected by a reputable certified third party home inspector prior to closing the sale.” The bill is currently in review by the House Standing Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations, with no guarantee that it will survive the legislative channels to become law. Even so, if passed, it would make Kentucky the first state to require home inspections on all home purchases. The current bill was introduced by House Representative Rick G. Nelson, a Democrat from Middlesboro’s House District 87.

Tenn. Statute of Limitations

The Tenn. state legislature is currently considering a bill that would reduce the statute of limitations for bringing a claim against a home inspector. According to Pierre Billiard, President of the Home Inspectors Tenn. Association (HITA), getting the bill passed will be a giant step forward for all home inspectors in Tenn. “The proposed bill has been delayed until the next legislative session and we are currently joining with other home inspection groups to foster support and possibly hire a lobbyist. We undoubtedly will have an amendment attached to the proposed bill that would provide an 18-month statute of limitation,” says Billiard. Efforts to limit a home inspector’s liability through legislative initiatives are not uncommon, and savvy home inspectors have often pushed to include such language in their inspection licensing laws. For example,

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the Wisconsin home inspector licensing law includes a provision that any claim against a home inspector must be filed within two years after the date the home inspection is completed. In Illinois the statute of limitations for home inspectors is five years. Because of the different state laws, the timeframe under which an inspector can be sued varies widely by state.

Unlicensed Inspector Fined \$80,000

In April 2017, the Oregon Construction Contractors Board (CCB) fined Gregory Mason Miller more than \$80,000 for performing home inspections without a proper license. According to the Board's press release, Miller used a license number belonging to a legitimate licensee who had the same first and last name. In advertising, Miller claimed to be licensed, bonded and insured. According to *The Bulletin*, an Oregon newspaper, Miller was reported three times before the CCB took action. In a statement, CCB Enforcement Manager Stan Jessup reported that Miller was "doing significant business without offering any of the consumer protections

that come with licensing, including a bond and CCB record that would alert potential clients to any history of problems." Home inspectors in Oregon are required to carry

a minimum of \$100,000 in general liability insurance as well as a bond for \$10,000. **WRE**



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History of Home Inspection

by Isaac Peck, Editor

The motivations of the pioneers of the profession nearly 50 years ago to begin inspecting homes are probably not much different than your own: a desire to help—to offer your expertise to those who lack it, combined with the drive to recognize an opportunity and pursue it.

How the profession was born and evolved into what it is today will be of interest to all home inspectors, new and established alike.

Ask many of the old timers and they will tell you that it began in the early 1970s. In 1976, the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI) was formed. The California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA) was also formed in 1976. The formation of these first home inspection associations led to the first inspection Code of Ethics and “Standards of Practice.”

It wasn’t until 1985 that Texas became the first state to regulate home inspectors and pass a home inspection licensing law. Other states followed and now more than 30 states have home inspector licensing laws, with many of the remaining states exploring options on how to regulate the profession.

Retracing the timeline of this relatively young profession raises an important question: what was the impetus that kick-started the industry and how has the role of the professional home inspector changed over time?

In the Beginning

Marvin Goldstein, President of Building Inspection Services, Inc. and a founding member of ASHI, reports that his father first began performing home inspections for prospective homebuyers back in 1938, after graduating with a degree in engineering. “My dad worked full-time as a professional engineer but people would ask him to do a home inspection before they bought a home, so he formed Building Inspection Services and ran the business as a part-time venture. But at the time, the industry was still very young, and very few homes were being inspected before the 1960s,” says Goldstein.



Isaac Peck is the Editor of *Working RE* magazine and the Director of Marketing at OREP, a leading provider of E&O insurance for home inspectors, appraisers, and other real estate professionals in all 50 states and D.C. He received his master’s degree in accounting at San Diego State University. He can be contacted at isaac@orep.org or (888) 347-5273.



It was during the late 1960s that the home inspection industry finally began to take form. Goldstein entered in 1969, being trained by his father by going along on over 50 home inspections to learn the trade. To put things in perspective, Goldstein estimates that in the late 1960s only about five percent of total home purchases used a home inspector in the U.S. Today, roughly 80% of all homes are inspected by a professional inspector.

One event that helped kick-start the industry, according to Goldstein, was a requirement by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) that all FHA insured loans receive a plumbing, heating, electrical, roofing, and termite certification prior to the loan being funded. “FHA’s requirements created substantial demand for home inspectors, in part because mortgage interest rates were very high in 1969 and 1970, and conventional lending institutions that would normally lend to buyers wouldn’t get involved. The percentage of FHA insured loans became a very large part of the market,” says Goldstein.

This created incredible demand for a single professional who could provide a certification for each system of a home with just one inspection. “At the time, Realtors would call a plumber to do the plumbing certification, an electrician to do the electrical certification, a roofer to do the roofing certification, a termite professional to do the termite certification, and so on. I cut my teeth when I was going through college doing termite inspections and treatments. My father told me he thought there was a future in the home inspection business, so instead of pursuing a career in law, teaching or investment banking, as I was considering, I chose to go into the family business,” says Goldstein.

Riding the wave of demand for home systems certifications due to FHA requirements, Goldstein says he incorporated his father’s company, Building Inspection Services, Inc., in 1971 and the rest

is history. “To spread the word about our services, I went out to real estate brokers initially and told them of the service that I provided. I saved them the trouble of having to arrange four or five different people to inspect the house because I could provide all the required certifications with just a single inspection. Within six months of incorporating, our company was doing a tremendous volume of business. That led to other inspectors in the Philadelphia area getting into the business, and the practice of home inspecting in our area grew from there,” says Goldstein.

Following the demand created by FHA requirements, Goldstein says another factor that drove demand among the general public was that many inspection companies developed the idea of guarantees and warranties to go with the home inspection. “Guarantees and warranties were used early in the inspection profession as a means of enticing homebuyers to purchase a home inspection. While my company has never offered guarantees, those warranty companies were a significant part of the foundation of ASHI in 1976. The public was very receptive to the idea of a guarantee as a value proposition when purchasing a home,” reports Goldstein.

Finally, a third motivation that Goldstein believes increased the demand for inspection services during the 1970s was publicity about corruption among real estate agents who were selling homes, especially FHA repossessed homes. “It was *caveat emptor* back then—the idea that the buyer alone is responsible

for checking the quality and suitability of goods before a purchase is made. There were a number of corruption and fraud cases involving real estate sales professionals at the time, and this raised awareness among the general public and established the need for homebuyers to have someone on their side representing them and telling them the truth about the home. The home inspector became the go-to person because of the lack of trust for real estate agents,” says Goldstein.

Formation of ASHI

The American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), which many say was the very first home inspection association, was formed in 1976. Ronald Passaro, whose member number is 0000001, is the founder of ASHI and played a key role in organizing the inspection profession as we know it today.

Passaro started as a builder in Stamford, Conn. and got started in home inspections in the early 1970s because people would sometimes ask him to “inspect” a home prior to their purchasing it. “When I got started, I had never met another home inspector. The term ‘home inspection’ did not even exist. I started ‘inspecting’ homes for friends and relatives, and then strangers started asking me to look at their homes. One day I sat down with my staff and we started writing up an outline of what we can tell people about a home they were buying. We developed our first set of home inspection forms from there,” says Passaro.

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At the time, Passaro says there were no books, no schools, no standards, and he had no idea there were any other “home inspectors” out there. “I set out in 1973, trying to find other home inspectors and form an organization. My daughter, Donna, was a teenager at the time and worked in my office part-time in the summer, so I asked her to search the reference books in the office and call around to find other home inspectors. She found a half a dozen in the Tri-State area (New York, New Jersey, and Conn.). For our very first meeting, six inspectors showed up at my office in Stamford. Norman Becker was there, who wrote one of the first books on the topic of home inspection,” says Passaro.

As ASHI began to take shape, Passaro began hearing from other home inspectors across the country. “By 1975, our numbers had grown to the point that we had to stop meeting in our offices. We organized a large meeting in the School of Engineering at Rutgers University. The building could only accommodate 100 people and we sold out. Many in the room had never met another home inspector. Imagine being a writer, and never having met another writer? Or being a doctor and never having met another doctor? The energy in the room was incredible. One of the first things we worked on was to identify what a home inspector was. We also began collecting data and defining our Standards of Practice (SOP) and Code of Ethics,” reports Passaro.

ASHI issued its first SOP and Code of Ethics in 1976, and the rest is history. ASHI has served to advance the profession in two critical ways, according to Passaro. Not only did ASHI serve as a vehicle to spread the word to the public, but it also allowed for a sharing of information, knowledge and training within the young profession. “Home inspectors are required to be knowledgeable of so many systems and parts of a house, so it was absolutely critical to have a means of educating ourselves and training each other. ASHI has always been big on education. ASHI allowed us to share our professional knowledge, learn about new technology, high-end equipment, and keep up with the latest advancements in plumbing, electrical, air conditioning, carpentry, roofing, and more. The training, the education, and the knowledge sharing that ASHI facilitated helped drive the industry forward,” argues Passaro.

As the home inspection profession developed and grew, it resulted in a dramatic improvement of the housing stock in the U.S., according to Passaro. “Few people ever talk about how the home inspection profession has improved the housing stock to the incredible degree it has and the number of lives that have been saved due to home inspecting. I have found more heat exchanges and water heaters leaking carbon monoxide than you could believe. There are so many potential safety issues within homes. Before we came along, the only time a professional looked at the house was when it was built. Now inspectors serve as an additional check to help protect the buyer’s investment and ensure the safety of the home-buying public,” Passaro says.

Early Marketing

With marketing being such a central focus for many home inspectors today, a reasonable question is how the early home

inspectors marketed their businesses back in the 1960s and 1970s. Passaro says that most home inspectors back then, just like today, were technical people, not marketing professionals. “We didn’t know how to market professionally. In the beginning, all my brochures were printed in black and white, and I used to hire kids to go to apartment complexes and drop them off at people’s doorsteps. I also went around myself as a salesperson to real estate offices. I was asked to leave a lot in the early days, but I would always go dressed up to the hilt, always with a rose in my lapel. That way they would remember me,” says Passaro.

Once his business got off the ground, Passaro started ramping up his marketing. “As my company grew, I started making good money and our marketing became more professional. I had a poster for my company at every railroad stop from New York City to Stamford, CT. Stamford was the relocation center of the country, so a lot of people were relocating to the state via railroad so it worked very well for me. I also advertised in the railroad program books, so every program they picked up for the train station, we had an ad in there. There was incredible demand for what we were offering at that time. If you wanted an inspection done by me, you went on a waiting list. There were only two home inspectors in the entire state,” Passaro indicates.

Landmark Case

A later catalyst that helped to further advance the profession was a 1984 court ruling, *Easton vs. Strassberger*. After purchasing a property for \$170,000 in 1976, it was discovered that the property had soil issues and experienced extensive damage due to a slide just prior to the sale. The buyer, Easton, sued the seller and the seller’s agents for “fraudulent concealment and intentional and negligent misrepresentation.”

The California Court of Appeals ruling sent a message loud and clear that agents and brokers had a duty to conduct due diligence and disclose facts materially affecting the value of the property. The Court ruled that real estate agents and brokers have “the affirmative duty to conduct a reasonably competent and diligent inspection of the residential property listed for sale and to disclose to prospective purchasers all facts materially affecting the value of the property that such investigation would reveal.”

The ruling not only increased the responsibility and liability of real estate agents, but also led to the realization that they could better serve their clients and reduce their new liability by referring independent home inspectors to provide a complete and thorough inspection of the property.

The result was a substantial increase in the demand for home inspectors and home inspections. Many brokerages and Realtor Associations, such as the California Association of Realtors (CAR), now encourage all sales professionals to recommend a home inspection to their buyers. Home inspections serve as a

liability-reducing mechanism for real estate brokers and also help to protect buyers in a purchase transaction. After Texas passed home inspector licensing in 1985, states across the U.S. began to explore their own licensing programs and home inspections became much more popular among consumers and agents/brokers. According to a 2009 survey by the National Association of Realtors (NAR), roughly 80% of all homes nationwide are now being inspected.

Licensing

After Texas's inspector licensing law in 1985, other states began to follow suit. Now over 30 states have some form of home inspector licensing requirements. Home inspector licensing has been a hotly debated issue among inspectors, with some arguing that it cheapens the profession by formalizing inadequate inspection standards. Others maintain that licensing elevates the profession by setting a baseline for what an inspector is responsible for. (For more, visit WorkingRE.com, search *Inspector Licensing: The Wrong Path?*)

Passaro explains that he played a central role in the inspector licensing efforts in his home state of Conn., which first licensed inspectors in 2001. "I served as chairman on the first licensing board and I sat in the meeting with Realtors and everybody else involved as we crafted the licensing law. I told the other inspectors in our state: 'We're going to get licensed one way or another; do you want the Realtors to dictate how we get licensed,

or do you want to be involved in the process?' We ended up making the requirements very stringent. Home inspectors have to take 40 hours of education, pass an internship that requires 100 actual inspections under the supervision of a licensed home inspector, take two exams, and then take continuing education every two years," says Passaro.

The key question with respect to licensing is whether inspectors have a seat at the table and a hand in forging the future of their profession. "The law we passed in Conn. is not bad, and so as long as the law is set up with the input of home inspectors, I think licensing can be a good thing. My approach to licensing is that if we don't control our own destiny, the Realtors will control it for us and they are a lot bigger and more powerful than we are. So inspectors have to stay involved in any licensing effort; otherwise it can lead to poor standards, as it has in some states already," argues Passaro.

Specialization

As the profession developed, inspectors quickly began branching out and offering niche services in addition to the typical "visual" inspection. Goldstein says one of the first "niche" specializations was inspecting for lead paint. "Over the years, the various side inspections have become more and more important for home inspectors. The first was in the early 1970s, when

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I was approached by FHA to help them identify lead-based paint issues. I inspected 100 HUD repossessed houses, and I ended up testifying before several Congressional committees about the lead-based paint hazard in housing, how serious it is and how it can affect the health of the occupants and cause the government great expense over time," says Goldstein.

After Congress passed a law in 1978, the use of lead was banned in paint and gasoline. "The result of the law is that lead levels in the average American are half of what they were prior to 1978. And now lead paint inspections are offered by home inspectors on older homes. At the time, FHA had over 2,000 repossessed houses in its inventory and they could not sell any house in the state unless the house was inspected for lead paint. My company received a \$1 million contract to inspect these homes for lead paint," says Goldstein.

Adding additional services or "inspections" alongside traditional home inspections is now the norm in the industry, according to Goldstein. "The inspection industry is going in the direction of multiple inspections. In the 1970s, it was lead-based paint. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration made a big deal about radon, and radon inspections are now a service that many inspectors offer. Today we have mold inspections and inspectors are also beginning to use drones. We have sewer line inspections and septic inspections. There are many separate

inspections that were never part of the original home inspection and are still not part of the ASHI SOP," says Goldstein.

Since the beginning of the profession, home inspectors have been using these additional services and specializations to both diversify their revenue streams, as well as build a competitive advantage in the marketplace as they compete for potential clients. As a profession, home inspectors can look forward to continued evolution, as the tools, technology, and services offered in the market continue to advance and improve.

For a relatively young profession, it's impressive how far home inspectors have come. It will be exciting to see what comes next. **WRE**

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Business Key: Answering the Phone

by Lois Rusco, PASS, Inc.



Communicating quickly and efficiently is critical to having a successful inspection business.

Most home inspectors work hard marketing and inspecting but unfortunately, this often does not leave sufficient time for answering phones and responding to texts and emails in a timely manner and scheduling appointments. It can be difficult and even hazardous to answer your phone, text, or email while on a roof or in a crawl space, not to mention the potential negative impression it can leave with a client or agent attending the inspection—seeing your attention divided and compromised.

Real estate transactions are time sensitive, and the marketing that is done to get the phone to ring can also be a waste of time and money if the phone isn't answered.

Studies show potential clients are not patient when they need to get an appointment scheduled:

- 80% of callers say they will not call back if they can't speak to someone when they call.
- 80% say they prefer to hang up vs. leaving a message.
- 98% of callers say poor telephone handling gives a bad impression.
- 69% will never call back.

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While many inspectors believe they are not missing business, even one missed call can cost you hundreds of dollars in inspection fees and maybe years of referrals.



Lois Rusco, CEO started PASS, Inc in 2004. We focus on increasing sales and providing exceptional virtual office services to home inspectors. PASS, Inc can help grow your business utilizing phone, chat and email capabilities.

There are multiple options available for phone answering. No matter what option you chose, it is critical that the person answering on your behalf is trained and knowledgeable about your business, as this will improve the overall conversion or close rate.

Just answering and providing a price or taking a message for you is not enough to close the deal. Cost is important to the caller and generally the first question, but it is also critical that whoever answers the phone takes control of the call and lets the caller know about the credentials and background of the inspector in addition to the "price." Clients also need to understand what is and is not included in the inspection, what additional services are available and what other benefits may be part of the home inspection (such as a home warranty).

If you're skeptical about outsourcing or don't believe another person can answer the phone the way you can, consider the following: an inspector in MD who answered the phones himself converted to using a virtual office service and saw his inspections increase 86% or 24 additional inspections per month. This is an average increase of \$10,200 per month.

Another inspector in Idaho who did the same saw an increase of 67% or 30 inspections per month yielding an average increase of \$12,000 in revenue per month, and he had to increase his inspection staff! Having multiple staff answering your calls, who are knowledgeable about the business, will absolutely have a positive impact on your bottom line.

Be sure your calls and other direct communications aren't being missed or going to voicemail. Help increase your business and provide excellent customer service by answering your phone and providing prompt responses to all business inquiries.

WRE

It's Summer...It's HOT (My IR Camera Won't Work As Well—Right!?!)

by Christopher Casey, President of Monroe Infrared

Infrared camera adoption by home inspectors is still much less than 50%. And of those “early adopters” we know that many haven’t completed any formalized infrared thermography training.

Why is this so important? You know why! Because infrared training improves your understanding of the tools and how to use them. Infrared training increases your confidence. And infrared training develops competence in home inspectors for using the technology to differentiate, to grow and to become a more profitable business.

At the time that I’m writing this, it is summer and the weather is HOT in most places around the country. Many home inspectors think using an infrared (IR) camera in the summer may not be as effective as it is during the cooler months of the year. Why the misconception? Hands-on training helps demonstrate what and how ambient temperature, reflected temperature, emitted temperature and atmospheric temperature interact when viewed through the lens of your IR camera. Understanding what happens when moisture changes state and why an infrared camera can detect the temperature delta (difference) created by the evaporation are critical to getting the most real time information from that infrared camera that you have invested several thousand dollars in.

So here’s a tip: don’t put your IR camera away when it gets hot! We tell home inspectors all the time and especially those who are attending and graduating from our infrared training classes—like the Certified Residential Thermographer (CRT) class—designed specifically for home inspectors and other residential inspection professionals, that just like learning to ride a bicycle, a home inspector is often uneasy and worried about making a mistake or “crashing” when they first start out using infrared technology. And worse, that no one is going to be there to catch them before they fall!

We understand and we know that you have to practice what we teach you in order to gain confidence in your new skills; that



Christopher Casey is President of Monroe Infrared, a Veteran-Owned Small Business supporting clients with infrared training and selecting the best IR camera for their business since 1984. Christopher focused Monroe Infrared to work with home inspectors over 4 years ago recognizing the power of thermal technology to improve the quality of inspections offered as well as business growth and overall revenue.



you need to practice “seeing” the information presented in the classroom out in the “real world.” You have to get up on that bicycle, break out that infrared camera and use it every day on every inspection you perform. You can begin at home: offer to look at all your neighbors’ homes as well as the homes of any other friends and relatives who live nearby. Get your “balance” for having the infrared camera in your hand and understanding what you are seeing in different homes at different times of the day with different temperatures inside and out.

Summertime Inspecting

Most everyone understands the greater the temperature difference between the inside and outside of a home’s wall surfaces, the more pronounced the thermal image will present and the easier it is to identify and analyze thermal anomalies. Summertime in the southern half of the country offers great delta T’s with customers making use of air conditioning to make their indoor living spaces more comfortable. So what about those homes you need to inspect which are not air conditioned? What do you do when it is the same temperature inside as outside the home? What can you do for that second inspection of the day, which likely starts after lunch in the hottest part of the day? What do you do if the home does not have the utilities turned on so there is no hot water or maybe no water at all?

Everyone reading this article should consider a few suggestions for infrared inspections during the summer (or just on hot days!), regardless of whether it’s inside or outside work or whether your customer market is north, south east or in the western United States:

- Be aware of where the sun will be positioned when you are going to do your inspection. Solar loading the roof and walls of

the home can actually be used to help you better utilize your infrared camera during the inspection and generate some outstanding images which tell the story for you and your clients.

- Walk around the home before you start to check for shadows from trees in the client's yard as well as from trees in adjacent yards.
- Be aware of surrounding structures for both shadows and reflected sunlight. Reflections often have substantial impact on a home because of how strong direct sunlight can be on clear summer days. These reflections come from windows, siding, sheds, fences as well as vehicle windows and windshields.
- If you plan to have the AC turned down, be sure your clients confirm and that this is done at a minimum of two to three hours prior to your scheduled inspection start time.
- Properties without electricity and/or air conditioning available may need to be scheduled in the evening or early morning once thermal loading can be removed and heat dissipated (as the house will maintain heat within while it starts to cool outside).
- Home inspectors who are confident using infrared will want to consider using manual level and span control on your IR cameras to better identify and highlight suspect areas.
- If you are not as familiar with summer inspections and don't have air conditioning to help create minimum delta T conditions, be sure to work slowly and look carefully. This will help you find those small anomalies.
- Always confirm your infrared findings with other diagnostic tools like moisture meters, borescopes, confined space entry cameras and electrical measurement meters.

Your infrared camera is an investment in your business's growth and success. It is an excellent tool that you can learn to use effectively and efficiently throughout the entire year. Don't let warm weather be a deterrent to your using an infrared camera as a value added service to your customers.

Hot, cold, wet or dry, infrared thermography allows you to see with your eyes those issues which might otherwise go undiscovered during the home inspection. And those unseen issues today can be major headaches in a week, a month or several months. Don't miss finding these issues and providing your clients with the absolute best inspection that you possibly can. With ROIs of three to six months for most home inspectors, an investment in infrared really has become a "no-brainer." One day in the not too distant future, it will absolutely be an expected tool for every home inspector—just as the flashlight and moisture meter have become.

One final thought—many home and commercial building inspectors tell us they often leave their infrared cameras in their SUVs and trucks (on hot days) for security purposes. Remember, your infrared camera feels the heat just like you do! A suggestion on how to keep your infrared camera secure when on a jobsite is to utilize the soft-sided nylon carrying pouch designed for it. These pouches or holsters safely keep your infrared camera on your person and across your chest/back, freeing up both hands while allowing for quick access to get your camera back out and into use. **WRE**

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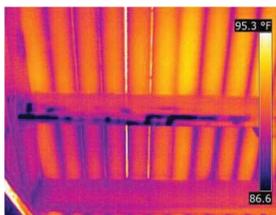
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War on Radon and What You Need to Know

by Carolyn Koke, Spruce Environmental Technologies, Inc.

Lung cancer is the leading cancer killer in both men and women. According to American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 158,040 American citizens will die from lung cancer this year—more than colorectal, breast and prostate cancers combined.

One of the leading causes of lung cancer is radon. Radon, a radioactive gas that is present in homes and other buildings, is the #1 environmental health threat and the #1 cause of lung cancer for non-smokers. Although radon is found in all buildings, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends reducing the radon when test results are 4.0 picocuries/Liter (pCi/L) or higher. EPA suggests that homeowners consider fixing the radon if the level is 2.0 to 4.0 pCi/L.

Home inspection professionals are in an ideal position to help turn around these statistics by making potential buyers—and sellers—aware of the hidden dangers of radon and the need for testing and mitigation. A home that has been mitigated to reduce radon levels is a safer, healthier home. The existence of a radon system in a home is a benefit to potential buyers and a selling point for agents and sellers.

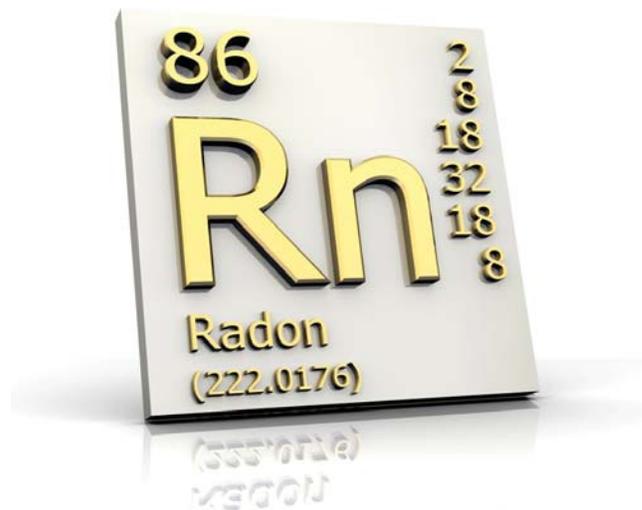
This presents an opportunity for home inspectors to help educate buyers, sellers, and real estate agents, while growing their business and offering a service that sets them apart from the competition.

Invisible Killer

In 1982 the world learned about a fatal virus that became known as AIDS. It took over a year to determine how it was transmitted, and another year before a screening blood test was developed. As the death toll climbed and fear grew, so did a worldwide outcry for public health protection and action. In



Carolyn Koke has been in the radon industry for more than 20 years. She is a Past President of the American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists. Ms. Koke works for Spruce Environmental Technologies, Inc., which manufactures and distributes radon testing products and specialized fans under the AccuStar, RadStar and RadonAway brands. AccuStar's long-term Alpha Track radon test device was rated number 1 in its category by a leading national consumer advocacy group.



1988, 20,786 people in the U.S. died from HIV and AIDS (*NY Times*). In 2014, 6,721 people in the U.S. died from HIV and AIDS. (CDC)

In 1988, the U.S. EPA estimate of deaths due to radon-induced lung cancer was 21,000 per year. That number of deaths has been the same - 21,000 - every year since then. The lack of awareness of the dangers of radon and the absence of concrete actions to prevent radon-induced lung cancer is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Federal Programs

Congress passed the Indoor Radon Abatement Act in 1988. However, little progress has been made in reducing the number of high radon homes and the number of lives at risk. In 2008, the U.S. EPA Office of the Inspector General released a report entitled, "More Action Needed to Protect Public from Indoor Radon Risks." The report observed that new home construction has outpaced the installation of radon mitigation systems. It's important to remember that the principal driver of radon awareness, research and reduction activities, EPA State Indoor Radon Grant (SIRG), has been capped at a meager \$8 million annually for years. That funding is likely to be discontinued next year.

In 2011, the U.S. EPA launched the Federal Radon Action Plan (FRAP) to provide a framework for increased radon awareness and reduction activities within nine federal agencies. Several milestones were achieved. The EPA reported that 88% of FRAP goals were achieved. Additionally, the program provided, "direct and immediate effects reaching at least 1.6 million homes, schools and childcare facilities with federal guidance and incentives and, in 12.5% of those units, testing and mitigating when necessary."

Other Initiatives

To continue the work of the FRAP, in 2015 the National Radon Action Plan (NRAP) was launched by the American Lung Association. The official goal of the NRAP is to mitigate five million high radon homes and save 3,200 lives from lung cancer annually by 2020, working together with federal agencies and several non-profit organizations.

One of the most active organizations mobilized against radon is Cancer Survivors Against Radon (CanSAR), whose mission is to “help spread the importance of radon testing so no one will hear the words, ‘you have cancer [due to radon exposure].’” CanSAR was founded in 2005 by Elizabeth Hoffman, who was diagnosed with Stage IIIA lung cancer in 2003. A never-smoker with no family history of lung cancer, Hoffman tested her home for radon. She was shocked to learn that she had been living with more than twice the U.S. EPA’s action level of 4.0 pCi/L.

CanSAR supports lung cancer victims and their families and advocates for the passage of radon legislation. Their keystone project is a drive for states to each pass a Radon Awareness Act. In two states, Illinois and Minnesota, where CanSAR was instrumental in getting Radon Awareness Acts passed, the results have been significant. In Illinois, within the first year, radon testing increased by 29% and mitigation by 26%. In Minnesota, there was a 400% increase in radon mitigations.

On August 1, 2017, CanSAR began a new radon awareness campaign called Women Against Radon, with the purpose of making women aware of the risk to them and their families. The American Lung Association estimates that every five minutes, a woman in the U.S. is told she has lung cancer. In addition, the number of women dying from lung cancer each year has nearly doubled over the past 30 years. Many of these deaths are preventable. The easiest form of prevention is testing for radon.

Women Against Radon committee member Pat Everett states, “It’s time to show our outrage. We are asking everyone to join the fight against lung cancer. It’s time to stop the tens of thousands of deaths caused by radon, the invisible killer.”

What Inspectors Can Do

November is national Lung Cancer Awareness month. Home inspectors are, in many ways, on the front lines of the fight against radon as they often inspect homes which may have dangerously high radon levels. This is an opportunity for home inspectors to help educate home buyers, sellers, and real estate agents on the dangers of radon, while also providing a valuable service that can help inspectors grow their businesses and increase their revenue. What will you do to help save lives? I hope that you will join the war against radon. **WRE**

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Five Tips for Managing Client Complaints

by Joseph Denneler, Esquire



Home Inspectors face many challenges on a daily basis. While safety concerns and accuracy of findings are important components of your work, managing client expectations and dealing with occasional complaints are also part and parcel of being a professional home inspector. While nobody wants to deal with disgruntled clients, on the rare occasion you do get a complaint your response to it is critical.

There certainly is no absolute right or wrong way to respond to client complaints. Many professional home inspectors have had success using their good instincts and prior experience to work through them. While my list is by no means exhaustive, these five steps have been proven effective to limit your risk and protect your reputation.

One caveat before we begin: if you have E&O insurance, your first call should be to the carrier or agent to report the claim and to get it on the record to ensure your coverage will respond in case you need it.

1. Acknowledge the complaint. While an unhappy client is a problem, an unhappy and ignored client can cause a maelstrom. Giving the client no other recourse but to retain a lawyer or file a complaint with your licensing board or national association is never a safe bet.

It is important to also obtain a clear explanation from the client of the nature of their complaint so you can prepare for further investigation. The basis for the complaint may be something simple, related to your standards of practice or a condition you clearly identified in your report. Communicating with the client can give you an opportunity to immediately and decisively put a claim to rest.

Some of my clients prepare form reports for documenting client complaints or questions. Keeping an organized “diary” of the complaint process is important because it can help your attorney if the complaint becomes a lawsuit, and it can help you narrow the scope of your investigation to minimize the drain on your time.

Even if you only receive a phone call from the client, acknowledge the complaint in writing in whatever fashion is appropriate. Complaints that become claims sometimes gestate for a year or more. Your recollection of events will never be clearer than immediately following that call. Documenting the complaint process will act as a timeline if needed later in the process.

2. Visit the property and inspect the conditions. You should always visit the property and personally observe the defects that form the basis of a claim. It gives you an opportunity to evaluate the conditions as they exist now versus when you inspected the property. Additionally, it gives you an opportunity to explain to your client why the condition was not discoverable during the inspection, or why it was outside the scope of your standards of practice.

Many claims arise after your client has done renovations or excavation of an area formerly obstructed by walls, floors and ceilings. Others arise after a severe weather event. The passage of time between your inspection and the notice of a claim can result in significant changes to the property. It is critical to identify potential defenses early in the claim process. Your insurance carrier or attorney needs to know early-on whether the alleged defect was hidden behind a wall now removed, or was in an area that was inaccessible for other reasons.

Visiting the property also gives you an opportunity to snuff out a claim before it becomes a mental and financial drain on you and your business. Sometimes being able to explain to your client in person why a condition was not identified results in your client better understanding your scope of work and why a claim would be fruitless. If it's a smaller issue, you have the opportunity to nullify the claim and move on (with a signed release of all claims, of course).



Joseph W. Denneler, Esquire, is a trial attorney specializing in representing home inspectors in litigation. He developed his Claims Assist program to assist inspectors with managing risk. You can get more information about Claims Assist at www.inspectorclaimassist.com. Mr. Denneler is also a co-founder of InspectionContracts.com, a company providing home inspection contracts based on state specific home inspector regulations. You can order contracts online at www.inspectioncontracts.com. OREP insureds enjoy 25% these services.

There may be occasions where, based on the tone of the communications about the claim, you do not believe it would be prudent to visit the property and engage the client. Investigating the claim is no different than doing the inspection where your safety is concerned. If you believe it unsafe, then it's unsafe. A claim is not worth putting yourself in harm's way.

3. Document the evidence. While visiting the site it is important that you document all of the conditions. This may be your only opportunity to record the conditions before repairs are made, or before the conditions worsen over time. In addition to fully photographing the conditions forming the basis of the claim, you should record any noticeable changes to the property since the date of your inspection.

Many of my cases involving home inspectors are not in litigation until a year or more after the inspection. By then repairs have been made, and the evidence I need to prove that a condition was hidden, or not visibly defective, is destroyed. Sometimes the condition gets worse in that time. I and any other lawyer representing an inspector in litigation, rely on you to preserve evidence of conditions at the time they were discovered when you are given the opportunity. Visual evidence is a powerful courtroom tool. Your photographs could form a meritorious defense. You should take any opportunity to preserve that evidence before a lawsuit is filed.

4. Avoid the flame war. The internet is the 20th century's version of the printing press. It is an amazingly effective tool for marketing to and connecting with others. It is also a boneyard littered with the skeletons of communications gone awry.

The advent of the digital age gave us consumer message boards, Facebook groups and many other avenues for sharing "ideas." I've seen a spike in requests for assistance with addressing negative posts on *Angie's List*, *Yelp* and other review sites. How you react to negative posts can greatly affect your defense if the complaint becomes litigation. You should assume that everything you post exists somewhere and can be retrieved. Everything. Responding in a less than professional manner to a client's critique of your skills will undoubtedly be evidence used in an arbitration or trial. Tailor any responses so that you avoid arguing the merits of the claim.

5. Respond in a timely, professional manner. How you respond to a client's complaint is important. All of your important communications with your client should be in writing. I've found that sending a dismissive response sometimes makes a difficult situation worse. I am certainly guilty of being blustery at times, but your written communication with a claimant must be a communication that can be read and understood by the claimant. This is not the time to make them pull out a dictionary or read a technical manual to find out what you mean.

I developed my methods for managing pre-litigation claims over years of trial and error. It is a part of my job as an attorney representing home inspectors. Responding to claims and complaints is hopefully not a routine part of your work. I'm happy to help you develop and manage your risk management plan. Much like you refer your clients to other professionals for specific problems, you should seek out experts in risk management and home inspector claims to help you with those specific problems. Let us know if we can assist. **WRE**



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Soot, Ghosts and Ugly Stains

by Tom Feiza, Mr. Fix-It, Inc.

Have you seen a ghost? In recent years, I have investigated numerous complaints of black or gray stains in homes. These may be geometrically shaped stains that outline exterior wall framing, dots at drywall fasteners, or dirt staining on carpeting along outside walls. The stains may create a ghost-like outline of the framing (the skeleton) of the home. What is this?

Black particles may also occur on television screens, appliances and countertops. I have even investigated a home in which stains appeared on walls, white carpeting under doors and a pure white miniature poodle. Why does staining occur in our homes? What has changed to cause these problems? (See Figure 1: Ghost Stains on Walls, Ceilings.)

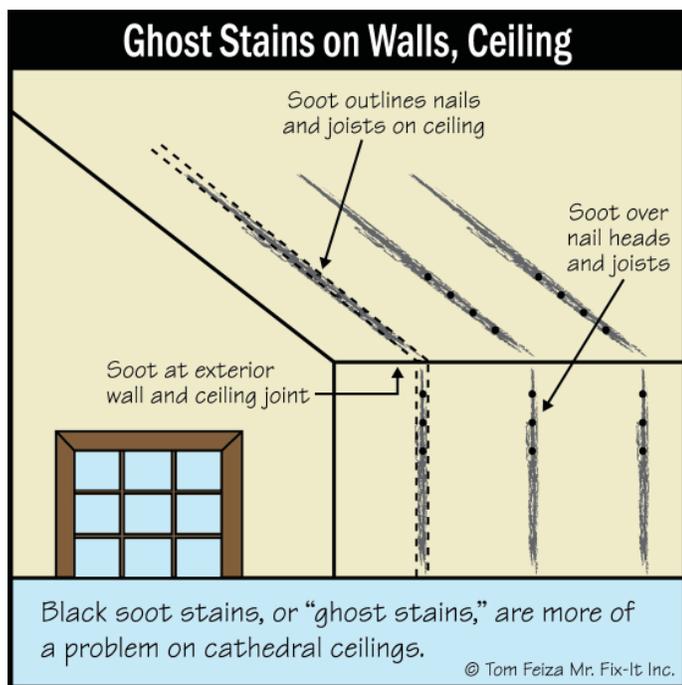


Figure 1: Ghost Stains on Walls, Ceiling

Dark stains or "ghost stains" are difficult to investigate. We need to determine the source of the dark material and its relationship to the pattern of staining. Usually we discover two problems: soot production and delivery of the soot to the surface. The location and shape of the stain can give us a few clues. And don't worry—the stains usually are not mold.

Mold?

First, let's discuss the mold question. With the scary media coverage of mold, any black, green or gold mark is a suspected mold growth, but most dark ghost stains, carpet stains or deposits on plastic surfaces are caused by soot or carbon, not mold.

Ghost stains? Soot stains

The dark stains that outline wood framing or drywall fastener heads are often called ghost stains because they appear as

ghostly images of the framing or fasteners. Ghost stains may also appear on room or stairway carpeting, on plastic, around pictures or below doors.

Most ghost stains are related to soot or small black particles that deposit on surfaces through several mechanisms. They are difficult to remove because they consist of very fine dirt particles or an oily and/or carbon-based deposit from incomplete combustion.

Are stains more common today?

Years ago, when homes were heated with a fire and lit with oil lamps or candles, soot was just accepted. A common chore was cleaning the soot from clear glass lamp mantels. Today we maintain very clean homes with many white surfaces, and even a small dark stain is easy to identify.

We also have forced-air heating systems and numerous fans and combustion devices that move air in the home. If systems aren't perfectly installed—and they are never perfect—air flow will move particles and deposit stains in remote locations. Many homes can suck air and particles from the outside and through carpeting, doors or even walls. The carpet becomes a filter that traps dirt and soot.

We love our electronics and plastic. Electronic devices can create a charge that attracts particles. Plastics may have an electrostatic charge that also attracts particles. Many electronic devices move air through their framework for cooling—again, moving and depositing particles.

Finally, today we are pickier homeowners. We expect our homes to be clean and to stay clean. We don't accept stains in our homes.

Where do the dark particles come from?

There are many possible sources inside and outside your home for these dark spots. The exact source can be difficult to identify, and often you must work from the most obvious to the remote possibilities. Common sources of particles are:

- **Candles**—the big offender. Candles that are scented or in jugs often create more soot than standard candles because of incomplete combustion. Candles with long, untrimmed wicks can also produce more soot. (See Figure 2: Candle: Soot Generator.)
- **Oil lamps**—these create the same problems as candles. Just look at the glass mantle. Burning incense belongs in this group, too.
- **Combustion appliances**—any device that burns solid fuel, oil or gas is a potential source. Incomplete combustion creates particles. Appliances that are not vented properly can deposit

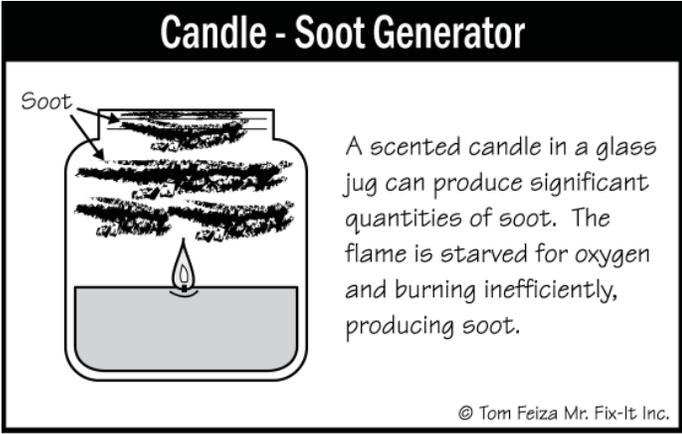


Figure 2: Candle: Soot Generator

products of combustion and particles in a home; a wood-burning fireplace is an obvious source.

• **Gas fireplaces**—that nice, lazy yellow flame looks good but can also produce particles. If the combustion were more complete, the flame would be closer to a solid blue color, not a soft yellow.

• **Gas pilot lights**—poor adjustment can produce soot. A pilot light that strikes or “impinges” on a surface may also produce incomplete combustion and soot.

• **Smoking**—a possible cause in excessive cases, but often these smoke particles are tan or yellow until they pick up common dirt.

• **Internal combustion engines**—cars, lawnmowers, diesel engines. If your home has poor air balance, these particles can be sucked indoors from the attached garage or from outside.

• **Construction-related dirt and dust**—drywall-sanding dust or concrete-cutting dust are two sources.

• **Deteriorating carpet, drapes and cloth** can produce sooty stains.

• **Dirt**—from soil, pets, kids and animals.

• **Cooking**—what have you burned lately? Does your kitchen fan really exhaust cooking odors and smoke to the outdoors or just recirculate it inside your home?

• **Dust-producing activities**—these include woodworking, furniture refinishing, welding, cutting metal with flame, and grinding.

• **A vacuum cleaner**—if your vacuum has a poor filtering and capture system, it may spread dirt and soot in your home.

page 22 ►►

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Why the ghost-like deposits?

Soot and carbon particles are very small and light. They move easily and can remain suspended in the air for many hours.

These particles will also be distributed by your forced-air heating or cooling system and most vacuum cleaners.

Several scientific principles describe the action of particles depositing on surfaces.

- **Changes in air flow:** When air changes direction, particles can drop out of the air. Where air flows beneath doors, for example, the particles drop into the carpet. (See Figure 3: Soot Deposits at Doorway.)

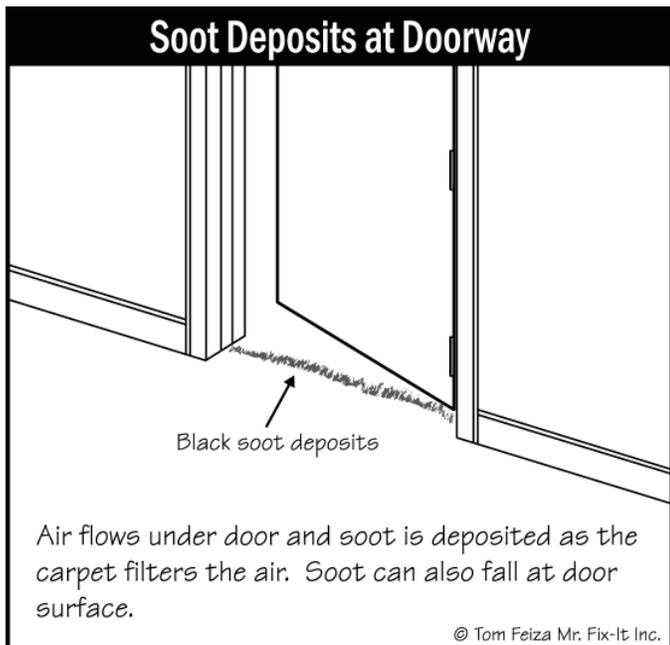


Figure 3: Soot Deposits at Doorway

- **Filtration:** When air moves through carpeting, the carpet acts as a filter and traps dirt particles. In a home that has an improperly operating forced-air system, you may see filtration stains at the exterior baseboard where air is being sucked into the home. You may see stains on carpeted stairs since air is sucked through the stairs into the return of the air handler in the basement. (See Figure 4: Soot Stains at Carpet / Walls.)

- **Surface Temperature Changes:** Air has a certain amount of energy that varies with temperature. At a higher temperature, particles in the air move quickly; at a lower temperature, particle movement slows. When air that contains soot particles moves across a cooler surface, the soot particles slow and can be deposited on the cooler surface. This action is what causes the ghost stains that outline framing and drywall fasteners; there is less insulation at the wood studs, so the surface is cooler, and the soot deposits on the cooler surface. (See Figure 5: Ghost Stains on Exterior Walls.)

- **Increased Air Flow:** Warmer air rises, and forced-air systems push, pull and move air. The air flow can cause visible deposits

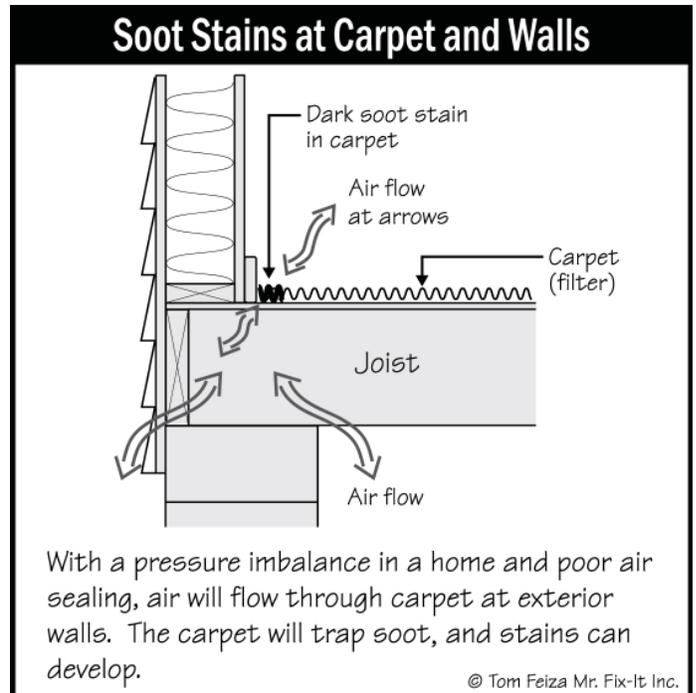


Figure 4: Soot Stains at Carpet / Walls

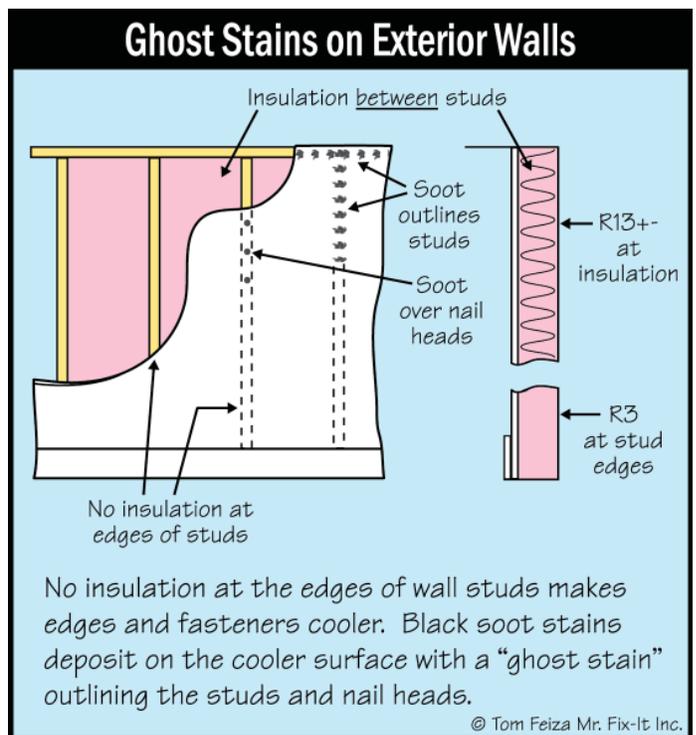


Figure 5: Ghost Stains on Exterior Walls

on and above heating grills, above radiation equipment, and above light bulbs adjacent to walls. Some of the deposits are also caused by the convective flow of dirty air in the room. (See Figure 6: Soot Stains at Light Fixture.)

- **Electrostatic Charge:** Electronic air filters and smoke filters use electrostatic charges to filter air. The same electronic-charge principles attract particles to the TV screen, some plastics,



Figure 6: Soot Stains at Light Fixtures

electronic equipment and appliances. Movement of air through the ductwork in your home can also charge particles in the air and make them stick to surfaces.

• **Gravity:** Eventually, particles and debris will drop out of the air. They often create deposits on flat surfaces such as countertops.

What can a homeowner do?

Start by understanding the sources of soot and dirt particles. Consider the process that may be depositing the soot on surfaces in your home. Then eliminate the obvious sources and watch for future stains. Be particularly wary of scented candles, candles in jugs, oil lamps and gas fireplaces.

If you must use candles, use high quality candles and burn them in an open area—not in a partially closed container. Keep the candlewick trimmed to one quarter inch or less for better combustion and a cleaner burn with less soot.

Have all your combustion appliances serviced by professionals on a routine basis—a good practice with or without soot

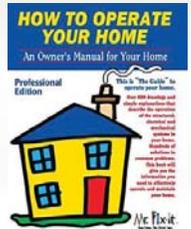
problems. Specifically ask the contractor to check the combustion gas venting and test for backdrafting of combustion gas.

Unfortunately, there are few resources and a limited number of experienced consultants who understand the soot and ghost stain problem. If your home has a particularly bad problem, with strange deposits outlining walls or strange patterns in carpeting, it's probably due to an air imbalance in your home combined with a soot production problem. This type of air flow problem could be investigated by a consultant who specializes in home performance and has training in measuring air flow and pressure differentials. Your home should be evaluated as a complicated set of interrelated systems moving air and creating differential pressures.

It appears that most ghosting problems are not directly related to construction. Problems are often related to increased production of soot, more light-colored surfaces in our homes, and higher expectations of homeowners. Increased use of candles certainly has had a big impact on increasing the soot and ghosting stain problem. **WRE**

Tom Feiza has been a professional home inspector since 1992 and has a degree in engineering. Through HowToOperateYourHome.com, he provides high-quality marketing materials that help professional home inspectors boost their business. Copyright © 2017 by Tom Feiza, Mr. Fix-It, Inc. Reproduced with permission.

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Let's Role Play

by David Brauner, Senior Broker at OREP.org

Let's role play for a minute (about your business!). Imagine you're a homebuyer. Your offer was just accepted and you're excited...but worried too. It's a big investment. Being experienced helps some but no matter how many times you've been through it, buying a home is daunting and a bit scary for most folks...the chance of buying a money pit...yikes!

So your offer is accepted, the loan is in process and it's time to hire a home inspector. You surf the internet a bit and call a few inspectors referred by your agent; they all seem like they know what they are talking about. They are all friendly and professional. They are all within the same price range; many belong to a professional association. What now? As you review the websites again, you notice that one offers a free 90-day home warranty with every home inspection to back up their work. The warranty covers most everything with very few restrictions. Yes! This feels pretty good—sort of like a guarantee. You like getting the reassurance you need to move forward. Sold to the inspector offering the warranty!

The Icing

Ok, let's switch roles—you're the business owner trying to keep the orders flowing. For you, the tipping point of the sale and many more to come is the home warranty you included with your inspection report. You've rolled the modest cost of these warranties into your fee (\$12.50), so giving them away does not affect your bottom line. But you haven't heard the best part yet...you now can avoid the worst part of home inspecting—trying to satisfy unhappy clients.

There are no statistics on this, but probably 80% of client complaints about their home inspections are small issues usually covered under a home warranty. Let's roleplay one more time: imagine when your clients have a problem with something after they've moved in, they call the home warranty professionals to resolve it instead of calling you. Ah... These professionals handle these issues all day long, quickly and efficiently. Are you smiling yet? You don't get into any verbal "discussions" over what you are or are not responsible for. You don't go back to the property numerous times; you don't take out your checkbook. You don't repair anything yourself and you don't feel badly either, because if the issue is legitimate, it will be repaired/resolved professionally by the warranty company.



David Brauner is Senior Broker at OREP, a leading provider of E&O Insurance for home inspectors and other real estate professionals in 50 states (OREP.org). He has provided E&O insurance to home inspectors for over 20 years. Contact him at dbrauner@orep.org or (888) 347-5273. OREP—Organization of Real Estate Professionals Insurance, LLC. Calif. Lic. #0K99465.



A warranty can be the first line of defense before a problem is referred to an E&O carrier. Offering a low-cost, reliable home warranty will help you grow your business by offering potential clients a service your competition does not. The peace of mind a home warranty offers your clients makes your business the easy choice. Now you can spend your time home inspecting and marketing, not resolving complaints. Yeah!

Warranty You Can Trust

CPT[™] has been offering award-winning service to home inspectors in the United States and Canada since 2006. CPT[™] is one of only two home warranty companies in North America to receive Angie's List Super Service Award, and they've won it twice. The 90-Day Guarantee is valid for 90 days from the day of inspection (or 30 days from the closing date, whichever is later) and has no dollar caps on repairs with no deductible or copay. They are working with the E&O provider OREP to offer warranties to OREP insureds and to all inspectors nationwide (OREP insureds enjoy a discount). Unlike other programs, all claims are done over the phone without having to submit any documentation in order to receive service.

CPT[™] 90-Day Guarantee offers:

- * No exclusions for lack of maintenance, rust or pre-existing conditions.
- * No age restrictions – some other programs don't protect anything over 11 years old.
- * No deductible or copay – service calls are not covered under some other programs.
- * No limit on mechanical repairs – some other programs limit them to \$500.

Claims Procedures

- * Everything is done over the phone – no submission of itemized claims for review before receiving service.
- * Customers can call Complete Protection (CPT[™]) 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- * No need to provide a copy of your home inspection report.

So differentiate yourself from the competition and remove nuisance problems from your plate by adding a home warranty to your inspections. Visit OREP.org/warranty and enjoy a special offer for free enrollment in InspectorAdvisor.com at checkout. InspectorAdvisor.com is the place home inspectors get their tough inspection questions answered fast! For more about the comprehensive OREP E&O program, visit OREP.org or call OREP at (888) 347-5273. **WRE**



90 Day Warranty

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Grow Your Business—Give your Clients More

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Be Stress Free—Turn Over Nuisance Problems to Professionals

“Nuisance” complaints drain your time and attention, but you don't have to hassle with them anymore. Turn nuisance complaints over to warranty professionals to handle quickly and to the satisfaction of your clients. (See pg. 24 for details.)

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Meth Testing: What to Look For

by Julie Mazzuca, Founder, Meth Lab Cleanup Company (MLCC)



Thinking about offering meth testing as part of your home inspection? Here is what to look for in a comprehensive training course.

Many of the properties that are identified as former meth labs are discovered through means other than law enforcement. Contamination is often discovered during a property assessment in response to health complaints by occupants, information from neighbors regarding a prior occupant or as part of a real estate transaction. Home inspectors provide the first independent evaluation of the condition of a home prior to a sale. Meth testing is becoming more and more popular as the numbers of contaminated properties rise and homebuyer awareness increases.

Primarily, a meth testing course should provide an overall understanding of meth production, regulations, safety and health hazards and protective measures to take while on-site. It is vital that course participants learn how to visually assess a suspect property, how to sample for meth, how to understand the results and appropriately document the meth inspection.

Here is what to look for when evaluating a comprehensive meth testing course. A good course will address each of the following segments.

Methamphetamine Production

Although meth is not the only drug manufactured in clandestine labs, meth labs are the most common. A segment on the "cooking" of meth should describe the variety of chemicals used to manufacture and how they are obtained. Further discussion should demonstrate that although many of these chemicals are commonly found in households and can be "safe" if used appropriately, their inherent dangers are increased when used inappropriately or in combination with other chemicals during the meth production process.



Julie Mazzuca has been designing both classroom and online training courses for Meth Lab Cleanup Company since 2004. Julie has signature authority on all MLCC clandestine drug lab assessments and decontamination documentation; over 6,000 to date. Contact her at info@methlabcleanup.com or (208) 683-1974.

Hazards of Active/Inactive Labs

There should be a segment on the hazards of clandestine drug laboratories. Although a functioning drug lab presents the greatest risk of adverse health effects for occupants, some residual contamination created from repeated "cooks" can persist long after all production has ceased. The release and hazards of ingredient chemicals should be outlined in addition to how these chemicals settle into a residence.

Human Health Hazards

A segment on the toxicity of meth lab production chemicals should be included. This segment must discuss how chemicals may enter the body, symptoms and short and long term exposure hazards.

Personal Protective Equipment

A segment on the use of proper personal protective equipment (PPE) must be included. It is important to understand potential site hazards, what PPE is appropriate and how to implement proper protective measures.

Meth Screening

A course segment on the visual assessment of a residence, both interior and exterior must be provided. Meth production indicators should be identified to include stained coffee filters, syringes, plastic hosing, disabled smoke detectors, weapons, distressed vegetation, burn piles, pornography, and drug paraphernalia.

Meth Sampling

Sampling is performed to establish the presence or absence of methamphetamine. The different types of methamphetamine sampling, how to perform sampling and how to interpret results are skills critical for meth home inspection services.

Remediation

A segment on meth lab "cleanup" methods is important in providing the inspector a general understanding of initial meth lab component removal and the process of property remediation.

Reporting

After completion of interior and exterior screening, the inspector must verify to the client and/or property owner that the screening was completed according to recognized standards for screening. A segment on reporting that outlines appropriate documentation is a must.

Regulations

Many home inspectors may be under the impression that they are not allowed to offer meth testing services. The state of Utah, one of the most progressive in clandestine drug lab regulation, has recently amended its standards to allow for “non-confirmation sampling.” This means collecting samples by any party other than a certified decontamination specialist. These results can be provided to the local health department and then the owner of record is encouraged to obtain confirmation sampling, performed by a certified decontamination specialist, within 10 days of notice. In addition, many health departments now acknowledge sample results from do-it-yourself meth residues test kits.

A careful review of the applicability of home inspection meth testing is critical. It is important that you know if you are doing business in a state that regulates testing, remediation and/or disclosure. Keep in mind, some county and/or cities have their own cleanup ordinances. A segment that provides a resource for state clandestine drug lab standards is essential. **WRE**



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Solve Problems, Don't Just Answer Questions

by David Brauner, Senior Broker at OREP.org

I have a story to tell you about customer service. I think it might help you improve your business.

The older and (hopefully) wiser I get, the more I realize that most every one of us, no matter what we do to earn our living, is in the customer service business. I know it's a cliché but clichés are told and retold for a reason.

First, let's stipulate that there are two key ingredients for the success of your business and mine: competency and customer service. We have to be competent at what we do but we also are dealing with people, who make buying decisions based on how they feel about us.

Beside the quality of our services, what makes a client choose us and like the experience enough to choose us again and refer us to their friends and family? Is it being polite—a good listener, friendly, honoring commitments, “going the extra mile”? Yes, all of those things are important. It is proven that people are more likely to buy from people they like, and here's something interesting: studies also show that people are also less likely to sue someone they like! (That study was done with doctors.) Consider that for a moment!

Is the customer always right? Certainly not.

Key

Good customer service is more than simply answering a customer's questions competently: it's solving their problem(s). It's understanding what they are asking, even if they can't articulate what they need—even if they don't know what they need! Good customer service is using your expertise and the trust your clients give you, to provide them with complete and honest answers, even if they don't know the right questions to ask. I think most of us who have been in business any length of time understand this intuitively—be it doctors, lawyers, real estate appraisers or insurance agents. The more proficient you are at solving your client's problems, the more valuable you are. Which brings me to my customer service story.

I had an important meeting at 9 a.m. in my office and it was my 13 year old daughter's first day of summer camp. Sounds like a movie pitch right?

Knowing I have to be at work at 9 a.m. or a little before to prepare, I move mountains to get my daughter out the door early and in plenty of time. As we exit the car at the YMCA, I ask a



young employee walking by where the “LIT” camp is (Leaders in Training). They point to a grassy field with trailers about 50 yards away, where I remember the summer camps were last year. Great—we head over. As we turn the corner, I see about 20 sets of parents and children in line ahead of us. No problem, we're early but it doesn't take long to realize that, while it may be fun to stay at the YMCA (according to the “Village People” at least), it's not so much fun waiting in line at one; things are not moving very quickly or efficiently—at least not at this YMCA.

After a few minutes, I notice that the kids in line are all about half my daughter's age, and I wonder if perhaps we're in the wrong place for LIT. So I direct my daughter to hold our place in line and head off for a set of trailers behind a gate that serve as camp offices. Standing at the gate is a young employee, obviously there to screen questions. I ask, “Is this where we should be for LIT?” They leave for a few (very long) minutes and return saying that we need to register at the facility. It doesn't dawn on me to ask any other questions such as: what if she's already registered? Is she registered? (My wife handles this stuff. I'm just the chauffeur.) No, I'm not sharp enough to ask any questions—probably because I'm preoccupied with my upcoming meeting. So, we embark on the five-minute walk up to the YMCA facility. There is a greeter/screener at the door who asks how they can help. I tell them the entire story and as I do, I can see that within earshot is someone listening, who I later learn is a “manager” and could have solved the problem right then and there in a minute or two. They say nothing.

After going through the whole story with the greeter, we are told to stand in line, which we do, and believe me when I tell you that things don't move any quicker inside the YMCA than outside. When our turn comes, I recount the entire tale again. They ask whether my daughter is registered—I say I think so

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Why Customer Reviews Matter

by Josh Fulfer, KVF Marketing

What is your first job as a home inspector? Without customers nothing else in your business matters. Inspecting homes only comes after you have customers. So your first job is to get new customers.

Now imagine for a moment that you need to hire a home inspector. So, like most people, you go to Google and search for home inspectors in your area.

Which of these businesses would you be most likely to click on first? (See Figure 1: Home Inspectors on Google)

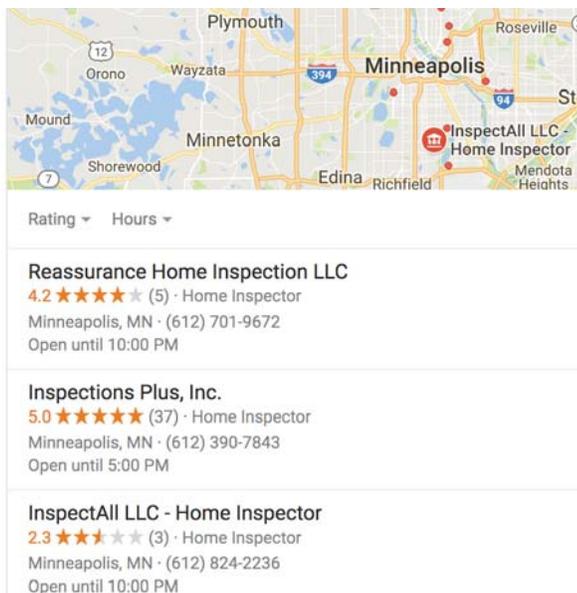


Figure 1: Home Inspectors on Google

If you said Inspections Plus, Inc, with 37 reviews, congratulations. You're like most people.

In this article we discuss why an online review strategy is one of the easiest things you can do to improve your online marketing. And I'll show you four simple things you can do to get more customer reviews.



Josh Fulfer is a member of the Wisconsin Association of Home Inspectors. His firm specializes in generating qualified leads for home inspectors from the Internet, including web design and search engine marketing. You can find him at KVFmarketing.com.



How Online Reviews Help You Book More Inspections

Online reviews help you book more inspections in two ways: 1. More website visitors. Nobody goes to *Yelp* or *Google* looking for a nice restaurant for their anniversary, and says "Oh look honey, 2.3 stars. Let's go there."

No, of course not. This is the U.S.A. We want the best. We want the top-rated. We want the guy with the most customer reviews on Google.

So despite the fact that Inspections Plus, Inc. was not listed first in the search results, they still receive the most visitors to their website. Why? Because people place a lot of importance on reviews and social proof. Thus the guy with the most / best online reviews is likely to get more people to his website, and hopefully book more inspections.

2. More online visibility. There's another huge benefit to online reviews, and that is that Google factors in your online reviews when ranking websites in their search results. All else being equal, the businesses with more reviews tend to be more prominently displayed in the search results, leading to more inspections booked.

So between improved consumer confidence, and better Google rankings, it's not surprising that the inspectors with the best review profiles are the ones booking the most inspections. Reviews are a win-win.

Helpful vs Hurtful Online Reputations

According to studies, about nine out of 10 of people have used online reviews to decide which businesses to hire.

As an average consumer, if you're searching Google for a home inspector, and you see an inspector with lots of positive reviews, you're probably going to call him because other people have seemingly had good experiences with them.

Take Big Moose Home Inspections for example. (See Figure 2: Big Moose Home Inspections.) They're a client of ours. When we started working together they had no reviews. But within a few short months they were up over 70 reviews on Google, and now they're over 200.



Big Moose Home Inspections ★

Website
 4.9 ★★★★★ 204 Google reviews
 Home inspector in Bessemer, Michigan

Figure 2: Big Moose Home Inspections

And guess what, they dominate their market. They're all over the first page of Google for home inspector searches. And they have ten times the reviews of any competitors. Their review portfolio is now a valuable asset to their business, rather than a liability. And it's an asset they can leverage for years to come.

On the other hand, businesses that have negative reviews, or don't have any reviews, are usually passed over. Fair or unfair, that's the reality.

The example below is an extreme case, but you can see how bad reviews can hurt a business (See Figure 3: Len Kachinsky). With just a 1-star rating, after 51 reviews, would you hire this guy? I know I wouldn't. (If you're wondering, Kachinsky is an attorney featured in the Netflix docu-series "Making a Murderer." Needless to say, he upset some people.)

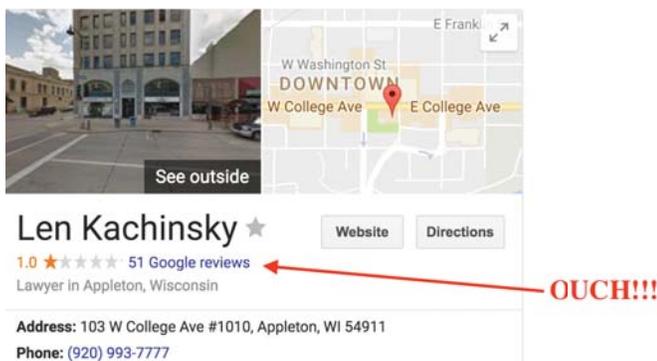


Figure 3: Len Kachinsky

How Do You Get Reviews?

Getting positive reviews written by customers is great in theory. The problem is that people usually only review home inspectors when they are upset about something. But if you have the right tools in place, and you have a little persistence, you can get happy customers to write you testimonials.

Of course in order to get positive reviews, you do need to do good work and be nice to work with. But from my experience,

as long as you do those things, it's not difficult to get customers to write reviews.

Besides that, you must have a **Google Business page** for these strategies to work. It's free to setup, and only takes a few minutes of filling out your general business details. If you haven't signed up yet, go to [Google.com/business](https://www.google.com/business) to get started.

If you're not sure if you have a business listing setup, you can start filling out the information and Google will prompt you if they find a page that matches. You can claim your page if you haven't yet done so.

Once your page is established you'll need your business page ID & URL so you can send people directly to your review page. Don't worry though. It's easy to find both. Here are the instructions from Google. Check them out when you're ready here: <https://support.google.com/business/answer/7035772>

So, with that, let's get into the tools.

Four Tools for Getting Reviews

1. Review Email Template

Cost: Free

The most effective tool I've found for getting customer reviews is email.

Here's an email template similar to the one that Big Moose has success with. It's designed to get reviews to your Google Business page. It's short, sweet and to the point.

For best results, we have found that sending this email a week or two after the inspection report is emailed leads to a higher response rate. Also, by using a template, you can quickly copy and paste a new email to customers, and then just update their name and the review link. This saves a lot of time and headaches.

Feel free to copy this template, or update it as you see fit.

Subject: Favor to Ask

Hi [First Name],

I have a favor to ask. Now that your inspection is complete, would you be willing to take 2-3 minutes to provide us with a Google review/testimony on our performance? This will allow others searching for a home inspector to better understand the value we provide our clients. If so, here is a link to our Google page where you can leave your review. We'd greatly appreciate it!

Also, just a note... You do need a Gmail account to leave a review.

Thank you again for your business!

[Your Name]

2. Customer Review Cards

Cost: Less than \$50 per year

We recently started using business-card style cards to request reviews. Each card has a link to our client's Google Business review page, making it easy for people to leave a review. The cards can be given to both customers and Realtors.

Here's an example of a card for Towne & Country Building Inspection. (See Figure 4: Example Review Prompt) One side is branded. The other says "Happy with your inspection? Follow the link below and let us know how we did..."



Figure 4: Example Review Prompt

We don't yet have much data on the use of the cards but we believe a tangible card is a nice addition to the email requests that we send. Plus the cards are cheap. 500 cards only were about \$30 on Vistaprint.

3. Website Link

Cost: Free

Another free option is to add a link to your Google Business page on your website. For example, on your Home page or your Testimonials page, include an image that tells people to review you, like the one seen here. Then link the image to your Google review page.

4. Inspection Report Link

Cost: Free

That same image can also be added to your inspection report. If you use digital reports, make sure to link to your Google review page. And if you still use printed reports, make sure to add the review URL to the report.

Each of the four review methods can be successful when used consistently. But everyone is different, so pick a review method that fits you. I've found that commitment to the process is more important than the actual tactics used. So pick a method that you are most likely to follow through on, and go with that. Email is my preferred method but you may prefer using business cards, or another option when requesting reviews.

Do's & Don'ts of Online Reviews

Do:

- Use multiple review methods
- Ask every customer
- Ask more than once
- Thank people for reviews
- Respond to all reviews in kind
- Use templates
- Be diligent
- Write reviews for others

Don't:

- Be rude, even if you disagree
- Pay for reviews – Google frowns on it.
- Write fake reviews – Google frowns on it.
- Trade for reviews – Google frowns on it.
- Give up

Should I only focus on Google?

With nearly 80% of the search engine traffic, Google is where people look first for inspectors. So a strong review portfolio is a must here. However, if you're doing well on Google, and you have many more reviews than your competitors, then it's a good idea to diversify your review profile. Websites like Yelp, Bing, Angie's List, and Thumbtack are all great websites for reviews since they're credible sites and they get lots of traffic.

What about Reviews on Your Own Website?

There's nothing wrong with customers emailing you a review for use on your website. But if you can get people to publish their review on a major website, like Google or Yelp, that review will be seen by many more people and you'll get more value from it. So whenever possible, you want your customers to write reviews on third party websites, starting with Google.

Takeaway

Both consumers and Google place lots of importance on customer reviews. So the inspectors with the best online reputations, and the most social proof backing them, are the ones who attract the most business online.

Luckily for you, the odds are that most of your competitors aren't yet asking for reviews. Most guys simply don't know they should be. And that's great for you. It's an opportunity for you to stand out from your competition and create a true competitive advantage.

By being proactive about reviews, you can position yourself as the go-to inspector in your market, and make more money. So if you are looking for an easy and effective way to help you book more inspections, reviews are where it's at.

Action item: If you have a minute today, search your business name on Google. Is your review profile an asset or liability to your business?

Have a question about reviews, or want some help with your online marketing? Give me a call. **WRE**

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"I went from being a single-man home inspector doing 110 inspections per year to running a multi-inspector company with 10 inspectors, doing over 3,000 inspections per year. This program has been critical to my success. I would highly recommend this program to any home inspector who is serious about increasing sales."

- Jerry Linhorn, Linkhorn Inspections, Columbus, OH



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10 Tips To Get Agent Referrals

by Jill Weittenhiller, Housefax



Marketing is the cornerstone of success for any business, especially home inspectors. But it's smart marketing that can really elevate your business. That means being timely, relevant and personal. Whether you are new to the industry or consider yourself a pro, everyone can use help getting his/her name in front of real estate agents.

Being qualified, responsive and objective is absolutely required, but what is the secret sauce to effectively marketing yourself to real estate agents?

The good news is marketing does not have to be expensive. For example, word-of-mouth marketing is a powerful marketing strategy. And in the digital age, it's even easier to spread the word across your network and beyond.

Here are 10 easy and effective ways to market your home inspection business to agents.

1. Create a Brand Identity and Message

Before you begin developing your marketing plan, create a brand identity and message. Your brand identity is not a logo, color or clever tagline. These are the components of a brand. A brand is the affect and lasting impression you leave behind in the marketplace. We'll spend a lot of time on this because it's the heart of your marketing plan.

According to *Chief Outsiders*, a strategic marketing consulting firm, a strong brand can give you the competitive edge you need.

Strong brands can:

- Create greater customer loyalty
- Make you less sensitive to competitive pricing
- Increase support from partners (i.e., real estate agents)



Jill Weittenhiller is a Marketing Manager at Housefax. Housefax offers instant access to property-specific details, financial transactions, building permit history, local schools, emergency incidents, natural hazards and more. Housefax PRO is a service that gives home inspectors access to personalized Housefax Property Reports at preferred pricing. To schedule a demo of Housefax PRO call 877-594-6634. For more information and to view sample reports, visit housefax.com/go/inspect.

- Provide focus to your marketing efforts
- Allow you to attract the resources you need such as talent and capital
- Be instrumental in developing strategic partnerships
- Act as a powerful tool for guiding internal decision making (i.e., when offering a new service, ask yourself, "is this on brand?")

If you're serious about creating and building a brand, don't start advertising it immediately. Marketing tactics are the last step. Chief Outsiders stresses that building or reenergizing your brand starts with answering some questions about your business and services:

1. Who are my customers?
2. What customers do I want?
3. Who are my competitors?
4. What is the brand position of my competitors?
5. What problem does my company solve? Does anybody care?
6. What is my value proposition? Is it distinctive? Is it relevant to my customers?
7. When people think about my company or services, what are the feelings and associations I want them to have? Are they unique? Can we "own" them?
8. What are the functional benefits that we deliver to our customers?
9. What are the emotional benefits that only we deliver to our customers?
10. What kind of personality will my brand have?

Your brand message needs to convey a sense of authority and trust. Don't worry if you aren't the most experienced inspector on the block. Being a hometown native who's seen the rise and fall of homes in the area is just as valuable.

Your goal after all of this, is to get to the core of why a real estate agent should refer their clients to you.

2. Offer Additional Services

Offering additional services is another great way to set yourself apart from the competition and it is critical to creating your

brand message. It could be testing for lead paint, radon, asbestos, or carbon monoxide. More home inspectors are building buyer confidence and growing agent referrals by providing a property history report along with the inspection report.

3. Target New Agents

Once you've created your brand identity and message, it's time to begin your marketing efforts. Consider focusing on newer agents who do not yet have a list of inspectors to pass along to their clients. It's also a good way to test your message to see if it resonates — and an opportunity to perfect it. Remember though, their business is just getting started so this is a slow and steady process.

4. Ask for Referrals

It may seem awkward to do at first but you should always ask agents as well as consumers for referrals. This is often done in person at the end of the inspection process when you are making final comments about the home. If the idea of asking for a referral makes you uncomfortable, try asking in an email when you provide the inspection report to them. By design, when you ask for referrals, chances are you'll also receive strong testimonials. These are valuable to add to your website, social media and even flyers.

5. Have a Website

Having a website is critical to your success. Agents and buyers will surely Google you and if you don't exist online than you simply don't exist. You can build a great-looking website using WordPress. Your site must quickly give visitors a reason to stay. Internet users tend to click from link to link in a search for the right site. If you don't prove your value in 10 seconds, most will leave and go elsewhere (NN Group).

Here are some critical elements to designing your website:

- **About Page. Who are you?** Here's a chance to tell your story and what makes you unique.
- **Clear Description of Your Services.** Avoid industry jargon when talking about your services. Be clear and concise. Feature a sample home inspection report, and if you provide additional services, such as a property history report or home warranty, include those samples as well. A best practice is to always ask yourself is "What's in it for agents and consumers?" Meaning, your website copy should talk to them about the benefits of working with you.
- **Testimonials.** Thanks to Amazon, it's become standard practice to go online seeking product reviews before making a purchase. The same is true when it comes to services. Add testimonials as a stamp of approval and social proof.
- **Videos.** For marketers across all industries, 2017 has been called the Year of Video. It's easier than ever to make high quality videos, to stream a live Q&A session on Facebook or to create 30-second video tips. When making educational videos, consider hot topics like *What is Radon?* or, *How to Test Your Water Quality*. Sharing your knowledge and expertise will very quickly help you become the industry expert.
- **Blog.** Regularly update your blog and provide resources that real estate agents would value and pass along to their clients.

Don't have time to write a blog? Leverage content from other sites, just be sure to give credit.

• **Incorporate Social Media.** If you're active on social media (and we'll get into this later) you might want to consider streaming content on your site, including comments to your website. Most importantly, make sure your site has social media icons with links to your profiles so visitors can easily access your social media pages.

• **Visible Contact Information.** Make it easy for real estate agents and consumers to get in touch with you. Don't bury your contact information. Make it visible and display it often.

• **Write Like a Human.** Use a natural tone but speak from a sense of authority. This allows you to very quickly build trust and confidence online.

6. Stay in Touch

Create a database of all real estate agents you have worked with, including both listing and buyer's agents. Periodically send out a link to your blog posts or newsletter to stay in touch and position yourself as an expert in your field. Remember that agents receive a ton of email, so this is where being timely, relevant and personal are key. The last thing you want to do is annoy an agent by flooding their inbox with useless emails.

7. Use Social Media (Your Competitors Already Do)

Have you thought about social media for business? The Big Three are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. How are they used?

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Everything on your website can and should be shared across your social network. That's brand message consistency. Follow agents on social media and interact with them. And it's not a bad idea to follow other home inspectors, too!

8. Visit Real Estate Agent Offices

Stop by local offices to drop off literature and business cards. Be sure to introduce yourself and offer to give a presentation to their agents. While you can talk about your services, you're more likely to hear a "yes!" if you offer an educational presentation, perhaps regarding the flood zone risk in your area. Oh and don't forget the branded pens. Everyone loves (and uses) free pens!

9. Join the local Board of REALTORS®

Joining your local Board of Realtors is a great networking opportunity. Here's another chance to teach a class and position yourself as the go-to neighborhood inspector. And, you can leverage the same presentation you used when visiting real estate agents.

10. Pick up the Phone

When all else fails, pick up the phone or send a personalized email asking to meet. Remember Realtors get a ton of email so avoid mass marketing and make it personal.

Marketing begins with a strong brand identity and message. Your marketing plan must always be timely, relevant and personal.

Real estate agents have a list of their top few inspectors who they recommend to their clients. Getting real estate agent referrals typically means that you need to be on this list. Delivering a quality home inspection and following these tips will help you forge great relationships with the agents in your area. **WRE**

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Q&A

by Jerry Peck, InspectorAdvisor.com

Editor's Note: This question is from InspectorAdvisor.com, a free inspection support service for OREP insureds. Others can subscribe for just \$59 per year at InspectorAdvisor.com.

Question

Are there any revised rules that allow two wires in one lug either at the bottom of the meter base or in the breaker panel?
– Home Inspector

Answer

It's not a revised rule, but there is, and has been, an exception for more than one conductor in a terminal—that exception is that the terminal must be listed and identified for more than one conductor.

The labeling on the equipment will state various things about the equipment, including the temperature rating of the terminals and equipment—older equipment would likely be rated 60 °C; newer equipment will likely be rated 75 °C or 60 °C/75 °C. The voltage rating of the equipment, the maximum ampacity rating of the equipment and if the equipment is listed for use with aluminum conductors, should also be stated on the label and if any terminals are rated for more than one conductor the label will state that ... along with other things.

Larger terminals will have the conductor size stamped on the terminal lug, such as 4–4/0, which means the terminal is listed for use with one conductor sized 4 AWG up to 4/0 AWG. The terminal might be stamped with something like (2) 4–4/0, which would mean the terminal is listed for use with two conductors sized 4 AWG up to 4/0 AWG.

The label will also show the ratings/listing of the terminals and number and size of conductors—such as 14–4, which means the terminals are listed for one conductor sized 14 AWG up to 4 AWG, and if listed for 2 conductors it will show (2) 14–4 (sizes of conductors as previously stated). Typically, all terminals are listed and rated for one conductor only, and copper conductors are presumed unless identified as being suitable for aluminum

Jerry Peck has been in construction since 1972, first as a contractor then as an inspector; he has been inspecting since 1991. He is the owner of Construction Litigation Consultants, LLC and does construction consulting, construction defect litigation consulting, and personal injury litigation consulting relating to construction of new and existing buildings. Jerry is a licensed General Contractor, Plans Examiner, and Code Inspector in Florida. Jerry answers your questions at InspectorAdvisor.com.



use too. Grounded (neutral) conductor terminals are always only allowed to have one conductor in each terminal, even if the terminal is stamped for (2) conductors. This is because the same type of terminal lug may be used for an ungrounded conductor in a panel as is used for a grounded conductor in a panel.

Most panels will list and show that the grounding conductors (equipment grounds) are allowed to have (2) conductors...of the same material (copper or aluminum) and of the same size (both 12 AWG for example, not one 14 AWG and one 12 AWG).

All deviations from one conductor will be shown on the label. I have seen one panel label which, as I recall, listed the grounding terminals as: (1) and gave sizes, as (2) and gave sizes, and as (3) and gave sizes (yes, this allows for one, two, or three conductors of the stated sizes in a single grounding terminal).

The best thing is to read the panel label, and on larger terminal lugs you might also see the rating on the terminal lug, but it should also be on the panel label. Don't go by the terminal lug rating only. The panel label is the information to follow. The terminal lug may say (2) while the panel label may not. Go by the panel label in this case and let the panel manufacturer chime in if they missed putting it on the panel label.

Regardless of what code is applicable or not—the manufacturer's installation instructions are the rules that must be followed (the listing and labeling information).

I have not seen any AHJ (Authority Having Jurisdiction: the building department/official) who will allow something to be done which is not within the listing and labeling—that would be stepping outside their authority and would expose them to personal liability because it is not covered under their city's/county's sovereign immunity coverage as they would have stepped outside their job description. Typically, when that happens, and they get “caught,” the city/county attorney tells them that the city/county will no longer defend them and that they are “on their own dime” for their defense. – Jerry Peck **WRE**

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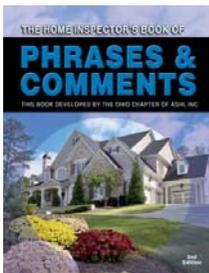


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but I'm not sure. We give them the spelling (B-R-A-U-N-E-R) but they can't find her. After some back and forth, the manager I mentioned previously is called over to help. Now I've been in the facility probably 10 minutes and at the YMCA probably 25. The manager finds my daughter almost instantly as registered and pronounces, "You just have to go down to the field to sign in." This is the field I just came from. Maybe it's my body language—I'm told I should never play poker, but the manager somehow intuitively understands my frustration and graciously offers to walk us down to the field to get it straightened out.

As we arrive back where we started, there are now about 25 sets of parents and kiddos in line in front of us. Yes, I'm checking the time, but I assure you, I'm calm and friendly, if only to set a good example for my daughter. The manager who walked us down tries to confirm with the folks at the signup table but they don't know anything. Then the manager heads over to the trailer/offices to double check for me while my daughter and I stay in line. About five (long) minutes later, they return with the good news, "Yes, you can just sign in at the table." Now, again, it must be my body language as I look up at the 15 or so sets of parents and kiddos ahead of us in line, because the manager almost immediately leads us out of the line and straight up to the front of the table where I sign in my daughter in about 30 seconds. In case you're wondering, I made the 9 A.M. meeting.

Here's what happened as best I can figure: when I asked if I was in the right place for LIT, the first person at the trailer should have asked: "Is your daughter registered?" If yes, sign up here

(in minutes). If no, go up to the facility to register. If I wasn't sure, they could have checked right there. But unfortunately, I didn't know the right question to ask and neither did they. They didn't know how to answer my question completely or solve my problem so they sent me "up to the facility to register." They passed me along, got me off their plate. To be fair, the big picture process was probably never explained to them or if it was, maybe they were thinking about lunch. They probably only know their one small function.

So, am I happy about my experience at the Y-M-C-A? I think you can figure that out. But here's why the story matters: if I want my daughter to go to this camp, this is what I have to endure because this YMCA is the only one offering this type of experience. But you and I don't have that luxury when it comes to our businesses. If only our competition was so sparse! Our customers, yours and mine, have lots of choices and we must do better if we want our businesses to flourish.

Your clients won't always know what they need or if they do, they won't always be able to ask for it clearly and succinctly. If you can guide them through the process and solve their problems honestly and efficiently, you will have no problem making clients happy and growing your business. Be someone who can solve your customer's problems rather than just answering their questions and you will be very valuable indeed. I have preached this to the folks at OREP for the 15 years we've been serving the E&O needs of home inspectors and it seems to work pretty well. **WRE**



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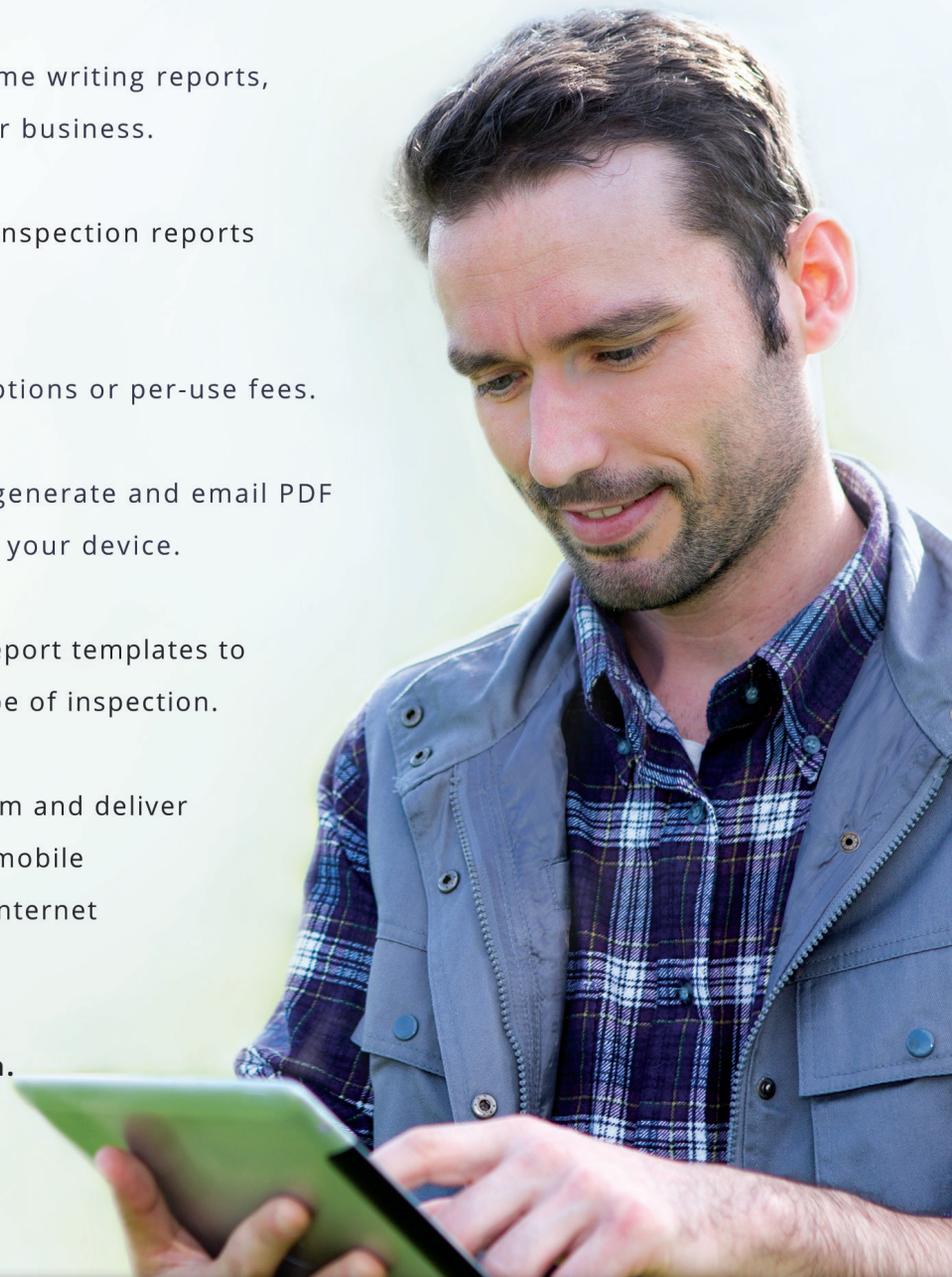
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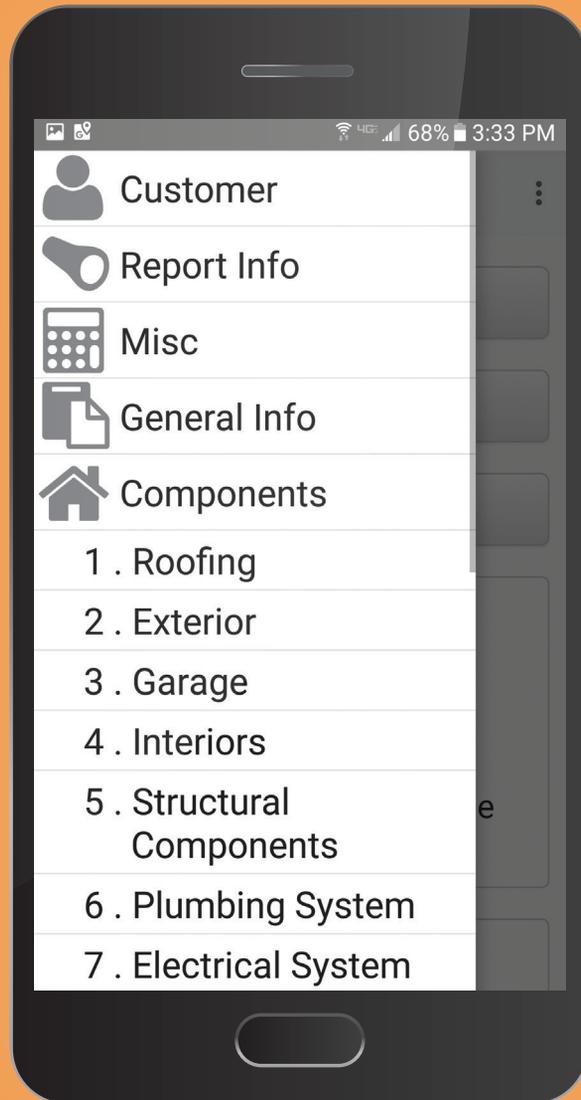


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