

Hiring the Right TV Installer

Considering the sprawling dimensions of today's flat-panel television screens—some of which can soar to diameters of 60" or more—finding the right model and the right combination of performance specifications is just half the battle. When it comes time to mount your mammoth investment on the wall, you might want to consider hiring a professional to ensure a sturdy, reliable installation.

Remember, your flat-panel TV will be a permanent fixture on your wall for years to come. You don't want to risk a potentially devastating fall, an electrical problem, or an off-kilter viewing angle. It's crucial that you find a reputable, well-established installer with the experience and expertise worthy of your electronic investment.

Below, we've compiled some guidelines for choosing the right installer for you:

Comparison shop. A trustworthy installer should be able to provide you with a general estimate over the phone for the services you need. Obviously, the cost will fluctuate based on your specific project and the installer's level of expertise.

Look for a solid track record. You may be able to get a good deal from someone who's just starting out and needs to acquire jobs, but you'll sacrifice the peace of mind that comes with hiring a long-standing, experienced installer with a long list of satisfied clients willing to serve as references. For instance, if you need an entire home theater system wired throughout several rooms, don't settle for someone who has only done very simple installations but is "willing to learn."

Use someone nearby. If you select an installer within a reasonable distance, perhaps 10-30 miles from your home, they'll be much more likely to assist with any future adjustments or fixes down the road.

Get a feel for their communication style. You want someone who returns calls promptly, explains procedures and technologies in clear, easily decipherable terms, and shows up when they say they will.

Ask for references. Your television installation is a crucial component of your home entertainment suite, so you want to make sure you get someone who has performed many similar jobs. Don't be afraid to request pictures of past installations. Reputable companies will often post past clients and testimonials on their web sites. Another great source is a friend or family member who has had success with an installation company. If you spot a well-implemented television or home theater, request the name of the company who installed it.

Secure a contract. This document will help protect both you and the installer from lost expenses and miscommunications. The installer should provide you with a signed contract specifying your agreed-upon pricing structure, technical details, and dates of completion for each portion of the installation.

Be up-front about what you want. Before the installer begins drilling holes into your wall, make sure he or she is extremely clear on what you want to accomplish. Be very specific about where and how your TV should be mounted. If there are any architectural or design details you'd like to preserve, let them know before they begin.

With the proper research and communication, using a professional media installation company can help ensure that your high-tech investment is utilized to its utmost capacity.