

*E-Guide :*  
**How to Avoid the  
10 Buying Pitfalls**



“ *Buying Windows and Doors can be a major investment and is something you should only have to do once. However it is amazing how many consumers simply trust a company without doing any research into the company, their product and their reputation. Read this short guide and be well informed when you are ready to make a purchase.* ”

**Ernie Ebner,**  
President and CEO, Northern Comfort Windows & Doors Ltd.

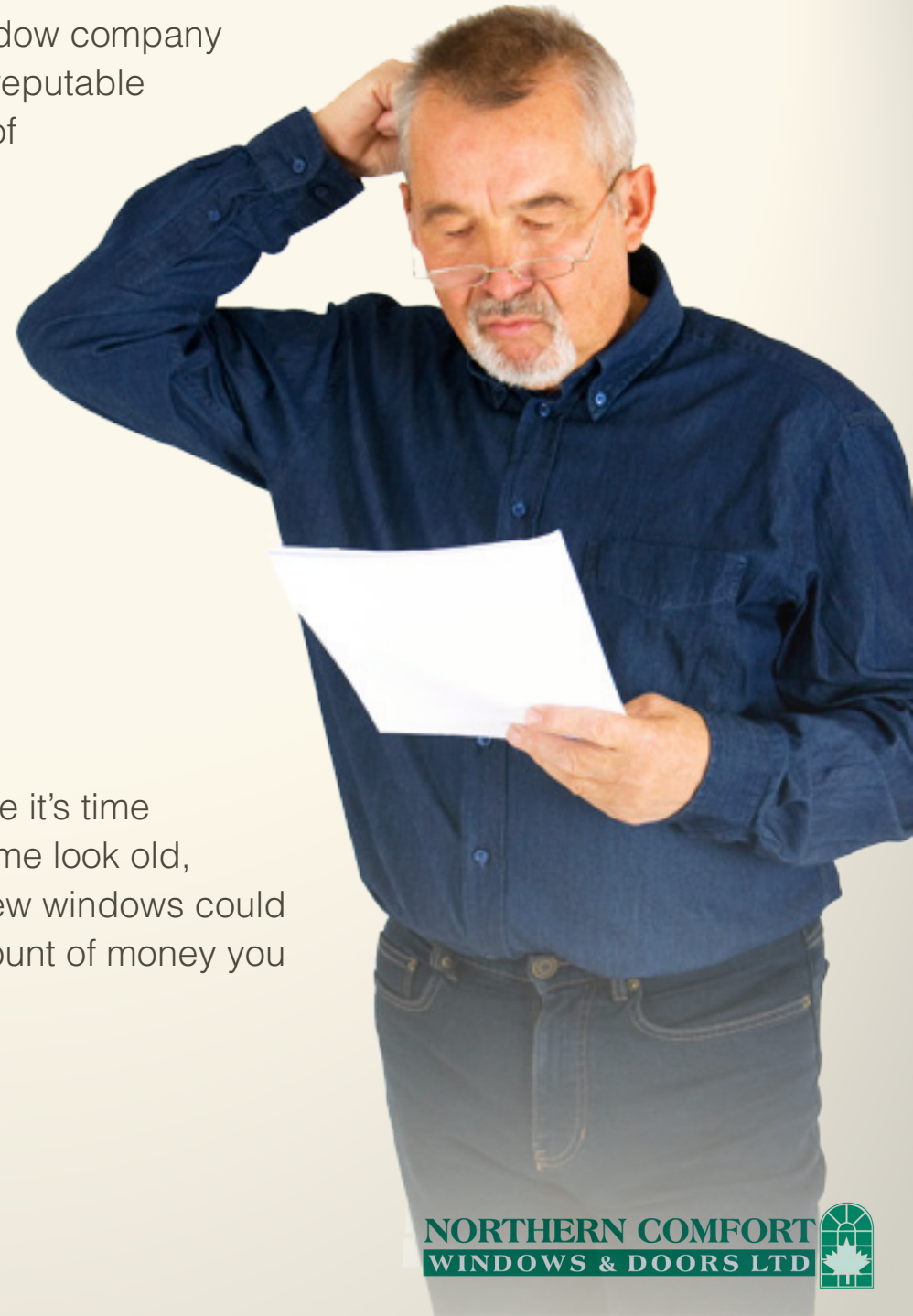
# **TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY?**

## *1. To Buy or Not to Buy?*

Knowing when to buy new is just as important as the window company and its products. Perhaps your windows are still okay. A reputable company will tell you. Here are some tell-tale symptoms of windows that need replacing:

- Your home has started to feel drafty in cold weather or too hot in warmer weather;
- Your costs for heating and/or air conditioning are high and continue to increase;
- If the glass is cracked or steamy between panes;
- Hardware is in need of repair;
- The paint has started to chip or peel;
- Your windows rattle in the wind;
- The window is difficult to open or close;
- With older windows, the wood has started to rot – if the wood is soft or punky it means it's begun to rot.

If you're experiencing any of these problems, chances are it's time to update your windows. Do your windows make your home look old, dated or in poor condition? If you're thinking of selling, new windows could make a significant difference to curb appeal and the amount of money you will receive from the sale of your home.



**2. BUY SMART  
& SAVE YOUR MONEY**



## *2. Buy Smart & Save Your Money*

It all starts with a good window company. How do you find one? Check with friends and co-workers; find out who they used and if they were happy with the results. If your friends or family were happy with the process then contact their window company for an estimate. In fact, contact two or three companies for estimates but no more or it becomes unwieldy and confusing. You should also get references from the company – preferably for the last two jobs or ask for recent jobs done in your area... Seeing their Lawn signs everywhere is usually a good indication that this company must be doing something right.

Do your windows have any Low-E or Argon Gas? A reputable company will do a free Low-E test as part of the estimate. Check with the Better Business Bureau for accredited businesses, their ratings and complaints history. The website <http://mwco.bbb.org> serves the mid-western and central Ontario.

High prices are just as much of a rip-off as a 'sale' price that's too low. Some companies will try and convince you that their windows are worth \$1200-\$1600 each. Not so. Also be aware that any prices below \$300 won't include installation or service for the product once it's installed. Beware if a company gives you an estimate and it is substantially lower than other estimates you may already have.



# **PUSHY SALES REPRESENTATIVES**

### *3. Pushy Sales Representatives*

Don't be pushed into signing a contract today no matter how good the deal appears. Discounts, sale prices and special promotions will not end immediately. There is usually a time period they are in effect - find out what that is. Don't buy from the first person that visits your home unless they are highly recommended. Check their credentials, find out about the company they represent and most of all don't sign anything on the spot. Go visit their showroom and check out the company. You have 10 days to cancel a contract under the Consumer Protection Act, 2002.

See [http://www.sse.gov.on.ca/mcs/en/Pages/Cancel\\_a\\_Contract.aspx](http://www.sse.gov.on.ca/mcs/en/Pages/Cancel_a_Contract.aspx) for more information about your right to cancel a contract as well as a sample 'Letter to Cancel a Contract'.





# 4. CLARITY IS IN THE DETAILS

## *4. Clarity is in the Details*

As much as details can be dreadfully boring, this is what separates a good window experience from a bad one. Find out, for example, what happens if the company discovers dry rot. Will the wood be replaced? Is there an extra charge? If you are paying for it, make sure it is replaced. Know what you're buying and get it in writing. In fact get all the details in writing so there is no confusion or misunderstanding later.

Are there any additional charges? Removal of windows should be included in the price, as well as sealing the new windows with insulation and caulking. Clean up and disposal of old windows should be included in the price. Reputable companies use a contract where everything is spelled out in black and white. Make sure you get a copy.

Ask if a company representative will make an appearance on installation day or are you going to be dealing with the crew on your own. A good Sales Representative will always find time to stop in on the installation day to follow up and see if everything is going as planned.

## 5. INSTALLATION TRAPS

## 5. *Installation Traps*

Who is going to be installing the windows? It won't be the salesperson. It will be a crew. Ask who will be doing it. Is it a subcontractor or the company's own crew? Subcontractors will usually arrive in an unmarked truck as they work for other companies too. How long have they been installing windows? A window is only as good as its installation. How do you know it will be properly installed? Experience and certification such as Window Wise are important criteria to meet. Window Wise is an energy efficient, certification program of the Siding & Window Dealers Association of Canada. They conduct random inspections throughout the window industry ensuring companies and installation crews adhere to industry guidelines.



# 6. GOOD WINDOWS vs. BAD WINDOWS

## 6. Good Windows vs. Bad Windows

Every company will say they have the best windows on the market. How do you know you're making the right choice?

Select Energy Star windows from a manufacturer that participates in the nationally rated program. Check out their Energy Star ratings on the windows they carry. Energy Star windows have an Energy Star logo. Some Energy Star windows are more efficient than others. You should always check the U Factor. The lower the U Factor the more energy efficient the window. The U Factor is listed on the National Fenestration Rating Council (NFRC) website at [www.nfrc.org](http://www.nfrc.org). It is an independent rating and labeling system for the energy performance of windows. Three panes of glass (triple glazing) tend to be much more energy efficient than two panes but they are also more expensive.

Materials make a difference when it comes to energy efficiency. Windows made from premium grade vinyl are the best for energy efficiency, durability, low maintenance and appearance. When it comes to buying your windows, choose 'custom made'. They are the best value even though the initial price may be higher than a standard sized window. Custom means the installation will be faster with minimal or no cosmetic work inside or outside the home. A made-to-measure fit will also be reflected in better performance and lower energy bills.

Choose a window company that offers products from a reputable manufacturer. A good window company will also help with the design and choosing the best style of window for each area of the home.



# **WARRANTIES**

## 7. Warranties

Read the fine print. Many windows are made to last between 10 and 20 years. It's important to know that "Lifetime" warranties are limited to the life of the window - not the life of the homeowner. Find out what the warranty covers, what it doesn't cover and if the company will stand behind it. Find out what the labour or installation warranty is. The standard is 5 years in the industry. Any company that offers more is definitely a company who has confidence in their installers. You should also find out if the company has their own service technician just in case anything happens with the windows.

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## 8. REPUTATION

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A window company is only as good as its reputation. You don't want a fly by night contractor that runs away with your deposit, doesn't deliver on time or deliver what was promised. You should always find out how long the company been in business and whether it has won any awards. Check to see if they have any good reviews on line, which are contributed by home owners at sites such as Homestars or N49. Most of all, a good window company will help you avoid these 10 pitfalls.

*“... a good window company will help you avoid these 10 pitfalls.”*



# 9. COMPARISON SHOP

## 9. Comparison Shop

There's more to shopping for new windows than price. The lowest price may not be the best price. Compare apples to apples – that is if you're shopping for windows compare companies – what type of windows and what style they are offering. What type of Low E – single, double or triple Low E? What type of glazing are they offering – double, triple or laminated security glass? Find out what type of installation they are offering. Retrofit? Stud to stud frame out or Brick to Brick with brick-mould? You should compare products, warranties, installation and after service between different companies. Look for a company that has been around for at least 10 years and will still be there if you need assistance after your windows have been installed for several years. Get a written estimate. Most companies will provide this free of charge.

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**10. SAFE &  
SECURE**



## 10. Safe and Secure

Some windows are easier to break into than others. Investigate the lock - how secure is it? What kind of hardware is used? It should be high quality and made from premium materials.

Another option to consider is security glass. Do you need it? It is a good option but it also costs more money. Security glass reduces break-ins plus increases your energy efficiency because your window has 3 pieces of glass. Even if the panes break they are laminated together with a tough adhesive plastic interlayer. Security glass also protects from storm damage or hurricanes.

Don't be afraid to ask for financial credentials. Is the company insured? Does it have five million dollars in liability coverage? Ask to see a WSIB clearance certificate.





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