



Learn 10 Tips on How to Pick a Solar Company

Description

It might be nerve-racking to look for a reliable solar panel installation business. You may trust these suggestions to guide you toward a good decision.



Many solar energy providers currently exist. If you had to pick one, how would you do it? Most people experience some trepidation when it comes to hiring a solar installer due to their lack of familiarity with solar technology.

Almost every house has needed a plumber at some point, but solar is something most have never dealt with. How do you identify a trustworthy solar panel installation company? Exactly what sorts of inquiries do you pose? Don't worry about it right away.

The process of finding and engaging a solar contractor is not dissimilar from that of finding a contractor for any other type of home improvement job. The technical aspects of solar energy shouldn't put you off; just do your research and ask the correct questions, and you'll be OK. This post will help. If you want to avoid terrible companies and find good ones, consider these 10 suggestions.

Prepare your mind

Most people have hired a professional to fix anything in their home, whether it be a plumber, electrician, or general contractor. Yet, few people have ever worked with solar energy. From where should one even begin?

Finding a solar installation requires more effort than locating a plumber to replace a dripping faucet but less than doing a full kitchen renovation. Expect to put in a little extra effort, but it won't be too horrible.

The fundamental procedure is the same as with hiring any contractor: learn as much as possible about the organization, know what you're getting, and read the fine print. You'll have to make some choices as you go.

You should meet the company in person (although due to the pandemic, this may be a virtual meeting) and come prepared with a list of questions. You can find a couple checklists useful to you here.

Solar energy pricing comparison websites should not be relied upon.

Companies exist with the goal of making residential solar panel purchases as easy as making travel or lodging reservations. This simplistic approach, which places an excessive amount of weight on cost, is, in our opinion, detrimental to shoppers.

If you need a vehicle over the weekend, you may get away with hiring the cheapest available vehicle. Actually, any given rental Toyota Corolla is functionally equivalent to any other.

But, a residential solar array is an intricate system that calls for the flawless coordination of numerous moving parts. Coordination with your utility, permits from one or more local authorities, and paperwork are all part of the installation procedure.

A professional solar installation will handle the logistics of the job, leaving the homeowner with minimal preparation. Yet, because of the complexity of the underlying process, there are numerous ways in which an installer could go wrong. If a business is providing extremely low costs, you should be wary of the possible shortcuts they are taking.

Another drawback of buying solar equipment online is that customers are more likely to ignore vital information about the product they are purchasing. Paying no attention to the hardware and instead focusing on cost could lead to a system that doesn't perform as planned.

Get many estimates.

You should seek various quotations for your ideal kitchen remodel in the same way. This is important not only so that you can determine which company is offering the most competitive rate, but also so that you may examine and contrast the many proposals made by each candidate.

Keep an eye out for shady practices like being told your home is ideal for solar when it actually isn't. To make the figures look better, dishonest companies may neglect shading issues that reduce your solar

system's production to the point where it will never pay for itself, or they may inflate the production numbers to make it look like your system will be more effective than it actually is.

If your roof needs fixing before solar panels make sense for your home, a reputable company will tell you so. If the system isn't going to work well, they will not try to sell it to you and will instead walk away.

In contrast, a less honest business would rather focus on profit than ethics. In this case, if you get three quotes and two of them say solar isn't going to work and the third says go for it, you should probably go with the majority opinion.

The availability of several bids also provides an opportunity to examine and contrast various options for equipment and methods of installation. One of the most often overlooked aspects of a solar installation is the means by which the racking is fastened to the roof and rendered watertight.

When it comes to more difficult roofing materials like clay tile, the experience levels of solar installers might vary widely. Any money you save by switching to solar power could be lost if the solar panels are improperly installed and leak water into your home.

It is also vital that you inquire as to the means by which your installer will prevent the installation from resulting in a downpour in your living room. One way to determine a good contractor from a bad one is to compare how they respond to your questions. A poor contractor would be dismissive and offer you imprecise answers, whereas a good contractor would be patient and answer all of your concerns thoroughly.

There are a ton of other inquiries you need to make. Check out the checklist at the bottom of this article for some more tips.

Choose a business carefully, and never based solely on pricing.

While it's understandable to want to cut costs wherever possible, choosing the cheapest solar photovoltaic system quote could end up costing you more in the long run. The quality of equipment and setup might vary significantly. It's possible that the most affordable installer will also turn out to be the best, but you won't know for sure unless you get estimates from many businesses and conduct some background research. Yet, you shouldn't assume that you'll get better results by hiring the most expensive installation.

Do not sign any leases or PPAs.

Major solar installers like Sunrun and Vivint Solar aren't necessarily eager to make a sale. Finance options like solar leases and power purchase agreements are typically used to encourage you to rent a system instead (PPAs). With these financial products, they make more money and you make less.

Escalator clauses, which cause your electricity bill to rise every year even if your utility company doesn't, are one of the many ways in which these financial instruments hurt customers. Nevertheless, many of these major national installers have received low ratings and even been sued by state governments.

A large majority of homeowners (about one-third) opt for one of these financing methods, making this a complex and consequential issue. We reviewed several companies, such as Sunrun and Vivint Solar, and prepared a comprehensive post on leases and PPAs to address this topic in detail.

Favor long-established businesses in your area.

Be skeptical of solar energy firms that have only been around for a short period of time (say, less than 5 years). The longer a company has been in business, the better.

Inquiring with the company directly, consulting the Better Business Bureau, or, in some cases, researching the company online through the state licensing agency, can all yield this information. If you need warranty service years down the road, you'll have a greater chance of getting it from a reputable company if you went with one that has some industry experience.

If you live in a state with a more developed residential solar market, like California, you'll have an easier time finding installers with at least ten years of experience. In regions where solar power is still in its infancy, like the Midwest, you may be limited to working with startups.

Learn from customer feedback, but tread carefully when reading online

The Better Business Bureau is a wonderful place to begin when looking for information about a company through internet evaluations. Unlike other review aggregators, you can trust the BBB's ratings.

It gathers client feedback about a firm and attempts to resolve conflicts between the customer and the business. It's important to study a complaint thoroughly to determine whether it warrants action, as it could reveal poor practices on the part of the firm or simply be the result of a misunderstanding between the company and the client.

In addition, the status of a listed complaint can vary from settled to unresolved. Resolved complaints are of lesser consequence, and it is to be expected that any large company with a significant amount of business will have some dissatisfied consumers. Traditional reviews are allowed on the BBB, but they are not moderated in any way.

It's a good idea to research the firm on other review websites, but remember to take the opinions of others with a grain of salt. Quality can be harder to gauge from online reviews because they can be skewed.

In particular, you should stay away from "pay-to-play" websites like the ones you see on Angies' List and ConsumerAffairs.com. You should also be wary of solar company review websites, as they too have been implicated in pay-for-placement practices.

We found that reviews on Yelp and Google were slightly more reliable than those on these other sites. If you want to learn more about this topic, check out the resources we've provided below.

Verify the validity of the contractor's license.

You may check your state's solar license requirements on a website kept by the Interstate Renewable Energy Council. The installation of solar panels may need a contractor to obtain a specialist license from some states, while in others only a standard electrical license may be sufficient.

A general contractor's license will suffice in some jurisdictions. In fact, there are several states where licenses aren't even necessary. The IREC website should be consulted, but only after careful perusal, as solar photovoltaic installation (for generating electricity) typically has different licensing requirements than solar thermal installation (for hot water).

If a license is needed, you can check the company's credentials online in many jurisdictions, including California. It's possible that online license databases will simply reveal the most essential details, including whether or not a license is still active.

Keep in mind that not all violations are created equal, and that just because a corporation has a violation on file doesn't mean you should immediately cross them off your list. Don't be afraid to approach the firm for clarification if you have questions about a reported infringement.

Finding out if the solar installer is NABCEP board certified is an added bonus to making sure they have the required licenses. Although this accreditation is not required to do business in the field, it is a good indicator that the company is competent.

Inquire about guarantees.

When purchasing a solar system, it is important to carefully examine the manufacturer's guarantee on each individual component. It is critical that the installer completely explain each one.

A good installer will stand behind their work and the parts they use in your system with a guarantee that includes both, plus the cost of labor to repair or replace anything that breaks.

Photovoltaic panels come with their own warranty, which is typically broken down into two parts: one covering defects in materials and workmanship, and the other covering the panels' ability to produce the advertised amount of electricity.

In most cases, solar panels gradually lose efficiency over time and produce progressively less energy each year. (The annual rate of this decline should be under one percent.)

After a specified number of years, the panel should still be able to generate the same amount of power as when it was first installed, according to the warranty. Most product warranties are for a minimum of 10 years and can be as long as 25 years, while power warranties often last for 25 years.

Because of its importance, the inverter system will be covered by its own warranty. On average, people live between 10 and 25 years. The racking system must last for at least two decades in possibly harsh climates.

The warranty should be at least 20 years long and batteries should be included. It's an expensive part, so read the fine print before you buy. A 10-year warranty is standard on both the Tesla Powerwall and the Sunrun Brightbox.

Avoid being coerced into making a purchase.

It's not always a red flag if the sales representative you're meeting with is eager to close the deal because many respectable solar installers offer commissions to their sales personnel. Yet, high-pressure sales tactics are a clear indication that a company values quantity over quality in its business operations.

Some red flags to keep an eye out for include

When a company:

- tells you that solar will be great for your home while other companies tell you otherwise;
- pushes you to go with "no-money-down" financing schemes (leases and PPAs);
- pressures you to sign a contract quickly rather than letting you carefully study it on your own;
- preys on the elderly

Read the Better Business Bureau's documented cases of consumer dissatisfaction with major national installers like Vivint Solar, Sunrun, and SolarCity (Tesla) to learn more about their questionable sales tactics. The best solar panel installers in your area aren't aiming to expand into a national powerhouse, but rather to remain locally based and focus on providing exceptional service.

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1. Lifestyle

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