

# Leveraging Handyman Services

Susan Daywitt

## THE BIG BENEFITS OF HIRING A CONTRACTOR FOR SMALL JOBS

Using handyman services for smaller projects can save a facility a bundle in funds that can be allocated to provide a bigger ROI elsewhere. Given the large scope of possible services and the challenges with finding and vetting these services, it's important to take heed and learn from experience if you want to avoid headaches.

Maintaining and repairing a business asset requires a unique skillset that differs from average home or other commercial repairs.

## When to Use Handyman Services

By its nature, the term "handyman services" can be a bit vague or all encompassing. As one contractor puts it, they do "small jobs," not the major capital expenditures or infrastructure. That said, don't expect one person to be able to do everything and anything. A "Jack of many trades, master of some" perhaps, but be certain you don't compromise quality by falling prey to grandiose promises.

In the typical restaurant environment, there are numerous jobs that could benefit from a handyman, such as:

- Light bulb changes
- Painting, touch-ups
- Wall repair
- Tile and grout installation and restoration
- Carpet repair (seams, bubbles, post-warranty carpet repair)
- High work (high dusting, re-lamping, etc.) Ramps and stair lifts
- Grab bars and railings
- Universal access fixtures Door installation and repair Restroom repair
- Minor water/plumbing leaks
- Small electrical work (outlets, fixtures)
- Light carpentry
- Furniture assembly

- Fence installation and repair
- Stucco repair
- Graffiti removal
- Exit lighting
- Locks and hinges

Most facility managers choose to leave more extensive maintenance and repairs to the formal trades: electrical, plumbing, HVAC and so forth.

Tony Gauthier, Director of Facilities at BLD Brands LLC, shared that the historic buildings he manages as part of the Spaghetti Warehouse brand pose unique challenges in this area. Since the majority of these properties are 100 years old or more, a plethora of problems can arise that could become major ones. He is almost always forced to find local handymen to fix odd things. He shared an instance in Memphis where he found a local man who could fix a 300- to 400-pound door hinge that was specific to the historic structure. You simply cannot find an 18-inch-long door hinge in Home Depot!

### Common Pitfalls and Nightmares

Randy Alper, Facility Manager for KBP Foods, shared that when he needs handyman services, he prefers companies bigger than a one- or two-person shop. He has experienced the pain and expense of having small handyman companies go through the bid and award process only to have them vanish. Reliability is important, and dependability is nonnegotiable.

In addition to handyman MIA scenarios, other nightmares include when a service says they can do X, Y and Z, but are only skilled in one or two types of work. Beware of the situation where a handyman gets in over his head, encounters a larger problem and needs to pull in additional help. This diminishes the cost savings and delays repairs as you wait for other parties to arrive.

One of the more commonly cited messes is the case of the distractible handyman. It can be easy for a handyman to lead you down a path to projects that linger and negatively affect customers because they get stuck doing something else and never complete the work.

### Ways It Pays Off

Of course, sometimes the use of a handyman can ward off disaster.

Gauthier shared an example of avoiding a nightmare by turning to handyman services. Since most of his stores have ADA challenges because of their age, accommodations are crucial. He had an old wheelchair lift in a San Antonio, Texas, location that needed repair. The lift company quoted the work at \$16,151. Because he had a reliable multi-faceted handyman vendor to fall back on, he was able to combine his expertise with an electrician to repair it for \$1,600. A \$14,551, or 90-percent, savings is nothing to sneeze at!

Alper shared that using handymen has enabled him to lower costs across the board by using these services for "lighter work." Handyman services are not as expensive as skilled trades (not to be confused with the fact that handymen require plenty of skills to do what they do) and thus have less overhead and lower rates.

When you find the right handyman services, you know they have the tools to extend the life of your property and reduce maintenance costs.

### Ensuring Success in Your Facility

When asked about work guarantees, Alper shared he "insists on perfection." Both Alper and Gauthier drove home the importance of ensuring everything leads to a positive customer experience. If the general and regional managers are not happy, the handyman must return—multiple times if needed—until they are fully satisfied. Needless to say, if a handyman doesn't do things right the first time, or at least fix something within their control, it's time to change vendors.

The same due diligence that goes into hiring other trades applies to handyman services. Quality, timeliness and insurance and reputation are just as important for a surface repair as a major infrastructure problem. Remember, customer-facing items that may be deemed minor in the budget are considered major in the eyes of the customer and are a contributor to their experience.

At times, serendipity is the only way to find what you need and ensure success. Gauthier explained that often his best source of referrals is from customers themselves. Clientele solve problems frequently by noticing something while dining and approaching him with, "Hey! I do this and can help." The nature of the landmark buildings that Spaghetti Warehouse occupies (think 25,000 square feet of nooks and crannies and an old ice house) demand creative problem solving and service sourcing. As a life-long seasoned tradesman himself, Gauthier appreciates and seeks out the experienced, master craftsman looking for longevity and people who are licensed and insured to repair historical structures.

If you are simply frustrated with your search for quality handyman services, you have options. A management company that maintains national standards while providing locally owned help can ensure:

- Quality and on-time, guaranteed work
- Beginning-to-end work order management
- Vetted, qualified and reliable handymen
- A complete escalation process to ensure no requests slip through the cracks
- Work orders are logged and tracked
- Well-established preventative maintenance schedules

- On-demand accountability and reporting
- Necessary documentation is completed and maintained

Whether you DIY or work with a management company, following these tips will help you avoid the nightmares so you can ensure a worry-free experience and work that is done quickly, professionally and perfectly.

Susan Daywitt is the Founder, President and CEO of SLM Facility Solutions Nationwide. She is an active member of RFMA and a regular contributor to Facilitator.