



Research & Development Highlights

Technical Series
91-204

Consumers' Need for a Renovation Advisory Service

Introduction

It is estimated that one in ten Canadian homes is in need of major repair or renovation.

However, most of the money which Canadians spend on renovation goes to improvements rather than repairs. If the nation's housing stock is to be maintained in good condition, homeowners will have to be encouraged to devote more time, money and effort to repair and maintenance.

One way to do this would be through the development of a technical advisory service for residential renovation. An advisory service would provide an independent source of unbiased information through such means as general or specialized information, evaluation of quotes provided by renovation contractors, inspection of renovation work, or a telephone advice service.

To evaluate the concept, CMHC commissioned a study of consumers decision-making processes when planning renovations.

The study consisted of a series of focus groups followed by a telephone survey. The questionnaire used in the survey was developed in consultation with CMI-IC and with the Association provinciale des constructeurs d'habitation du Quebec (APCHQ). About one-third of the interviewees were consumers who had contacted APCHQ for information on renovations; the remainder were chosen at random. In all, 601 people were surveyed.

Results

About half of the survey participants had had renovation work worth at least \$2000 done over the last three years. The work was most often done by general contractors or by specialized contractors. Most homeowners had asked for quotes from several contractors.

Their best source of information for finding a contractor was their friends, closely followed by professional associations and the Yellow Pages.

On average, about six months elapsed between the first discussions about renovation and the beginning of the renovation work. Where problems occurred, they usually arose prior to the renovation work itself and usually

involved establishing the cost and defining the work to be done. Participants felt that it was difficult to obtain a reasonable price quote or to get a good idea of the cost of the work to be carried out.

Once the work was completed, homeowners were relatively satisfied with the quality. Even so, most expressed only limited confidence in renovation contractors.

The APCHQ's public profile was very good, as was CMIHC's. Participants said they appreciated an agency which could inform and assist them. They expressed the most confidence in an agency made up of both contractors and government. The service would most often be used for renovation work exceeding \$3000. The overall probability of using the services of this type of agency was 5.9] on a scale of 10. The most popular services, in order, would be a specialized technical appraisal service, a general appraisal service, a renovation work inspection service and a telephone service.

The most important factors in consumers' decision-making about renovation involved the outcome of the work: quality of work, after-sales service, and so on. Factors prior to the work—choice, cost estimate, etc.—were also significant.

Clients of APCHQ were more likely than the general public to complain that it was difficult to get an idea of the costs, and to choose a contractor and materials. The APCHQ's clients also give a slightly lower ranking for the quality of services rendered. As a rule, the APCHQ's clients saw the creation of a renovation advisory service to be more important than did the general public.

The results indicate strong support for the idea of a renovation advisory service. To avoid overlap with similar services offered by building-supply dealers and other organizations, the target audience for such a service should be carefully identified.

What type of work was it?

Roofing	17.6
Foundation	2.3
Structure	4.7
Basement	15.9
Exterior cladding	11.0
Fenestration	20.6
Washroom	22.6
Kitchen	20.9
Balcony	11.3
Insulation	3.3
Plumbing	7.6
Electrical	7.6
Additions—solarium, greenhouse, garage, other	10.9
Other renovations	19.9

Was your last renovation done by...

yourself	24.6
parents and friends	14.3
general contractor	31.9
specialized contractor	29.2

Where did you get the names of these contractors?

Professional associations	24.8
Friends	25.5
Parents	3.3
Neighbours	4.6
Decorators	0
Designers	0
Newspapers	15.1
Trade magazines	2.0
Yellow Pages	23.5
Shows/Displays	5.9
Other	5.9

How much time elapsed between the time the work started until the contractor had finished the work?

Not yet finished	7.2
Less than one month	54.1
1 to 3 months	28.7
4 to 6 months	5.5
More than 7 months	4.4

In general, do you believe that renovation contractors can be trusted?

Certainly	28.0
I have some reservations	60.9
Absolutely not	11.1

If you were to choose an organization in Quebec to help consumers who want renovations done, which organization would be your first choice among the following list:

Private firm	21.2
Contractor association	19.7
Group made up of contractors and government	35.1
Government organization	23.9
What would be your second choice?	
Private firm	19.2
Contractor association	24.9
Group made up of contractors and government	32.5
Government organization	23.3

If such an organization existed in Quebec, can you tell me, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), what is the likelihood that you would use it?

1 Very unlikely	11.9
2	3.1
3	7.2
4	4.7
5	14.0
6	11.7
7	13.3
8	18.7
9	4.7
10 Very Likely	10.8

Project Manager: Jacques Rousseau

Research Report: Étude sur les besoins des consommateurs pour un service de consultation technique en rénovation domiciliaire

Research Consultant: Centre de recherche en gestion de l'UQAM

A full report on this research project is available from the Canadian Housing Information Centre at the address below.

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**The Canadian Housing Information Centre
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
700 Montreal Road
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0P7**

Telephone: (613) 748-2367

Fax: (613) 748-2098

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