

# How to... choose the right builder



**Gary Bettis** explains why choosing the right builder is key and how to avoid becoming a dental build horror story

Whether you are refurbishing, relocating or extending your practice, you'll be looking to find a reliable and trustworthy builder that's honest and won't go disappearing with your hard earned money, leaving the job half finished.

The majority of dental build horror stories are a direct result of hiring a bad builder. Common problems that arise from hiring an incompetent and/or inexperienced builder include the project being behind schedule and over budget, poor quality workmanship, and not paying suppliers and/or sub-contractors.

This is the last thing that a busy practitioner needs on top of trying to run and maintain a busy dental practice. Having to take time off work to deal with ongoing problems, reassuring disgruntled staff and patients affects performance at work and can be detrimental to the business.

## Taking on an interior designer

Before you take on a builder you need to provide them with details about your project. This will include construction information, the extent of work and what materials are to be used. Only then can they accurately provide you with an accurate cost for the works. If you don't supply the builder with information you may find yourself being charged 'extras'. If you drip-feed them information, they may take advantage of the situation and inflate prices in full knowledge that your priority is to get your project finished.

A dental interior designer or architect will supply all the necessary details, schedules and scaled drawings that your builder will need to get the job done. They will take on other roles too, acting as your agent, to see that the selected choices are used and that the work begins and ends in a timely manner.

Your designer can help you select an appropriate builder from their tried and trusted pool. They will take full responsibility if there are problems, doing whatever is necessary to overcome any obstacles that may occur.



Gary Bettis is architectural director of DesignClinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from squat NHS dental practices to high-end private clinics. Visit [www.designclinic.uk.com](http://www.designclinic.uk.com) for further information.

## Types of builder

### Small domestic outfits

You should be very wary of builders who have only worked on domestic projects but are keen to 'help out'. These smaller outfits are invariably cheaper on paper, but may have little appreciation of deadlines and the consequences that missing these has on your business.

Perhaps more important is that commercial building projects are subject to a range of additional legal requirements that a domestic builder may not be familiar with but that, ultimately, you will be responsible for!

### Shop fitters

The prospective builder will not necessarily need experience in the dental/healthcare sectors. Builders working in other commercial sectors (ie, shop or restaurant fitters) can prove to be very successful in understanding the needs and limitations of running a building site while the client may still be occupying the property with a functioning business.

### The friend or family builder

If you are related to a builder then you need to think carefully and consider all risks and eventualities before asking them to carry out work for you. Do not risk your family or personal relationships as a result of issues arising during or after the project.

### Design and build

There are a number of 'one-stop' building companies or partnerships offering to design, build and sometimes even equip your practice as one complete service.

Be careful – they may supply you with inadequate design drawings, which will save them time and money, but remove the opportunity for you to obtain comparative building quotes. This leaves your project open to interpretation, leading to potential disputes if they fail to deliver what they promised you and escalating costs for items not clearly specified or quantified at the start of the job.

Some of these companies may offer to design your practice (sometimes 'for free') but don't be fooled; their so-called 'free' design fees can be concealed within the overall construction costs.

## References

As mentioned, your designer can provide you with a list of suitable builders. If, on the other hand, you are thinking of using your own builder, ensure that you have independently obtained good references. These are not just from the prospective builder. A builder is not going to list clients that there have been problems with. Perform due diligence in locating several past and present projects and contacting the practice owners directly. Find out if they are happy with their work. Was it started and completed on time? Was their final bill in line with the initial quotation? It is also worth contacting sub-contractors, suppliers and bank references. This should give you a good basis in determining the right builder.

## Public liability insurance

Nowadays, even minor injuries and property damage can lead to major compensation charges, which could close down your builder. Make sure that your builder is fully covered and ask to see his/her builder's public liability insurance certificate (which will cover the cost of repairing any damage to your property).

## Contracts

You must have a contract in place between you and your builder. Once you agree a price and start date, get a written contract and make sure you understand it and agree to all of it.

If your contractor won't supply a contract – and you do not have a designer on board, consider drawing up one yourself. (My article next month looks at how to ensure your design is implemented and the various contract options available to you).

## Payment terms

Before any work commences, make sure that there are agreed payment terms within your contract. You may be required to pay money in advance for the ordering of specific goods, but never be afraid to ask for paperwork so you can check it for yourself.

Your agreement must state that work will be paid for in stages with a percentage held until all the works are complete. Only release the final payment when you are fully satisfied with the work.

## Stay in control

As a final word of caution, ensure that you always remain in control throughout the project. If you have entered into a contract that gives your equipment supplier or builder the role of 'designer', you may have relinquished your opportunity to be involved in the development of your design scheme. In short, you get what you are given. If you decide to engage a professional designer to detail and schedule out every single element of your proposed practice, and to monitor the building works, there is no reason why the quality, function and style of your project should be compromised. [PD](#)



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