

Three ways to cheat homeowners when selling them a new heating and cooling system.

If you're a heating and cooling contractor, these little known secrets can improve your profit without increasing cost or effort.

1. **Install oversized equipment** – It's the American way, bigger cars, bigger houses, and bigger yards. Most homeowners will consider you the professional. So you can easily dupe most of them into thinking bigger is better. Installing oversized heating and cooling units is a sure fire way to pad your profit and build a fat retirement. First of all, bigger units cost more to install. Secondly, since a bigger unit will cycle off and on more frequently, it wears out quicker. This means you'll get the replacement sale sooner. If the oversized unit causes homeowner complaints about higher than expected energy bills, their problem is your opportunity. Sell them a programmable thermostat. The name of the game is repeat business. It's a win- win - win!
2. **Ignore the ducts** – Don't waste your time evaluating duct systems – Homeowners are usually not engineers. They will have no idea that leaky, poorly insulated and undersized ducts compromise comfort, generate household dust, waste energy and increase heating and cooling bills by 30% to 40%. Don't bring it up.

Remember, you are the expert. Convince buyers all they need is a brand name, high SEER unit with an extended warranty. It takes a couple hours to test for duct leaks and you won't get paid for it. Besides that, sealing duct leaks and repairing design defects could improve the efficiency of the entire system. That could shrink the size of the equipment, improve comfort, reduce household dust, relieve allergies and save energy. **Not a good idea.**

Smaller equipment means smaller profits. Comfort is relative. Most buyers think hot and cold rooms are normal. Resolving comfort, dust and humidity problems by addressing duct leaks and poor design is the quickest way to cut yourself out of selling other high profit accessories. Don't sabotage future sales of installing additional heat vents, duct cleaning, UV lights, air cleaners, humidifiers and dehumidifiers by fixing these problems. Don't give the buyer any ideas about the house *working as a system*. Stick to selling the box!

3. **Make the unit blow and get your dough** – When everything looks good and the unit is blowing air, get what you're owed and hit the road. Don't waste time making a punch list and looking for things that aren't installed right. Fixing, testing and adjusting equipment to assure it performs at the efficiency you sold takes 3 to 4 hours. What's the problem if the unit operates at 75% to 80% of its rated efficiency? No one believes the gas mileage stickers on new cars either. A 16 SEER unit running at 13 SEER will not bankrupt the owner. Also, be absolutely sure that you do not leave the installation instructions behind with the unit. There is always a chance homeowners might read them and discover errors made in the installation.

Handling the difficult buyer – If the homeowners mention that Consumer Reports suggested calculating the proper equipment size unit using ACCA (Air Conditioning Contractors of America) Manual J, and confirming proper duct design using ACCA Manual D, immediately downplay and discredit the process. Say that you have been in the business long enough to know you can make numbers say whatever you want them to say. Remind the owners that they don't want a unit that runs all the time and that their duct system worked fine with the old unit.

If they persist, asking, “won't a bigger unit connected to a poor duct system just use more energy and be uncomfortable?” Try misdirection by talking about SEER or the brand of unit you sell. Buyers won't usually know that when a unit is oversized and attached to a poor duct system, its efficiency can drop as much as 30%-40%. Be careful not to “over sell” energy savings. A super-sized unit on leaky ducts will use more energy. So this could come back to bite you if you've already sold them a programmable thermostat.

Some buyers just won't drop the “right size”, poorly designed duct rant. Its like a broken record, Manual J, Manual D, “we want a right sized unit that's properly installed and tested to make sure it's working right.” They might even ask you to provide a printout of all the calculations and assumptions used in sizing their unit and assessing their ducts. **You probably don't want this customer.** They will expect to get what they pay for. Politely explain that you will be happy to install a smaller unit and look at their ducts. But only if they sign a liability waiver relieving you of all responsibility if the system doesn't work. You'll either loose the job or install the unit with guaranteed profit with no responsibility for the outcome.

Always remember that selling low cost with high-perceived value equals greater profit. Don't get outfoxed. Just sell the box.

How to cheat is a series of cynically humorous articles designed to convey knowledge on topics that are typically about as exciting as a root canal. Their intent is to educate and inform homeowners and homebuyers on how to improve their quality of life through affordable home ownership that's supportive of better health and wellness. Characters, attitudes or motivations are purely fictional. Any resemblance to the real world should be considered strangely coincidental.

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