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Homeowners have a new fixation

Handyman businesses boom with trend to repair rather than replace

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When that dishwasher goes on the blink or the fridge goes out, consumers aren't rushing to the store for new ones.

Ditto for purchasing new homes.

They're going for that quick fix.

As Americans hold tightly to what they own and have little discretionary income to splurge on new and flashy purchases and homes, business is surging for handyman and appliance repair companies.

"People are repairing machines that really aren't worth the repair, and that is because of the economy," said Clarence Duncan, owner of Hoosier Appliance Repair on the Southside. "It's more about getting through than being smart."

And in today's economy, getting through is the cheapest option.

"You don't have to have a whole lot of money to fix up," said Daniel Killebrew, who owns Killebrew & Sons Handyman Service in Indianapolis. "A little will go a long way in the proper hands."

From windows to roofs to any small repair job, Killebrew said his business is booming.

"People are fixing up what they have, and I'm glad about that," he said.

Spending on home renovations and fix-ups is expected to jump to \$223 billion in 2009 from \$216 billion last year, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

Remodeling companies say homeowners are looking to add space and freshen their homes rather than buy new ones.

"People are saying, 'Do we really want to spend the money on a new house? No. Let's update,' " said Steve Gray, owner and chief executive of Steve Gray Renovations, which does high-end remodeling in the Indianapolis area. "And that's where we come in."

Gray said sales grew about 40 percent in 2008 to more than \$1.2 million, and he expects 2009 to be even better.

An update can range from new carpet and paint in the master bedroom to a reconfiguration of the main level of a home. Whatever it is, it's cheaper than buying a new house.

Still, the market for smaller projects and repairs prompted Gray to add a handyman division to his company.

"We were going into homes and more and more people were asking us to do small repair jobs, so this

just made sense for us," he said.

At Turner Appliance, Connie Cantleberry said the company has been swamped with calls this month.

"This is our month where we usually get to take a little bit of a break, but we are slammed," said Cantleberry, whose husband, Rick, is co-owner of the location.

In addition to repairs, Turner sells refurbished appliances. Cantleberry said high demand prompted the company to build a store to sell the fixed-up items.

At Affordable Appliance Repair in Indianapolis, Courtney McCorkle said nothing is off-limits for repair in these tough times.

"Washers, dryers, refrigerators, stoves," she said. "Even if the fix is somewhat expensive, they want to replace it rather than buy a whole new unit. It just costs less."

Additional Facts

HOME MAKEOVER TIPS

If you can't get out of that old house, look at some good home projects to tackle in a down economy:

- » New carpet.
 - » New roof.
 - » Replace windows.
 - » Repair appliances.
 - » Add space, perhaps a room over the garage.
 - » Kitchen remodel
 - » Cosmetics: new paint or wallpaper.
 - » Main-level renovation.
 - » Update master bedroom.
 - » Finish a basement.
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