

Sign up online for job leads

Marketed as an effortless way to promote your business and find the jobs you really want, online job matching services are growing in popularity, **Caroline Kearney** reports.



Online job matching services, like Bangitup.com, match customer job requests with local registered tradespeople, who decide whether or not to accept the SMS leads.

Word of mouth only takes you so far. Smart promotion is vital to the success of most businesses.

For tradespeople this has traditionally meant placing an ad or listing in phone directories or the classifieds section of a local paper – but if your ad isn't the biggest or your business doesn't start with the letter 'A' you're less likely to be spotted by potential customers.

Online booking agencies take a different approach to overcome these and other problems. In this article we take a look at three national providers.

Each one uses a similar method. Firstly, the service provider pays a fee to register their details – type of work, preferred job value, region – on the database. Trades are screened to ensure they are legitimate, registered businesses.

For the customer the service is free. They simply log on to the site and fill in a job request form with all details including cost, location and time frame.

The system then selects and sends an SMS to a number of matching trades, who choose to accept or reject the lead.

If the lead is accepted the tradesperson is either given the customer's contact details, or the customer receives a number of trade contact details. No computer is required and quoting and completion of the job continues without further input from the agency.

Trade Connect

Marketed as a one-stop-shop for products and trades, Trade Connect combines an extensive building materials database, from which you can order products online, with a job lead service.

As CEO Fred Mancer explains, it started prior to 2000 as a spin off from the Northern Suburbs Building Information Centre in Brookvale, Sydney.

"Customers were constantly complaining about the difficulty of getting tradespeople to either return their calls or turn up for the work they needed done. I conceived the concept of offering not only a list of trade professionals, but to go one better with the utilisation of SMS technology to actually notify the closest-matched professionals to the requirements of the job at hand, allowing them to respond if interested and available.

"This service still compliments our online materials mall and we cross-sell this system to the 4500 visitors our mall receives every day," Fred explains.

The job lead system boasts 38,000 registered service providers, and Fred says customer demand is increasing and the initial reluctance and fear factor of new technologies such as SMS and the Internet, are quickly fading.

"For the customer the service is very simple, is free to use and actually works. We find people give it a try and once they realise the ease and effectiveness, they become repeat users."

To register your services with Trade Connect you pay an annual fee of \$132. There are no other costs involved. The company also offers a 90-day trial and money-back guarantee.

Bangitup

Bangitup.com is an online building and construction community incorporating the Trade Select job match service, infrastructure lifecycle management, industry links, and a soon to be launched product database and project management service.

As Bangitup CEO Scott Maxworthy explains, development of the site began in 2000 following a discussion in the surf off Cronulla between himself, an IT and business entrepreneur and two mates – builder Mark Riley and plumber Rob DeMeio – who were wondering how technology could help improve their businesses.

“In looking at the businesses, much of the information management and communication relied on memory, paper and the mobile phone – trades were not taking advantage of the major global advancements in technology such as email, software, the Internet and SMS.”

The other major problem, Scott says, was the public perception of trades as unreliable.

“People’s major complaint was the time it takes to call an average 10 tradesmen just to find one person who was interested in the job, who would then sadly often not turn up! It is important to note that the trades trying to be helpful and saying ‘yes’ even when they are already overbooked causes much of the market frustration.”

The solution – Trade Select – was officially launched in July 2003 as a tool to help builders find subcontractors quickly.

In early 2004 it was opened up to the general public. The site now boasts 48,000 registered service providers, has processed 12,000 jobs over the last two years and receives 70,000 visitors each month.

The pricing structure varies depending on the number of leads you want guaranteed – from the free bronze membership to the \$350 silver and \$650 gold, with a guaranteed number of leads.

“Jobs are not SMS broadcast to hundreds of trades, so Bangitup members do not compete against hundreds of other trades for the job,” Scott says.

Bangitup also features Simplicity Accounts, a mobile phone SMS invoicing system which integrates with Trade Select, MOB and Outlook Express, allowing the user to create instant quotes, invoices and appointments while in the field. ➤

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With Service Central the client simply logs on to the website, fills in the details of the job and suitable registered service providers are found for them.

Service Central

Established in late 2004 by father and son team Danial and Bruce Ahchow, Service Central is the new kid on the block, so to speak. With more than 500 registered service providers, the system covers both the traditional trade areas, as well as professional services including legal and financial.

“Our aim is to grow our service provider base into the thousands this year to ensure this service continues to grow in line with the increasing number of jobs received, and to ensure that we can cover an even broader range of trades and services,” says managing director Danial Ahchow.

Danial says Service Central’s extensive consumer-targeted advertising program, which has helped generate 8000 jobs in the last six months, along with the business management and communications tools built into the company’s website, is what sets it apart from similar providers.

“Registered service providers benefit from a broad advertising reach and recognised brand. Over the last six months Service Central has advertised heavily on 3AW, Gold FM, SEN, 3MP and Triple M,” Danial explains, “and our powerful network means we can offer a wide range of benefits to help

build better business, with new services coming on-line regularly.”

The company also has a strict screening policy.

“You will need to provide basic business information to demonstrate that you are a legitimate and properly insured business, and you’ll be asked to read and agree to a Service Provider Code of Conduct,” Danial explains.

Service Central charges a one-off registration fee of \$1200 plus GST. You will also be charged a set lead fee for each lead you accept.

“Once you’re registered you decide what job leads are worth to your business, depending on the value of that job and you only pay for the leads you can use. If we do not generate the work that a business wants, they do not pay.”

Jobs of all shapes and sizes

“The service caters for all facets of construction and home maintenance both small and large – from getting leaky washer changes, the lawns mowed to full factory or multi-residential work,” says Fred at Trade Connect.

Danial says Service Central’s listed jobs vary from as little as \$50 up to more than \$100,000, and often lead to call-backs.

“In some instances service providers have gone out to do a small job and because

they’ve given such excellent service, have come away with bigger jobs. One cabinet maker on our books was engaged through Service Central to build a small bookcase and the home owner was so impressed they got him back to build a new kitchen!”

Scott says many of the jobs on the Bangitup site provide amazing opportunities.

“We’ve had jobs range from fixing a tap in Toongabie to an electrician required on an oil rig off the North West coast of Western Australia. We’ve even had tradesmen required to build in Fiji.”

Beats the classifieds

The key benefits of these services over traditional means are you only receive job leads matching your profile and there is no obligation to quote on any job.

“This drastically reduces the time wasted by trades calling back customers only to find out the job was not what they wanted or were suited to,” says Scott.

The other key benefit, says Fred, is that all businesses are on an even par.

“There is no comparison to other static directories as ours is an active system that gets the jobs straight to the trades instantly and in a way that suits them. Additionally, they are treated equally – the suitable trades receive the same job leads at the same time, as opposed to whoever pays the biggest dollars to the telephone-style directories to get the biggest ads and prime positions in their particular category.”

The service is also much more cost effective than traditional advertising, according to Danial.

“With these alternatives a business has to pay up front and hope that they get a good return on their investment. With Service Central the return on investment is guaranteed.”

Builders have their say

Still not sure if this is for you? We spoke to some builders who use these sites to help promote their businesses. Some use them as their primary source of business, others to complement other advertising in classifieds or phone directories.



Fearless Maintenance and Renovations in Chelsea Heights, Victoria, specialises in home and bathroom renovations. Angus Searle says the company has seen a growth in business during the year it has been registered with Service Central.

"We'd probably receive about five leads per week. The only real problem we have is sometimes we probably get too many leads, sometimes my phone is full of them."

Luke Elliot, from Elliot Homes in Frankston, Victoria says the response from Service Central has been much greater than advertising in directories or classifieds, resulting in a 60% increase in business.

Danny Bryant Building Services has been registered with Trade Connect for about four years. The NSW building company completes extensions, renovations, decks, pergolas and alterations.

"I'd say about 30% of our business is through Trade Connect. On average through the year we'd receive at least two leads per day. The response is a lot better than the classifieds because the people that send through the enquiries are legitimate; they actually want the work done. They're not just hunting around to find out how much something's going to be.

"It's excellent; it's a really good service. If you want the job you just answer the SMS that comes through. If you don't you just don't return the calls."

Anthony Homsy uses the Bangitup Trade Select service to find other tradespeople to help on large construction projects, most recently a 31 town house project in Penrith, NSW.

"I've been using the service for 18 months and I've found it to be very responsive. I mainly use it to find contractors I'm unable to find through other sources."

Rick Simmons from One Up Building in Cronulla employs 15 workers and completes large residential building projects. He uses Bangitup to source new projects.

"I've been registered for about two years and I'd say it has led to a growth in business. I'm a little bit different because I'm set up for larger jobs, so you can appreciate not every wants a house renovated next week. I receive job leads every couple of days and it's up to me whether I want to take on that lead or not. I take on the larger jobs." ■

CONTACT

Trade Connect	1300 TRADES (872 337) www.tradeconnect.com.au
Bangitup	1300 796 279 www.bangitup.com
Service Central	1300 733 470 www.servicecentral.com.au

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