

Managing paperwork professionally

Dean Taylor offers small businesses tips on how to simplify the paperwork process

Invoicing. It's not fun, but all self-employed and small businesses have to do it. In the muddle of receipts and bits of scrap paper, sorting out what you need to include on your invoices can be a headache.

Should you include a date of payment? Do you need to include your company logo? Does it need to have a unique number? Will any of the presentation actually matter?

These are not questions you want to be asking yourself when you've come home from a long day's work. This is why YourTradeBase was started, and why the company has put together some top tips to take the headache out of paperwork issues. Below is a list of 10 things YourTradeBase recommends your invoice should include, so you never need to wonder again:

- **Your business name and address**
This might seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many tradesmen forget
- **Company email address**
Everything is online these days, and it looks far more

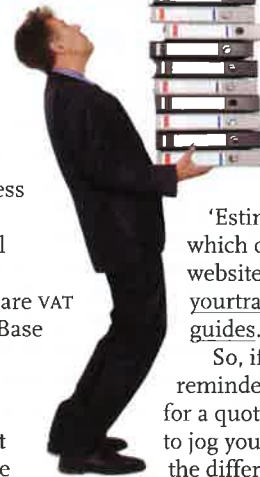
professional to have a dedicated email for your business

- **The name and address of the person you're invoicing**
- **Products and services**
The cost of each should be included. Not only is this a requirement, but it can also help if your customer disputes the price
- **Total amount of the invoice**
- **Payment terms**
For example, whether your customer pays in one lump sum or week by week. This again is especially helpful if you have problems getting payments from customers
- **Date for the invoice and a unique invoice number**
These will help you at the end of the year with your tax return and if you ever need to find a particular invoice. These must follow on from one another (e.g. ABC1, ABC2, ABC3) and, if one is spoiled or cancelled, it still has to be kept as a record for HM Revenue & Customs
- **Your payment details**
You might still deal with cheques, so this may not

apply to you, but it can save a lot of doubling up if you provide the information straight away

- **Due date of payment**
Again, this can help with late payments and customers not knowing a payment schedule
- **Logo and presentation**
These are optional, but they play an important part for you and your business and make it more likely customers will recommend you.
For tradesmen who are VAT registered, YourTradeBase recommends you also include:
 - **Your VAT number**
Either the amount of VAT on each line of the invoice with the VAT rate charge, or the total amount of VAT on the invoice and the rate of VAT applied to all items
 - **Your company name** if you are a limited registered company
 - **The time of supply** (also

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known as 'tax point') if this is different from the invoice date.

As well as these useful pointers, YourTradeBase has put together a series of other guides to help tradesmen with their paperwork, including 'Write a Winning Quote' and

'Estimates vs Quotes', which can be read on the website for free at www.yourtradebase.com/guides.

So, if you need a reminder of best practices for a quote, or just want to jog your memory about the difference between an estimate and a quote, take a look at YourTradeBase's guides and you'll be sure to beat your paperwork problem.

Dean Taylor is co-founder and director of YourTradeBase

A tradesman's tool



Dean Taylor, installer and YourTradeBase co-founder

YourTradeBase is a web-based business aimed directly at helping installers to be more professional in how they maintain their paperwork.

Originally formed in 2010 to help creators Dean Taylor and Adam Austin manage their own paperwork, the online tool was launched to the general public in 2012. Now, the website has grown into a port of call for 4,100 customers, with £2,750,000 worth of invoices and £3,117,000 worth of quotations having been generated in 2013 alone.

The system works by

providing templates so installers can easily create estimates, quotes and invoices. The paperwork can then be sent straight to the customer from the website, or downloaded and printed to be sent as a hard copy.

Other features include a reminder system to chase up jobs that have been quoted for, a dashboard that alerts users to what needs their attention, and an address book to store contacts.

YourTradeBase can be accessed from any computer, tablet or smartphone, and all users' information is backed up on the company's server.

"We take our users' data security and privacy very seriously," said co-founder

Adam Austin. "Because we built YourTradeBase to solve our own paperwork problems, we understand that storing business information in the cloud can be daunting. We only use the latest secure server protocols, ensure all data is encrypted, back up customer data hourly and make sure our servers are kept updated with the latest firewalls."

He added: "We hate spam just as much as our customers! We never share our customers' data – ever."

YourTradeBase is a paid-for service with a monthly or annual fee. To get a 45-day free trial, use the code INVOICE45 when you sign up.

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