

Finding Value when Buying Cabinet Doors Online

What does it cost? Am I getting a good deal? Are the doors any good? What are the risks? What don't I know?

These are the questions that a typical – and wise – consumer will ask before making the decision to purchase cabinet doors online. Frankly, these same questions apply even if buying them in a local store.

I'll throw in a couple more questions that consumers *should* ask before purchasing any cabinetry product or other wood product: Where are they made? Who is making them? Where does the wood come from?

In this series of articles, we will address these issues and try to help you get the answers necessary to make a wise buying decision. In this article, we'll talk primarily about cost.

When shopping for cabinet doors, prices range all over the place, from quite inexpensive to quite expensive. This is true whether buying online or in retail stores. The thing that is fairly unique about cabinet doors is that price is **not** a great indicator of quality. Some of the least expensive cabinet door products are the best made and some of the more expensive are pretty low quality. But also, there are inexpensive junky doors and expensive doors that are excellent. Price alone just does not tell you what you think it would.

So let's think about the factors that go into the cost and price of a cabinet door:

- Cost of wood
- Cost of transporting raw wood
- Production labor costs
- Design style
- Available tooling
- Sales and marketing costs
- Freight
- Producer's mark-up
- Sales commission (or mark-up)

I don't proclaim to be an expert on raw material procurement, but there are a couple principles that I understand to be true: (1) There are a limited number of providers of wood; (2) Quality of wood sourced in North America (US and Canada) is generally a higher quality and consistency than imported woods; (3) Better pricing is available to companies that buy more. If you're with me on that, then it stands to reason that companies with lower cost of wood either import lower-grade lumber or they have a larger operation. Since many of these cabinetry companies are privately owned, it's hard to find solid data on how big they are or where they source their wood. But, you can look for clues in the number of species being offered and in lead-times for large orders. It also doesn't hurt to ask.

Labor is more expensive in the US than it is overseas. Craftsmanship on these products is also still much better when made in the US or, in most cases, Canada. Pay the extra few bucks for American-made products. You can do this to be patriotic if you wish, but the real reason is that you'll get a better product.

While simple shaker doors or basic raised panel doors are still very popular and may be exactly what you're looking for, an offering of multiple mitered and applied molding doors indicates an investment in tooling and equipment that indicates the company has been around for a while and plans to be around when you decide to add on to your kitchen. Now, if you're looking for a simple door, you don't want to pay the cost of a complex door. Be wary of the "one price fits all" operations. Either they have a very limited selection or they don't really know how to make the variety of doors that you may want. If you're looking for a complex door, understand that there is labor and tooling involved to get it right. Don't necessarily go for the low-cost solution or a sale price unless all the other factors indicate that the company is reputable.

(Which reminds me of another point: Avoid cabinet companies that run sales. Sales typically mean that they have a high markup which they're willing to sacrifice temporarily or that they have an inventory backlog. In the woodworking trade, neither is a great sign.)

Freight charges can drive a consumer crazy. Online companies that ship across the country are going to all choose from among the same set of competitively-priced carriers. The ones who ship more will get somewhat better pricing. Some companies mark-up freight costs to increase profits, some build the freight costs into their pricing. (There's no such thing as "free shipping", even though my company and others advertise it. It's either built in to the product cost or it's not.) Understand what the shipping cost is *before* you do anything else. In some cases, the shipping cost can exceed the price of the products! If you can't find the answer easily, go somewhere else. (Our site has a price comparison chart for leading online retailers that shows you how varied it can be.)

Everyone deserves to make a profit. You want a company to be profitable so that they'll be in business the next time you want to buy. But the closer the seller is to the producer, the better since there'll be fewer parties taking profits.

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