

Buying New Windows: **THE THREE FACTORS OF VALUE**

To most people, windows are a mystery and shopping for new ones becomes a slog through tongue-twisting acronyms and mind-numbing numbers. Others think “windows are just windows” and go for the lowest price they can find. This article explains the three primary factors in getting the “best” windows for your needs and the synergy between them.

Price (25% of Value)

Price alone is rarely an indication of good value. My first lesson of this came right after high school. Living on my own and always broke, I would buy the cheapest shoes I could. They would last approximately three months before I needed to buy another pair. I was proud of my thriftiness. One time, however, I had to buy a nicer pair that cost half again more because it was all that was available. That pair lasted me a full year, four times longer than the cheaper ones. That early lesson taught me that the cheapest item can sometimes be the most expensive way to go. Today, the cheapest windows on the market are vinyl-frames with Intercept Spacers. Buy these and you'll be needing all new windows again in less than ten years. (see our [Double Trouble](#) article). The bottom line for windows is the same for every consumer good: quality components cost more than cheap components. However, a higher price does not always indicate better quality. Knowledge is key to knowing the difference.

Energy Efficiency (30% of Value)

Every new window sold in America is required to have a [National Fenestration Rating Council](#) (NFRC) label. Begun in 1989, “NFRC is a non-profit organization that administers the only uniform, independent rating and labeling system for the energy performance of windows, doors, skylights, and attachment products.” The purpose of the NFRC label is provide consumers an unbiased energy efficiency rating for all windows. The two primary numbers on the label are the “U-Factor” (how well the window reduces heat loss) and the “Solar Heat Gain Coefficient” (how well it reduces heat gain). The lower each number the better the window is at minimizing your heating/cooling bill. As a *general rule*, the highest quality window components are the best performing. Vinyl frames are better than aluminum, wood is usually better than vinyl, and fiberglass is the best performer of all. There are caveats: Location is everything when choosing windows. A home in the woods of North Bend gets little direct sunlight and does not need the same kind of window configuration as a home on Magnolia Bluff overlooking Puget Sound. Low-e and argon gas add 15 to 20% more cost to a window, but increase the insulating ability by 50% or more. That is money well spent.

Longevity (45% of Value)

Read the first factor, **Price**, over again. Windows are not cheap, so why buy twice or thrice? While there is no such thing as a “Lifetime” window, there is a 20 year difference in the life span between cheap and high grade windows! “Value priced” vinyl windows with Intercept spacers begin failing at 5-8 years (see [Double Trouble](#) article). A high end Fiberglass window with dual seals, stainless steel box spacer, Cardinal 366 Low-e and Argon gas is good for a minimum of 25 years. And your “Lifetime Warranty?” In the last decade, over three dozen major window manufacturers have closed their doors. A quality window will outlast that piece of paper by a long shot.