

Looking for the best rate

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PHOTO BY KENTON SMITH [Enlarge Image](#)

Sarah De Klein, CEO of Ratetrades, said she is a strong defender of small businesses.

If e-entrepreneur Sarah De Klein has a passion, it's for empowering people with information. Indeed, information is the sole product of her latest e-venture, Ratetrades.ca, a "community organization" running for two years now that provides widespread exposure for Manitoba tradespeople, and a comprehensive source of peer-to-peer information on same for consumers.

Founder and CEO of Ratetrades, De Klein — who received her business degree at University College Dublin in Ireland and came to live in Winnipeg in 2007— finds what she sees as an info-deficient environment here surprising.

"With only 1.3 million people in Manitoba, renovations are a billion-dollar industry province-wide," she says.

"Canadians are private and don't offer referrals very often," says Keith Bowie, vice-president of Ecologic Spray Foam, who's been listed on Ratetrades since it launched. "And we're very rare to complain."

With 2,500 trades presently listed for Manitoba, De Klein notes that she remains a strong defender of small businesses. Nonetheless, "we're used to more transparency in Europe," where she was previously involved with such e-ventures as Aisleway, a London-based destination wedding company.

The contrasting state of affairs in Manitoba is no good for trades either, she insists.

"Tradespeople can't communicate effectively with consumers like this, and they need consumer trust."

"Ratetrades provides a great format for my business," says Bowie, who met De Klein when he did some work for her himself. "I can say, 'Don't take my word for it.'"

Trades can list for free on the site — there's no agency fee, nor any cost for the consumer. Reviews of tradespeople are also completely anonymous and non-incentivized.

Winnipeg's ViewSource Media, who built the website, uses an algorithm to bolster what they first do manually: check for multiple usernames for the same IP addresses, date and time stamps and patterns in tone and language.

"Anything we miss, it finds," De Klein says. The goal is to weed out fake reviews, which have become a conspicuous problem on consumer report websites.

"We can and will even contact reviewers for documentation on any particular job," De Klein continues. (For that matter, she adds, one can pick up the phone and call Ratetrades directly.)

Those kinds of trusted, first-hand accounts are exactly what user Allister Penner, a Winnipeg chartered accountant and senior manager of assurance services at MNP LLP, appreciates about the site.

"Since the site launched I have used it to source a plumbing contractor and I'm currently looking for a landscaper," he says, adding that the site is also extremely user-friendly.

If there's any time people should take advantage of De Klein's service and product — now available in a mobile version — it may be now, with the June renovation season looming.

Meanwhile, the scope of Ratetrades is expanding westward: De Klein says the site will list 8,000 trades in Vancouver in the next few weeks.

"These kinds of endorsements are worth gold to me," Bowie says. That's at least one local tradesman who'd agree with De Klein: "There's a place for building your business on merit," she says.

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