



How Long Does it Take to **Forget the Plumber?**

Authors: Aric Zion, MS; Nicole Medina; Thomas Hollmann, MBA, PhD | 2019

BACKGROUND

How will you find a plumbing company if you have a badly clogged drain that requires professional help? If you're like most people, you'll call someone you've used before. But remembering that plumbing company and finding their contact information . . . that's another story.

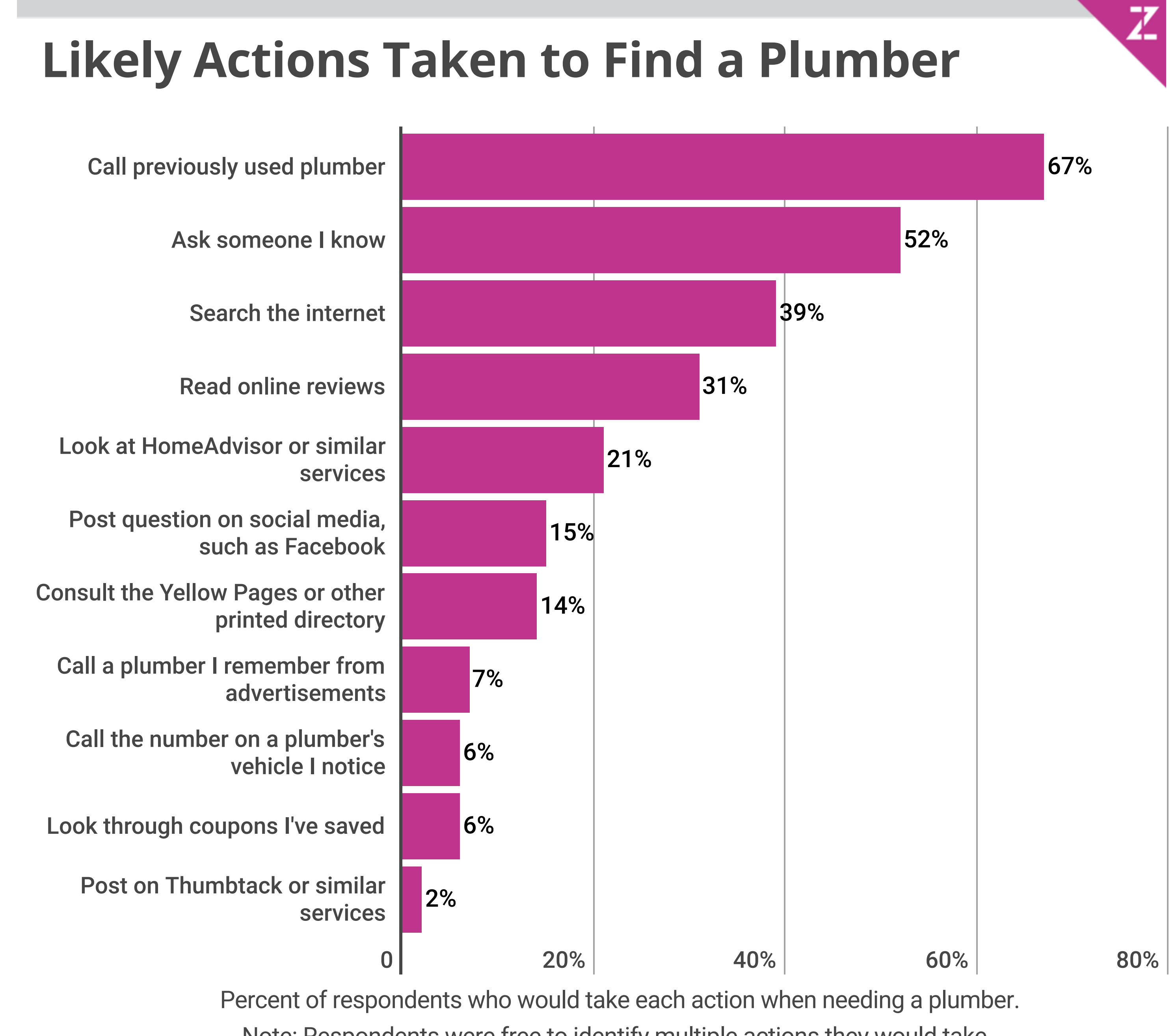
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To better understand how people find and remember home-services providers, the Zion & Zion research team conducted a nationwide survey of 863 adult homeowners (age 25+). We investigated what actions people take to find a plumber and the role that memory plays in the decision-making process. We found that the vast majority of people first want to turn to a provider they've used before; that nearly half have trouble remembering who that was; and that as time goes by, it becomes more difficult for people to locate the contact information of their last-used plumbing company. We also present implications of our findings for the home-service industry.

THE FIRST CALL

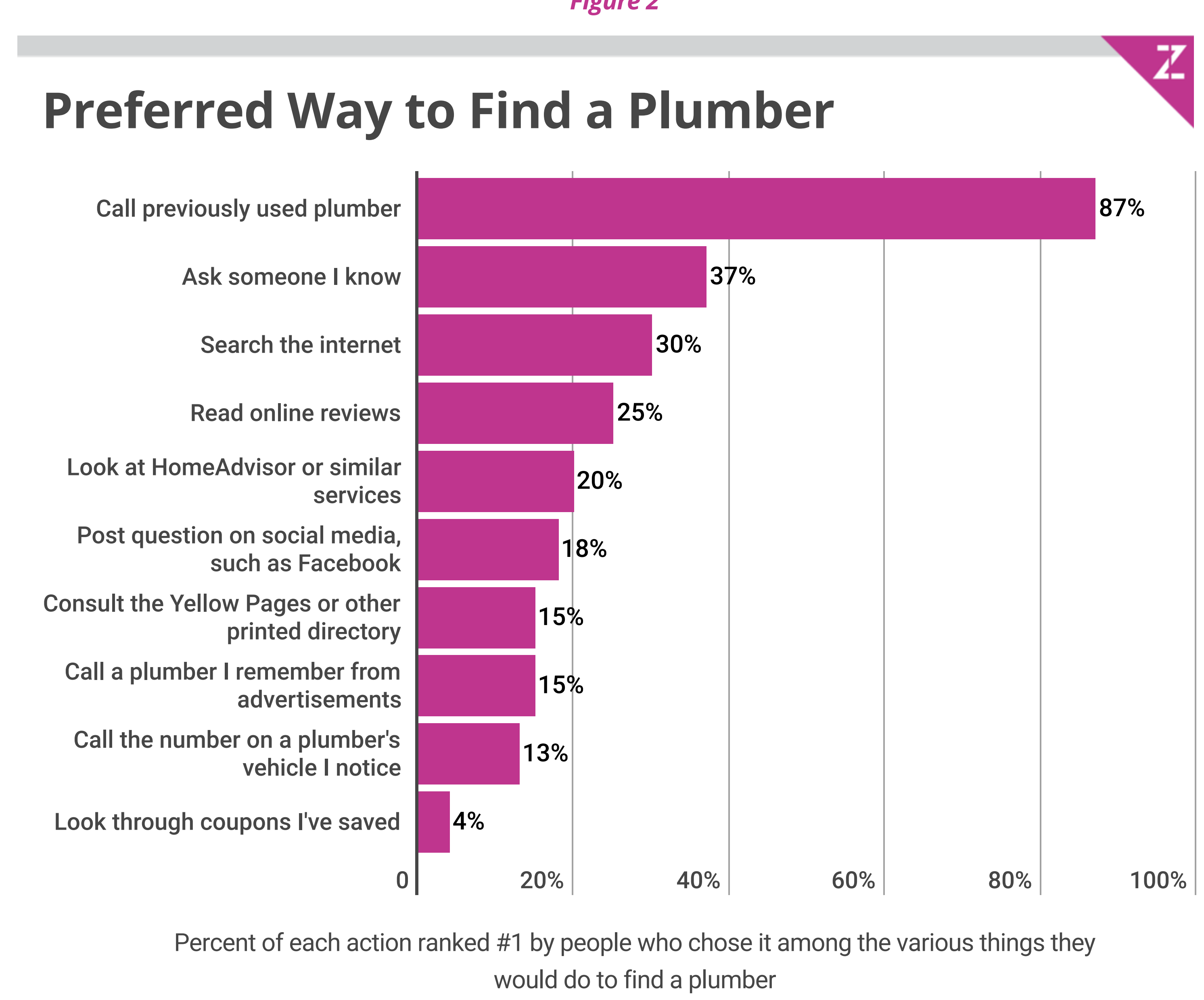
As a strong testament to the comfort of familiarity and to perhaps rewarding a previous job well done, an impressive majority of consumers prefer to call a plumbing company they've used before. In our survey, 67% of all respondents said that calling a prior plumbing company would be one of the actions they take when needing service (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



When asked to prioritize the various actions they would take to find a plumbing company, the reliance on a former service provider becomes even more pronounced. Figure 2 shows that among people who chose calling a previously used plumbing company as one of the actions they would take, 87% of them named it the first thing they would do.

Figure 2



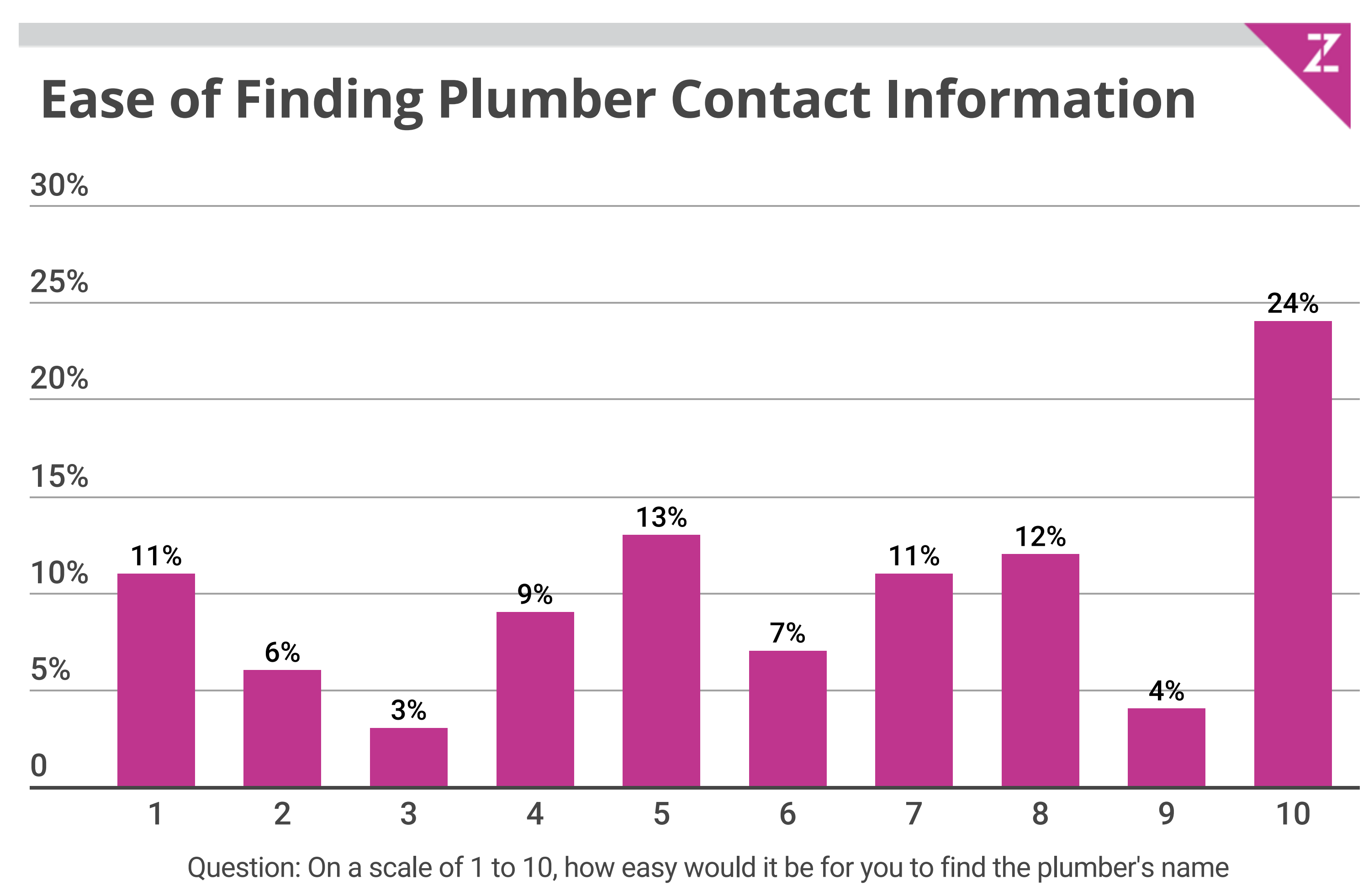
REMEMBERING THE PLUMBING COMPANY

However, while people may desire to contact a former plumbing company, they may actually never be able to make such a call as nearly half couldn't recall which company it was that they used last. This is an eye opener for companies that rely on repeat business and referrals.

We asked consumers if they could remember the name of the last plumbing company they used without looking it up or referring to anything. 45.1% could not remember the name of the plumbing company they used most recently.

While it's significant that nearly half of consumers can't remember the name of their plumbing company, all is not lost. Of the people who could not name their plumbing company off the top of their head, nearly 25% said it would be very easy for them to find. Figure 3 shows how easy it would be for these respondents to find their plumbing company's contact information.

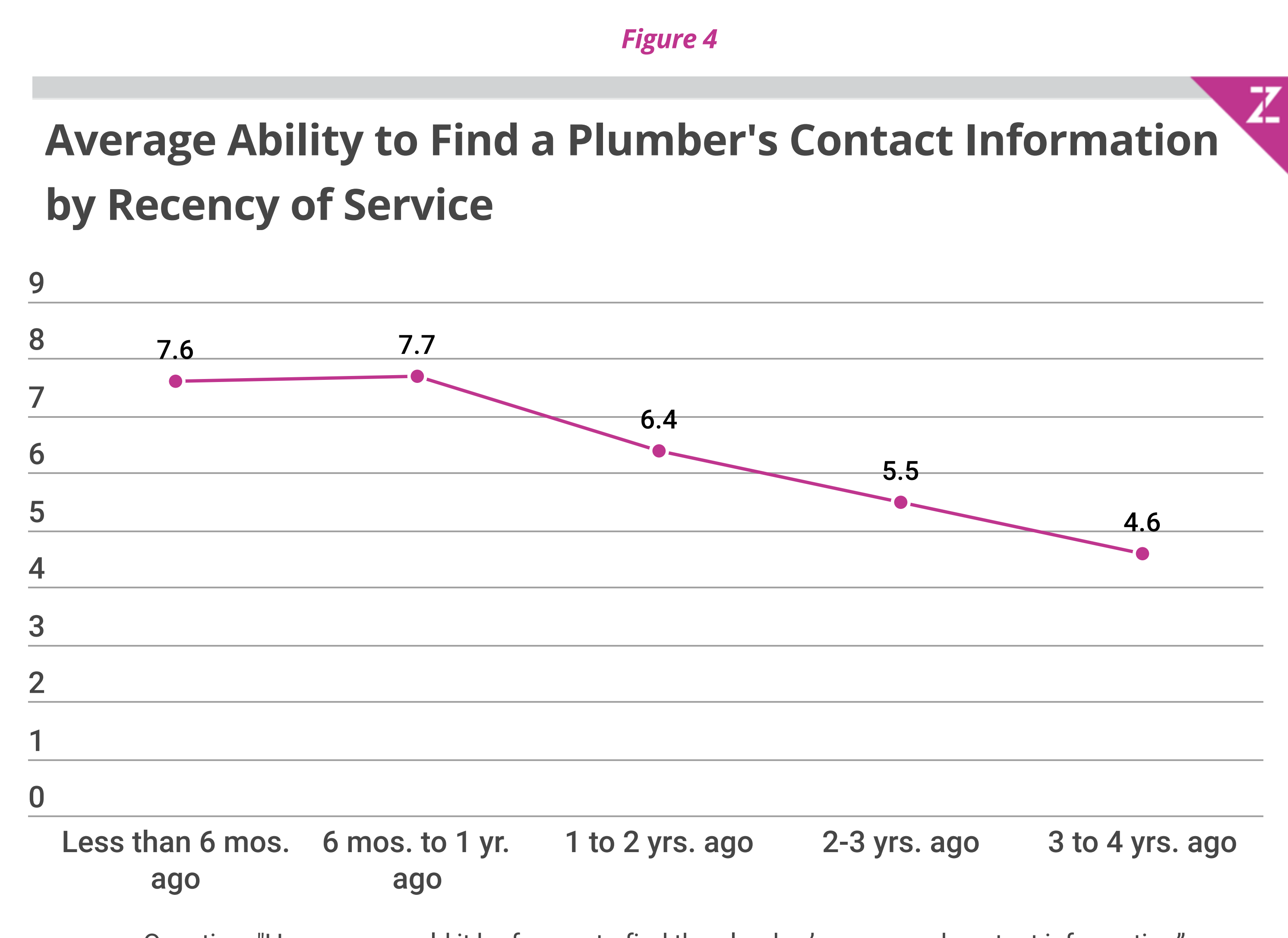
Figure 3



On a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being "very difficult" and 10 being "very easy," 24% of those who could not remember their provider's name chose 10. While that's nearly a quarter of all respondents, 42% of people ranked their ease of locating the plumbing company from 1 to 5. That's an alarming number of people who don't have confidence they can find the name of their past plumbing company.

A view of this data based on recency is also illuminating (see Figure 4). We asked respondents when they last called a plumbing company, and we cross-referenced it with their likely ease of being able to find the plumbing company's contact information (from 1 to 10, with 10 being very easy to find).

Figure 4



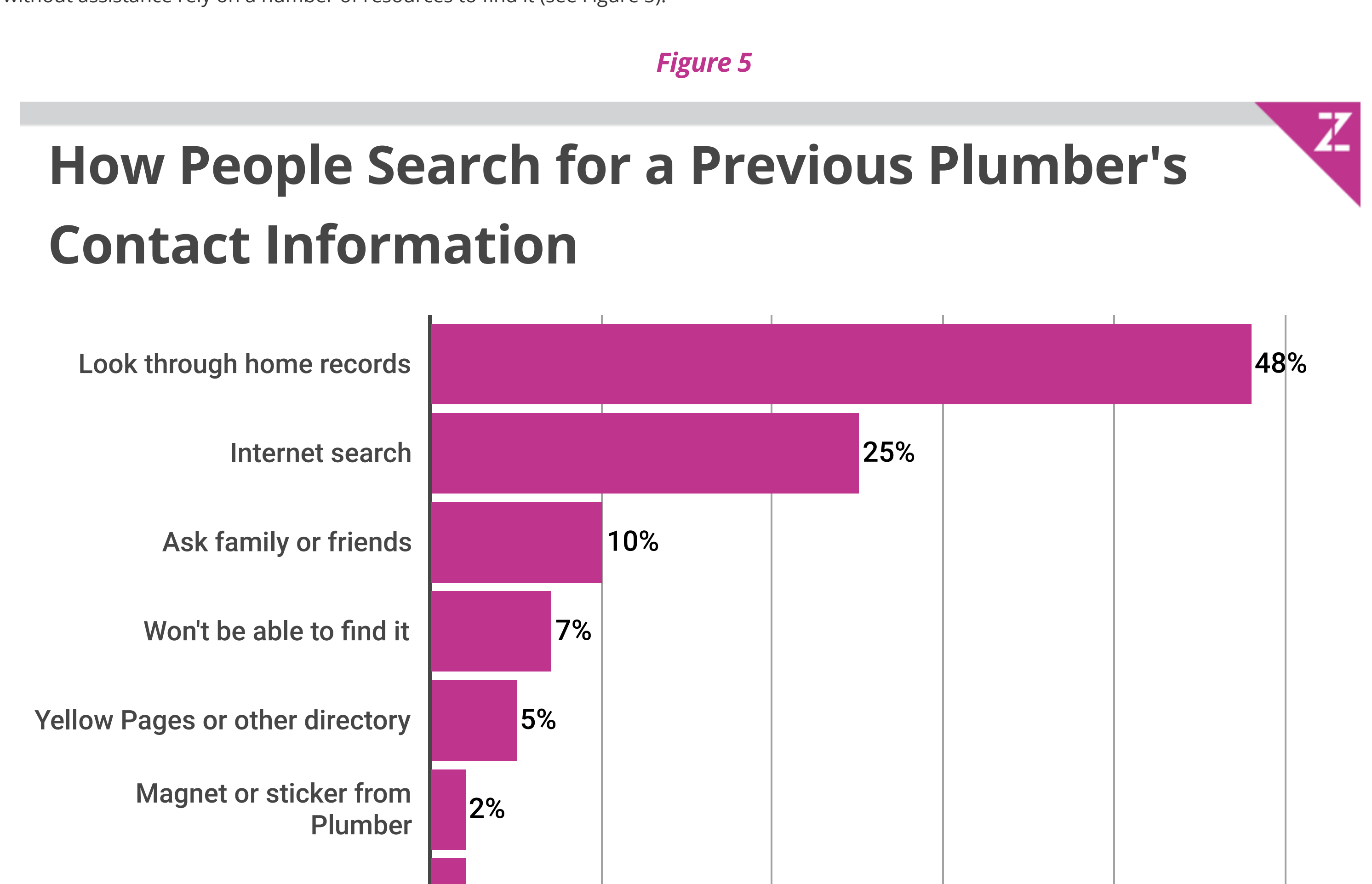
The downward arc is compelling evidence that people will have greater difficulty in finding a plumbing company's contact information as time goes by. Within the first 12 months of service, respondents' self-rated ability to find their last-used plumber's contact info is a very healthy 7.7 (out of 10). But after that, their confidence falls exponentially—a 40% drop by year three.

That people are unlikely to find a plumbing company's contact information after 36 months isn't surprising; memories fade, and documents that might have provided clues to the plumbing company's identity become more difficult to find. Respondents last called a plumbing company an average of 28.3 months ago, or well over two years. At that point, the ability to find their plumbing company's contact information has already degraded substantially and is in danger of slipping away entirely. When a consumer has any difficulty finding their previous plumbing company's contact information, the door opens for a competitor to be given an opportunity.

MEMORY PROMPTS

Unless a plumbing company is consistent with its one-to-one marketing or institutes a special program to help customers be more likely to recall them when they need a plumbing company, consumers are pretty much on their own. The 45% of people who can't remember their plumbing company without assistance rely on a number of resources to find it (see Figure 5).

Figure 5



Far and away in the lead at 48%, consumers look through home records to find the name of a previous plumbing company. This method includes looking through:

- Receipts, invoices, checkbook registers and bank statements
- Contact lists, calendars, address books and business card files
- House repair/maintenance files or notes
- Emails and text message archives

When customers can't find their plumbing company's name in home records, they next turn to the place they may have found the plumbing company in the first place: the internet.

PUTTING THE DATA TO WORK

Our research suggests three actions plumbing companies can take to substantially improve the odds that customers will return. First, plumbing company owners who aren't happy with repeat or referral business may not need to look beyond fine-tuning their direct marketing and providing handy reference devices. While budgetary constraints may keep some plumbing companies from mass-market advertising, there should be no skipping on direct marketing to existing customers. It is well-established that it is cheaper to keep a customer than to acquire a new one, so there should be significant focus on staying in touch with customers. Quarterly newsletters, emails and "anniversary of your service" celebrations can go a long way to ensure that your customer will remember who you are when there's a plumbing emergency.

Second, to help the 45% of consumers who need help finding your contact information, we suggest innovative programs that will alleviate customers from having to rummage through their records to find a plumbing company's number. For example, at the first visit some plumbing companies already give the homeowner a memory device. This is a common approach, with home-service companies often providing a business card or refrigerator magnet, or placing stickers on the appliances they service, but this is generally out of sight and out of mind. Our survey suggests this may not be enough. Only 2% of consumers look for such devices when trying to remember the previous plumber's contact information. More innovative approaches are needed. What if the plumbing company gave each customer a special branded "my home" 3-ring binder with tabs and pocket folders to keep information about each type of home-service provider, such as landscapers, HVAC, roofers and plumbing companies? The plumbing company tab/info would already be filled out, with a copy of the receipt already tucked away inside the notebook. Customers are likely to appreciate such a terrific and practical parting gift, and it's likely that the notebook would be saved and used. Regardless of the approach plumbing and home-service companies have the opportunity to realize the true potential of customer lifetime value by working harder to make it easier for their customers to remember them and return.