

PRO

Painter

FALL 2017 VOLUME 12, #2

Residential | Commercial | Institutional | Industrial

EXPERT PAINTING

Chris Hodgins and his brother are building on the firm their father started more than 40 years ago



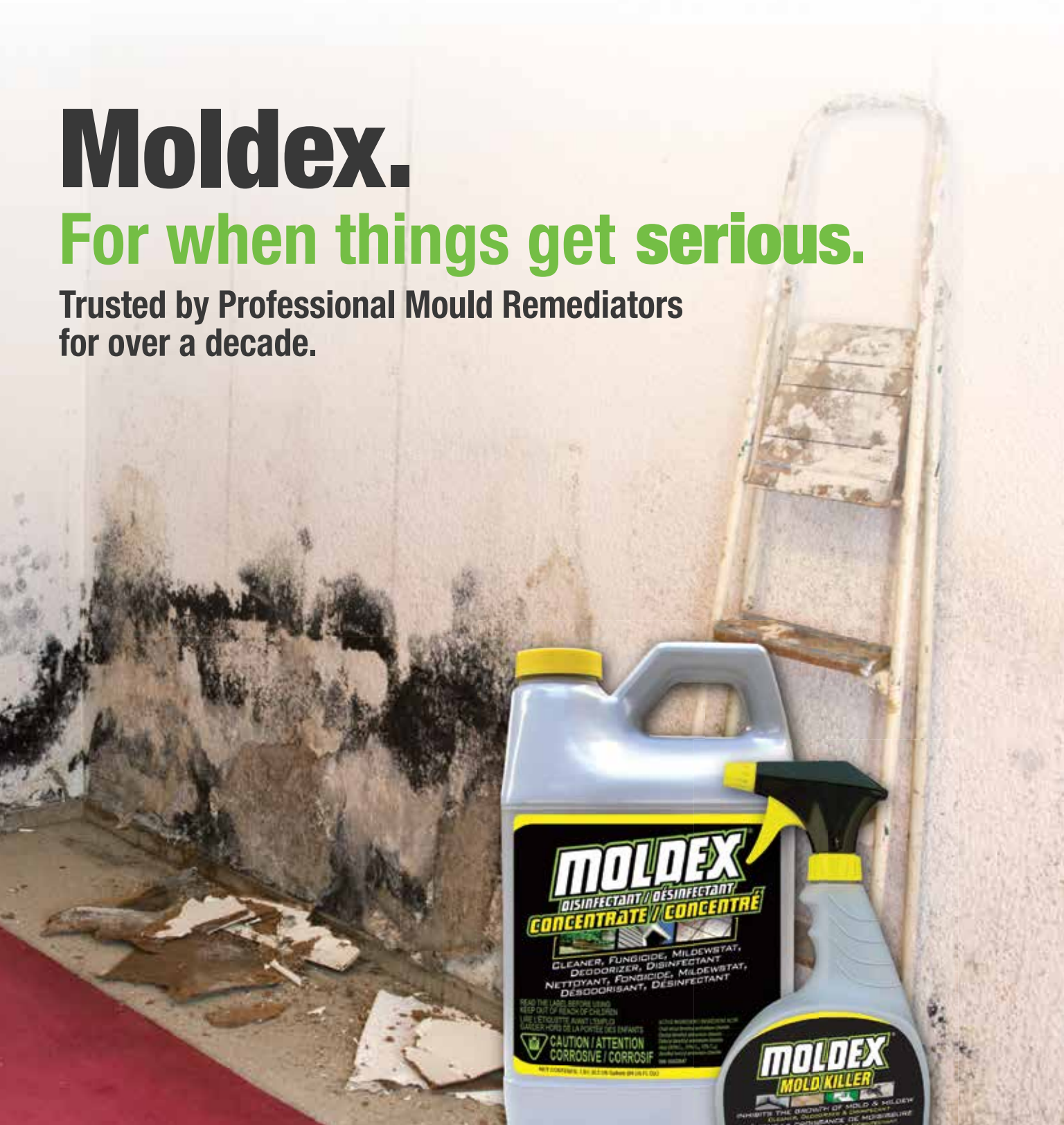
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FEATURES

10 Exterior Wood Prep

Steve Maxwell's tips for Canada-proof coatings for a harsh climate

16 Cover Story: Chris Hodgins, Expert Painting

How the Hodgins family has built a dynamic commercial and residential paint contracting firm in Kitchener, Ontario

22 Painting Masonry

Purists say never to do it – and they are completely wrong. Steve Maxwell on how to do it right.

26 Six BAD Reasons to Start a Painting Business

There are so many good reasons – but these ones will lead to owner dissatisfaction.

10



16



COVER PHOTO: LARRY ARNAL.

22



DEPARTMENTS

4 Editorial

Lessons learned from a Chinese motorcycle

6 Facebook Conversation

What is the best paint for vinyl siding? Surprise: there is one!

7 New Products

15 News

30 Brag Page

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By Steve Maxwell

Lessons Learned From a Chinese Motorcycle

Sometimes the little things in life determine success or failure, and experiences that one of my sons and I had with a Chinese motorcycle reminded me of this.

When Joseph was 12, he got the urge to buy himself an off-road dirt bike. Nothing large, just something to toot around the country property where we live. Joe had a couple of thousand dollars saved, and that would buy him a decent but used name-brand bike. Somewhere along the line he discovered that he could buy a brand new discount motorcycle made in China for half as much as a used Japanese bike cost, so that's what he did. The little motorcycle arrived in a wooden crate needing some assembly. Shortly after getting the thing running, an old-timer came over and warned us about something. "The nuts and bolts on those Chinese motorcycles are always coming loose", he warned. "Better put Loctite on all of them before you lose something."



This sounded crazy to me, but he was right. It's not that the motorcycle vibrated much, either. In fact, it ran smoothly and started on the first kick. But sure enough, things fell off that bike every day or two. Sometimes this was no big deal, other times it caused metal parts to break. I spent a lot of time wrenching, welding and delivering TLC to this "bargain" bike. I also bought a big bottle of Loctite.

The problem, as I discovered upon close examination, was something very small but crucial. The fit between the threads on the nuts and bolts was loose. Although they seemed to tighten properly with a wrench, there wasn't enough friction between the threads to keep nuts and bolts together reliably. Everything else about Joe's Chinese motorcycle worked great, but it turned out to be a massive make-work project for me because the fit of small but crucial details was deficient.

The deficiency of small but crucial details can affect your painting business, too. Just like Joe's motorcycle, the difference between success and failure can sometimes be nothing more than a small detail here or a little tweak there. Do you gather and use testimonials from happy clients? Do you capture photos of your best work and use them for promotion? Have you taken steps to connect with contractors you can trust to handle overflow work? All these things and more are the business equivalent of the fit between nuts and bolts on a boy's hard-earned dirt bike. Are there small things coming loose regularly on your business? Fix them and life will be better. pp

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A FACEBOOK CONVERSATION

Pro Painter magazine's Facebook page group has attracted a loyal following over the years. The conversation below is a small part of what our Facebook painters are talking about while they help each other learn and grow professionally.



Nikki Fish Todd Driehorst

I have a lady that wants her vinyl siding painted, told her it wasn't happening. A good friend who has been a contractor for 30+ years told me he painted vinyl siding 10 years ago and it still looks like new, but he can't remember what he used. Can anybody lead me in the right direction?



Randall Gibson : There's all kinds of products that work these days specially formulated just for that. I've been using Sun-Proof from PPG with good success for the last 4 years. (That's what my employer purchased but it works.) Ben Moore makes a good one too.



Nicholas Perry:

I've done it probably 15 times. My own house also. Any exterior acrylic latex. Light colors only.



Jenny Burroughs: Gripper is a great primer, but primers aren't necessary when painting vinyl. Go direct with 100% acrylic. My favorite is PPG Sun-Proof. A new formula was just launched too!!



Sean Shaffer: I wouldn't recommend a big color change because they make siding different thickness for different colors so doing a major color change could cause warping in the sun. That being said Sherwin-Williams Multi-Surface Acrylic is a fantastic product. Also, definitely spray it. Anyone who thinks brushing and rolling would look better isn't a professional in my book. Ever see anyone brush and roll a car? Spray finish is the best when you know how to do it . . .



Geoff Smith: In 1994 I painted a house with avocado siding using 25 year Sears WeatherBeater latex after a TSP wash. Painted white over green with 2 coats and today it still looks like new. If you think latex won't adhere to aging siding, try to scrape or clean off the last person's paint from 10 years ago who was sloppy with their application technique around windows etc. It tends to stay where it was put down . . .

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EFFICIENT EXTERIOR WOOD PREP

How to get the most from
scrapers, abrasives and heat



The most challenging and important part of painting exterior wood is almost never the painting itself. The real trick is creating a paint-ready surface beforehand. This fact applies to both brand new wood and previously painted wood attacked by the ravages of sunlight, moisture and seasonal temperature changes. These forces are why flaking, bubbling and peeling is always worse outdoors than inside. Although there are effective tools for this kind of surface prep, there's no magic bullet. Successful, efficient surface prep involves finesse and knowledge that's not immediately obvious. Many painters would do better at surface prep if they had more detailed insights about choosing prep tools and maintaining them. That's what this article is all about. Put this knowledge into practice the right way and it'll save you time and help you make more money.

Although it's not essential to remove areas of old paint that are rock solid, you must go back to bare wood in places where peeling, bubbling and cracking is even a little visible. This is a given. You might even consider removing solid old paint in the interests of making your new paint look its best. The ridges left where old paint remains can make new paint look bad. Either way, you'll need to experiment to determine with the main surface prep tools below to see what makes sense for a given application. Each job is unique.

Scrapers for Bulk Paint Removal

While every experienced painter knows about the different designs of scrapers, too few understand how to make these tools fully effective. It all comes down to

Surface Prep and Your Bottom Line

As a painter you're in business, and every profitable business opportunity sits behind a wall of difficulty. The higher the wall, the bigger the profits on the other side. The lower the wall of difficulty the more competition exists, driving down prices and profits. In the case of exterior painting, the wall of difficulty is mostly about the challenges of surface prep. To win the most profits out of this challenge you need to do three things. First, you must convince your client that proper surface prep is key to a long lasting paint job. You have to differentiate yourself from slip-shod painters out there who simply pretend to do surface prep but really don't get it done at all. Second, you need to become efficient at surface prep operations. And third, you need to bid accurately on exterior jobs. If you take the "safe" way out and strike a deal on time and materials, the project owner gets all the gains from the hard-won surface prep efficiency you've learned. And if you do bid but bid short, you'll make less money than you should have.



sharpening. Start using a brand new scraper of any kind and it'll bite well. An hour later, not so well. A day later and you've probably lost 50 per cent of your former efficiency. Maybe more. To optimize scraper effectiveness, you need the tool to remain at or near peak sharpness. Scrapers with replaceable blades are one option, but learning to resharpen scrapers is at least as effective, and in some cases faster and more economical than replacing blades.

A sharp file, a belt sander and a bench grinder are three tools for sharpening scrapers. You'll find a 10" mill bastard file with a wooden handle is perfect for sharpening scrapers as they sit in a vise. Store the file wrapped in a cloth or inside a leather sheath because banging around in a tool box dulls a file faster than hard use.

An ordinary woodworking belt sander is another option for sharpening. Lock it upside down gently in a vise or a workmate and you've got a great way to sharpen scrapers. A 120-grit belt does the job perfectly. Remove the dust bag and do the work outdoors to eliminate any fire hazard caused by sparks.

Possibly the best way to sharpen paint scrapers is with a bench grinder, but don't use the grinding wheel that comes from the factory. It's too coarse and it causes too much heat build up. A cool running wheel is far better. It allows more precision and it generates far less metal-damaging heat.

Regardless of the tool you use to sharpen scrapers, look closely at a new scraper blade to show you the optimal angle to aim for. Most scrapers are ground to a fairly steep bevel, anywhere from 60° to 85°. Copy what you see.

Got Rot?

With bad paint removed, have you found punky wood? If the situation isn't structural, you can fill the space and paint over. Scrape out the soft stuff, kill the active rot organisms, solidify any remaining spongy areas with wood consolidator, then fill the cavities with an epoxy-based filler. Whatever you do, don't just jump in and use autobody compound. As effective as it is on metal, autobody products are too brittle for use on exterior wood with all its seasonal movement. It'll simply crack and fall out in short order. Besides, the microbes that produce rot need to be killed before filling or they'll just keep working below the surface. Don't forget this step.

Heat for Softening Paint

This is one of the best ways to soften solid layers of old paint to make it easier to scrape, but heat poses risks. Traditional paint-softening with a propane torch and flame spreader is effective, but poses a fire hazard. A propane flame also vaporizes lead if it's present in the existing paint layers because the process involves temperatures hotter than 1100°F. Any paint layer applied before 1978 could contain lead, and paint that's older than 50 years almost certainly does contain lead.



Although softening paint with an open flame can fill your body with toxins, there are two heat-related approaches that are safe. One is an electric heat gun that operates below 1100°F. This is the vaporization point of

Why This Paint Failed

The paint you see here was applied 15 years ago to new lumber, but it began peeling just a few years after it went down. Now it's a massive disaster. Complete lack of surface prep is the reason why. Primer and paint was simply sloshed onto the new wood, even though new lumber can't hold paint well. The surface simply isn't absorbent enough. See the way this paint has peeled cleanly? It highlights the importance of a two-step process for prepping new wood for paint. Start by pressure washing with plain water to quickly break down the mill glaze that prevents paint absorption, then follow up with a quick sanding of the dry wood to mow down any raised surface fibers. The combination of pressure washing followed by sanding takes less time than sanding alone. If this two-step operation had been done here, the paint layer would still be sound.



lead. Keep paint temperatures lower than this and the lead stays in the old paint. An even more effective choice is the infrared paint stripper. It's a handheld electric tool that uses glowing red heating elements to warm paint by "shining" on it. Soften an area, move the paint heater to the next spot, then scrape what you just heated while the new area is heating.

Abrasion for Final Prep

When it comes to paint prep, there are two kinds of abrasives: wire wheels and sanding disks. A wire cup wheel in a variable speed angle grinder is an aggres-





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sive tool for initial paint removal. You'll find the knot-twisted version of the wire cup wheel the best for this application because the wires last longer and work better on loose paint. Straight wire wheels don't last nearly as long and they're not aggressive enough for most paint removal situations. You don't necessarily need variable speed control on your angle grinder, but it's a great feature. The ability to slow down the speed of the wheel is useful when working in close quarters or inside corners.



No matter what preliminary steps you used for stripping old paint, sanding the surface is the ultimate final step before repainting. That's because nothing beats the right kind of abrasion for creating optimal absorbency on a wood surface. You can leave sanding out on some

The Truth About Pressure Washing

A pressure washer is a useful prep tool for large exterior surfaces because it lets you cover a lot of ground quickly. But there are two reasons why a pressure washer alone is never enough. First, the spray stream doesn't necessarily remove all loose paint. It can rip most of it off, but about 20% of flaky paint will remain



because the high pressure spray stream is simply pushing it harder against the surface, not tearing it off. And second, no matter how carefully you use a pressure

washer on a wood, it'll lead to fuzzy surface fibers. This isn't a problem as long as those fibers are removed with an abrasive before painting happens. The good news is that surface fibers raised by a pressure washer fall right off with just a quick pass of the right kind of sander if you let the washed surface dry completely first.

Mackinac Island – The Land of Painted Wood



Some places in the world don't have much exterior wood, while others have it everywhere. Mackinac Island is definitely an exterior wood sort of place. It's located in the Great Lakes region near the border of Canada and the USA and it's covered in gorgeous buildings sided in wood clapboard and shingles. Many of these buildings are more than a century old, but even the new ones are required to follow architectural rules that demand exterior wood. Naturally, painting and repainting in a place like Mackinac is a way of life and the people there are good at it. Their prep trick? Just the basics of washing, heating, scraping and sanding. They also have a commitment to wood that shows up in the quality of the place. So next time you have a client who's thinking of tearing off perfectly good wood siding just because they don't want to invest in repainting, explain that the best wood buildings in the world aren't covered in vinyl.

jobs if the budget won't allow it, but sanding is always the best final step because it creates the ultimate paint-ready surface. The trick is choosing the kind of sander that'll be effective, plus the kind of abrasive that creates the most absorbency.

For typical paint prep work, a hand-held 6" random orbit sander is ideal. Though a tool like this is just a little physically larger than the more common 5" random orbit sander, a 6" model is roughly twice as effective. Part of this is because it has a larger disk, but more than that is that 6" models have much more powerful motors. An 80-grit disk on this tool creates the best balance between a smooth surfaces that's still rough enough to offer a good grip for paint. Too smooth actually reduces absorbency.

Exterior paint prep is like a combination lock. You've got to get all the details right for the lock to open. Combine the right tools and information with a commitment to detail and you'll be better than average at this essential exterior painting skill. pp

DULUX Paints launches 'first-of-its-kind' painters marketplace

If you're a Canadian pro-painter or contractor looking to brush up your painting skills and grow your business, Dulux Paints has an opportunity for you.

Earlier this year, Dulux launched an online painters marketplace, promoting professional painters and contractors from coast to coast who have been trained in applying new, leading-edge Dulux Effect Finishes paint.

"Our goal is to support and promote Canada's top professional painters and contractors, while enabling them to differentiate themselves in a competitive market with a unique skill set and tools affiliated with a leading paint brand," said Martin Tustin-Fuchs, brand manager for the Dulux paints brand of PPG.

"You don't need to be an artist to create a masterpiece with Dulux Effect Finishes, but with the proper training, you can take the results of a paint job to the next level, delivering striking walls that completely transform a decor, even if nothing else in the room is changed."

Dulux is offering training workshops for professional

painters and contractors country-wide. Offered for \$300, the full-day, hands-on course includes a supply of Dulux Effect Finishes products, applicators, sample board and colour tools – with a value well beyond the cost of the course, Tustin-Fuchs explained.

"It's a win-win opportunity for the paint trade," he said. "Our message to pro-painters is that Dulux Paints will teach you new skills and techniques under professional guidance, and promote your skills and services through our new online marketplace to help you attract and better serve clients."

Accessed at findapainter.dulux.ca, the national marketplace features a growing list of pro-painters and contractors divided according to region. "Each month, additional pro-painters will be added as they become trained as masters in Dulux Effect Finishes," Tustin-Fuchs said.

For a list of workshop locations and dates, and to register, please contact your local Dulux Paints store or Dulux Paints representative. *pp*

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Tom Atkinson, Peter Kober, Norman Melanson and Mike O'Reilly are four of the painters on the Expert Painting crew.

EXPERT PAINTERS

How this second generation Kitchener firm became an Ontario institution

It's easy to start small when it comes to professional painting. That's often the way pro painters begin. A brush, a roller, a can of paint, a diligent attitude and a willing clientele are all you need. What's more difficult is growing that humble starting point so it becomes a large, stable painting organization with a long track record of happy customers as well as a reliable source of work for painters and income for their families. Growing from small to large isn't the only way to be successful as a pro painter, but when a painting organization does grow successfully, it's worth looking at because it happens so rarely.

Kenneth Hodgins Sr. started Expert Painting Inc in 1971 as a one-man show based out of a small farm house on Balzer Road in Kitchener, Ontario. It's since grown into a pillar of the southwestern Ontario industrial, commercial and institutional painting scene. Chris and Casey Hodgins are sons of the founder and they own and manage the business these days. Casey and Chris took over day-to-day operations from their dad in 2010, and their client list includes some of the biggest landmarks in southwestern Ontario: Maple Leaf Foods, Grand River Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital, University of Waterloo, Dare Foods, the famous Cove Island lighthouse, too many school boards to list, plus manufacturing plants and municipal facilities across the region.

"My dad grew the business in the early days from one basic philosophy – hard work", explains Chris. "When he first got into the industry he knew very little about painting. By working hard and learning everything possible he was able to

grow and land more projects. Hiring in the early years was either by ads in the local news paper, through local paint stores or from family and friends."

Ken's no longer involved directly in management – he spends winters in Florida – but he often stops in to the office when he's in Canada. "Dad's only ever a phone call away", explains Casey, "and happy to offer advice from his many years of experience."

"Like most start ups, my dad began as a lone painter with a passion for the industry and a vision to grow", says Chris. "I've been involved in the company ever since I can remember. Starting out in summers prepping for the more experienced painters and learning the trade from them, I always knew I wanted to be involved in the painting industry. Learning the trade from the inside has been great."

Part of the reason Expert Painting has succeeded is stability, both for customers and painters. "We've always used employees instead of

“ Like most start ups, my dad began as a lone painter with a passion for the industry and a vision to grow,” says Ken Hodgins’ son Chris. Along with his brother Casey, the sons are now the owners.



The Expert Painting facility includes a large warehouse, space for storing scaffolding, lifts, painting equipment and supplies.

Cash is King

It's not unusual for solo painters or hired employees to set out on their own and try to build a painting business. There are lots of reasons to want to do this, not the least of which is the ability to spend winters in Florida at some stage in your career. But just because you want something doesn't mean you know how to get it. Running a painting business is entirely different than painting, and one of the big differences is financial. "The construction industry typically pays 30 to 90 days after completion of a project", explains Chris. "Then there are hold-backs that can delay full payment even longer. Not having enough cash to meet payroll can make things difficult for a young company. You need access to cash as a basis for any startup."



We always tried to earn respect in the community," says Casey. "We have maintained an A+ rating at the Better Business Bureau for over 30 years... My dad's focus was always to deliver high quality service at reasonable prices."

subs or independent contractors in our business", says Casey. "I believe our customers hire us for a reason, and it's not to have subs do the work. We currently have 20 to 25 employees during the busy summer season."

Expert Painting is the longest standing firm in what's called the "tri-cities" area of southern Ontario: Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo. The company has moved three times in its history, always to accommodate growth.

Growing larger as a company takes time, patience and skill, but it also makes greater efficiencies possible. A bigger team with bigger facilities means more specialization can happen. Office staff handles paperwork and invoicing that would normally fall to the owner of a small painting business. Large companies can also save time by making the flow of paint and painting supplies more efficient. But of course, no startup can begin this way. Chris and Casey's mom, Heather, managed paperwork in the early days. Invoicing and estimates were sent by mail or delivered by hand. Fax machines were used when they became available. Now it's all email.

"Our current office and warehouse allows all of our full time office staff to work in a comfortable environment," says Chris, "while the bay at the back of the building

allows for easy and quick access to our painting supplies. We don't typically buy paint in bulk for future projects as many paints are unique and require different applications, but do buy basic drywall primer in bulk and store it in the shop. We also have several hundred gallons of paint stored in our shop as well as a paint shaker. The majority of this is left over from projects. Sometimes situations come up where we can mix and tint this paint to use as primer and help cut back on waste. Other than this we let our local paint suppliers take care of tinting."

The Hodgins put a lot of emphasis on building and maintaining business relationships as a source for new contracts, and that's something painting companies of any size can do.

"We always tried to earn respect in the community", says Casey. "We've maintained an A+ rating at the Better Business Bureau for over 30 years, we're members of local business associations and we contribute to local sports communities."

Phases of Growth

"My dad's focus was always to deliver high quality service at reasonable prices, and this is one thing that's been behind our success," says Chris. "In the summer of 1988 we packed up and moved to a larger location in town and stayed there for 22 years. In 2010, we moved again to our present spot. This place is bigger and more conveniently located."

"The painting industry has changed significantly over the last 40 years," explains Chris. "Part of this is driven by different products that are available today. Safety standards have gotten more demanding as well."

Working mainly in the industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) sectors, Expert Painting markets themselves differently than a residential painting business might.

Expert Painting project at a local high school auditorium.

“Being a member of the business organization Grand Valley Construction Association (GVCA) helps us make connections with ICI clients”, says Chris. “We also have a website, of course, and logos on vehicles. Our full size office and shop has our sign out front, too. We sponsor sports teams throughout the region and you can see our bright red and white Expert Painting hockey jerseys around the arenas on any given night. We still have a small section in the Yellow Pages, but being around so long we’ve developed some great working relationships.”

Great relationships don’t happen just by being around a long time, though. Expert Painting works at this in tangible ways. “We make it a point to give back to the community, including through local charities,” explains Casey.

How Expert Painting Inc Operates

Expert Painting handles about 150 projects each year, ranging from one-day jobs to projects that last several months. They’ve always focussed on the institutional, commercial and industrial sectors, too. Over the past 5-10 years they’ve been more commercial and institutional as some of the larger factories in the area have closed. About 10 per cent of Expert’s work is residential. “In most cases we recommend another painting contractor that prefers this type of work”, explains Casey.

“Business management skills have become increasingly important to professional painting contractors”, says Chris. “We’re being asked to play a more active part in the day-to-day management of job sequencing. In years previous our role was limited to supplying general labour, but today we’re often part of the decision-making team on projects.”

Successful businesses usually have a simple focus behind everything they do, and that’s the case



Tips for Success

One of the best ways to grow a successful painting business is to learn from companies that have done just that. Here are Casey and Chris's tips for painting entrepreneurs looking to grow:

Tip #1

Hire a foreman who doesn't need hand holding.

The role of a foreman is to manage the troops so you can manage the company and your first foreman is crucial. If a person can't handle all aspects of managing a crew and ordering materials while also painting, then you need a new foreman.

Tip #2

Grow only when you really have the resources to grow.

Growth is good, but it can also blow up in your face if you try it too soon. Don't let your enthusiasm for growth get the better of you. If you don't have additional skilled labour, efficient methods for ordering and distributing more materials, and time or staff to handle additional office tasks, then more business could kill an otherwise good company.

Tip #3

Get good at estimating.

Accurate estimating is crucial and it takes time and practice to master. You also need to keep a diligent eye on how you're doing if you expect to get better. Record how long a job takes, carefully keep track of all expenses, then compare these numbers with revenues. This is always a pain, and sometimes painful if you've underbid. Just the same, you won't get good at the essential job of estimating if you do it by the seat of your pants. "Some of the bigger estimating mistakes I made were in areas outside our expertise", says Chris. "I've learned to stick to what I know. I never bid on even the smallest thing unless I have experience in that area."



Chris (left), founding father Ken and Casey Hodgins outside their Kitchener, Ontario headquarters.

with Expert Painting. They take great pride in following four major rules:

1. Do whatever it takes to use the right products to suit the needs of the client.
2. Work hard to make sure everyone on the team of painters is a real pro.
3. Do whatever it takes to complete all projects on time.
4. Always complete projects on budget.

All employees are fully trained and updated regularly on all of the industry requirements for the profession. This includes Health and Safety, WHMIS, Fall Protection, Confined Space and Lift Tickets. "The industry is changing quickly, so there are other certifications we train and update for, too", says Casey.

"We're fortunate to have knowledgeable foreman capable of managing a crew and ordering materials ahead of time to minimize downtime. This is key for meeting tight project deadlines and keeping crews productive", explains Chris.

Foremen always paint alongside the crew they manage, too. "This gives them a good sense of the products being used and paint quantities required for the week", explains Chris. Foremen let me know when to place orders so paint is ready and down time reduced." The average

number of painters on our projects is two or three. Sometimes the company might have ten on one job when they need a quick turn-around.

"We aim to grow our company by building relationships with our existing customers and by being reliable", says Casey. "Adapting to the latest technology is also a key ingredient in our success as well. There's new software coming out all the time to help estimate, for instance. Technology exists to help track job costs, and even to help match and order custom paint colours on site."

"There are always plans and ideas to grow the business", explains Chris, "but we don't want to grow to the point where we can no longer provide the same level of quality the company was built on. It's especially hard to grow in a industry where people are losing interest in learning the trade. We're finding it more and more difficult to find skilled painters or even people that want to learn the trade at all."

Expert Painting is one of those rare success stories where a one-man show grows into a stable organization over several generations. The world of painting needs companies like these just like it needs solo painters, too. Whether or not you have aspirations to grow your own company, there are always lessons to be learned from people who've grown successfully over the long haul. pp



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HOW TO PAINT MASONRY

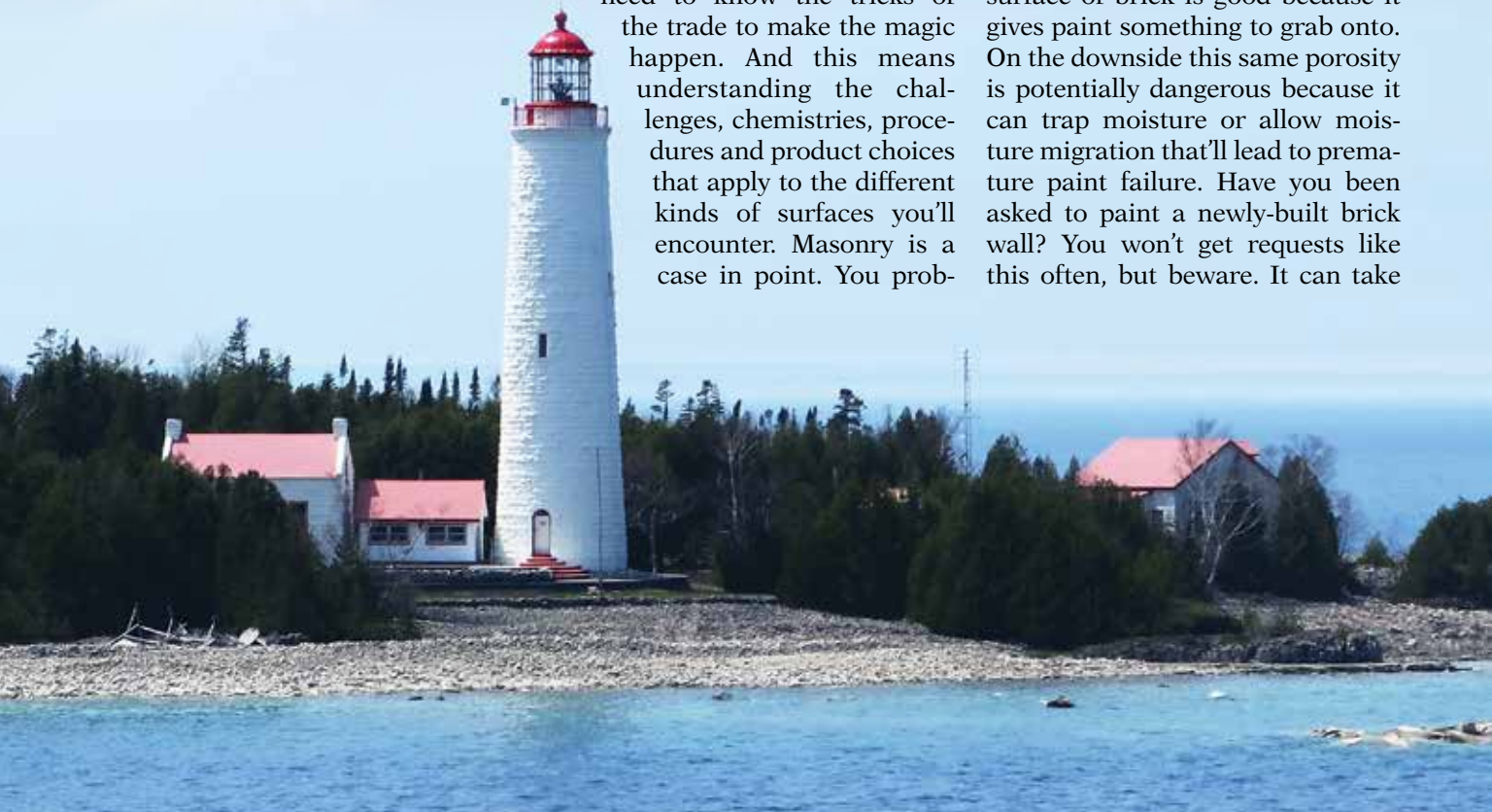
Real-world tips for dealing with brick, block and stone

From the perspective of your clients, painting is pretty simple. Wet, coloured stuff goes on buildings, spaces and rooms, making everything look better. That's pretty simple and it's all most non-painters want to know. But as a painting professional with a brush and roller in your hand, you need to know the tricks of the trade to make the magic happen. And this means understanding the challenges, chemistries, procedures and product choices that apply to the different kinds of surfaces you'll encounter. Masonry is a case in point. You prob-

ably won't need to paint these surfaces often, but when you do you need to get it right.

Painting Brick

Brick is one of the most porous surfaces you'll paint and this affects the way you prepare brick and coat it. On the one hand the porous surface of brick is good because it gives paint something to grab onto. On the downside this same porosity is potentially dangerous because it can trap moisture or allow moisture migration that'll lead to premature paint failure. Have you been asked to paint a newly-built brick wall? You won't get requests like this often, but beware. It can take



Dangers of Painting Exterior Brick

Exterior brick can last for centuries, but only if freezing moisture doesn't break it apart. If damp brick goes into winter weather with temperatures below freezing, this moisture will solidify, expand internally and break flakes off the brick. As this process continues it can completely destroy bricks. This is called spalling and these days modern brick is fired hot enough that moisture absorption isn't normally a problem if left bare. Bricks are also constantly tested to make sure they don't absorb damaging amounts of moisture and that they can dry out quickly. The thing is, painting exterior brick can change all this. In most locations on a wall, a coat of ordinary paint

will keep moisture out. Trouble is, if that paint film is incomplete or damaged, liquid moisture will enter the brick through the flaw and stay there. It's virtually guaranteed. Impervious paint prevents drying and can lead to brick failure in time. This dynamic is why many brick manufacturers warn against painting exterior brick in a climate that gets winter. Explain this danger to clients to protect yourself against liability if they do decide to go ahead and paint brick anyway. If you do paint exterior brick in a cold climate, be sure to use breathable paint. Google "breathable paint" to find the options. For an even simpler and breathable choice, see Traditional Lime Paint for Brick & Stone on page 25



The next time you get a request to paint brick, explain that it's a once-and-for-all move. Short of sandblasting, it's impractical to return brick to its original, unpainted state.

a year for excess moisture from the mortar to leave the brick. Your client won't want to hear they need to wait so long, but better they be disappointed and call someone else than you have to deal with paint that's coming off in sheets because moisture is migrating out of the brick.

The next time you get a request to paint brick, explain that it's a once-and-for-all move. Short of sandblasting, it's impractical to return brick to its original, unpainted state. This sounds obvious enough to you as a pro, but don't forget how much explaining non-painters need some times.

The good news in all this is that 100% acrylic exterior latex primer and paint works well for all interior brick. The thing is, you can't just slap a couple of coats on brick and leave. At a minimum you'll need to clean the brick and allow time for it to dry before painting. If you're working outdoors, pressure washing on its own is good, but wetting, brushing, then pressure washing as a final step is even better because it removes dirt more thoroughly, plus any loose particles of mortar sand or brick. Of course you'll need to skip the pressure washing indoors, but use TSP to make up for this as part of washing only by hand. Either way, leave the surface for three good drying days to allow it to dry completely after a

thorough cleaning. Got a request to paint exterior brick? See "Dangers of Painting Exterior Brick" for key info.

Most of the brick you'll be asked to paint will be old, and this could mean broken bricks or loose mortar joints. You can't expect reliable painted results on a shifty surface, so remove loose bits of mortar as you clean. Is your client reluctant to spring for a full repointing job? That's typical, but if failed mortar joint areas are less than 1" long and 3/4" deep you can fill them with paintable caulking. The best is polyurethane. It's not as common as other types, but it's worth it. Polyurethane caulking is more flexible than most: it sticks like crazy, and it's completely paintable. Squeeze some into gaps, then dip your finger in a solution of 70% water and 30% dishwashing liquid to smooth out the results. Even if the caulking is close to the same colour as the mortar, it'll still stand out visually at this stage. Things will look much better after the paint goes on. Another nice thing about polyurethane caulking is that a little moisture actually helps it cure better than dry conditions. Do your caulking work after the initial wash water has dried superficially, but before the wall has dried out enough for painting. This way both the wall and the caulking are drying at the same time.

Staining Brick

Paint isn't the only way to change the colour of brick. Stain is an option, too. Stain doesn't create a sealed or semi-sealed surface like paint can, so stain doesn't pose a risk for holding moisture within the brick. Brick stains can be used both outdoors and inside. If you've never used any before, practice on the brick with water. Brick stain and water are the same consistency so the experience you gain avoiding runs and loading your brush will be the same. Neatness and an even application are necessary for even results, so practice is worthwhile. Most brick staining jobs look best when the brick face only is coated. If you're leaving the mortar joints unstained, use a high-quality latex brush for the precision you need. One little-known application for brick stain is when matching the new brick of an addition or repair to the existing brick.

The thing about painting brick is that it's not an all-or-nothing venture. Results are more like points on a gradient. Undiluted primer and paint straight from the can will hide all the colour of bricks and some of the texture. And the more coats you add the more texture will be hidden. Does your client think they might like some of the original brick colour to show through, but not too much? Paint washing is what you need. Some people call this brick wash and it's nothing more than brushing diluted latex paint onto the wall. Brush it into the mortar joints and on the face of a couple of bricks, brush out any excess, then move on to the next area. How much water should you add to the paint? That depends on the look your client wants and the porosity of the bricks. Moving from

a more dilute mix to a more opaque one is the way to home in on the type of water-to-paint mix ratio. Start with a light mix, then add more paint, stir it completely, then try again if you want something more opaque. You can always go heavier, but not lighter. Start with 30% paint and 70% water then go thicker from there. Many painters find that a 50/50 blend of paint and tap water works fine.

Painting Concrete Block

The surface of concrete block is usually smoother than brick, but block is also used differently than brick in ways that affect painting. Block is almost always a structural element, including basement foundation walls, structural exterior walls, retaining walls and as dividing walls between properties. The

Chalk Paint on Brick

Do you have a client interested in an antique, informal painted look on interior bricks? Consider something called "wipe-on whitewashing". Not to be confused with lime-based whitewashing of wood and stone, whitewashing brick involves rubbing a superficial coat of light coloured paint onto the surface of bricks. There's something of an art to this because you need to apply a consistent amount to the bricks to get an even look. The usual approach is to use a brush to cover the mortar joints fully, then a rag to wipe paint on the faces of brick. Flat paint always looks best for whitewashing, and chalk paint gives the greatest antique effect of all.



“ Although concrete blocks are a porous surface, there is no need to use a breathable paint on the inside of a basement block wall that has been waterproofed.



Stained brick

that moisture is making its way into the walls. Not enough moisture to be visible, but more than enough moisture to cause paint failure.

As small amounts of mineral-laden moisture make their way through masonry from the outside, the moisture dries as it comes in contact with indoor air, leaving the minerals it carries high and dry. This inward flow of moisture isn't large, but it's constant, resulting in the formation and growth of those white fluffy deposits you see. It's crucial you understand this as a painter because it means you need to waterproof the wall to stop the migration before reliable painting can happen. Efflorescence is something you must never ignore.

Two waterproofing options with excellent track records are Drylok and Xypex. You can apply them to any masonry surface as long as no flowing water is moving through the wall. Clean the blocks, let them dry, then apply the waterproof coating before paint. Both Drylok and Xypex can only be applied to bare masonry. They need to soak into the pores of the masonry to form a waterproof layer below the surface. In the case of Xypex, this product has been independently tested to withstand 175 psi of hydrostatic pressure. That's way more than anything you'll encoun-

ter in a basement.

So what can you do for a client with a block wall where existing paint is failing? You can prep the surface and make it look good for a while, but you also need to explain that the fresh paint you've applied won't last. Submit that in writing and get a sign-off before you paint over a peeling block wall surface. If the flaking of the old paint is extensive enough you could use a bushing head in a small rotary hammer to knock off the flaking paint and reveal fresh masonry. Anywhere you can get rid of the old paint can be waterproofed permanently.

Although blocks are a masonry surface, there's no need to use a breathable paint on the inside of a basement block wall that has been waterproofed. The interior side of foundation walls aren't subject to freezing and thawing that causes spalling, so 100% acrylic primer and latex work fine.

You probably won't have to paint brick, block or stone very often, but when you do it's wise to understand the challenges. Every time you tackle a paint job you're creating a possible headache for yourself if your work doesn't last like it should. Minimizing your risk is one of the biggest reasons to get good at all the different masonry situations that come your way. **pp**

same requirements for cleaning brick before painting applies to blocks, but there are differences you need to know about.

When block is used below ground as part of a basement, there's a very good chance inward moisture migration is happening, even if things seem dry. If you see white, fluffy formations on the block surface, you can't simply clean it off and paint. This white stuff is called efflorescence and it's a sure sign

Traditional Lime Paint for Stone

Have you ever seen those brilliant white old stone buildings? Or perhaps you've visited the inside of a traditional barn with a stone foundation that was also white? Chances are this isn't paint, but lime whitewash. It's the olden-days coating used to create this effect, and like many time-tested methods, there's good sense in it. Lime whitewash is made with hydrated lime and fine salt mixed in a ratio of 5 parts lime to 1 part salt. Add enough water to create a slurry that's like thin cake batter. Clean the wall, then brush the whitewash on. Choose a cloudy day if you can since you don't want the whitewash to dry out quickly. It's economical, long lasting and it allows moisture to pass through it easily. You can also add powdered pigments to lime whitewash for colour.

6 BAD REASONS TO START A PAINTING BUSINESS

“The paint business remains, in spite of its challenges, a tremendous opportunity for a hard-working entrepreneur. But getting into this business for any one of these six bad reasons will lead to owner dissatisfaction.

If you're like many painters, you've probably toyed with the idea of starting your own business and taking on the role of boss. Who wouldn't want a profitable, marketable business they can sell or pass on to their kids? The whole boss thing looks pretty good from the outside, too. Nice vehicle, cleaner clothes, longer lunch breaks and a lifestyle that looks like it runs on more money than a journeyman earns. And while there are successful painting businesses out there, building one in the real world is probably a lot different than you imagine. If you're thinking of making the transition from solo or employee painter to business owner, success depends entirely on going into the venture for the right reasons. And the best way to have the right reasons is to identify the wrong ones first.

Bad Reason #1 “I Want to Make More Money”

I get to talk to a lot of painters, and the most common reason they give up as a business owner and go back to painting solo comes down to lack of profits and too much work. They expected to make more money as an owner but they actually earn less than a journeyman, at least at first. And the painting business is more likely than other trades to deliver this unhappy outcome. Why is that? It all comes down to lack of value delivered as a business owner.

In the long run, the free market

only ever pays for value. If you want to earn a profit as the boss of a painting company, you need to bring real value to the venture as a manager. And simply calling up some painting buddies, giving them the address of the next painting job, then writing some pay cheques does not constitute value. Your painters could have done that on their own.

Painting has one of the lowest barriers to entry of any trade because the tools are inexpensive and you don't necessarily need a big, fancy vehicle to get into the game. It's actually harder for a painting company owner to deliver value than with other trades because it's so easy for individual painters to work on their own. So what legitimate value can you bring to the table as the owner of a painting company? See “Seven Ways to Create Value” on page 27. Just because you call yourself a business owner doesn't mean the market place will pay you.

Bad Reason #2 “I Want to Work Fewer Hours”

Creating a business is about building a system, and this never happens easily. You'll make mistakes, people will let you down, and things always take longer than you expect as you build. On top of all this you also need to keep yourself and your family fed while you're creating your business. All this is why you'll probably need to work at least 50% more hours as you start a painting business than simply working as a painter. It could be more. How long will you have to keep this up? It depends on how efficiently you build your business system, and how well it works when it's done. The fact is, you'll need to work way more hours building your business rather than just painting. Eventually, if you do your work well, you may be able to work fewer hours, but only if you design your

business to function without your constant involvement. Starting a business always involves way more work than you expect.

Bad Reason #3 "I Love Painting"

Whenever I hear people talk about starting a business, the enthusiastic reasoning often sounds something like this: "I want to start a (insert business idea here) because I like (insert product or service enjoyed here).

"I want to start a restaurant because I like to cook", is a common example.

"I'm starting a clothing store because I love to dress up."

"I want to make video games because I love to play", is a common delusion among teenage boys.

This sort of dangerous nonsense is probably responsible for more failed businesses than any other mistaken notion. Enjoying your work as a painter is no reason to think that you'd enjoy life as the owner of a painting business. The two are entirely different. In fact, if you absolutely love painting it's probably a sign that you shouldn't start a painting business at all. Very few painting business owners actually do much painting. Sure, you need to know all the details behind successful painting, but only so you can hire, manage and sell painting jobs better than the other guy. Love of painting is not sufficient reason to start a painting business.

Bad Reason #4 "All I Need Is a Few Painters"

Imagine you met a farmer with a great new dairy barn. He takes you inside and shows you the stalls, feed storage and milking equipment. Everything's impressive, except for the fact that he only has two cows. You can be the best farmer in the world, but two cows simply don't create enough value to support the operation. Same

Seven Ways to Create Value

You'll never earn a profit as a painting business owner unless you bring real value to the table. Here are six essential ways to make that happen:

SELL WELL: Selling jobs at profitable prices is a completely different skill than painting, and most painters don't like to find new jobs and clinch deals. Selling well is key to any business, and if you don't like selling you shouldn't try starting a painting company. And selling effectively these days always involves some kind of online presence. It's certainly not the only part of selling, but it is the new normal for any painting business owner who expects to thrive. If the internet scares you, don't try starting a painting business.

ORGANIZE BIG JOBS: The larger the painting job, the greater the role for you to coordinate painters, supplies, timelines and financials. Solo painters simply can't do this on their own, so it's a natural role for you as manager. Many successful painting companies find a profitable niche doing jobs that are too big for anything other than an organization to handle.

STREAMLINE THE FINANCIALS: Invoicing and collecting payments will always take too much time and too much effort if you don't design a streamlined financial system intentionally from the start. The slickest I've seen painting business owners use is on-the-job digital payment systems at the end of each project. Swipe the clients credit card through a reader on a cell phone and you're done. You get instant payment and there's no need to follow up with paperwork. Painting business owners I know who use on-the-job payment also find that clients are less likely to call back for touchups and repainting when they've paid immediately, too.

PROTECT YOUR PAINTERS: Part of running a successful painting business involves finding and keeping skilled and loyal employees or contractors. And a big part of loyalty comes down to creating a hassle-free zone for your painters to work within. You need to protect them from the conflict caused by angry customers and the hassles involved in gathering paints and painting tools. Eliminating everything beyond the work of painting is one way you can bring value to your work as a painting business owner. Painters will want to work for you because it's a simple, hassle-free experience for them.

PAY LIKE CLOCKWORK: This is huge. One of your main roles as a business owner is to cushion your employees against all financial shocks. Making payroll late is a recipe for disaster because your painters will jump ship. It doesn't matter if a client pays late or stiffes you for an invoice. Your job is to take the hit and make it up another day. If you don't have enough cash on hand to make at least three months of payroll with no revenues, don't start a painting business. You'll fail.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT: As the painting world advances, it's your job to stay on top of technical advances, try them out, then introduce the good ones to your crew and clients. Don't neglect this role or your business will slowly lose vitality and profitability as the painting world advances.

GATHER AND ANALYZE NUMBERS: Bidding profitably on jobs is the single most important skill you need as a business owner, but it's a skill that requires informed practice. And the only way to get that practice is by monitoring the numbers to see if they lead to profit or loss. Keep close tabs on what your crew actually costs you in time, wages and benefits, then compare these costs to the offsetting revenues from your bids. While you're at it, monitor the productivity of individual employees and contractors. You need to know who's actually delivering more value than you're paying them for. Some employees will contribute much more to your bottom line than others.

“ Even the smallest business has a surprising number of hidden expenses that leak money out of the venture. Eventually, those expenses will demand to be paid even when they are ‘invisible’ at the outset.

goes for a painting business. It takes a minimum number of painters to support your work as a business owner. You can do everything else right, but if you don't have enough cows in your barn you're going down. Your profits as a business owner come from the fact that you've got to pay your crew members less than the value they create for you. It's this spread between value and pay that makes your profits, but of course the spread can only be so wide. If you're not managing enough painters, you'll be caught in that nasty place where you need to paint to keep eating while also somehow finding time to manage your crew. It's hell. So how many painters does it take to support you as a business owner? That depends, but start looking at simple numbers. If you pay your people \$8 less per hour than they generate for you in value, you'll need to employ six painters to generate \$48 an hour for you. This might seem like a big hourly rate at your end, but it's actually a bare minimum when you have to cover all overhead costs, marketing, company vehicle, bad debt and expenses. Don't under estimate the number of painters you need to support your business.

Bad Reason #5 “I'm a People Person Not a Numbers Person”

Even the smallest business has a surprising number of hidden expenses that leak money out of the venture, and eventually these expenses will demand to be paid even if you can't see them at first. The total cost of running a truck, for instance, is actually twice what you pay in gas, all things considered. Employees cost wages, but there are also benefits to be paid, vacation pay, sick days and possibly severance. Even something as insignificant as the cost of paper towels and hand cleaner adds up big-time. It's fine to be a people person, but you also need to be something of a stickler for numbers and accounting if you expect your painting business to succeed. If you hate numbers, definitely don't try to start a painting business.

Bad Reason #6 “I Want a Simpler Life”

There's no professional life simpler than being an employee or solo contractor. Even the boss of the smallest business has way more hassles than meets the eye. Naturally, good management will reduce these hassles, but they'll never go away. In fact, your entire role as a business owner is all about smoothing out the bumps and making things happen properly in a world that's hardwired for trouble. As a painting boss, you'll need to deal with unreasonable clients, unreliable employees, incompetent suppliers, government regulations and a whole bunch of other troubles. If troubles follow you to bed at night, you'll need to strengthen your mental resilience or stick to solo painting.

The world will always need business organizations and there's room for your new painting business, too. Just be sure you really understand what the role of successful business owner looks like before you jump in. Get this essential part right and the rest is just hard work. pp

Three Benefits of Building a Real Business

If running a business is riskier, more demanding and more worrisome than being an employee or solo painter, why would anyone do it? A few reasons:

1. You can make more money. If you get the whole value thing right and you attract enough painters to work with you reliably, you can easily make 2x or 3x as much as a journeyman painter.
2. You like the challenge. Building and running a business is a complicated challenge that involves diplomacy, salesmanship, financial management and luck. If you're tired of the technical challenges of painting, the variety of business challenges might be just what you need.
3. Freedom from the work-for-pay lifestyle. As a painter, if you stop painting you stop eating. There is no accumulated value to sell after a lifetime spent painting solo. If you build a business properly, you or your kids will have something of value to cash in on in the future.

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Pool Party

Four-man crew gives high school swimming pool a facelift

When Daniel Howell and his crew with CertaPro Painters tackled the swimming pool at Calumet High School in Schererville, Indiana, it was a new challenge for them. “This was my first time painting a big pool like this”, says Howell. “I’d done the rim of swimming pools before at a few hotels, but nothing on the size and scale of this job.”

It took Howell’s four-painter crew 200 hours to complete the project, including some fancy work creating logos. “Before prep, we covered the tile floors to protect them”, explains Howell, “then sanded the walls before applying one coat of PrepRite ProBlock primer. We caulked the corners and used autobody filler to repair holes before applying two coats of two-part epoxy followed by three coats of Resilience exterior latex for the red stripe along the walls. Other than being careful in the usual way, we didn’t have to take precautions to catch the odd paint drip as we painted the ceiling because the pool has a state-of-the-art filtration system. For logos we used a digital projector to trace outlines onto walls, then taped them out and painted.” pp

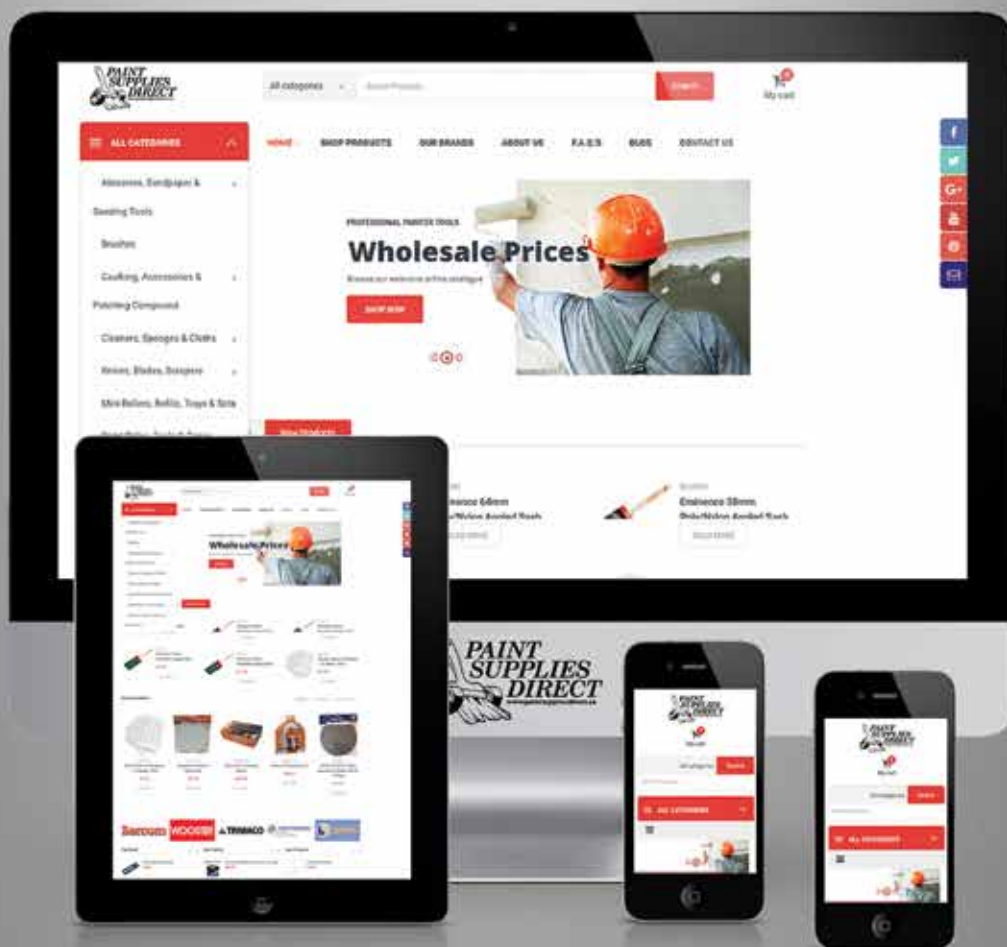


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