

# Marketing for Paint Contractors

What Every Paint Contractor Needs to Know

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# INTRODUCTION Am I a painter or a sales person?

This book was developed especially to help paint contractors like you. If you find marketing confusing, or if you'd just like to learn how to get better at it, read on for some simple, easy tips that will help you get more clients.

Your primary business is painting, but usually, painting jobs don't just land in your lap. You have to go look for them and sell potential clients on using your services.

Selling a service is hard.

A paint job isn't tangible in the same way as a new cell phone; no box is passed over a counter. Painting is a service, and in order to sell that service you need to create confidence and trust.

If your client doesn't trust you to do the job, do it well, listen to them, and charge a fair rate, you won't get too many contracts.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## ***Pete and John are both painters.***

*Pete's work is outstanding. However, Pete has trouble getting business. He doesn't earn much and drives an old truck. When he tried raising his prices, he lost customers. His dirty clothes and old truck create a poor impression. Potential clients look at him and think his work must be as sloppy as his appearance.*

*Pete doesn't put much faith in marketing. He thinks it's all nonsense and a waste of money. His wife is discouraged and wishes he'd go work for someone else (and get regular wages).*

*John, on the other hand, isn't nearly as good a painter as Pete. However, his work is good enough and his clients are happy.*

*He has professional business cards, flyers, stationery and a professionally designed website. When someone leaves a voice mail message, he gets back to them within the hour. He delivers on his promises, is polite, and knows what he is talking about.*

*If his clients have a question, or a problem, he takes the extra time to listen to their concerns and try to solve them. He wants his clients to be happy and comfortable with their decisions.*

*John does everything he can to make sure people trust him. His clients feel that he cares about them. Their problems are dealt with efficiently. The result is that people gladly pay more for John's services, even though Pete is a better painter.*

*John could tell at one glance what's wrong with Pete's business, and how to fix it. But Pete only cares about the work. He can't be bothered with marketing, branding, or advertising.*

*Pete's work may be better, but John just hired a secretary and bought his fifth truck.*

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## **No marketing, no sales, no business**

You've probably noticed that none of the differences between Pete and John have anything to do with painting. In fact, Pete's work was much better than John's. The quality of your work is important. But equally, or even more important, is the quality of your service and interaction with your clients.

The quality of your paint job, your way of talking, your clothes, your truck, the brand of paint you use, your advertisements, your website, and all the other ways a client perceives your business, are all part of marketing. And marketing is what really makes the difference.

## **You're not selling paint, you're selling delight**

Painting is actually the least important part of your job. Nobody is surprised when a painter does a satisfactory job, just as nobody is astonished when they see fresh bread in a bakery.

What your residential customers really want isn't paint, it's happiness, satisfaction, and pride. They want to protect their investment, realize a dream of owning a beautiful home, and show off to their friends and family.

Businesses want protection, easy maintenance, and minimal disruption.

## **Little things mean a lot**

The first thing people notice isn't your painting skills. It's your appearance, your reliability, and whether you are trustworthy.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

If you have an appointment, arrive on time. If you're stuck in traffic, call ahead and let your client know.

Make sure your quote is inclusive, clear, and firm, without any surprises.

Collect testimonials and positive feedback from your customers.

## **Perception is important**

The way people perceive your business is a promise in itself. Do your logo, business card, and website say "careful craftsmanship" or "slapdash and sloppy"?

## **Build a reputation by keeping your word**

A strong reputation can be so powerful that you're the only one people want to do business with. Promise something exceptional and then deliver it.

Promise an outstanding paint job, email replies within two hours, a great color scheme, or help choosing the right type of paint for different purposes.

It may not always be easy to keep your promises, but make sure you do. In an era of Twitter, social networks, and a worldwide web, a broken promise or a missed job can ruin your reputation.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## **What do you stand for?**

It's not a political question; it's a question of what kind of painter you want to be. Are you the painter who is the fastest? Or the absolute best? Adjust your prices, your business cards, the quality of the paint you use, and how you interact with your customers to fit the promise you want to deliver.

## **Under-promise and over-deliver**

Deliver more than you promise, and you'll also deliver a more lasting impression. Clean up after you finish. Wash the windows, or add something extra (maybe a small can of paint for touch-ups).

Contact the customer afterwards, to make sure there are no problems and they are happy.

## **Quality isn't enough**

Painting isn't just about the paint, any more than great pizza is just about the dough. You also need sauce, seasonings, a brick oven, and the entire experience of eating in the restaurant (ambience and service).

What's your secret "sauce" for service or delight?

You don't have to be a huge business to be a market leader. Just choose your market carefully. An independent painter cannot keep up with painting every Marriott hotel worldwide, however, you might be able to cover several school districts in your county, or focus on local restaurants.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## **Picture your perfect client**

What does your perfect client look like? Is it a business? Or a person? Where are they located? If it's a business, what sort of business is it? If it's a particular sort of person, where could you find him or her?

What bothers them most about painting? What are they worried about? How can you calm their fears?

Once you know that, you can then go look for clients who best fit your "perfect profile." You'll know who they are, where they live, and how to approach them. It's much easier than trying to appeal to everybody!

## **Know your limitations**

Accepting every job may not be the right thing to do. Small jobs can be more hassle than they're worth.

On the other hand, if you're a one-man operation, there's no sense bidding on a job to paint a large factory.

Before you start bidding or advertising, figure out which jobs are too big for you, and which ones are too small to be profitable.

## **Small jobs don't lead to bigger ones**

Some painters try to bid on small jobs, hoping that referrals and word of mouth will lead to larger projects. Occasionally, prospects will offer a small job, for a lower price, and promise more to come.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

This may happen, but it's not likely. A better way to get bigger jobs is to subcontract from a larger competitor, or have him refer the jobs that are right for you (but too small for him). Likewise, you can send him work that's too much for you to handle.

## Co-opetition

This is just a fancy word for cooperating with the "competition." For instance, you might coordinate with a kitchen contractor, a plumber, a real estate agent, or other people and businesses involved in home improvement or selling.

Offer package deals or discounts with a furniture store or a fabric company. The fabric company can offer a discount on your services to their clients, and vice versa.

You can share contacts, share marketing, and refer each other. Everyone wins.

## Opinions count

Ask your customers for feedback. How do they feel about your business and its service? Are they satisfied? Would they hire you again?

After a while, you'll start to see patterns, and identify your strengths and weaknesses. You can then use this information to adjust your marketing strategy.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## ***Jackson and Sanderson***

*Jackson specializes in apartment buildings. The firm is experienced in building maintenance and light carpentry work. He makes sure to maintain good relationships with apartment management offices. They know where to find him, and know they can call him when they need help.*

*Since color decisions are often made by committee, Jackson uses color visualization software. This makes it easier to make decisions because the committee can see what the color will look like before authorizing the paint job.*

*Jackson is not an artist, but he gets the work done quickly, and makes sure to use durable paint. He can keep his costs down, and his clients are happy.*

*Sanderson takes a completely different approach. He looks for young families in a fairly new suburb. His clients are young, affluent people drawn to the area by the striking architecture. They are not interested in DIY projects and prefer to spend their weekends golfing or sailing.*

*Sanderson's truck is always clean, and has a large logo, with his company name and telephone number. He got the logo designed by a professional, as well as his business cards, and his web site. He always parks it in a conspicuous spot when he's working and keeps it stocked with a few flyers, in case anyone asks about his services.*

*He teamed up with a color expert, who works with him and his clients, to choose the perfect paint colors.*

*His prices are high, but not the highest in his area. However, since he targets a very specific type of client, he has become the leading painter in his market, and his trucks are everywhere.*

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## **Low price, high quality, fast delivery**

There's an old business saying which says you can have two of these, but not all three. Price is certainly an important part of marketing. That doesn't mean that your prices should be as low as possible.

Low prices usually mean low quality. Nobody expects high quality for a low price, or low quality for a high price.

If you want to charge higher prices, offer added value that your competitors don't (or can't) match. For instance, you could include technical advice on types of paint and where to use them, or offer help choosing a color scheme.

## **Calculate realistically**

Have an hourly rate in mind when you prepare a quote and stick to it. Include your time, your expenses, and your equipment (wear and tear).

You don't want the lowest prices; that's a good way to go broke. And you can't (and shouldn't) compete with people who what to do it themselves.

If your clients can't pay your prices, either change what you offer (and how you present it), or change the kinds of clients you approach.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## Be creative

If price is a problem, offer to break a job into several stages. If a client cannot afford to paint the entire house, split the job into two pieces: interior and exterior.

Raising prices may cause you to lose some customers. That doesn't necessarily mean losing revenue though. If you raise your prices 10%, and lose 5% of your customers, you'll still increase your income by 5%. Since you're also doing less work (and will need fewer supplies), your net profit might rise 10%.

## The quote

Quote small jobs at the first appointment. Listen to the client's needs, take measurements, and then enter the data into your computer. Feed that into a spreadsheet, and print your quote right on the spot with a portable printer.

Strive for fixed prices. Extra costs (so long as we're doing x, we might as well do y) are often a normal part of construction and building jobs, but they're a nasty surprise to your client.

You want your clients to be happy (and tell their friends and neighbors), not complain that you cheated them.

## Follow-up

After you send a quote, follow up with a phone call or an email in a few days. Take the time to answer questions and listen to the client's reaction.

Each contact is not wasted time, but an investment in trust and a good relationship.

# MARKETING Find the right clients and stand out

## **Summary:**

- *Every choice (appearance, interaction, response time) makes a difference*
- *Choose your market*
- *Know your customer*
- *Know your limitations*
- *Team up*
- *Make quotes quick and easy - deliver on the spot and on site, if possible*
- *Follow-up and listen.*

# ADVERTISING ONLINE

## Creating an effective website

*"Half my advertising is worthless. I just don't know which half" - John Wanamaker.*

The goal of advertising is to generate more business. If you don't know what's working, you might as well set your money on fire and watch it burn.

The internet, direct mail, and even telephone sales are much easier to measure than traditional advertising. Unlike Mr. Wanamaker, you don't have to waste your money.

Google Adwords will tell you exactly how many people click on your ad, how many convert to customers, and at what cost. Google Analytics will show you how people interact with your website.

Track the number of visits, the number of clicks, which ads generate the most visits, and which offers lead to the most revenue.

### Google Adwords

Some painters have found Adwords to be an effective tool. They're easy to measure, you can set a fixed budget (large or small), and you can stop at any time. The disadvantage is that once you do stop, the traffic the ads generate will dry up.

### Organic search

Many businesses use SEO (search engine optimization) instead. This means selecting keywords with a high number of searches, and low competition, then using those words in your site and your tags. The goal of

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## Creating an effective website

organic search is to be on the first page of Google results for particular search terms — leading to more clicks and more traffic to your site.

### Google Places

Localized search can help you compete against larger competitors. Here's how it works. Suppose you are a painter in Rockford, Illinois. If you add your business to Google Places, it will show up in results when someone types "painter, Rockford, Illinois" into Google.

The top of the search results will show paid ads, but the results under that will be free. You can even add some text to your company's listing so potential clients can see what kinds of work you do. Or, you can use that space for an offer of some kind.

Google Places is specific and local. Only people who are looking for a paint contractor in your area will see you. Google even throws in analytics, so that you can see the effect. All free.

### Essential website information

- At the very least, include your name, address, phone number, and email address, and put them in a prominent place on every page of your site.
- Write a headline, and a few paragraphs about the types of paint problems you solve (and who you solve them for). If you specialize in a particular type of client or job (such as painting schools), say so upfront. This will pull in your best prospects, and tell others that you're not right for them (don't worry, it's OK, even better, to not work for everybody).

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## Creating an effective website

- A call to action, such as "download your free painting guide."
- Before and after photos, as well as testimonials, add evidence that you do high quality work. Testimonials and feedback instill trust. Use your customers' words and their real names (with permission).
- Don't distract visitors with flashing banners, lots of social media buttons, or automatic audio/video. Just keep it simple.
- One of the best sales tools is a story. On your "about" page, tell the story of how you got started. Is it a family business? What led you to become a painter (this works especially well if you started out as something else, like a pharmacist).

### Quick website checklist

- You have 8 seconds to attract attention - make sure your profession, your market, and your solutions are clear
- Focus on the client, not yourself. Are you talking about yourself or about them? Count the number of times you say "me", "my", and "our." Is it more frequently than you say "you" and "your"?
- Are you talking about needs? Or solutions? They need paint, but they want protection and style.
- Is your contact information easy to find on your site?
- Is there a call to action (meaning, are you asking visitors to do something)?
- Does the website look right on all the major browsers and operating systems? You can check here: [www.browserlab.adobe.com](http://www.browserlab.adobe.com)

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## Creating an effective website

- Do you have your own domain (such as williamspainters.com)? Try to avoid hyphens and underscores. Williams\_painters.com can easily be confused with wiliams-painters.com and vice versa.
- Do you have a backup of your website? Your host should do this regularly. If not, schedule regular backups manually.
- Is your web address on your stationary, business cards, and flyers?
- Have you checked your site title names and keywords? The title is the name that shows up at the very top of your browser. If it says "home" or "about" go change it to something more specific and useful to search engines, such as "williams school painting" or "wiliams commercial painters"

If you don't know the first thing about web design, either hire a pro or, if you're just starting out, try using a blog. There are plenty of themes (designs) offered either for free or for little money.

# ADVERTISING ONLINE

Creating an effective website

## ***Summary:***

- *Make your website easy to find and easy to use*
- *Take advantage of Google's free tools*
- *Look at your site through your customers' eyes*
- *Add your site to your other marketing materials*

# ADVERTISING OFFLINE Pull vs. push marketing

## **Push or pull?**

Traditional ads (online or off) pull people in. So does telemarketing, door hangers, and flyers. Stop advertising and you stop getting results. It's a constant tug of war between getting business and spending money.

## **Use push marketing wisely**

Keep some flyers in your truck if someone passes by. Send one if someone calls for more information, or use them as informational direct mail pieces to a targeted list (with an offer that gets the recipients to call you).

Put your URL on everything: flyers, business cards, stationary, and your truck. Make it really easy to find your business online.

## **Headlines matter more than text**

Research shows that 8 out of 10 people only look at the headline of an ad. If the headline isn't compelling, they'll turn the page, or move on to the next billboard, sign, or flyer.

Here are a few tips for writing great headlines:

- Surprise: "Save Money by Hiring an Expensive Painter"
- How/Why: "How to Save Money with a Paint Job"
- Who wouldn't: "Who Wouldn't Want to Save Money on Home Maintenance?"
- The secret of: "The Secret of Lower Maintenance Costs."

# ADVERTISING OFFLINE

## Pull vs. push marketing

- Because: "Because it Needs to Last Eight Years"

If you're not much of a writer, or you'd rather spend your time painting, consider hiring a professional copywriter; the return will be much higher than the money you spend.

### How to use pull marketing

Pull marketing can bring in clients without a "hard sell." Instead of sending flyers or mailers, create something that people want to see and tell their friends about.

Create a free series of tutorials about painting:

- how to choose a painter
- what kinds of paints work best in different environments (indoor, outdoor, kitchen, bath)
- a color-picking guide

Establish yourself as the paint authority — not just a vendor, but someone your clients have a personal connection with.

One electrician has a website where he answers electrical questions (for do-it-yourselfers). If they still can't fix it themselves, he offers a personal phone call, at \$50 for half an hour. This could be adapted for paint consultations, color consultations, or other kinds of advice.

# ADVERTISING OFFLINE Pull vs. push marketing

## **Focus on your client's needs**

Pretend for a second that you want to hire a painter. Which slogan do you like better?

“Johnson’s paint contractors has 20 years of experience.”

“We paint, while you play golf”

The first one is all about the painter and his experience. The second one is all about the customer; the painter works, while the customer does what he really wants to do (play golf).

Use plain English (test it on your mother-in-law or a neighbor). If people can't understand you, they won't hire you.

# ADVERTISING OFFLINE

Pull vs. push marketing

## **Summary:**

- *Measure your marketing efforts and act on the results*
- *Target a specific type of client, not everybody*
- *Use headlines to attract attention*

# COLOR AND SALES

## Color helps make the sale

Your clients need paint for protection, but they want paint for beauty and style. That means color.

Every big paint brand has its own color marketing department, because both property managers and consumers understand its appeal. It's an easy way to make a home, or a commercial building look better.

There are now more colors available than ever. And, thanks to home decorating shows, magazines, and books, consumers are more aware of color than they've ever been before. Color sells, and it's a great, easy way to personalize your home.

### Using color to sell

You can start with fandecks, and then move on to online color selection tools. Many paint brands offer color software: upload a photo, and replace the existing color with a new one (all with a few mouse clicks).

When a client makes a poor color choice, don't criticize it but simply suggest another option, or use color visualization software to show them how the new color will look. The bright orange that caught their eye on a fan-deck may overwhelm an entire room. Show them photos with several color schemes, so they can make a better decision. Just remember that ultimately, it's their home, and their choice.

You can create the photos with photo-editing software, such as colorjive, or outsource the work (usually around \$45-\$85 a photo).

Some contractors add 20% to their quotes to cover the costs of creating virtual photos. Even if you don't add 20%, the photos can be powerful sales tools. Seeing a color, and falling in love with it, gets the sale.

Some paint suppliers have a 90% success rate when they use a virtual photo during the sales process.

# COLOR AND SALES

## Color helps make the sale

With homeowners, there's only one or two decision makers. If your business is largely commercial, it can be difficult to reach an agreement about which colors to use in an office or apartment building. There are more people involved, and many people have trouble looking at a paint chip and extrapolating how a new color will look on a wall.

Showing them a virtual photo solves that problem, and adds a lot of value to your services. It's much easier to agree on photos than to agree on paint chips.

### **Summary:**

*Color sells — the emotional connection makes the sale*

*Photo-editing software can make sales*

*Decisions are easier when the client can see the new color*

*The client is the final decision-maker (not you)*



**Paint a House With a Click of Your Mouse**

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