

## Primers have a distinct role to play in the painting project

# A Time to Prime

**T**o prime or not to prime. That is a question that has gotten a bit more cloudy with the recent attention being given to the so-called “paint and primer in one” products. Whether these products are good, bad or somewhere in between, could the rising prominence of these products cause a drop in sales of traditional paint primers?

Not at all, according to Frank Glowacki, Director of Marketing for Zinsser Primers, Rust-Oleum Corporation. “And that’s coming from the perspective of a company that introduced a paint and primer in one, Perma-White, in 1992,” he added. “However, some early brands might have oversold the concept, and that’s what has added confusion in the marketplace.”

Glowacki observed that primer and paint each fulfill a purpose. “It’s difficult to ask a paint to do what a primer does, because they are expected to do different things,” he said. “Primers are resin-rich, allowing them to seal porous surfaces, provide adhesion and block stains. Paints are pigment-rich, allowing for color acceptance and retention and provide a durable finish.”

Primers’ ability to offer better hide, especially over dark colors, is just one of the things that they do better than paint, according to Glowacki. They also do a superior job of performing other tasks,



○ Masterchem’s Clean Start is a cutting-edge product with zero VOCs.

including stain blocking, sheen control, better adhesion and uniformity of the topcoat. These factors explain why professionals continue to use primers as a regular course of action.

“The ‘paint and primer in one’ is definitely a trend, but it hasn’t had much impact on Zinsser’s sales for one simple reason,” Glowacki said. “It’s more geared and has been well marketed to consumers. However, professionals are not biting; they consume over two-thirds of the primers sold in this country. I just came back from the PDCA Show, and they weren’t even talking about paint and primer in one. They have a fail-safe system that works: a coat of primer and a coat of paint will provide a

great-looking finish for years—without the chance of error or callback.”

Tracy Pease, Brand Manager, Residential Repaint Segment, PPG Architectural Coatings, cited the popularity of “paint and primer in one” products as indicative of our “instant gratification” society. “Everyone is looking to save steps and shortcut the entire process, and all of the advertising and marketing plays cleverly to this trend. Granted, there are instances when these types of products or self-priming products can be used. However, no one would disagree that the time spent in preparation using a proper primer produces better results and long-term success of the job. It’s important for retailers to be up to



○ Zinsser's Bondz Maximum Adhesion Primer.

speed on when a specialty primer is needed and to probe customers about the project, the substrate and conditions or factors impacting the job.”

To address the buzz in the marketplace, PPG developed a straightforward guide called “Understanding Self-Priming Paints and Primers,” available in both the PPG Pittsburgh Paints and PPG Porter Paints brands. “It outlines the types of projects and situations when a specialty primer should be used and when a self-priming paint can be used,” Pease said. “Additionally, the PPG Seal Grip family brochure is available to support the need for specialty primers and provides comprehensive information on the extensive line with specific primer uses by project and by application and substrate.”

Pease suggested that retailers use the analogy of a manicure when explaining the benefits of a specialty primer to their female customers. “They can ask, ‘You wouldn’t put just one coat of nail polish on would you? A base coat followed by a topcoat provides a strong foundation and beautiful, long-lasting manicure. Well, the same holds true for a beautiful, long-lasting paint job—one coat of primer followed by a premium topcoat.’”

Ron Boyajian, Vice President of Product Development and Technical Sales for California Paints, stressed that primers are needed in the exact same sit-

uations that they were needed in before the buzz about “no primer required” products came about. “The ‘no primer necessary’ and ‘primer and finish in one’ is nothing more than marketing,” he said. “We still believe in a good quality primer to hold back stains, to help neutralize tannin bleeds, to get more uniform coverage, to go over exterior bare wood, and so on. There is still most definitely a place for primers.”

To give the situation a bit of perspective, Boyajian reported that the whole “no primer necessary” trend—if we even want to call it that—is nothing new.

“Twenty years ago, we promoted a product as ‘no primer necessary,’ so it’s not new technology, as some would have you believe,” he said.

Even today, California Paints is marketing some specialty coatings that require no primer. A case in point is a new product called Stopz, a waterproofing paint that is a primer and finish well. “It will hold back at least 10 psi,” Boyajian stated. “It has a mildew eliminator and also a bit of a sheen.”

Another new product is Ultra-plate, a finish coat that requires no primer. “It offers a factory-like satin finish that is good for countertops, shelving—that type of thing,” Boyajian stated. “It’s very durable, it can be used over Formica, and once again, no primer is required.”

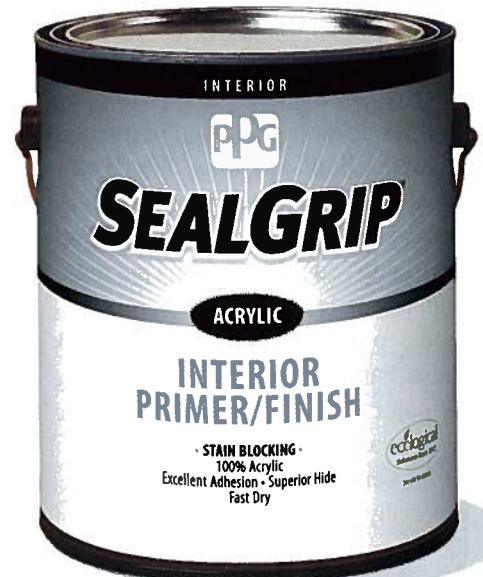
Boyajian doesn’t expect sales of primers to drop because of the attention that “primer and finish in one” products are getting. However, he suggested that retailers not let big boxes get the upper hand on this issue. Otherwise, it’s possible that the paint store will not only lose a primer sale but a paint sale as well. “I wouldn’t want to talk Mrs. Jones out of buying an extra can of paint, but you should be aware of what big boxes are doing with no primers. You need to stress your expertise and let the customer know that you have the correct information about when it’s ap-

propriate to prime and when a primer is not necessary.”

Dick Hardy, president of XIM Products Inc., explained that in many cases, such as repainting a room with latex paint, a primer really is not needed. This is where the “paint and primer in one” strategy is applicable.

“A good quality latex paint will bond fairly well,” Hardy said. “As long as it doesn’t have lots of durability demands on the paint. It doesn’t have to withstand exterior weathering or temperature changes. It doesn’t have to bond to anything but previous latex paint. It really isn’t sealing anything, just rehiding the old color. Why not call it a paint and primer all in one? Because that’s what it actually is. The paint is doing both jobs. It is an idea from years ago that has been brought up anew. And not a bad marketing idea at that.”

But that marketing strategy only goes so far, Hardy added. “Start to ask the all-in-one ‘paint and primer’ to bond to a wider range of surfaces or bond to lower-energy surfaces or to glossy surfaces. Start to ask that it maintain its adhesion in exterior weathering conditions. Start to ask that it seal specific stains or lock in odors . . . Well, you get the idea. At some point you need a ‘base coat’ that does something special or that can give additional durability in a tough environment. That’s a primer.”



○ PPG offers the Seal Grip® line of primers.



### ○ Peel Bond from XIM.

Mike Walsh, VP of Marketing & New Product Development at Masterchem Brands, likewise conceded that “paint and primer in one” products have their uses. But he, too, spoke to their limitations. “For tougher jobs, priming before you paint is the best solution. Primer is the ultimate problem solver: It promotes maximum topcoat adhesion, more even topcoat sheen and prevents bleed-through from problems on the substrate. It’s critically important to use a primer when dealing with stains caused by water, smoke, grease or mildew. Proper surface preparation, coupled with a high-quality primer like KILZ® Premium—a fast-drying, water-based sealing and stain-blocking primer—will create the best-looking, longest-lasting job.”

As a counterbalance to the “paint and primer in one,” marketing phenomenon, Glowacki urged using the contractor’s product preference as a way to build business with contractors. “For a number of years, we had a commercial: If you want to paint like a pro, prime like a pro. Professionals use primers, so my advice to the retailer is to promote the primer from the outset as part of the sale. This isn’t overselling. It’s providing the best advice. Also, as with any product, understand the uses and limits of these new top-

coats. Most continue to recommend primers for stain blocking and tough adhesion surfaces.”

### “Going Green” Trend

Another important development in the paint primer market is an increasing number of “green” products. “Going ‘green’ is a trend we’re seeing broadly in many markets, and the paint primer market is no different,” said Walsh, pointing specifically to KILZ Clean Start as indicative of this trend. “KILZ Clean Start is perfect for at-home paint enthusiasts and professionals alike,” he said. “The zero-VOC and

low-odor formula addresses indoor air quality concerns related to VOCs while delivering the quality performance expected from other KILZ brand primers.”

In addition to its sealing and stain-blocking power, KILZ Clean Start allows for fewer topcoats, ensuring quality results for any project. “It is intended for use on most interior and exterior surfaces, including woodwork, drywall, plaster, paneling, masonry, brick, painted metal and properly prepared glossy surfaces,” Walsh said. “The fact that KILZ Clean Start contains zero VOCs

not only makes it a cutting-edge product, but demonstrates KILZ’ commitment to meeting the evolving needs of professional contractors and painters. Because it contains zero VOCs, it’s a superior product for contractors and painters seeking to meet the demand for ‘green’ options.”

Glowacki reported that there is a trend toward products providing more benefits via advanced waterborne technology. He mentioned Zinsser® Smart Prime Advanced Technology Water-Base Primer as an excellent example of this. This is a product that combines the performance characteristics of an oil-base primer—i.e., dependable stain blocking, exceptional flow and leveling and deep penetration to seal the surface—with all the benefits of a water-base primer.

“Smart Primer is No. 1 with a bullet,” Glowacki said. “It’s the first water-based product that truly blocks water stains. It’s a product of tomorrow, available today.”

Another eco-friendly product from Zinsser is Bulls Eye Zero™, delivering high performance in a zero-VOC, LEED-compliant formula that is free of HAPS and packaged in a plastic, recyclable can. “It’s one of our highest-hiding adhesion products,” Glowacki said. “We were able to create a product that did not disappoint and outperforms many products with higher VOCs. It’s a great-performing product with great hide and adhesion.”

Also an ecological choice is PPG’s new addition to its growing Seal Grip® family of primers, featuring a low-VOC formula of less than 50 g/L that can earn LEED 3.0 credits. “In the world of universal interior/exterior-



○ A project with extreme efflorescence was successfully completed with Mad Dog Primer.





**○ Gardner-Gibson's SMART™ line includes Stain-Hide Primer.**

or primers which may be over-engineered for interior-only needs, this new product works nicely," said Pease. "Because it doesn't need special components to combat exterior elements, it's appropriately priced for the purpose."

Pease explained that this 100-percent acrylic interior primer/finish has multi-

purpose capabilities to tackle most interior jobs with the ease and convenience of one product. "It can be used as a stain blocker to cover common household stains and marks; an under-coater for use as a base coat on bare wood and trim; a drywall sealer to prepare drywall and plaster and ensure sheen uniformity; a wall covering preparer to ready the surface for wallcoverings and protecting dry-

wall; and finally as a finish coat providing a smooth finish for ceilings, closets, walls, garages and more."

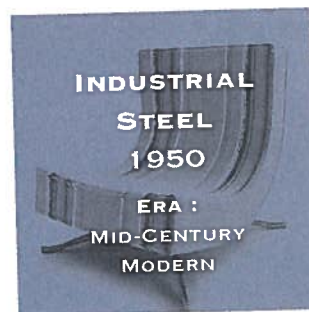
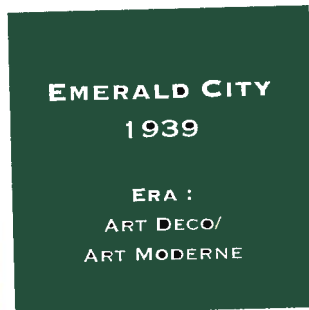
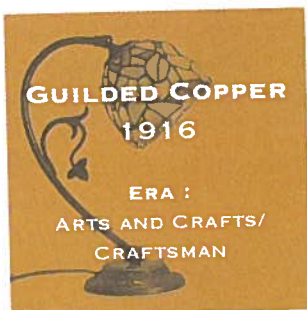
In addition, the product glides on smoothly and has excellent adhesion to resist chips, peels and blisters. "One of the strongest characteristics is its superior hide ensuring thorough color cov-

erage, uniformity and better appearance in fewer coats," Pease added.

While "green" is also a key to coatings manufacturer Gardner-Gibson, "performance is still the key feature for pro painters and consumers alike," said Gordon Blicke, director of marketing. Blicke warned that "not all green products live up to their advertising," noting that a common misconception is that all water-based products are low-odor and low-VOC. "However, many smell terrible and have irritating solvents, much like traditional primers. Further, the performance compromises that some manufacturers make to hit a low-VOC claim make the products virtually unusable, even for experienced contractors, or they're so expensive that no one can justify using them."

Gardner-Gibson has a new primer that solves many of these issues, Blicke added. "SMART™ Stain-Hide Primer is a stain-hiding primer/sealer that is part of a complete zero-VOC

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By removing the odor issues while retaining fast dry times, SMART addresses a major reason that painting contractors have jobs postponed or canceled due to building occupant complaints, Blickle explained.

### A Selection of Primers

New primers continue to be introduced in the paint industry. "We are always innovating and adding to our primer lineup," said Glowacki. Among the product innovations from Zinsser is Bondz Maximum Adhesive Primer, an interior/exterior water-based products that has superior adhesion so that it can adhere to a wide variety of surfaces—even glazed brick or tile.

"Zinsser primers have always been known for their great adhesion," Glo-

wacki said. "Sometimes, we go above and beyond great. Bondz grips both the topcoat going over it along with the surface. We like to call it a sandwich effect. Bondz is the peanut butter, and the wall and the topcoat are the two pieces of bread. It will accept any topcoat you can think of, including two-part epoxy."

Zinsser is also well-known for its B-I-N® Shellac-Base Primer. Glowacki acknowledged that price increases have hit the product this year due to a worldwide shortage of shellac. "There have been some issues because of the good old lac bug," Glowacki said. "We've run into similar instances in the past, but never to this degree. The hope is that it's a short-term situation related to weather and other circumstances."

Nonetheless, B-I-N has a major following that won't be deterred by market forces. "It's the ultimate stain blocker," Glowacki said. "It's extremely unique. Nothing performs as well as B-I-N in

terms of stain blocking and permanency of odor-blocking. It seals in tough stains as well as smoke and fire odors."

Masterchem, meanwhile, addresses a trend to have a multi-faceted product with new KILZ Complete. "While trends come and go, the standard of keeping things simple while saving time and money will always be important," Walsh said. "In the case of primers, one trend is that of having the products 'do' more."

Walsh cited KILZ Complete primer as an example of this. "It provides a much wider scope of performance with superior stain blocking over virtually any type of stain. And its formulation ensures better coverage and durability. Perhaps most importantly for pros, this unique primer is a one-stop shop as it covers both interior and exterior surfaces with KILZ high-quality performance."

California Paints has the whole gamut of possibilities covered with a full range of interior primers, exterior

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primers and specialty primers such as rust-inhibitive primers and DTM primers. For instance, the Prime Choice line encompasses several products, including a premium-quality, high-hiding 100-percent acrylic primer sealer; a 100-percent acrylic universal primer with exceptional adhesion and stain-killing properties; a professional-grade acrylic latex wall and trim enamel undercoater; and a professional, acrylic latex primer-sealer. "We also have two zero-VOC primers, ELEMENTS and ENVIROTECH," Boyajian reported.

Another choice in the California Paints lineup include Grip Coat® bonding primer, a water-based urethane-modified acrylic primer with excellent gripping power. "We introduced that last year, and it's been phenomenally successful," Boyajian stated.

California Paints primer selection also encompasses Wipe-Out, 100-percent acrylic stain block, as well as economy-priced choices, a masonry sealer and a

block filler. Specifically for exteriors, the company's TroubleShooter® line has a 100-percent acrylic latex and a fast-drying alkyd that can be used as a base coat for all latex and oil-based house paint, both of which have excellent resistant to tannin bleed.

Mad Dog Paint Products Inc., meanwhile, offers Mad Dog Primer, created to solve universal problems such as peeling, cracking and rusting specifically for the contractor market. "We started out promoting the benefits to painters, and soon discovered our dealers loved the product even more," said company president Steve Ryan. "Mad Dog Primer works so well that our dealers are reporting a 90-percent reduction in coating failure complaints, service calls and job inspections. Not only do our dealers make a great profit, they don't lose money running around in the spring dealing with complaints."

Mad Dog Primer is an exterior stabilizing primer that works well in both

residential and commercial applications. Ryan characterized this exterior primer as having extra "bite"—hence, the inclusion of a photo of his dog, a 140-pound French Mastiff named Cupcake, on the label.

With its proprietary patent-pending formulation, Mad Dog Primer has superior adhesion and flexibility that Ryan reported gives it greater flexibility and glue like qualities than other primers on the market. "It gives the project, two to three times the performance you would normally expect," Ryan stated. "All things being equal, a job lasts two to four times longer if you prime with Mad Dog."

Ryan has numerous case histories that verify the primer's effectiveness and longevity. *Case History No. 1: A bowling alley project in Minneapolis with a terrible efflorescence problem. The customer used 10 gallons of Mad Dog to stabilize the concrete block (af-*

*(continued on page 68)*

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# Primers

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ter normal preparation), and costs about \$600 versus an approximate \$300 cost of a standard primer. However, Ryan reported that this added investment actually saved the building owner money in the long run.

"A project in this condition would normally last two or three years because of the problems with the masonry surface. But the project is going on six years and is still looking great," Ryan said. "If the customer had used a standard primer, it would be coming up to the third time to paint the building. At a cost of \$2,000 each time they do the job, that's a savings of about \$4,000 to \$6,000—all thanks to that extra \$300 they spent on Mad Dog Primer at the outset."

*Case History No. 2:* A college stairway project that required two gallons of primer. "It was \$60 more on a \$5,000 job to use Mad Dog," Ryan reported. "Eleven years later, it still looks as good as new. And it is nice to know we saved the customer about \$10,000 over the last decade."

"At first, the paint store and contractor might think Mad Dog is 'too expensive,'" Ryan says. "But very quickly our customers realize how Mad Dog Primers makes them money, solves problems and lightens the load of running a paint store."

In addition to Mad Dog Primer, Ryan's company also offers Mad Dog Crack Fix, a stabilizing primer for interior use, and Mad Dog Deck Fix, a stabilizing primer for use on exterior horizontal deck surfaces.

XIM's product line addresses the new category of High Build, Filling Primer, which Hardy reported is one of XIM's fastest-growing primers. XIM offers two primers in this category: XIM Peel Bond® and XIM Trim Magic®. XIM Peel Bond can be applied (by brush, roller or spray) up to 40-mils thick on a vertical surface without sagging or dripping.

"Because the Peel Bond can be applied thickly, it will help fill and level uneven surfaces. It can help reduce prep time and greatly improve the surface appearance for the topcoat paint," Hardy said. "It will take longer to dry when applied thickly, but an added feature is that Peel Bond will tell the painter when it is ready to be painted. The Peel Bond is white when applied, but turns to a hazy clear color when dry and ready for painting."

The Trim Magic primer uses the Peel Bond XIM "X-Stay" Technology to achieve the high build, but it has even higher solids. "Because the Trim Magic is so thick it can only be applied by brush, roller or paint pad," Hardy explained. "The Trim Magic is used mostly for smaller jobs and spot priming and spot filling. Both products remain flexible and breathable, and give long lasting durability."

Another new product from XIM is an interior wall primer/sealer called Restorz™ II. This product is used to prime and seal before painting or applying wallpaper. Working with representatives of the NGPP, XIM developed this product with a pleasant lemon fragrance.

This product fits into a growing trend for primers with low or pleasant odor. "Water-based, latex paints are by nature lower odor than the solvent-based primers and paints, but even these have some odor drawbacks when contractors must work in commercial buildings and areas where office employees or retail workers can not vacate the area while the area or nearby area is being painted or wallpapered," Hardy said.

However, with Restorz™ II, Hardy commented that the pleasant odor has allowed painters and paperhangers the flexibility of scheduling their work with added assurance that they are not going to offend or hamper those who are occupying the building.

United Gilsonite Laboratories, meanwhile, offers the EcoLok Primer Sealer,



## ○ EcoLok Primer Sealer from UGL

which prevents tannin bleed on such surfaces as wood and composite decks, T-111, vinyl PVC plastic, tile, masonry, fiber cement, ceiling tiles, textured hardboard, sheetrock, glossy painted surfaces—even properly prepared galvanized steel.

## Tips for Selling Primers

Given the prominence of "paint and primer in one products," it's a good idea for retailers to promote the advantages of primers. Manufacturers help in this endeavor by offering an ample assortment of marketing materials. For instance, Hardy reported, "XIM offers pamphlets, merchandising features and in-store demo boards, free of charge, to show and explain the features and benefits of specific primers and sealers."

Walsh urged retailers to display signage and banners in their paint aisles to remind consumers of the importance of primers for a quality result. He also recommended selling the overall project as a way to promote primer sales.

"The KILZ brand offers a number of tools such as signs, literature and more that help explain not only the importance of priming, but the keys to a successful project," Walsh said. For retailers, this means addressing consumers' needs in surface prep, in painting and clean-up. Selling the successful projects means providing consumers with the right tools and materials to enable them to have a great end result and feel pride in their work." ■