

able. That does not mean the lowest-priced product, but rather the product that gets them through the job most efficiently and satisfies the customer more effectively.”

Now more than ever, adds Dougherty, dealers need to focus on their own strengths of knowledge and service. And take advantage of your supplier! “At PPG we doubled the number of consumer rebate periods that we’re offering this year from two to four to help dealers generate excitement and traffic,” he reports. Everyone is feeling the pinch, and perhaps your supplier will be willing to go the extra mile to help you, just as you are willing to walk that mile for your customers.

This might not be the time to tighten the screws on a contractor who’s fallen behind, warns Boyajian at California. “If it’s a long-time contractor with good standing, work out some kind of financial arrangement. The smart dealer will say ‘keep coming in and pay cash for what you buy, and chip away at the old bill as you can.’ The last thing you want is for him to stop shopping at your store because you’ve shut him off!”

Also, work with him on product. “In some cases, there isn’t a need for a top shelf product for a project, so he can save a dollar or two that way.”

Dan Calking, director of retail implementation at Ben Moore, says to soothe your customers’ fears that they’re blowing a lot more money than absolutely necessary. “People with less discretionary income want to make sure they are getting the most for their money,” he says. If a customer has a limited budget, make sure that when he swipes his plastic he is confident you won’t swipe him wrong.

Eight is the New Two

While you aren’t a fan of “price shoppers,” many of your



painters are finding themselves forced into it in order to stay competitive. “Price used to be eighth or ninth on the list of contractor needs, but now it’s probably number two,” says Mansfield. You can help by selling versatile products that can be used in several areas or that will save labor and callbacks. “We’ve been able to show contractors how to save money with Devco’s products that perform as good or

better than the competition but at a lower cost,” she says. “When you show the value of a product, you remove the price question.”

And, of course, offer more stuff. Stuff you can’t get at the big boxes. Like a smaller parking lot. Less aisles. Treat your customers like human beings. Delivery, drawdown, perfect color match, specification submittals, making paint available when it’s needed. Coffee and doughnuts don’t hurt either. Glazed blueberry cake comes to mind. We’ll be right over.

If money is tight for you, don’t panic, and don’t slash prices beyond the point of no return to beg people to shop with you, says Boyajian. “Don’t change the way you go to market in a rash manner to the point that it will affect you down the road. If you decide you’re going to deep discount and it still doesn’t generate business, then where does that put you?”

Rocky Prior suggests stocking that cheap paint, if nothing else, to get the customer in the door. “Advertise that you have paint to match any budget,” he says. “Once the customer is in the store, show them that the premium product will actually save time and money. Labor is expensive, so coverage, splatter, ease of clean-up, and other factors must all be considered when determining the value of a can of paint.”

Wow, that’s a lotta work! We better end this article now before we come up with more stuff you have to do.

PRIMERS

When a Base Line and a Bass Line are the Same Thing.

The best music is ringing up more sales for the right reasons.

There’s a local bass player who wears a t-shirt that says, “You would notice if I stopped playing.” Sometimes the instrument that lays the foundation, however simple, is the one people feel you can leave out.

Your tractor-pull customers might not be interested, but here we go anyway. Take your typical baroque violin sonata. The violin has the melody, say that’s your topcoat. The harpsichord accompanies with chords and fill-ins, say that’s your wall. And then a cello or double-bass, or what the

heck, a bassoon, carries the low end... that’s your primer.

Now perhaps someone wants to save a bit of money, so they’re going to hire the violin and harpsichord but leave the cello at home. Sure, you get the melody and it sounds nice... but something about it doesn’t hold up as well.

Same with a primer. Primers have a different function in the painting process than paint, says Valerie Bokar at Eliokem, a primer resin manufacturer. “Different types of resins and solvents are used in the production of



Eliokem reminds its painters that priming can seal in unsightly stains as well as odors.

top-coating paints than in base-coating paints, which result in different performances. Primers, because of the penetrating resins that are used in the formulation, are going to be able to block odors and stains and also adhere to difficult surfaces better than a top coat. That's what they were designed for."

So yes, the violin, even a Stradivarius, is going to sound better when played over the bass designed for it. (It's not the perfect analogy, but work with us.)

Masterchem recently conducted a study it calls the "Kilz Roller Report," where it interviewed more than 300 pro painters and nearly 1,000 DIYers about their priming habits. "Eighty percent of professionals say they prime before painting, and their No. 1 reason for doing so is because clients are requesting it," says Jason Long, Kilz brand manager. "This sounds great but it also means that one in five is not. (Probably someone related to that dentist that doesn't recommend Crest.) "Those 20% of pros who don't prime believe it doesn't affect the short term result," says Long.

Tim O'Reilly at Zinsser has an even more startling stat: "On a national basis, primers are used at a rate of just over one gallon to 10 gallons of paint. If projects were optimized, primers would be used at three times their current rate and paint would be used less often to correct the absence of a primer."

Even if you don't sell more, you sell better.

Prime and Proper

But first, you have to sell the prime idea. "Starting with primer affords better coverage, truer colors, a more even topcoat sheen, longer lasting finish, and time and money savings down the road," says Long. "Primer is made to seal surfaces and improve paint adhesion, whether the surface is finished or unfinished."

XIM shared five selling points for its new Trim Magic. It fades from white to clear when it's ready to paint over. It covers rough surfaces and cracking plus provides tremendous adhesion and penetration to the surface. It levels out brush strokes for a smooth appearance, and it renews old surfaces with an incredible final painted appearance, according to the company.

Using a high-quality primer might even save your painters money. It'll back up a better looking job and keep touchups to a minimum, all of which enhances not only the paint job, but the painter's reputation for quality work.

Your best bet might be convincing a customer that a primer is a different product entirely from a topcoat. water isn't Vodka even if it looks the same in the glass.

"As a general rule, primers are resin rich to assure adhesion along with good sealing and stain blocking," says O'Reilly. "Conversely, paints are pigment rich, which becomes important for color retention and surface durability." If the paint has to use what resin it has to do the work of the primer, that leaves the pigment to do the work of the resin. And you, to do the work over.

This high-resin quality in primers might actually encourage your customers to paint areas they previously thought impossible, notes Tim: galvanized ducts, plastic registers, fiberglass doors, PVC piping, and even previously painted glossy surfaces and clear finishes can benefit from the adhesion quality of a primer.

Deep Purple, St. Louis Blues, Red October, Cyndi Lauper's Hair, etc...

Put a little color in your day—add a flute to your classical ensemble or add a bit of tint to your primer. With your background, it might be easier to tint! But your customer might not be aware this is even an option. "There's always room to educate consumers and pros about new products, techniques, and tools to maximize their project results," says Long, who provides the following tips to tint it right:

When using a deep-colored paint or when painting over a loud color, it may be appropriate to tint your primer in the direction of the desired color—helping you achieve a truer color in fewer coats. It's important to note, however, that adding too much pigment to

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your primer can affect its performance. Only tint your primer when it is beneficial to the color situation and use the minimum amount of pigment. Most KILZ brand products can be tinted with up to two ounces of universal colorant per gallon. Just be sure the primer remains a lighter color than the top coat paint you plan to apply.

If you're tinting to a lighter color, handle it like blocking a stain, suggests O'Reilly. Dark, saturated colors can continue to show through multiple coats of paint, ultimately interfering with the true color intended. Dark colors should be sealed with a primer, and tinting the primer toward the finish should provide true color with a single coat of paint.

On the dark side, he continues, "in order to tint to ultra deep colors, all of the white titanium and fillers must be removed from paints, but this is normally where the hide comes from. Add to the fact paint store pigments don't have the hiding power of factory pigments and you begin to see how a light undercoat can reflect for many coats through a dark paint showing poor hide," he says. "This should be addressed by using a deep tint primer to tone the surface toward the finish while providing good hide with the primer. It doesn't get as dark as the topcoat, but it doesn't need to. It serves its purpose by cutting the reflection of the background by using a reduction of the finish formula."

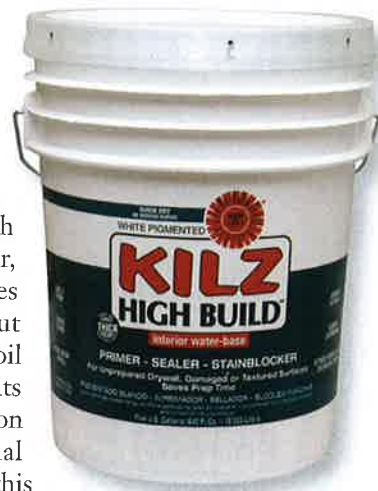
Another Day Older and....

Some folks are suspicious, and they're going to accuse you of trying to put them deeper in debt by insisting they use a primer. Why? It's just a coat of paint you can't see! Well, again "you would notice if I stopped playing."

"Stain and odor blocking are the main selling features of using a primer," says Bokar. "Nothing looks more unprofessional than having a stain bleed right through your coating! While a primer performs many other functions, like adhesion of the topcoat and a more uniform looking topcoat, all of those are somewhat subjective." But you can see the stain and smell the odor. "Either a coating blocks a stain or it doesn't," she says. "The job of the primer is to block and seal, and thus it is worth the few dollars extra."

Sometimes, oil is still the best way to go; Eliokem manufactures an odorless oil-based resin for those instances. "There are certain stains

like water stains and water-based markers or inks that latex primers struggle to block," says Bokar. "With an odorless oil-based primer, you get blocking properties of a traditional oil without all the smell. An odorless oil primer uses different solvents and resins in the formulation than what is in a traditional oil primer, and because of this requires less air renewal during the painting process than regular oil." Even so, Eliokem is working to develop a water-based product that will block like an oil.



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"In all research we've conducted about the primer market, price is low on the scale of purchase influence," adds O'Reilly. "Painting projects are very disruptive to one's lifestyle, so it's far more upsetting to have taken on a remodel project and have poor results than to have not taken it on at all. As part of the relationship-build, the dealer has a responsibility to educate the end-user on how to achieve a successful finish. If they won't listen...they'll learn eventually, but we don't want them discouraged with poor results. Priming is what professional painters do to protect their reputations, ensure a good final product, and get a recommendation for other projects from previous customers—as we say in our television advertising, 'If you want to Paint Like a Pro, Prime Like a Pro'."

For customers who think seeing is believing, well... time for some show and tell. "You can educate pros and DIY consumers easily by conducting in-store demonstration or creating before and after displays that illustrate the real benefits of priming," suggests Long at Masterchem.

Also, he adds, carry enough primers that they know you mean it. "It's important to carry a good balance of high quality latex, water-based, and oil-based primers, and ask questions of your customers to help determine the best primer for their needs and preferences." If you're serious about priming, perhaps your painters will be, too. If nothing else, now you know how to sell to your classical music fans! **TPD**



Products such as Kilz and Bulls Eye are long-time familiar brands to many of your customers.