

Good Paint Adhesion Makes Good Financial Sense

How proper sanding can contribute to your bottom line

By Vicki Eggleston and John Petersen

Due to the recession, new housing starts are down and homeowners are pinching every penny. Accordingly, new construction and residential repaint jobs are fewer and farther between, and painting contractors who've managed to weather the storm are fighting fiercely competitive bids with slim margins. As dire as all that sounds, there is good news. Simple changes in your approach to painting projects can save you money and lead to more referrals.

It's obvious that it would be a waste of money to pave a road that hadn't been properly graded and prepped with base material. What's not so apparent is that painting without doing sufficient prep work can also waste money. I say "sufficient" because oftentimes the difference between a lousy paint job and a great paint job is not whether or not the surfaces were prepped but how well the surfaces were prepped.

The fact is no matter how good of a primer you use, it won't block surface imperfections.

If there's a nib, scratch or divot from paint that has flaked off or drywall that has seen better days and you paint over it without sanding, odds are that imperfection will become even more pronounced. Your only choice to achieve a smooth finish is to start with a smooth beginning.

That said, when it comes to achieving painting nirvana, a perfectly smooth finish is not enough. You must also ensure good



Rigidity is the key to skiving off bumps and imperfections. A rubber sanding block fitted with sandpaper is a good bet.

paint adhesion. You can inspect the surface with your eyes and your hands and determine it to be smooth and level, but if the surface isn't scuffed slightly and the dust isn't tacked off, paint won't stick very well. That can lead to paint failure, costly rework and a bad reputation that, in turn, leads to lower profits and fewer referrals. When you consider the referral-based nature of this business, "sufficiently sanding" is something you can't afford to skimp on.

Considering the importance of sanding, it's a bit ironic that painters with the least experience are often relegated to the prep crew. For this reason, it's critical to ensure that your prep crew is trained in the sanding basics.

STRIP, SMOOTH AND SCUFF

There are essentially three reasons you'd ever need to sand:

1. To strip a surface of previous coatings. When the goal is to take a surface back down to bare wood for refinishing, start with a 60 or 80 grit abrasive. Once you're down to bare wood, you can transition to a finer grit to smooth the surface.

2. To smooth a surface. Previously painted or coated surfaces often require the most attention. First, if the paint is loose and flaky, it should be scraped or power washed prior to sanding. The goal for sanding is to feather the edges so that there aren't ridges between where the paint flaked off and where it stayed in place. For this type of project, choose a 100 to 150 grit abrasive.

3. To scuff a previously coated surface to give the next coating some mechanical bite for good adhesion. The key to paint adhesion is that you want a smooth surface, but not too smooth. For instance,

Stripping Abrasive	Smoothing Abrasive	Scuffing Abrasive
Stripping to a bare surface: 60 – 80 grit	Defect removal, surface leveling, surface smoothing: 100 – 150 grit	Scuffing previously coated surface or between coats: 180 – 320 grit



Furniture that has a clear coat should be scuffed prior to refinishing to get good adhesion.

furniture that has a clear coat or woodwork that's been painted with oil-based paint is too smooth to get good paint adhesion. In these cases the surface needs to be scuffed with a 180 to 320 grit abrasive prior to refinishing. Most important, the coating you are scuffing needs to be fully cured prior to sanding so it powders rather than gums.

BE TACKY – IT'S A GOOD THING.

Sanding is a step that really can't be skipped. Likewise, using a tack cloth to remove all traces of sanding dust from the surface is crucial to achieving good paint adhesion. Brushing down the surface or wiping it down with an ordinary cloth is not enough, because even the smallest amount of dust can leave a defect that can leave you open to paint failure.

SANDING HAS TO BE...BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE DIFFICULT

Let's be honest. Prepping is time consuming, physically demanding, dusty and unavoidable. But a number of sanding product innovations over the last several years have made sanding easier than it once was.

Gone are the days when your only choice in abrasives was the grit of sandpaper to buy. From sanding sponges and pads to sanding sheets to specially developed abrasive coatings and minerals, today's sophisticated sanding products are designed to cut faster, load less, and finish finer on curves and details. All these advancements go a long way toward increasing ease of use, user comfort and the overall productivity of your crew.

Having so many sanding material choices can be a blessing, but it can also create a bit of confusion. How do you know whether or not you need a sanding sponge vs. sheets? And does it really make sense to pay for premium abrasives, backings and minerals?

Simply stated, choosing the right sanding "tools" all comes down to what you are trying to achieve. Sponges are great for getting into nooks and crannies and working with detailed

woodwork. They are also the most forgiving and tend not to cut through on edges. But, at the same time, they may ride up and over a bump. So to level a surface or smooth out a bump, use a sanding sheet attached to a sanding block.

THE CASE FOR MORE COVERAGE

It's well known that a premium line of paint will cover more area with fewer coats. The same is true for premium sanding products. Many abrasive products are developed specifically for the professional painter, and some of these premium abrasives are manufactured with professional-grade sharp minerals and coatings. This recipe yields a much longer-lasting product that cuts faster and resists clogging, when compared to standard abrasives. And some premium abrasives can be used on soft, slightly cured paint, so you can finish the job sooner. That means you not only can cover more surface area with fewer sheets or sponges but also increase your productivity with less effort. And better results that are easier to achieve is one sure way increase your profitability. **APC**

Vicki Eggleston is the market manager for 3M Construction and Home Improvement Markets. She can be reached at (651) 737-9960 or veggleston@mmm.com.

John Petersen is the technical specialist for 3M Construction and Home Improvement Markets. He can be reached at (651) 737-4088 or jgpetersen2@mmm.com.

