

# Learning a New Language

By JOHN E.D. TAFF  
associate publisher

## Try Primers

The market for interior paints is one thing; the market for interior primers is something altogether different. Historically, primers have proven to be a tougher sell than paints. Instead of just trying to sell a customer on painting his walls, dealers find themselves in the potentially uncomfortable position of having to sell pre-painting the walls first. That can be difficult; so difficult, in fact, that some dealers skip the sale altogether. And that's a disservice to their bottom line... and their customers.

It's even tougher in a tough market. But just how tough is the market out there for primers?

"General interior primers are down in sales comparable to the interior paints," acknowledges Dick Hardy, president of XIM Products Inc. "This is due to the new construction market being down. The repaint market continues to hold. People and businesses are repainting and fixing up as usual. Specialty repaint primers have not fallen off as the general primers have."

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Barbara Hershfelt, senior product manager for Masterchem Industries, says that the priming market faces some challenges. "Professional painters understand the value of priming but may skip the step because they believe it will save time, while consumers are generally confused about the time- and cost-saving benefits of priming. While primer sales are strong, a huge opportunity exists for more professionals and consumers to use primer every time for the most professional-looking finish.

Added to that are concerns about the environmental safety of primers. "VOC challenges continue to change the market environment," says Valerie Johnson with Eliokem. "Due to these changes, the trend currently is to move from oil-based products to water-based products. However, many consumers and contractors agree that oil-based primers in some circumstances out perform water-based primers. Paint manufacturers

Masterchem's Kilz primer,  
in two sizes.



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are launching VOC-compliant odorless oil based primers for the user who desires the oil-based performance but does not wish to deal with odor.”

All of this contributes to a tough market for today's interior primers. But first things first. None of the rest of these things have a chance of being fixed until dealers can change perceptions about primers and their importance...and unfortunately that applies to both contractors and DIYers.



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“A few years ago we ran a number of focus groups about primers. What we found is that contractors knew about primers and their need,” says Dick with XIM. “Consumers, on the other hand, knew very little to nothing about primers. We identified, from these focus groups, a number of what we called ‘primer misconceptions.’ Things like primers are just low cost first coats; primers are made from the same things as the paints; you don’t need a primer, just use two coats of paint; and all primers are alike.

“While the above are true some of the time, they are not true all of the time. And, they are rarely true when considering a specialty primer that meets specific specialty needs.”

As with so many other things in your business, education seems to be the key here. To convince customers to purchase primers as part of their projects, you have to convince them that they need them...which means you have to explain why they need them and what they do.

“It starts with education and awareness,” says Barbara with Masterchem. “Dealers should work with their vendors and manufacturers to ensure they have all the tools they need to inform the consumer. Seeing is believing with priming so have samples on hand that show a surface that has been primed versus one that has not. Cost- and time-saving