

Setting a PRIME Example

Before you pop the lid, it's a great idea to know what's under it.

By Jerry Rabushka

It's a long standing joke that guys don't like to read directions, but it might not be so funny when you've got to go back to a job because you (or worse, your boss!) didn't bother to read the back of the can of primer.

Directions aren't such fun, and the more complicated the directions, the more it seems they're written by someone whose English (or Spanish) is a second language—slot A, tab B, what the....? The more stuff a company has to print on the back of a can, the smaller the instructions become. But remember, everything you're familiar with now was at one time a new product.

THERE WAS A TIME YOU DIDN'T KNOW SQUAT ABOUT THE PAINT YOU USE A LOT.

"New primer products can have a huge impact on any contractor's business, provided they're used as intended by the manufacturer," says Jason Long, Kilz brand manager at Masterchem. "We're increasingly seeing niche primer products in the industry, from water-based to low-odor/VOC to formulas specifically intended for interior or exterior surfaces."

In other words, there's a lot more out there than just run-o'-the-mill "primer." Before you get your primer, you might want to visit the job site first to see what it needs. "Note the condition of the surfaces you'll be working with and consider the environment of the work area, determining if it has the

potential to be subjected to harsh weather conditions or odors and smoke," Long prescribes. You might even take some notes and bring them to the store so you can describe your surfaces to the folks behind the counter. Along with that, Masterchem has product materials and brochures available to help you figure out what's best.

Tim O'Reilly at Zinsser—we'd say he lives and breathes primers, but breathing most primers isn't a great idea—says to start with the basics. Inside or out... water, oil, alcohol-based... how do you clean it up? "It's important to know what surfaces it was designed for and equally important to know which surfaces it wasn't." If you've got stains, for example, find out if the primer will cover those stains. That sounds simple, but so is "put down a drop cloth before you paint."

After that, plan your journey before you embark—don't take the diapers and leave the baby behind! You need to know the recommended application tools, spread rate, dry and cure time, and if possible ask some of your trustworthy paint buddies about their experiences with the product. "You're almost guaranteed to walk away with a couple of tips!" Long says.

Also, he says, don't start by slapping it up where everyone can see your trial-by-fire. Start off in an inconspicuous area so that you can see how it works and get a feel for how it brushes, rolls or sprays. "In the case of spraying you'll understand how it atomizes as you adjust pressure, how the spray pattern lays down, and get a feel for build and vertical hang," says Long.



IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

Read the ingredients, adds Valerie Bokar at Eliokem, which, among other things, is a resin manufacturer headquartered in Villejust, near Paris, France but domestically situated in Akron, OH. So, you know where her heart is—in the resin. “There are commodity type resins for low-end primers, and specialty resins for high-performance primers, and each serve a different purpose,” she points out. “Reading labels about

what the product is recommended for is important in choosing the right primer.”

Dick Hardy is president of XIM, a maker of specialty primers in Westlake, OH. He's got a variety of unique products that work in special places, so there's a bit of a different learning curve. “It's important to apply a test patch if you're unfamiliar with the surface or the conditions that the coating system must withstand,” he points out. “The performance

of most paints overlaps to some degree, but most painters know that when they really want the best durability, they go with the best grade.” Same thing with a specialty primer, says Hardy. “Where the primer has focused performance, there will be specific components that will be formulated in to give maximum durability in the specific application or on the specific surface.”

WHAT DO CUSTOMERS WANT?

How About The Truth!

There's another advantage to reading the directions. Over and above knowing what you're doing, you can convince other people you know what you're doing.

“The more knowledge a painter and store manager have about a specific product, the better they can explain the differences and match the performance to the expected results. Sometimes there are tradeoffs, and these need to be explained as well,” says Hardy. Find out what's important to your customer—is adhesion more important than quick dry, for instance—so he can make some informed decisions along with you. “You don't need to be a paint chemist,” says Hardy, “but you do need to have a familiarity with the performance characteristics. This is important everywhere, not just with the commercial or industrial sectors.”

There are a lot of factors that Valerie Bokar wants to get up in your grill... “Adhesion, stain blocking, dry time, spray, just to name a few. Using traditional oil-based primers in ‘people sensitive areas’ is not going to win you any points,” she says. Eliokem puts a lot of R&D into odorless resins, which then go into odorless primers. The painter

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who understands these products can get into a lot of places that the residents can't get out of. "Contractors that are conscious of people's inability to evacuate can use odorless products when oil-based performance is required and odor is a concern," she says.

Along with that, adds O'Reilly, just remember that every time you tape, drop and roll, you're putting your reputation on the line. "The professional applying the coatings bears responsibility of knowledgeable use," he says. Put more simply, you can't blame the primer when you used the wrong one. "As far as the paying customer is concerned, they want the job completed without failure, so proceeding without knowing the product you're working with is playing roulette with your credibility and income."

This may be a no-brainer, but apparently not—just by talking about primer, you're letting your customer know that you intend to prime. Part of your sale, says O'Reilly at Zinsser, is showing how primers are different from paint—i.e. resin rich as opposed to pigment rich. It's the kind of difference that may well convince your customer it's a necessary addition to the job. Remind your clients that anyone who isn't including full surface priming in their quote is expecting the paint to act as primer.

"The cost of materials as part of the total cost of the job still hovers around 10% in the world of painting," he says. "It's



Eliokem's Akron resin plant.

simply prudent and more economical to work with better products when considering the value of word of mouth advertising and the cost of call backs."

SOLID FACT

Hardy adds that while you might spend all this time reading

labels, you'll have to do a bit extra research to make sure of what's in the can. When you finally get that hot date, here are some ways to impress him or her that you really know your stuff about primer. If they're really interested, you might get to talk about an intermediate coat over dessert!

- Know whether a latex product is a straight 100% acrylic or a vinyl acrylic; the label may not identify that fact.
- The painter and store personnel should know that the % volume solids, and not the % weight solids, relates to the square feet per gallon at a specific dry film thickness.
- The painter and store personnel should understand the concept of PVC (pigment volume concentration) and how the loading of pigment in a paint formulation affects things like flexibility, how the coating film can breathe, as well as adhesion and other performance characteristics.

• It would really be beneficial to the painter and store personnel to understand how the drying and curing mechanism of a latex paint differs from that of an oil alkyd paint or from that of a two-component reactive paint or a solvent lacquer.

Notice how Hardy adds "and store personnel." If you're

