

How To Start A Profitable House Painting Business

If you would like a service business that will keep you busy, house painting is the one! A truck or van, ladders, brushes and some drop cloths are the main mechanical needs; you are the other ingredient needed for a thriving business. This is a business where you can get by with the bare minimum investment at first, then build slowly as your business increases -- adding air compressors, electrical paint rollers, and other fancy equipment as you need and can afford it.

The easiest way to keep busy (probably snowed under would be a better term) is to do work for real estate and rental agencies. They have lots of work but do not necessarily pay the best -- buy they do usually pay on time.

Most commercial interests are looking for economy: they want the inside walls painted "any color, so long as it is off-white" and don't care so much about long lasting jobs because tenants damage the best quality paints almost as fast as the lower priced products.

Besides, the places look and smell fresh and clean after they are painted. These jobs you can do fast and not worry so much about matching colors to rapidly changing minds.. In fact, if you want to learn the house painting business and need income right away, this is the way to start.

To start your painting career with commercial work, contact several real estate companies and rental agents. tell them what you do, about how much you charge, and ask them to try your services.

Always leave your card with them a telephone number that someone will answer. You have a wide choice of arrangements - who supplies the paint, whether you charge by the hour, square footage, room or job.

You can undoubtedly find a paint supplier who will sell you paint on credit,,, however these sources may only handle higher priced paints that your customer will not pay for. You can do the same with ladders and brushes -- and, you can rent equipment that you will not ordinarily need (or can't afford).

Commercial accounts require careful management of your time. When they call you for a job, they are usually in a hurry. A tenant is complaining or they need the place painted in order to rent it.. You should always be in a position to tell them when you can get started -- and you MUST SHOW UP when you promise! Not showing up will lose you more accounts than sloppy work!

If there is a problem and you cannot get there when promised, call the customer and inform them a problem has arisen. They may gripe over the phone, but they will appreciate the fact that you didn't "stiff" them (they know things like this happen). If you run into problems in this area and have any helpers, at least send a helper over to start the job.

When doing commercial work, you will be tempted to accept smaller jobs by individuals -- that pay better. Doing small jobs between

big ones is one thing; doing them INSTEAD is another. Decide what kind of work you want to specialize in and make that your first priority.

Commercial accounts have one additional advantage over private jobs -- they are continuing. That is, they keep sending you on job after job as long as they are satisfied with your price and work.

Normally, each private job is one-time thing. Although references to friends and relatives and word-of-mouth advertising can be a tremendous help to a successful painting business, each rental agent or real estate account represents a continuing series of jobs itself.

Contracting to paint for private individuals generally (but not always) is much more profitable than commercial work. But, it usually requires more time and effort because there are more individuals to please.

You will have to estimate the job, submit a bid, wait for a response, then start the job and undoubtedly modify details as you go -- private home owners frequently change their mind about colors or just what does and does not get painted.

One contractor sizes up his prospective clients and adds 10% to his bid for those he suspects will want a lot of modifications. When the job is completed, you will hopefully be paid in full. Here is where you can get into trouble! You have already paid for the materials and your helpers (or owe them), and the owner wants to pay you "next week."

One or two cases like this will teach you to get a clear understanding of payment BEFORE you start the job!

As long as you can take care of the paperwork, you can hire helpers to do much (if not most) of the actual painting. Consider hiring high school and college kids during the summer, and don't overlook retirees.

One entrepreneur went to a senior citizen's club and found a group of retired men who would go out and paint his houses without supervision. They did excellent work, kept their own time records, and did the jobs for less than half what a painting contractor would have charged!

Take a good look around your area and determine what kinds of painting jobs are needed (wood, stucco, one or two story, weatherability, styles, etc.), and adjust your efforts accordingly. When you see a need, make sure the affected people know you can provide the solution.

After a while, you will be able to "eyeball" a house and know just what it will take for the job. Until then, it is best to know what you are getting into before committing to a price.

Measure the square footage of the surfaces to be painted. For example, a wall 8' high, 50' long is 400 square feet. Subtract for large doors and windows for the exact amount of surface for that wall.

Do the same for all other walls, ceilings and offsets and subtract for the openings for the overall surface to be painted. Look on the paint can to see how many square feet a gallon will cover to estimate the amount of paint.

Next, figure the smaller surfaces (woodworks, window sills, trim) that will be painted with gloss latex or enamel. Some guessing may be necessary for this type work, but the amounts involved are relatively small.

Some painters base their estimates on the square footage alone -- they just consider the "savings" of doors and windows against the paint and extra time needed for small surfaces.

If the job is about average, they balance out. If the job has more or less openings, a percentage is estimated. This technique is much faster than measuring all the surfaces, but is not difficult for an experienced paint estimator.

Next, consider any expendables that might be involved, such as tubes of color, paint mixers, plastic drop cloths, and any special tools. Finally, it is time to estimate the labor.

If you have ever painted the inside of a 10 x 12 foot room you know about how long it took perhaps 2-3 hours with a roller, plus another hour for set-up, trim, and clean-up. Then, do the same with the trim and "close work" and add the two.

Although you will soon develop your own gauge, you can use a temporary formula for now, based on rooms, square footage and the amount of trim.

For outside painting, the surface to be painted will have a lot to do with what it takes to paint it properly -- some surfaces are more porous and require much more paint, some will need scraping and/or sanding, and still others require primer, sealer, and/or extra coats to cover dark colors.

Unless you already have some experience in this area, it would be a good idea to bid those first few jobs by the hour until you can more accurately estimate them,

Although rates vary drastically in different parts of the country and even neighborhoods, an arbitrary rate for normal size inside rooms (including materials) would be about \$100 each; outsiders of single, smooth surfaced dwellings, about \$500.

Don't forget to consider how many coats of paint the job will take, whether primers or "color killers" are needed -- and a biggie: surface preparation.

Many frame houses have peeling or blistered paint that must be sanded or removed; some have mildew that should be sprayed with a chlorine solution (Clorox - or any brand, washed and let dry.

Inside walls may have cracks or holes that need to be repaired, and there may be places where part of the surface is missing or rotted. Every painter has a supply of putty and normal cleaning materials, but some jobs obviously need more than a normal paint job.

When bidding on or accepting a job, look it over thoroughly and agree on what is to be done about any special problems like these.

Tip: An easy (and cheap) way to spray for mildew is house a garden sprayer. Pour household bleach into the plastic sprayer jar, turn on the hose and spray the water and chlorine mixture on mildewed walls and eaves.

After an hour or so, rinse. Check for any stubborn spots and redo them. When rinsed and dry, paint right over. Note that you should not wear your best suit while spraying chlorine, and avoid breathing the fumes.

When submitting your bid, always figure it with good quality materials and let the customer know that you did.. If he wants to scrimp for a better price, let it be his decision to use cheaper materials.

This is not to say that should you choose the most expensive paints -- only good quality. Since you are now a business person,, you can probably get a discount on all your painting supplies. If one store won't give you a discount, go to another!

This is extra profit -- you need not share this savings or information with your customers, even if you cut the contract price.

To help sell your services, compile a photo album of before and after pictures. Take the before and after pictures from the same angles, and it won't hurt if the afters are in a little better light. <count the best ones in your sample job book and post the addresses (not owner names) on each, so they are real to your prospective customers.

The main pitfalls in this business are over extending -- taking on more work than you can handle, or jobs that are too complicated for your talents and/or equipment at the time. These are clearly important because in order to be successful you must earn a reputation for keeping your word.

You can avoid over extension by looking over each job carefully before accepting it -- and keep your reputation by making good on all promises, whether to big or small customers (either can hurt you if you "do them wrong"). Pay your bills, keep your word and do good work, and you will do fine.

BUSINESS SOURCES

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF PAINTERS & ALLIED TRADES, 1750 New York Ave.,8th Floor, Washington, DC 2006. Write for information abut painting.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.,31 East 2nd St.,Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelster Rd.,Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St.,Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office

supplies.

IVEY PRINTING, Box 761, Meridan, TX 76665. Letterhead: 400 sheets plus 200 envelopes - \$18.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3; business cards - \$13 per thousand.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality, but no choice of style or color.