



THE PAINTER'S RAG

pdcaresidentialforum.org

IN THIS ISSUE...

- ☛ From the President
- ☛ Survey Says...!
- ☛ Color Selection: Stumbling Block or Smooth Sailing?
- ☛ Editor's Note: Congratulations, We Made It!!
- ☛ PDCA 2011 Expo Speaker List
- ☛ Social Media Made Simple
- ☛ If You Are Not Using Direct Mail Marketing, You Are Missing The Boat!
- ☛ Online Referrals Drive Business
- ☛ The Craftsmanship Forum Column



From the President

As my wedding anniversary rolls by in November, I pause to reflect upon the small business owner with the entrepreneurial spirit and the entirely positive outlook on life that I married. We exchanged vows in a church that has since been torn down, with gold bands that we never wear; me because I was a skinny teenager at the time who gained weight with every baby I had over the following 15 years, and he because after three days on the jobsite post-honeymoon, the ring was getting damaged. While the rings and church didn't last, the things that matter did. I continue to be amazed at what I learn about my beloved.

Recently I found out that he is a Woo. What is a Woo? A Woo is an acronym related to a leadership strength called "Winning others over". In a book by Tom Rath (2007) entitled *StrengthFinders 2.0* a scratch-off code is included and allows you to take a 30-minute test online. This test searches for your top 5 strengths, (out of a possible 34) based on extensive Gallup poll results, and then provides you with a multi page analysis. Once you know your top five, you can integrate them into your work life so the things that motivate you can be accentuated. Some people list their top five strengths on their LinkedIn page and resume; others give the test to all the managers in their organization, including prospective hires so that they don't duplicate their own strengths in management.

Back to my Woo. This explains why he wants everyone in the check-out line to

hear whatever clever thing he has to say. He knows every worker by name behind every counter he frequents. He is often greeted, no less than "Norm of Cheers" style when we walk into an establishment.

I thought I was the only one to wed a Woo until last summer at Advanced Shop Talk in Charleston when I went on a tour with John and Stacy Peek, Scott Lollar and Tony Kozak. While John and Scott delighted the public with their antics and I tried to look like an inconspicuous passerby, it dawned on me that this was just like being out with my husband! Stacy and I had an instant bond – the sisterhood of marrying a Woo. Note to Scott's wife who was not on the trip: you're invited to join our club.

I have a suspicion that many of my fellow painting contractors have a Woo in their top five. One of the many profound things Rath (2007) says is that "being anything you want to be if you just try hard enough" is a misguided maxim that should be replaced with "you can be a whole lot more of who you already are" (p. 9). When it comes to the Woo's, however, this could be a frightening scenario for the world.

Have a great winter everyone! Enjoy the things that last. I'll be sitting at my desk wearing my jacket and typing with my freezing ring-less fingers for the next five months.

May the forum be with you,

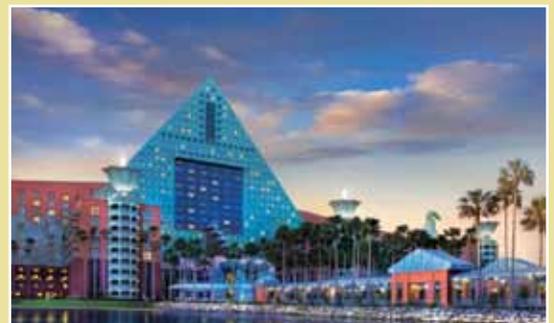
Julie Gehrke

PDCA 2011 Expo - Register Now!



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Convention Registration now open visit
www.paintinganddecoratingexpo.com for details



Survey Says...!

by Nigel Costelloe, nigel@catchlightpainting.com

Our recent Residential Forum survey received a strong response and we hope the results go some way to offering consolation, motivation and inspiration. We are all enduring challenging times and while none of us is confronting unique challenges, we have all succumbed at some point this year to the pitiful wail, "Why me?"



So in the spirit of misery loves company, read on.

Recall the ratings as follows: 1=terrible – 5=awesome. A median response of decent was 2.5.

HOW WERE SALES THIS YEAR? 2.69

Many rued the dismal sales figures and some had eliminated all employees and were back in whites to make ends meet. But some were celebrating either a return to normal sales or even exceeding projections.

HOW WAS GROSS PROFIT? 3.0

Most recorded decent GP for the year; more recorded 'encouraging' or 'awesome' than recorded the equivalent in sales so this means most have paid more attention to working more efficiently with fewer resources and smaller budgets.

HOW WAS NET PROFIT? 2.56

Sadly a full quarter noted terrible NP for the year, another quarter mediocre. Only 15% were encouraged by NP. If any fat remains in overhead, cut it out!

HOW'S YOUR OPTIMISM HEADING INTO WINTER? 2.65

Most are guardedly optimistic. 11% have already decided

to forecast doom and gloom but almost 50% are feeling encouraged or better.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING ABOUT YOUR PROSPECTS FOR 2011? 3.3

At last, unbridled almost-optimism! While 18% are still seeing the glass half empty, the rest are sipping from the cup of positive affirmation and 8% are feel-

ing warm and fuzzy about next year.

Some examples below:

- We have diversified our revenue buckets (sources); doors have opened for us in new verticals.
- Low balls are making it tough to land jobs.
- A lot of clients have postponed work for next year; we have \$100K lined up for next spring...
- The future is unwritten so I will write a great one.
- I think there will be demand in 2011 since so many have been conservative about spending money.
- We have learned that we can work less volume with a greater net profit – wow!

HOW AM I DOING AS A LEADER OF MY COMPANY? 3.5

Half gave themselves a decent rating, 45% a good-great score and 3% are awesome leaders (or have no employees...).

Most then must be communicating their fortunes to employees; seeking out their help in marketing, maximizing efficiencies, etc. After all, they have as much skin in this game as we do.

Continued on page 4...

Color Selection: Stumbling Block or Smooth Sailing?

by Dan Brady, dan@danbradypainting.com

Getting clients through the color selection process can have a dramatic effect on your bottom line! It's mid morning and your crew is out on the job. It's one you're sure they'll wrap up by mid to late afternoon so they'll be ready to tackle that really big job tomorrow. You've just gotten a second cup of coffee and are about to make some appointments to do some bids. Then it happens. The phone rings. "We've got a little problem here with the color," your crew leader tells you. And you know the rest of the drill. All work will stop today until you get the color issue straightened out... your schedule is completely thrown off and those bids for new business will get put off until this crisis is resolved.

Or maybe you don't even get the job started. Instead of having your crew onsite, you're having coffee with the homeowner – who has yet to make a color choice and who seems to want to talk about anything except color for their walls. This could be a great job – and your crew could start tomorrow – but you're facing the very real possibility that this job may not happen for a month... or ever. Let's face it. Some customers panic, some are clueless and others become paralyzed when it comes to picking colors for their home.

The number one roadblock to starting jobs on time is color selection. Without paint colors that have been chosen and approved by the customer, you can't start. And even if the paint color has been selected, chances are that unless you've helped the client to visualize exactly how that color will look in their room, your project will easily

be derailed.

Learning how to coach clients through the color selection process is key to making your painting business run smoothly and to maximizing your profit. Be prepared to help clients with color selection and your business will benefit thanks to projects that start on time and that don't get interrupted mid-project.

How do you accomplish that?

To effectively run your business and schedule your team, you need to help your client make their color selections well ahead of time. Just as soon as the client signs a contract, begin working with them on color. It's a simple process:



1. Meet with the customer and review the color deck to choose a color or colors.

2. Call that information into your paint store.

3. Have your paint store mix a quart of the paint in the color the customer has chosen and in the sheen that will go on the wall. In other words, don't

get a sample of flat wall paint if the client wants ceramic matte.

4. Have the paint store do a brush out of the paint on an 8x12" piece of construction paper.

5. Then have the paint store either mail the brush outs to the customer or hold them so the customer can pick them up.

6. Have the customer take the brush outs to the room

Continued on page 5...

Survey Says...! continued from page 2...

HOW IS YOUR SENSE OF PURPOSE AND MOTIVATION?

Here are some representative samples of the 48 we received:

- Slowly moving forward.
- Holding on for dear life 70%, driving the company 30%.
- Now that I have made the most difficult layoff decisions, I am more purposeful and motivated.
- Sense of purpose has never been more clear. Do what must be done to keep company growing in unstable times.
- I'm encouraged and positive – there are plenty of customers that value quality and service.
- Driving forward like a Mack truck with no reverse or brakes!
- We're spending the time we can't be painting building a better company... and hanging on for dear life.

In closing, it's worth noting that even though our unemployment rate is approaching 10%, that means that 90% of us are still employed - a figure that many other developed economies find enviable.

Our role as CEO is to constantly find new opportunities and then successfully 'sell'

our service – critical to this success is belief that what we offer has value. Be that value years in business, tradecraft, or service, if we cannot convey to each and every prospect that we are the best choice for their project **even** if we are more expensive than others, then we fail as sales professionals. It's not the economy, it's not the competition – it's us.

I'd like to invite those members who are enjoying success this year to share with us their secrets.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS AND HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE IT?

I'm happy to collate random thoughts into prose if you just want to shoot me a quick email (nigel@catchlight-painting.com) and we'll share the answers in the next issue. ■

*Have a great tool
or tip in your bag of
tricks? Please forward
it along for inclusion
in the next issue.*



Editor's Note: Congratulations, We Made It!!

by Suhaiba Neill sneill@johnneillpainting.com

While it's hard to believe that it is now December and we're all winding down the year, the good news is, that means we made it to the end. Whether you merely survived or found a way to thrive this past year, we all deserve a round of applause for having the courage and fortitude to make the necessary adjustments to run more stream-

lined businesses. Hopefully 2011 will bring a return of confidence in the area of consumer spending, and now that we all know how to run a lean business, we can use that knowledge to capitalize on new opportunities as they arise and increase our profit margins. And if you use the downtime this winter to get a jumpstart on your

marketing for next year, you'll be more prepared when things pick back up in the spring. So, give yourself a pat on the back and then get back to work. ☺

Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday season, and hopefully even a few days off.

Color Selection: Stumbling Block or Smooth Sailing? continue from page 3

you'll be painting at the time of day he or she will be in the room, tape them to the wall, take a good look and then move them to another spot in the room. This is the fun part for most clients. They can move the sheet of color around in the morning, mid-day and in the evening. That way they see the color and how the natural light in the room at different times of the day – and on different days, both sunny and cloudy – affects its appearance. By going through this process, they'll know that the color they've chosen looks good to them at the time of day when they'll be using the room.

7. You confer with the client and have the paint store make color adjustments well before the job is scheduled.

The benefit for you as the contractor in using this system is that if the color brush out isn't what the client visualized from the chip on the color deck – and it usually isn't – there's time to adjust before this "crisis of color" throws off your crew's entire schedule.

Even better, with the brush outs helping your clients to visualize the final color in their room, you won't end up with your crew repainting walls – maybe more than once – and spending 40 hours on an eight-hour project.

CLUELESS CLIENTS

Another frustrating client is the one who is truly clueless when it comes to color. They tell you "I like blue" but that's all you can get out of them. Do they like robin's egg or

aqua? French blue or navy? Even worse are those clients who simply don't have any idea what color they want in their home, which is why they're living with white primer walls eight years after moving in.

How do you get these clients to select a color? Well, if they're Internet savvy, you can ease them into the process by helping them go through the Color Sense game from Pittsburgh Paint. By answering a series of questions, this game helps customers determine their preferred colors based on the five senses, their interests and style.

But Color Sense is just a start. So much more goes on in a room than just color preferences: the windows, the window treatments, the furniture, the flooring, the floor coverings and the environment outside the home. While there's lots of good advice online, there's nothing like having the client walk through their home with a trained professional who takes into account everything inside the home and the environment outside the home as well as the homeowner's personality.

That's why offering a one hour free color consultation with a local interior designer is a great way to help lead the panicked, confused or paralyzed client through the selection process. It's a small investment for you that pays off big dividends over the life of the project. With the color selection process completed, you can order their paint and get their job on the schedule, confident that you've done everything you can to make the job run as smoothly and successfully as possible. ■

DISCLAIMER - While this newsletter is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information on subjects covered, the association is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional or technical advice. Accordingly, the association cannot warrant the accuracy of the information contained in the newsletter and disclaims any and all liability, which may result from publication of or reliance on the information provided herein. If legal advice or other expert assistance or advice is required, the services of a competent, professional person should be sought.

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Check out the PDCA Residential Forum page on facebook which includes a discussion board.
Visit: <http://tinyurl.com/of53cd>



2011 PDCA Expo - Residential Forum Seminars



If you were unable to make it to AST 11, here's your second chance to attend the first rate presentations, which will make up the Residential Painting Track at the PDCA Expo in Orlando.

Registration is now open at www.paintinganddecorating.com

THE BUSINESS STRESS TEST

In this session participants will measure the "pressure" created by their businesses or jobs. Based on individual test results, attendees will identify their top stressors and explore the options to bring more balance to their businesses and lives.

Presenter, Julie Gehrke, R.N. developed the Business Stress Test by combining her medical knowledge with her experiences operating a small business.

Julie is the current president of the PDCA Residential Forum. She owns and operates Signet Painting, Inc., a full service paint contracting business and wood finishing shop with her husband, Larry.

PAINT ADVOCATES: UNDERSTANDING DRIVERS AND MOTIVATORS OF THOSE WHO "LOVE" FRESH PAINT

Learn from The Paint Quality Institute's most recent market study on "Paint Advocates", those homeowners who enjoy a freshly painted room or exterior. By understanding the elements that drive frequent painters to initiate paint projects, professional painters and contractors are better equipped to develop programs that are likely to trigger painting activity among those "less inspired" and "less inclined" to be self-starters. This is very useful information for those looking for innovative tactics to grow their business!

Debbie Zimmer, Director of PQI Communications and Media Relations in North America, is on the cutting edge of the latest painting trends such as color, design and current decorative techniques.

BREAK-EVEN – WHY EVERY CONTRACTOR NEEDS TO KNOW IT!

Calculating your break-even point is a critical skill that every painting contractor should have. At anytime, you should be able to quickly analyze your break-even for the year, the month or even the week to know what number you need to hit to stay profitable.

In this session you will learn:

- How to calculate your break-even point based on annual and monthly budgets
- How to determine what it takes to make an investment in overhead pay for itself
- Analyze your situation to determine what costs can be cut to lower your break-even
- Determine how and when it makes sense to increase your break-even point

Knowledge is power. Knowing your numbers and learning how even small but timely changes affect your profitability increase your opportunities for success in any economy.

Linnea Blair of Advisors on Target is a Business Coach and Consultant who specializes in working with Contractors to run profitable businesses using best business practices.

WINNING THE GAME OF OPERATIONS

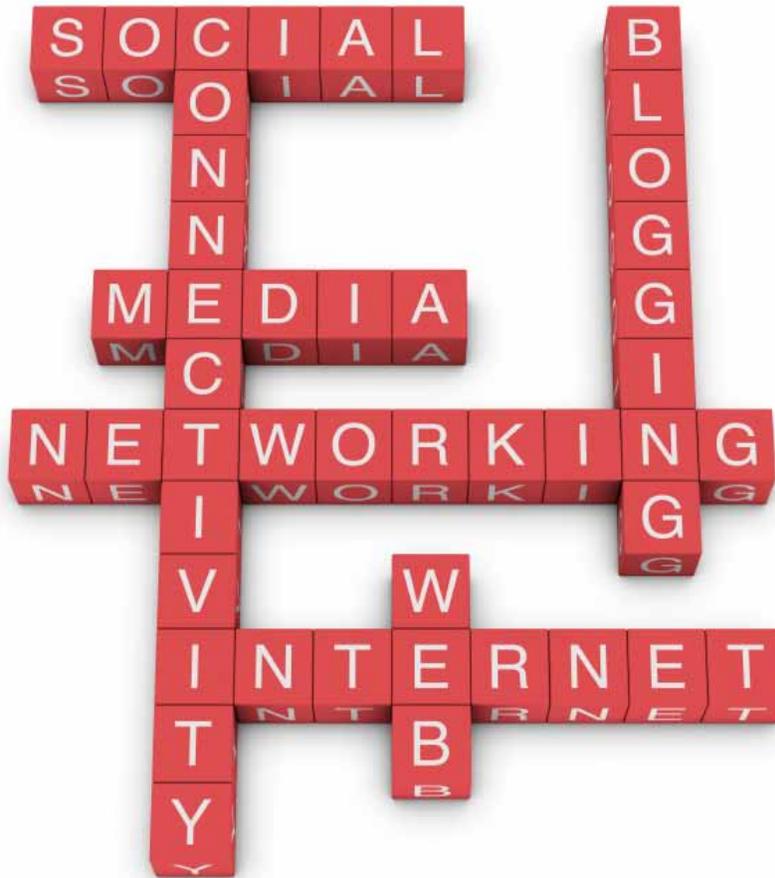
Our companies succeed or fail on their ability to produce a profit. A multitude of variables affect the profit margin of any project, beginning with the accuracy of the estimate and ending with the ability of your field crews to bring projects in on time. But what seems like a simple equation—accurate estimate=guaranteed profit—is easily tripped up by the challenge of making sure your people work efficiently and competently. Using a panel format we'll ask experienced and successful members of the PDCA's Residential Forum to share how they "Win the Game of Operations". ■

Social Media Made Simple

by Suhaiba Neill sneill@johnneillpainting.com

So for those of you who have been holding your breath and hoping this whole “social media” craze would blow over, I’m sure you’ve turned three shades of blue by now. Exhale, take a few deep breathes, and then use some of your down time this winter to get caught up with the rest of the internet savvy folks. I’m not going to sugar coat it for you, this can be a bit time consuming, but when you break it into smaller pieces (as I will outline for you below) it becomes much more manageable.

STEP 1 - We’ll start with your website, when was the last time you updated it? More and more people are doing their research online before buying, so you want to make sure that your website accurately reflects where your business stands today (and not where you were in 2004 when you launched it). Not sure what to change? Determine who your targeted customer is and then look at some larger consumer driven websites for ideas. For example, if you want to cater to the woman of the house, you might want to take a look at pottery barn’s website.



You may also want to take a look at your competitor’s websites and see what they have to offer, and be sure to update your site accordingly. And if you haven’t done so yet, it’s time to add a blog. Word Press is a free and very simple one to install and use. Once up and running this will make expanding your social media presence much easier. Worried about what to write about? Jot down some topics that come up frequently when meeting with customers and then post simple answers. One short and sweet post a week is all it takes to get picked up by the search engines,

who are always on the hunt for fresh content.

STEP 2 - Next comes LinkedIn. This is a fairly simple one too, and the set up can be completed on a quiet afternoon. Log onto LinkedIn.com, create a new account, and be sure to upload a headshot and fill in as much detail as possible on your profile. Then you can link to your current email address and connect to all of the people you know. You’ll also want to search for and connect to any groups or organizations you’re associated with. And last, but not least,

connect your LinkedIn page to your blog. If you used word press, you simply have to go to the applications section on your LinkedIn page and select it. Now, every time you make a post, it will show up here too. See, your web presence is expanding already, but we’re not quite done yet.

STEP 3 - Now, we’ll move onto Facebook. This can be a bit trickier due to some of the “business page” restrictions, but if you have a personal

Continued on page 9...

If You Are Not Using Direct Mail Marketing, You Are Missing The Boat!

by John P. Neubert rgbt86a@aol.com

Neubert Painting, Inc. will finish 2010 with close to \$1.8 million in sales. Our pre-recession sales were about \$2.0 million. We feel that the 10% decline in business that we experienced is better than the much larger declines experienced by other contractors. Furthermore, we did

this in Cleveland Ohio! The Cleveland area lost over 14% of its jobs over the last 10 years.

I feel that much of our success was a commitment to keep our \$100,000 direct mail campaign intact. Yes we still use direct mail! It may be expensive, but it still works as long as it is done properly.

Here are a few of the things that we have learned about direct mail over the years:

- Our best customer list is that of our past customers. Our interior painting business is supported by 10 mailings to approximately 3,300 former and current customers. These 33,000 letters cost us about \$10,000 a year and typically generates approximately \$250-350,000 in interior paint sales.
- Interior ads which are sent to non-customers generally do poorly.
- Long copy does much better than post cards.
- Val paks, coupon mailers and door hangers do poorly.
- Lists that you buy often do not work because of a focus on the income of the homeowners. This is a mistake. High income is a poor predictor of potential sales.
- High post graduation rates and high net worth are



better predictors of potential sales. People with postgraduate degrees and high net worth tend to congregate together.

- We generate our exterior painting lists ourselves by driving down streets and identifying houses as wood frame, brick trim, stain, and aluminum siding refinishing. We buy ownership

information lists and constantly update this data.

- Each homeowner on our list will receive 6 exterior mailings per year. Each ad piece is tailored to the type of house the homeowner has. The messages also change seasonally.
- Direct mailers must be patient. We do about \$150,000 of work in one community every year. It took us 5 years of mailings to get to \$50,000 in sales and another 5 years to get to \$100,000.
- Direct mail pushes potential customers to our website. This helps make our website more relevant.
- Our website along with other community marketing helps us to capture both highly educated and high net worth individuals who do not live in our target neighborhoods. We hired a good web developer to optimize our website. Since we have a well developed and optimized web site, we usually show up on Google's first page.

I am amazed at how many painters seem to be more focused on low cost guerilla type marketing instead of solid branding that can be developed with direct mail. Our direct mail marketing budget is less important now than it used to be. Today we spend about 25% of our budget on our Website, radio ads, ads in local community

newspapers and our charity projects. These other marketing methods have helped us to balance out our branding.

We are currently assessing the pros and cons of e-mail communications with our customers. At the present time we are collecting e-mail addresses. We feel that e-mail communications could replace or augment current mailed communications to our customers.

If you are planning to put a direct mail campaign together, please do the following:

- Send regular letters to your previous customers
- Make your own mailing lists
- Forget post cards. Develop long copy! There are many books at local bookstores on the subject of direct mail advertising. Consider hiring a writer to write this ad copy.

I am amazed at how many painters seem to be more focused on low cost guerilla type marketing instead of solid branding that can be developed with direct mail.

to grow market share with direct mail. Many of your competitors do not have the budget to send advertising pieces. Investments made on good marketing now, will pay off as our economy recovers. Good luck in your marketing endeavors! ■

• Hire a graphic designer to design your mail advertising. It should look like all of your other marketing pieces. Websites and graphic design should be left to the pros.

• Commit to target neighborhoods repeatedly.

A high quality campaign will succeed! Your success will allow you to grow and add new neighborhoods. . This is probably one of the best times

Social Media Made Simple continued from page 7...

Facebook page, you'll be able to use this to help you overcome the main hurdle. So, log onto facebook.com and click on "create a page for a celebrity, band or business". Word of caution, choose your page name CAREFULLY, for you cannot change it once created. Next, you'll want to add your company details to the "basic information" page, upload your logo to the "profile image" page (you may have to play around with the size of the image to get it to fit properly), create a few photo albums, and most importantly, use your personal page to ask people to "like you" on your business page. Once you have 25 "fans", you'll be able to further customize your page. You'll also want to link your Facebook home page to your blog, so again, when you make a post, it shows up here as well. From your home page, click on "edit page"

(under your logo) and then click on "applications". Once here, click on "social RSS" and then on "link to this application" and follow the directions to add the link to your blog (I recommend copying and pasting it directly from your website over typing it in by hand). Now your blog posts will automatically show up on your Facebook page.

STEP 4 - Finally, you'll want to set up a Twitter account. Yes, I said Twitter, and don't worry that no one will want to "follow you". Remember, you're trying to expand your web presence and every little bit helps. So, log onto twitter.com and click the big yellow "sign up" button. Upload your logo and fill in as much detail as possible. Then you'll want to go to twitterfeed.com and link your blog to your Twitter page. Now, your blog feeds here as well, and every time you post some-

thing, it's feeding to three other sites that are all linked to your business.

You can also use your LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter pages independently to promote your business and connect to customers, but for those of you who may not have the time or inclination, if you keep up with your blog, you'll still be making a larger imprint for the search engines to find. You may also want to add links from your website to all of your social media pages and include them in all of your email marketing campaigns as well. And remember, the best part of all about adding the recommended social media pages – they're all free! So get out there and "socialize". ■

Online Referrals Drive Business

by Mike Kelly, mike@crestwoodpainting.com

A website is you telling the world about your business. A blog is the same but with updated content to boost rankings. Both are simply a Business Owner going “blah blah” to potential customers. But online reviews are actual customers telling the world how great (or pitiful) you are. This is the gold standard in terms of relevance – customer-driven, customer-focused, unfiltered and direct from the source.



Online reviews are super-charged word of mouth referrals. A past customer will sing your praises when specifically asked about you or your services, but an online review communicates the same information to thousands, night and day, for a very long time. And at no cost.

Online reviews (and their effects) snowball – one is way better than none, five is better than one and twenty five will rank you head and shoulders above your competition. Research-prone customers can use the number of reviews and dates to see a trend in your business: 20 reviews over 3 years is much more impressive than one review 6 months ago.

Here are the major review sites –

Angie's list

- Angieslist.com is the only fee-based review site. Members pay about \$45 per year to access reviews and search for contractors. The demographics are great (upper income, willing to pay more for a good contractor experience) so an Angie's estimate gets special attention – those reviews have produced some good business.

YAHOO! LOCAL

- Yahoo Local is similar to Google Local but, like much of Yahoo, struggles to compete with Google in this area. The logical place to send a customer if they already have a Yahoo account.

yelp

- Yelp allows businesses to build the most complete profile page of all the sites – initially what got my interest. Three customers have since left reviews and all three were filtered by Yelp's hyper-sensitive You-Paid-Your-Mom-For-A-Review algorithm. A fine way for active Yelp-ers to find a good burger but there are better options for paint contractors to capture customer reviews - I no longer steer customers there. Google tried to buy Yelp; the deal fell apart (Dec.'09) but the attempt indicates that online reviews fit with Google's overall strategy.

Google places

- Google Local Business Center has been steadily introducing new features. While not touted as a review site, they will probably out-Yelp Yelp. You do have a Google Local profile, right? No? Good gravy, do this immediately if not sooner, even if you don't have a website. Google has been adjusting local business listings and review processes for quite a while and will likely continue.



- CitySearch, InsiderPages, Kudzu, BestOfTheWeb and others all do pretty much the same thing.

In the Internet Dark Ages of June '07 I asked customers to leave feedback at Yahoo Local. A firm believer in Murphy's Law and Don't Put All Your Eggs In One Basket, I created profiles at the other review sites as I became aware of them. Each review is then copied to my website where it is recognized as new content and so helps rank higher.

Initially Google only (very inconsistently) recognized their own reviews. Eventually, they saw CitySearch and the rest until one day just this past February Google included all of the early reviews from Yahoo. Woo-hoo! – my review numbers almost doubled overnight.

A good percentage of our customers find us online and so have already seen our reviews. Before we finish a job I explain that reviews really help a small business grow and "would you be kind enough to leave a review of your experience with Crestwood Painting?" They almost always enthusiastically agree. So I send an email with direct links to our profile on several sites – what could be easier? But then they have to sit down, often start a new account (name, email, password) and compose their thoughts so most people just don't follow through. This drives me nuts – I even send a gentle reminder and still only manage a 30% response rate. But I'm working on it.

There are Good Reviews and then there are Bad Reviews. If only 30% respond, every review must fire on all cylinders. A review that says "Great guys, nice job" is essentially worthless so I always include suggestions of helpful phrases that address the Big Four (accurate estimate, show up on time, finished on time, clean and neat) and ask that they include search-friendly terms like company

name, city, exterior or interior painting, etc. This almost always generates a nice-sized paragraph of descriptive, keyword-rich text that becomes a permanent part of our online identity.

The review has a very different function from customer satisfaction surveys. Surveys are helpful for internal quality control while a review is more advertising and marketing. Surveys can capture quotable material but those quotes can appear to be "inside jobs" more than review site quotes. Right now my only focus is getting more business; I'll deal with cleaning up internal processes later.

Negative reviews can happen. I had an Angie's List estimate for a pinoodling little homeowner-started-and-then-abandoned project that was just not going to be good business. He left a negative review when he didn't get the estimate (note to self: do this differently next time). Responding in an even-handed tone I explained the situation and have since had other homeowners comment positively on that exchange. Another time, a website telemarketer left a nasty one-star review on Google (maybe my NO was too direct); I responded with a brief explanation and less than two weeks later Google had removed that review – an obvious hit-job written by a non-customer and so it wasn't relevant.

There are two priorities for every project: getting paid and getting a review (satisfied customers, good quality, etc. are all assumed). Reviews lead to more estimates than a breakfast club, networking group, local PDCA meeting, updating our website and even yard signs. ■

**AST 12 -
SAVE THE DATE!**

September 29 - October 2, 2011

Marriott Oakwood - Chicago, IL

Mark your calendars now and look for more details in the next issue.



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The Craftsmanship Forum Column

- 1. I have noticed that the caulking on my house is cracked and some has fallen out. I think that could be making my house colder over the winter. Is it too late because of the cold weather?** Some caulks cannot be used in cold weather, but others such as Dap's Weather Master can be used even down to -35 degrees. For more on caulking, see COP RE-PR-7 about exterior caulking.
- 2. My stucco needed some patching done which has been completed. What must I know about the patches before painting?** Some stucco patches can be painted within a day. Other products need 30 days to cure. Check the packaging for instructions. Look for more in COP RE-PT-3 on painting stucco.
- 3. I just painted a door and it has small specks of grit even though I brushed it off with a dry paint brush before painting it. What should I have done to prevent this?** There are many ways for grit to get on a door that will ruin the smooth finish. Some things that may help are; vacuum the area and put down a clean drop cloth or clean paper, strain the paint especially if it is an already opened can, limit air movement by closing off drafts, and use a tack cloth on the door before painting. See more on COP RE-PT-4 about painting doors.
- 4. I painted my window last year and now it has started to peel by the glass. What could I do to prevent this?** Be sure the glass is clean next to the wood to be painted and that there is no gap between the wood and the glass. Then, when you paint, let the paint from the trim flow onto the glass about 1/16" to 1/8" so that there is a paint seal between the two surfaces. See COP RE-PT-5.
- 5. I have a railing with spindles. When I try to paint them, I get thick globs on the back side. Is there a way to prevent this?** If possible, have someone else on the other side of the spindles to either paint or at least brush out the excess paint as you do the side you are on. It is best if two can work in tandem from one end of the banister to the other. See COP RE-PT-6
- 6. I have heard that there is a special way to fill holes in stained wood that is different than painted wood. What is it?** After staining and a first clear coat, fill the holes with colored putty either from a jar or a putty stick. Wipe off any excess putty and then apply the final varnish coat. COP RI-PR-3