From the President

AST 16

This year’s Advanced Shop Talk (AST 16) was a great success, and I think it’s fair to say that we were all amazed at how what seem like simple business subjects surrounding paint contracting could be so expanded on by analyzing and sharing experiences in a room full of peers. It truly advanced my business thinking, as I’m sure it did for many others, if not everyone in attendance. Here are some of my personal takeaways and highlights from the conference:

While Servant Leadership may sound mushy, it takes a lot of guts to truly speak the effective language of HR. The quote “I hired an employee, but got a human” was a good reminder for why the most important factor in our businesses are our employees: from the apprentice to the top manager. The insights into our own natural personality traits was also extremely eye opening, but especially with regards to learning how to determine our employee’s and customer’s traits and styles as well and interact accordingly. By paying closer attention to each person’s natural state, personal interactions can be more productive and gratifying to all.

With great peer-to-peer discussion, the estimating seminar expanded our thinking on developing job costs and how to be more accurate in predicting the scope of work. Using digital media to display tricky access on exteriors, hard to gauge substrates, and whacky color choices, we had fun sharing horror and success stories with each other. I love how this diversified group isn’t shy about sharing details from their companies for the benefit of all in attendance.

Learning about current advertising trends, what works and doesn’t work for others, and new and powerful IT ideas that will modernize my digital footprint, will be truly beneficial in my business as I plan for the coming year. I was also able to renew my salesmanship fervor thanks to the discussion around “we are not in the proposal writing business.” Sharing company processes for project mobilization, learning about key business numbers, and sharing best practices for scheduling estimates and job operations rounded out a full two days of stellar information.

Our amazing sponsors also joined in as peers, participating in our discussions and sharing common business concepts and how they are handled in larger corporations. They are also great listeners, and continue to demonstrate great interest in how and what residential painters need to simplify their office and field processes. All of the different materials, tools and services on display (some to our surprise), was a good reminder of how much they have invested into our market, and for our benefit and ultimately, profitability. We are blessed to have such dedicated people as a part of our trade. Yes, technically it’s about sales, but these men and women have time and time again personally poured all they have into our industry, and for that I would like to thank them dearly.

As the new President of the PDCA Residential Forum, I would love to know how I might serve your best and address your business desires, needs, and challenges. With an enthusiastic board, our goal is to continue to provide great value to residential contractors on a national level, so please let me know how we may be of the best service in helping you achieve your business goals.

Contract well,
Randy Fornoff
Editor’s NOTE:

It was great to see both familiar and new faces in Providence this summer at AST 16 and thank you to everyone who made the trip. I don’t know what I was thinking when I put myself at the very end of the program (that will never happen again), but I do hope everyone got as much out of the conference as I did.

No matter how organized and efficient we are when it comes to running our businesses on a day-to-day level, I always find it extremely helpful to attend events like AST to get a different perspective on things. It’s also a great opportunity to take a much needed deep breath in the heart of the busy season, have a few laughs with old and new friends, and regroup before heading home to close out the year. If you still have yet to attend AST, I urge you to save the date for next summer now! They just keep getting better and better, and San Diego is a stop you’ll be sorry if you miss. So here’s to a great 4th quarter and seeing you next year.

Suhaiba Neill

SAVE THE DATES

Advanced Shop Talk
AST 17
July 29 & 30, 2016
The Westgate Hotel
San Diego, CA
Save the date NOW and we’ll see you in sunny California next summer!
Ten years ago when I was a brand-new painting contractor, I wrote enthusiastically about working with interior designers. I wrote that it was a great way to quickly generate word of mouth (and revenue), especially when you’re just getting started in the business, or expanding your market into a new town in your area.

Now, ten years later, it’s time for an update – time to revisit the question: if you’re a residential contractor specializing in repaint and/or remodel work, is it still a good idea to work with designers? **Yes,** but only to a certain point, and only from a very select pool.

Let me start by stating that markets vary from city to city – what works in Boston may not work in Denver, and in shades similarly across the country. I’ve been in the Denver area now for ten years and what I will candidly share is my experience alone, and it is specific to Denver only. If my story inspires you to look into working with designers, please do some research in your area before spending time and resources traveling down a road that may or may not lead to anywhere worthwhile.

**Lesson #1**
Joining a professional design industry as an industry partner or equivalent is mostly a waste of time and resources. Mostly. I’ll note that some of our best customers are designers, but they are the always-busy designers who bring new clients aboard consistently. They run tight projects, expect professional craftsmanship, and coach their clients that it is worth the extra 100–200% over the station wagon painter for exceptional results. The challenge is simply that most of the designers who fit this description are not sipping chardonnay at after hours events sponsored by a professional designer’s association. They’re too busy working to spend time schmoozing, as are you. I’m not saying you’ll never meet a great designer at a networking event, and more importantly, actually establish a working relationship, but it’s unlikely.

**Lesson #2**
You do have to get involved, but get involved on a high level. Don’t sign up for a committee which is made-up largely of student designers, or just-graduated designers – they don’t have a client list or any experience yet. If you are going to invest your time, get involved on the board level, nothing less. It will require a commitment of your time, you are going to be put to work, and it is going to be inconvenient, so make sure it’s at the highest level where you’re likely to find clients among fellow board members.

Get in the association directory, but be wary of sponsoring events, bar tabs, dessert tables, slide shows, etc. Instead sponsor breakfast at a busy firm or have coffee/lunch with a designer you know has a growing
client base and build your relationship, **one on one**. Finding out who the real movers and shakers are isn’t difficult, just ask around. Read local shelter mags and talk to remodelers who you have relationships with — the best remodelers know the best designers.

**Lesson #3**

**Stay true to what you do best.** There are ample opportunities to waste your time and money all around the professional design industry, so be discerning. Don’t try to be everything to every designer, instead be **selective**, be **impeccable**, and **be in demand**.

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**2015 KILZ® Picture It Painted Professionally Awards**

Here’s your chance to be recognized in front of your peers for **outstanding** work in the industry, community, and **PDCA itself**.

Log into the members area of the **PDCA** website to review the categories and download the entry forms.

For submission and guideline questions, please call **Beth Thompson at 800-332-7322**

**KILZ® Picture it Painted Professionally Awards (PIPP)**

- Community Improvement Awards
- PDCA Safety Achievement Awards
- L.E. Travis, Jr. PDCA Craftsman of the Year Award
- PDCA Painter’s Choice Awards
- PDCA Member Service Awards
Strategies (and 1 Ninja Strategy) to Annihilate the So-Called “SLOW SEASON”

By Steve Burnett, steve@burnettmarketing.com

Stay “Top of Mind”

We spend so much money and effort looking for new customers when we already have a list (in some cases, a very long list) of customers who already know, like, and trust us and would be more than happy to work with us again, or even better, refer us to a friend. But like the rest of us, they get busy and forget about us in the midst of managing their day-to-day lives.

Here are three ways to make sure you stay “top of mind”, so when do need additional work, or a friend mentions needing a painter, your name is the first one that pops into their head.

1. Connect with them on Facebook and/or LinkedIn. You should be friends and friendly with them online. Business is all about building relationships and — well, so is life!

2. Shoot them a quick email. You can use a simple system like Gmail or sign up for a more formatted email program that will automatically send and can be customized to match your brand. Mail Chimp, iContact, or Constant Contact are a few automated suggestions. But don’t just send them the “traditional” business email, send them G.I.E. emails: Gratitude, Inspiration, or Entertainment. No sales, no coupons, no blogs (only those who signed up to hear from you should receive blogs).

3. Mail them a card. YES, a real, lick the envelope, put a stamp on it, snail mail card. And before vetoing this idea, think for a moment - when was the last time you received a card in the mail from a service company you used and it had nothing to do with sales, coupons or discounts, but actually made you smile and want to put it on display in the living room?

This is the type of card that means a lot to customers (everyone, really) and will help you make a deeper connection with your customer base. Again, think G.I.E. - Gratitude, Inspiration, or Entertainment. (I’ve found that people like entertaining cards the best.) Find a funny holiday coming up soon and get creative!

Then plan to do it again in 4 months, and every 4 months moving forward.

All of this might sound like a pretty big undertaking, but if you know me, you know I like to streamline things as much as possible. To make this particular process simple, we use Send Out Cards. You have to know a current customer to sign up for their service, so ask around at your local networking groups or contact me if you are interested for more details.

The Real “A.B.C.’s” of Sales

Replace the old adage of “always be closing,” with “always be connecting!”

I don’t make calls with the goal of trying to close sales. Instead, I connect with people by giving them value first. The same goes for your company. When your customer is in need of your services, who will they call?

You want the answer to be the company who has already given them value for free and been helpful simply because that’s how they operate.

A great way to practice your “ABC’s” is with local networking. My 3 favorite groups are: BNI, The Chamber of Commerce, and The Rotary Club. They each serve different purposes, but are all great places to connect and stay “top of mind” in your community. Many of these new
**face-to-face** connections could also be what helps your company stay busy through the winter. And if you’re not a natural networker, I suggest reading *Endless Referrals* by Bob Burg and also *Givers Gain: The BNI Story*. No matter how and where you choose to network, remember that the key is to look for opportunities to add value or be of service.

**3 BLOG, BLOG, BLOG**

While this was not our hottest lead source straight away, with work, we did climb from 25% to 52% close ratio on quality internet leads over an extended period of time. Here are some strategies to use without having to pay for SEO services.

1. **Write a 300-500 word** blog post each week (ie – “long copy”). These can be short stories about current projects, before and after photos with explanations of what was done, or a short post about how to properly prep and paint. Typically, once a homeowner sees everything that goes into preparation for painting, they’ll understand why it’s best just to hire a pro and give you a call.

2. **Blog about prices.** I recently did a search for “exterior painting Venice fl” (where I live) and a post I wrote back in November of 2011 is still at the top of the Google search list.

It’s very basic, in fact the design is pretty ugly, but it answers the prospects questions and they can schedule an estimate without leaving the page. If you’d like to read the full post, here’s the link: http://www.burnettpainting.com/general-tips/how-much-does-exterior-house-painting-in-venice-florida-cost/

I strongly encourage you to answer these 5 questions in your next 5 posts:
- How much would it cost to paint my kitchen in (city).
- How much would it cost to paint my living room in (city).
- How much would it cost to paint my interior in (city).
- How much would it cost to paint my bedroom in (city).
- How much would it cost to paint my stairwell in (city).

**NINJA MARKETING STRATEGY**

(as promised)

Offer a **Lead Magnet** at the end of your blog post. This is a report that is emailed out, and it must be of value to your website visitors. Valuable enough that they are willing to trade you their email address for your free offer. Here’s an example:

5 Things You Must Know Before Hiring A Painting Contractor.

They select the item. A “pop up box” will open and ask them to enter their email address, and after providing the information requested, they are sent to a thank you page, which confirms the successful transmission. If you use “YouCanBookMe” on your website, you can also include a prompt that asks if they would like to schedule an estimate. Some book, some don’t, but now you have provided them with something of value while asking for very little in return. The most important step in this process for you is to be sure to add their email address your newsletter list (if you use an automated system like Constant Contact, it will take care of this step for you).

As for your email list, remember to only send articles of value. It’s not about you. It’s about them! If you focus on them, when they’re ready to paint, they will call you! And there you have it.
Join Us

Do you love seeing a new issue of the Painter’s Rag in your inbox?

Do you look forward to making the trip to AST every year?

Do you find the articles and tips in the monthly e-news helpful and relevant?

Have you ever considered joining the Residential Forum Board?

We need your help to keep the Forum fresh and new.

Whether it’s contributing to the e-news, joining the AST planning committee, or taking an official seat on the board, the door is always open for members to get involved. Please consider making a small contribution of your time to lend a hand and propel the Residential Forum into the future.

Contact Executive Director Tony Kozak at:

716-844-8174
or email Tonykozak@roadrunner.com

What did the painter say to the wall?
One more crack like that and I’ll plaster ya.
2015-2016
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