

# More Learning = More Earning

## *Conversational Selling Gets Results*

**T**he upside to a down economy is pro painters are shopping around more frequently. And with less work to do, they have more time to actually talk shop while shopping. This provides an exceptional opportunity for you to strengthen your relationship with the painters in your community by simply striking up a purposeful conversation with each and every customer.

Since your store exists to profitably help painters succeed, be sure to make every minute of conversation count. Rather than discussing the weather or bemoaning economic conditions, focus on conversational selling techniques that include warmly greeting and engaging each customer, identifying needs, offering solutions and developing long-lasting relationships.

### **Greet and Qualify**

First, welcome everyone who walks in your door. This means you and every employee smile, make eye contact and proactively greet each shopper as a welcome guest. If you do not know the customer, quickly introduce yourself and assure them you will help them get what they need. Greet regular customers by name. Always express curiosity about each customer's painting project. Every bit of verbal and non-verbal communication must reinforce how delighted you are to see this individual.

By engaging new and existing customers promptly, you are providing excellent service uncommon in today's retail environment. If the prospect is a homeowner needing product knowledge or project tips, you will be able to recommend the proper tools and products to make their job successful.

With a contractor, perhaps you offer tools or services that will help them

paint more profitably. By investing time to engage and get to know every customer's need, you will separate yourself from the competition and become the go-to paint dealer for the homeowners and pros in your market.

### **Listen and Connect**

When engaging customers, a paint dealer's gift of gab can be a hindrance. Remind yourself to listen twice as much as you speak as you build rapport and connect.

Ask relevant, open-ended questions or statements such as, "tell me about the job you would like to do." Listen carefully to their responses and ask basic questions that will help you assist them. By actively listening and establishing good rapport, you are better able to offer solutions to their problems today and you are building a bridge for future business.

### **Identify Needs**

As you attentively listen and build rapport, identify needs. Make a mental checklist of the tools and services that will satisfy the prospect's stated and unspoken needs. For example, a homeowner purchasing a small can of paint for crown molding may require a ladder, tape, tarp, paintbrushes, etc. At the appropriate time in your conversation, address those obvious needs. Then begin to plant seeds to harvest later. For example, a homeowner re-painting his crown molding is somewhat more likely than the average Joe to tackle a decorative arts project in the future and may be interested in learning of your faux-finish gear. While you have their attention, quickly provide a tour of relevant merchandise. By doing so, you give them the freedom to buy more now or to come again to buy more in the future.

You should let customers, new and old alike, know of all the goods and services your business offers. Also, ask contractors if you are stocking everything they need. Many times pro painters shop at more than one store, and you may be able to grow your business with existing customers simply by carrying all they need and removing any reason for them to shop elsewhere.



By **Mike Beaudoin** National Sales Manager for Paint Sundry Brands

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## Offer Relevant Solutions

In today's economy, everyone is looking for the best value. With pros in particular, the best value often is not the lowest price. Nor is it easy for contractors to articulate their most relevant needs. After all, it is a rare pro painter who will immediately state, "I need a better cash-flow management system."

Because painters have many unspoken and unmet needs, you must proactively cross-sell products and services. Offer special discounts to contractors who set up accounts? Inject this relevant detail into a conversation with any pro that does not yet have an account. Rather than waiting for contractors to randomly discover a new tool in your store, recommend they buy it and give you feedback. A simple example may sound like this, "I want you to be one of the first to see a new pro tool we just got in to help you be more productive. This new Chinex-filament paintbrush

from Purdy cleans up really fast. This means you spend less time cleaning after every project. Can you see the value of using a tool like this?" If you know your clientele, chances are they will see the value and buy the tool.

## Long-Lasting Relationships

Many successful paint dealers weather economic ups and downs by maintaining a steady clientele. Since we know painters are shopping around for the best value, it is important to entice new customers while simultaneously retaining existing high-volume customers during these tough times.

Consider offering coffee and donuts several mornings a week as a show of appreciation to your regular contractors. This simple gesture generates goodwill and creates a sense of community painters may not find elsewhere in their day. Keep in mind that some of your best customers are also your best sales-

people. Do not be afraid to ask these painters for referrals and award gift certificates to those who help you generate new business. In a similar fashion, you have the opportunity to be their best salesperson. Be sure to recommend the experienced pros who shop your store to the Do-It-For-Me (DIFM) homeowners who are shopping in your store.

Your goal in these tough times must be to initiate purposeful dialogue with customers so you can strengthen long-lasting relationships and attract profitable, new business. By actively seeking painter feedback and responding to demands in your marketplace, you will simultaneously maximize sales, grow market share and provide superior customer service. As times get better, your friendly conversations will provide a smart return on investment simply because you are wisely engaging your customers when they have the time to talk with you, right now. ■

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#### Address correspondence to:

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