PAINTING BUSINESS PRO.

The Startup Checklist for Painting Contractors

Everything you need to start a painting company in 9 simple steps

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9 steps to get started

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Establishing your company

01

Decide on your company name

Put “Painting” or “Painters” right in the name, and keep it easy to spell. Customers can’t hire you if they can’t find you.

Before you commit, Google the name. If another company is already using it, or anything close to it, pick something else. You don’t want a customer accidentally hiring your competitor when they were searching for you.

Once you’ve landed on a name, register your business.

02

Register your business with the Secretary of State

You’ll register your business with your Secretary of State. Google “Colorado Secretary of State,” or whatever state you’re in, and you’ll find it.

Stuck? Search “how to register my business in (state)” and you’ll find articles that walk you through it. Whatever you do, don’t pay a third party to register for you. This is an easy process once you know the steps.

Want to see it done? Click the button for a quick video of registering a business in Colorado:

REGISTERING YOUR BUSINESS

03

Get your Federal EIN (Employer Identification Number)

Once you’re registered with the Secretary of State, you’re ready to get your Federal EIN. You need it to open a bank account, file taxes, and legally run your business.

HOW TO GET YOUR EIN VIDEO   MORE FEDERAL EIN INFO

Insurance and licensing

04

Set up your bank account

Registered with the state? Got your EIN? Now open your bank account.

Bring three things: your Articles of Organization from the Secretary of State, your Federal EIN confirmation, and your driver's license. That's everything the bank needs.

05

Get general liability insurance and a workers' compensation policy

Contact an insurance agency and set up two policies:

- $1,000,000 in General Liability Insurance
- A Workers Compensation policy

A good agent gets you the best protection, not the best price. Insurance is one place you don't want the cheapest option, because the cheapest option usually means bad insurance. And if you ever actually need it, bad insurance costs you a lot more than good insurance ever did.

Need a referral? My insurance agent handles insurance and workers comp in all 50 states. Email me and I'll introduce you.

SUPPORT@PAINTINGBUSINESSPRO.COM

06

Determine licensing requirements and get license (if required)

Licensing is different in all 50 states, and sometimes county by county. Do a little homework.

Google "Painting Contractor License Requirements in STATE." The answer usually sits right at the top. If it doesn't, call a local government office and ask. Keep asking until you reach the right person.

Building your visual brand

07

Create your first logo

Don’t spend much time or money on your logo. You just need something to start with, and you can always redesign it later. Keep it under $50 to $100.

A few ways to get one made:

- Ask friends and family, or post on your social media. You probably know someone who can help. This is the best option.
- Design freelancers, found online at sites like Fiverr, 99designs, or Upwork
- ChatGPT using a strong prompt:
  - Example: Create a simple, professional logo for a residential painting company called [YOUR COMPANY NAME] in [YOUR CITY], using [PICK 2 COLORS, e.g., navy blue and white], with a trustworthy, established, clean feel — like a company that shows up on time. The company name must be large and easy to read from a distance, in a simple flat design with no gradients, photorealism, or busy backgrounds, and at most one simple graphic element such as a paint roller, brush stroke, or house outline. It must stay readable at small sizes on a business card, shirt, yard sign, and truck door, work in a single color (all white or all black) for embroidery and vehicle decals, and avoid fine details or thin lines that disappear when shrunk. Show me 4 different options: one text-only, one with a small icon, one in a badge shape, and one modern minimal.

Establishing your web presence

08

Build a company website

You can create a website for free using tools like Squarespace or Wix. It's easy, and it doesn't need to be fancy. This is exactly what I did for my business the first 2 years. You can also find an affordable website designer or resource to build something for you.

Whatever you choose, don't pour too much money into your website early on. Nobody visits it until you hand them the link. Nobody finds you on Google yet. Nobody knows your business exists yet. You need a website because customers will ask for it, and if you don't have one, you look untrustworthy. This is about credibility and looking "legit."

Make your brand Search Engine Optimized (SEO)

Ranking at the top of Google is very profitable. It's also expensive and time-consuming. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, or "how you get a website to the top of Google." Start investing in it as soon as you can afford it.

REFERRALS

TownSquare Interactive

They do a good job at a fair price, and I have a rep standing by who has worked with a lot of PBP members. Email Sean Henderson with the subject line "Painting Business Pro Referral" and copy support@paintingbusinesspro.com. They'll take extra good care of you knowing I sent you.

Painter Marketing 360

The biggest company out there. They handle every kind of digital marketing for painting contractors, and they cost more than anyone else. I do have PBP members who use them and like them.

Lauren Lawson

Lauren is a one-woman shop who has spent her career designing websites for small business owners. She builds fully custom, SEO-optimized sites on an easy-to-use platform, so after launch you can maintain the site yourself or have her keep managing it for you. She built our website, which is the best endorsement we can give. Email her at ldlawson92@gmail.com with the subject line "Painting Business Pro Referral."

Marketing and sales materials

09

Order basic marketing and sales materials

Keep it really simple at the beginning. The goal is getting this business started fast so you can win your first job. You don't need much to start winning jobs, bringing in money, and painting your first houses. Once that's happening, you're making profit, and you can invest in all the stuff you want.

Even then, keep it simple. At the very beginning, you need:

- Blank Exterior Estimating Forms
- Exterior Estimating Standards
- Blank Customer Contracts
- Flyers
- Business Cards
- Basic Client Manual

Use the templates provided for your first version. Don't overcomplicate this. The templates are basic on purpose, so they're easy to use. And they work.

WHERE CAN I ORDER FROM?

Your best options for ordering your first batch of sales and marketing material:

VistaPrint | Office Depot | OfficeMax | Staples

Congratulations. You're ready to build your business.

SECTION 02

6 powerful reasons to build a painting company

The painting business has a *lot* of appeal and opportunity. It's not that I'm super passionate about painting. I'm passionate about serving my customers, taking care of my people, and building a great business.

Owning a business gives you something you can never have as a wage-earner. You control your time and you control your income. You can create anything you want in your life using a business as the vehicle to do so.

That doesn't make the business effortless. It makes the opportunity unusually practical. You're entering a large, durable market with a service people already understand—and you can create an advantage simply by running the company better than the average contractor.

What you do with that time and money is up to you. For now, let me show you why painting is a very attractive business to be in.

Low barrier to entry & easy to start

01

Low risk & low start up cost

You can start a painting business with an incredibly small initial investment. Even if you only have $250 to your name, starting a business in this industry is feasible. In fact, I started my business with $200 and made $4,000 in profit in the first 4 weeks, while only working part time.

Once you've gotten started, you can keep it simple and avoid the big risks. You don't need a storefront, a warehouse, a large payroll, or a fleet of vehicles to win your first job. A lean launch lets you prove that you can generate leads, sell work, and deliver a strong customer experience before taking on major fixed costs. That's rare. Most businesses take a pile of money up front, and then you cross your fingers and hope the profit shows up. It kills me to watch. A restaurant opens, and 6 to 8 months later the doors close. How much money and time did they lose? How big is the hole they have to dig out of now?

This business is different. Your life savings never has to be on the line, and profit can come fast and consistently.

02

High profit margins and a direct path to revenue

There's no product to invent and no audience to educate about what painting is. Find a homeowner with a real need, diagnose the project, present a professional proposal, and earn the business. When the sales and production systems work, revenue can begin quickly.

You can set up the business model so money never goes out unless money comes in first... all positive cash flow. That's a dream come true for a new business. And you can start with no equipment and no office (more on that later).

Weak competition, huge market

03

Low level of competition

Everyone I talk to has a bad contractor story. This industry has a bad reputation, and if I'm being honest, it's been earned. If you operate with integrity, show up on time, and do what you say you're going to do, you're already ahead of the competition. That's the opportunity.

It's also not a business-savvy industry. Most painting contractors were never taught marketing, estimating, selling, or managing crews. That's exactly what I teach. Follow proven business principles and you can leapfrog contractors who have been in your city for years.

04

Massive, growing market

Every building out there needs paint, inside and out. Again, and again, and again. New houses go up every day, so the market keeps getting bigger.

Plus, this is work AI can't touch. Software can write emails and build websites, but it can't prep, tape, and paint a house. While other industries worry about being automated, demand for painting keeps compounding.

In almost any market you can start generating business immediately. You don't need an existing reputation. In some ways, being new is an advantage. No matter how many established companies are in your city, you can start peeling off business for yourself right away.

Simple to run, overlooked by most

05

It’s simple and easy

Painters give me a hard time for this one, so let me say it carefully. I'm not claiming painting is easy. I'm saying you can keep it simple at the start.

Begin with residential exterior repaints and you don't need years on the brush, because you aren't the one painting. Experienced painters handle production. Your job is knowing the problems a house can have, the fixes, and the products to recommend. Prep, application, products. Your painters carry the rest. I can teach you that much in an afternoon.

From there, grow as you learn. You don't need complicated jobs to build a great company. Residential repaint is a huge, profitable market, and most of your competition is still losing jobs on the basics: showing up, following up, doing what they said. Do those things every time, and that's your opening.

06

It’s not sexy

What *is* sexy? Software. Apps. The stuff that gets pitched on Shark Tank. Some of the smartest people in the world are chasing those industries, and almost nobody is chasing the trades.

That's your advantage. While everyone fights over the crowded, glamorous stuff, you get a huge, durable market, healthy margins, and a lean startup cost. Being "unsexy" is exactly what keeps most people from ever taking a serious look.

I'll take unsexy all day. Because unsexy work, run well, buys the exact freedom everyone on Shark Tank is chasing.

If you're here, you probably already know what I'm telling you.

Most people I talk to want to start a painting business for one of three reasons: they've been working as a painter and want more for themselves, they've watched the owner of their company struggle and know they could do better, or they're outside the industry and they've seen how low the bar is. People tell me all the time about trying to get estimates. Nobody showed up or the work was terrible.

Either way, you see the opportunity to come in and do a better job. And it's almost impossible to find another industry like this one:

1. Start up for as little as $250
2. Make a profit in the first 30 days
3. Operate in a massive, need-based market
4. Face a low level of competition
5. Require little technical knowledge
6. Have a low barrier to entry

Ready to start your painting business? Here's exactly what to do next:

When you start a painting company, nothing feels obvious. No one hands you a checklist. This guide exists so you don't have to figure it out alone.

ERIC BARSTOW

FOUNDER

You probably won't find another opportunity like this one. It's an amazing industry for building a real business.

When I started my painting company in 2010, I started the way most people do: guessing at the steps, buying things I didn't need, and hoping the jobs would show up. It was a bunch of trial-and-error. That's where this checklist was born. It's the exact startup playbook our own companies were built on, and we still run it every single day.

- My painting company uses this exact framework, doing $60M a year
- We're the longest-running coaching company in the industry
- 3,000+ members have grown successful businesses with our program
- I've been coaching painting contractors for over 20 years
- We have millions of views on our YouTube channel and hundreds of 5-star reviews

Take a look and shoot me an email if you get stuck.

Eric

SECTION 03

What are your startup costs?

What it costs to start

Starting a painting business does not need to be expensive. I started mine with $200 invested and made $4,000 in profit in the first 30 days.

Below is the low end and the high end of what you can expect to spend before you're making profit. Once your first jobs are running, the business covers its own expenses. These are just the costs to get to that first job.

Business registration

$0 – $150

Every state charges a small fee to register your business, between $0 and $150 depending on where you live. This one isn't optional.

Bank account setup

$0 – $200

The bank won't charge you to open a business account. Depending on your relationship with them, they may just require a small opening deposit.

License

$0 – $1,500

Most states don't require a license. If yours does, expect less than $1,500 (the most expensive I've heard of). You can save up and get it, or sell your first job first and use that deposit to get licensed, then paint once the license is in hand. Be creative.

General liability insurance

$100–$200 + $100–$150 / month

Get liability insurance before you run any estimates. Customers want to know you're insured, and the same goes for workers comp. A $1,000,000 general liability policy should run you less than $150 per month. Need a referral? I have a great insurance agent who works in all 50 states.

Workers' compensation

$0 – $500

Your workers comp policy comes from the same agent as your general liability. You can set it up to cost $0 now and "pay" for the policy at your end-of-year audit. Or pay $0 for the first 2 months and start paying once the business is going. Ask your agent (or the agent I refer you to) for help with the payment structure.

The rest of the costs

Equipment

$0 – $5,000

Please don't buy equipment. This is one of the biggest mistakes people make. You only need equipment if you're using employees, and starting with employees makes this a lot harder.

Start with subcontractors instead. They're business owners with their own equipment and years of painting experience. No ladders, no trucks, no sprayers, and no pressure to keep employees busy. You can do a job here and there while you get started.

Initial marketing costs

$0 – $3,000

You have a ton of options for marketing, and plenty are free: posting on Facebook, posting on Nextdoor, going door to door, calling real estate agents, dropping flyers in a neighborhood.

Then there are paid lead services like Painter Choice, Thumbtack, and Craft Jack. Spend $3,000 on lead services and you'll get about 50 to 60 customer leads. That's more than enough to start winning jobs.

Marketing & sales materials

$100 – $500

The paperwork you print to start marketing and selling: flyers, estimate forms, contracts, and a client manual. All of it is included in the Painting Business Pro course. Download it, add your logo, and print.

Business training & business coach

$500 – $3,000

If you can afford to invest in my Painting Business Pro program, do it. It will save you a lot of time and help you avoid the mistakes I can't fit into this guide. For more information, contact us.

Startup cost overview

MINIMUM STARTUP COSTS

$250

Business registration, insurance, and marketing & sales materials. The bare minimum to get legal and start selling.

RECOMMENDED STARTUP COSTS

$850 – $2,350

Business registration $50 · Insurance $150 · Marketing & sales materials $150 · Business training $500 · Optional: initial marketing costs $1,500. The smart, comfortable way to start.

MAXIMUM STARTUP COSTS

$15,000

Nobody should start a painting business with this much money. It would include everything above, plus $5,000 on equipment you DO NOT NEED. And spending it would actually make this harder.

SECTION 04

How fast can you make a profit?

How fast can you make a profit?

How fast you can turn a profit is one of the best parts of the painting business. The answer: very fast. But it depends on how you start.

There are a lot of ways to dig a hole with a new business, and I hear from people every week who did it before they ever made a dollar.

Start completely on your own and it's hard to say how fast you'll get there. Best case: profit in the first month. Worst case: you run out of money first. That's fixable, but it's a hard way to begin.
Follow Painting Business Pro’s guidance, and turning a profit within your first 30 days is a realistic target. You can get through the entire training in 1 to 2 weeks, and some people have done it in 3 days. It's a target, not a promise: your market, your decisions, and your effort set the timeline.

And when you hit trouble, you're not figuring it out alone. There's a community of thousands of owners behind you. Ask questions, get answers, keep moving.

> We provide the guidance, the step-by-step plan, and the proven system. You provide the action.
>
> ERIC BARSTOW / FOUNDER

SECTION 05

Let's create your business goals

A goal-setting example

Setting goals is critical. Without them, you just end up wherever you end up. Start with your real goal. Pay off $40,000 of debt? Take a $10,000 trip? Work 20-hour weeks? Most goals turn into money goals, so that's where we'll aim. First we'll walk through an example. Then you build your own.

PHASE 1 & PHASE 2

With any startup business, plan on doing all the sales and production management yourself. We call this Phase 1. Phase 2 is when you hire key players like a salesperson (estimator) and a project manager.

TARGET PROFIT MARGIN

- Subcontractor expense / 50%
- Marketing expense / 5–10%
- Miscellaneous / 5%
- Profit / 30–40%

SAMPLE GOAL

$50,000 profit in 6 months

Assume: $3,000 job · 33% margin · 25% close

Revenue needed
$50,000 ÷ .33 ≈ $150,000

Jobs to book
$150,000 ÷ $3,000 = 50

Estimates to do
50 ÷ .25 = 200

Leads needed
200 ÷ .70 = 285

WEEKLY (40 wks): 7.1 leads · 5 estimates · 1.25 jobs · $3,750

NOTE 1

Paying for leads? Average cost is about $60 per lead. 285 × $60 = $17,100, about 11% marketing cost.

NOTE 2

Conversion varies by lead source. Focus on the number of estimates, and adjust your marketing to hit them.

NOTE 3

These assumptions are low. Bigger job size and higher sales rate lower your marketing cost % and raise profit %.

Now build the structure

You have your goals. Now build the structure that hits them. These are the actions that produce each number. Put them in your weekly schedule and execute.

GENERATE 7 LEADS / WEEK

1. Use the free marketing first: Facebook, your network, Nextdoor, calling realtors, dropping flyers.
2. Pay for lead services: Painter Choice, Craft Jack, Thumbtack.

5 ESTIMATES / WEEK · 70% CONVERSION

1. Call your leads right away. The sooner the better.
2. Call your leads 2× per day for 3–4 days.
3. Call your leads from different phone numbers, and at different times during the day.

1.25 JOBS / WEEK · 25% CLOSE RATE

1. You need a professional, proven sales process. The Painting Business Pro course covers this in depth.

2. Be GREAT with people. Deliver what they're looking for, and care about the customer.

3. Ask for the job. If they don't want to sign, ask why. What are they looking for? Can you deliver on that?

4. Your margin starting out is 30–40%, so you can negotiate a little early on. Do not train your salespeople this way. But when you're the one estimating, if price is the customer's only concern, you can wiggle down a couple hundred dollars. Never estimate below a 30% profit margin.

Now it's your turn

Set your own goals below. Fill in your numbers, divide the totals by your number of weeks, then map your weekly action plan.

How much I want to make

Time frame

 # Weeks

CALCULATE YOUR TARGETS

Revenue

Profit ÷ 0.33

Total jobs

Revenue ÷ $3,000

Estimates

Jobs ÷ 0.25

Leads

Estimates ÷ 0.70

PER WEEK / DIVIDE BY # OF WEEKS

Revenue / week

Jobs / week

Estimates / week

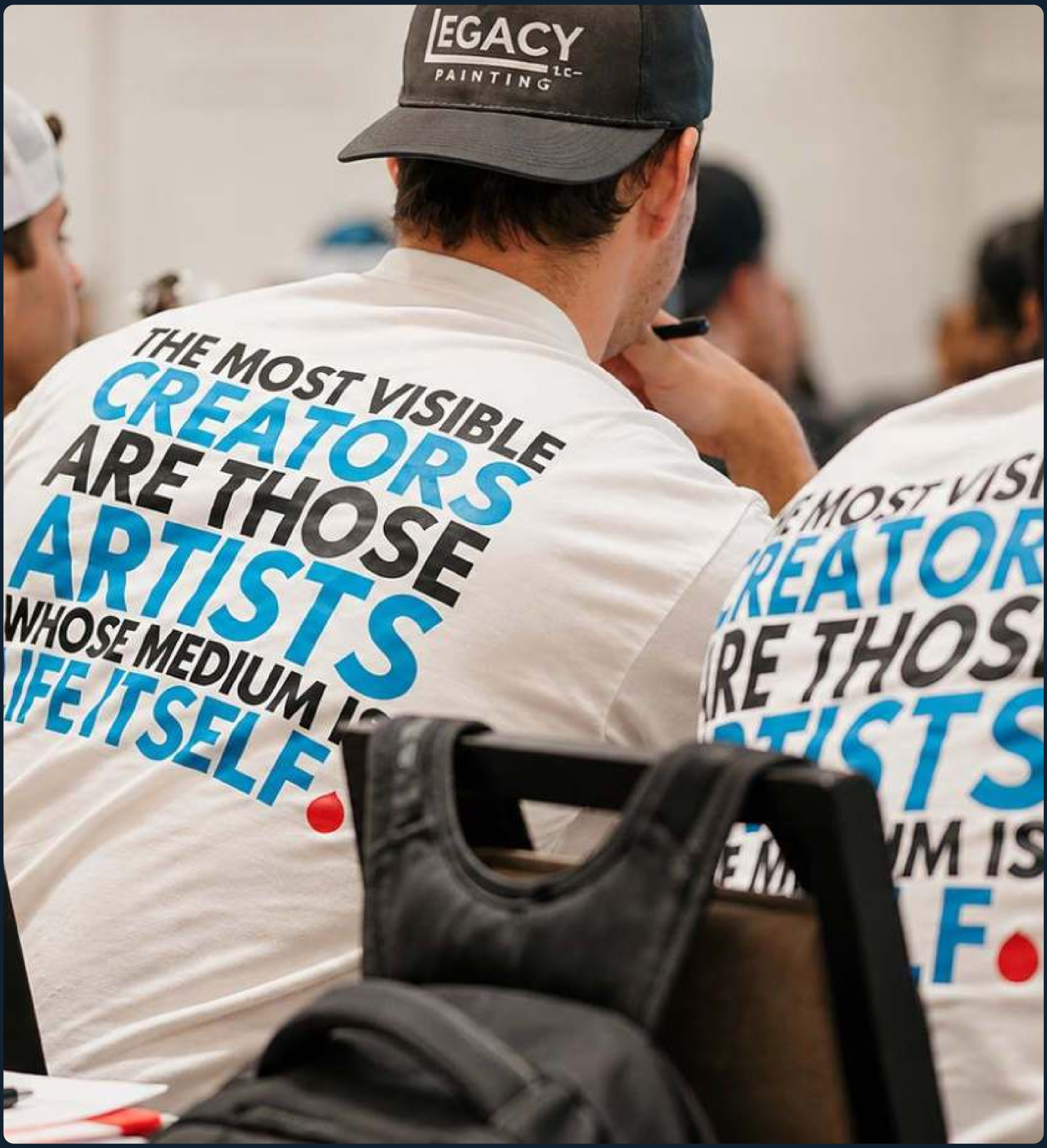
Leads / week

ACTION PLAN

Marketing	Conversion	Sales

SECTION 06

The big picture: growing your business



The Big 5

Starting a painting business is great. Growing it is where the real opportunity is. With a good business plan, building a $500,000 painting company that earns $125,000+ in profit is very achievable. There are 5 key areas you need to know to build a successful company.

01

Business planning & strategy

Map your numbers and the step-by-step plan to grow: who you hire, what you target, and when.

02

Estimating & pricing

Price for a healthy business, not to win on price. Cover the work, overhead, warranties, and profit.

03

Marketing & generating customers

Build a plan that uses the marketing that works and skips the money pits.

04

Sales & winning jobs

Your sales process wins jobs, beats competitors, and protects your price.

05

Project management & delivering on promises

Deliver on your promises at volume and protect your online reputation.

Planning, pricing & customers

01

Business planning & strategy

This is how you map out your financials, marketing plan, sales plan, and project management plan, and track it all weekly. Know your numbers. That's how a business person decides what to do next. Your strategy is the big-picture, step-by-step process you'll take to grow. For example:

- Who is the first person you should hire in your business?
- When should you hire that person?
- Who is the second person you should hire, and when do you know you're ready?
- What jobs are you going to target? Which will you avoid, and why?
- Will you use subcontractors or employees? Why?

Those are a few of the questions that make up your overall strategy. There are more.

02

Estimating & pricing

A big mistake painting contractors make is selling with price. That's not what your price is for. Your price is determined by your goals and how much money you need to earn. Your sales process is what sells the job. Your pricing must cover painting the house, marketing, insurance, warranties, future hires, other overhead, and profit. You need a reliable, consistent way to price jobs from day one, and a way to sharpen that pricing over time.

03

Marketing & generating customers

There are endless ways to market your business, but not all marketing is created equal. Plenty of methods work very well. Plenty of others are money pits that cost a lot and deliver nothing—and some of those money pits are household names. Hint: Angie's List is one of them. You need a marketing plan that capitalizes on the good strategies and skips the bad ones.

Closing & delivering

04

Sales & winning jobs

Your sales process wins the job. Your sales process beats the competitor. Your sales process lets you charge a healthy price so you never have to haggle. If you want to build a great business, sales is critical, and it's the part most painting contractors overlook.

05

Project management & delivering on promises

Now that you have paying customers, how do you deliver on your promises? How do you find and recruit good painters or subcontractors? How do you manage a project from signed contract to completed job? How do you handle the problems that come up? And bigger picture: how does one project manager oversee 200+ projects a year while keeping customers incredibly happy?

Because a great business means a lot of jobs. And a lot of jobs means you MUST do great work, or your online reputation falls apart fast. There are no shortcuts in this business.

SECTION 07

What's next?

What's next?

Whether you're starting from scratch or scaling what you've already built, the Painting Business Pro program is designed to help you create stability, healthy profit, and a business that doesn't require you to stay on the brush. Book a 15-minute strategy call and leave with a clear plan of action.

IF YOU'RE READY TO:

- Increase your profit margins
- Build a reliable team
- Get off the brush
- Grow past $1M and beyond
- Get back the freedom you deserve

Click to book a free 15-minute strategy call →

No pressure, no obligation, no sales pitch.
Walk away with a clear plan of action for your business.

PAINTING BUSINESS PRO.

Testimonials from members

★★★★★

Ben Tornambe

What an amazing coaching group! I never thought my business would've succeeded so much in just six months! I highly recommend Painting Business PRO! Shout out to Eric, Christiaana, Troy, Casey, Doug, Rachel, and Phil!

★★★★★

Daniel Rust

The best part about this program is that the people are real people, who genuinely care about you and your success. I recommend this program to all painting business owners who want to have freedom over their time, finances, and energy.

★★★★★

Mario Mormile

This program, this community, has changed my life for the better. I have grown as a leader in my business, family, and community more than ever this past year. I attribute this success to mentorship and accountability of the program. If you are serious about growing as a leader, have a conversation with the PBP team.

★★★★★

Antonio Velasquez

So much value! Eric and his team have gotten the painting business figured out. They also propose a different way of doing business that includes keeping your soul. We resonate with it so much! We are a painting company in South Carolina and are a top reputable business in the area thanks to PBP! Highly recommend!

★★★★★

Nick O'Keefe

We have been a member of Painting Business Pro since the beginning of our company 3 years ago. The course, community, and ongoing webinar support put us years ahead of the learning curve for jump-starting our business. Eric is creating more and more opportunities to dive even deeper as he continues to share his passion for teaching with the painting industry!

★★★★★

Forrest Jensen

For those that want to know the ins and outs of the painting world, Eric and PBP will show you the way. His SOP and sales advice is second to none and what he is able to plainly teach is impressive. I'd recommend this product to anyone and everyone who is looking for an industry to start up a business.