



HOW TO SELL EXTERIOR PAINT JOBS

American Painting Contractor recently spoke with James Martin, president-elect of the Color Marketing Group, an internationally recognized color forecasting group, about color selection for exterior paint jobs and how painting contractors can use this information to their business advantage.

AMERICAN PAINTING CONTRACTOR: How can color help a painting contractor secure jobs?

JAMES MARTIN: In this down market everyone's business is hurting. As we know, people aren't spending, but it is possible to use this market downturn to a contractor's advantage. That's because painting is the cheapest, most cost-effective way to completely reposition a property in the marketplace, commercial or residential.

APC: How should a painting contractor sell the value of a new exterior paint job to homeowners?

JM: Tell clients, "Curb appeal sells." You only get one chance to make a first impression; this cliché is still true. When a desperate seller is trying to make his or her property stand apart from all the rest on the market, it can be cheaper to paint than to drop the asking price. Any realtor will tell you that dropping the price is poison in the market, so upgrading the appearance of the outside of a building by painting is a strategic move.

APC: What are homeowners looking for?

JM: Today, what is most appealing to everyone is a feeling of shelter and comfort. We are living with the stress of traffic, cell phones, pagers, e-mails, tight deadlines, taking the kids to soccer. When we get home, we want to be protected. We want to shut the door, sit down in front of the home entertainment center and shut out the world. So we want our homes to give us a sense of respite. The easiest way to achieve this is to paint in warm colors. Advise clients to use a cream instead of a hard white – it softens the edges. Use natural colors that blend with the brick, stone and landscaping.

APC: What color trends do you see occurring in the market today?

JM: The trend in housing today is toward darker body colors for homes and businesses – for some of the reasons stated previously, and because darker-colored homes feel more solid and well grounded. They give the impression of being better built – and that lends itself to a higher sense of value. Everyone wants a quality home, and darker-colored buildings can feel more substantial. To keep the house from feeling too dark, however, cut the contrast with the trim. Use a cream or light tan rather than white. Once painted,



it will look white to the eye, but it will help soften the overall statement of the home.

APC: Most home exteriors are painted in natural or neutral tones. What if a homeowner wants more pizzazz?

JM: Make sure you use a "punch color." A punch color has an impact similar to the tie on a man's suit. It's what brings the whole house together and adds focus. With a punch color, you can change the demeanor of the home by changing the color. Typical places for punch colors are the front door and the shutters. A punch color can make a home feel cheery (coral) or stately (black-green) or just about anything in between. The tone you set for a client should match the interior. For example, a formal interior wants a formal exterior – there should be no disconnect for the potential buyer when he or she enters

the house after you have beguiled them out of their car with the sparkle of the exterior.

APC: What other advice would you give?

JM: Contractors should use a satin finish. A satin finish adds sparkle to the look and makes the colors richer and more vibrant. Sheen will actually hide defects in the exterior because the sun glints off of it and you cannot focus on imperfections. Flat paint, on the other hand, has a tooth and will hold dirt and enhance shadowing, which is what shows off defects the most. A satin finish also will tend to shed dirt when it rains or when it is hosed down. Most positively, it actually has a tougher finish than flat paints.

APC: How can a painting contractor convert this knowledge into more sales?

JM: Remember you are not in the maintenance business; you are in the value-added business. Remind potential customers that in this market they have to stand out to sell. If they are not generating any interest in their house, it may be because their look is tired or common.

Give them the example of a gray and white house. Simply changing the color to a warm gray and a creamy white and painting the house in a satin finish can make it feel completely different without really changing the colors very much. Suggest a tomato red door for punch and you have a transformed house sure to make an impact with its newfound curb appeal. **APC**

James Martin is an architectural colorist and owner of the national custom-color consulting firm The Color People. Internet: colorpeople.com. For more information on the Color Marketing Group, visit its Web site at colormarketing.org.