



Something New

To succeed in today's marketplace, independents very often find they have to do more than just sell paint. Today's independent has to actively and continually seek out niche or specialty markets. Moreover, it is finding and exploiting these specialty markets that allow independent dealers to compete with and set them apart from the competition.

One such specialty market that is often overlooked by the independent paint dealer is the restoration market. What is the restoration market? What does it mean to me? How the heck do I even know what to look for? How can I get started? These are some of the many questions that I get from dealers when I bring up the topic. But of course, the first thing they usually say is 'Are you nuts? There is none of that business around me.' After convincing the dealer that I am not as dumb as I look, we go through the why, where, and how do I get my hands on some of that business.

Chances are that if their businesses are in or near an older area with homes built more than 35 years ago, there are lead paint issues. A metropolitan area with masonry buildings, monuments, etc. will have a ready market for restoration products.

One of the first things they need to do is to understand who they are trying to sell to, namely the restoration contractor. The average restoration contractor is primarily in the business of paint removal and/or building cleaning. In all probability, unless you are fortunate enough to live in an older historic city or district such as Denver, Savannah or Charleston, where the restoration market is strong, you may not even be aware that some of your contractors are involved in restoration. But they can be found in many smaller cities and towns where the buildings are smaller than those in places like New York City or Los Angeles. They all need to be cleaned. And all those older home with lead paint need to be taken care of as well.

Chances are they come into your stores to buy power washers and some paint and sundries. However, when it comes to the acid washes, restoration strippers, paint removers, neutralizers, and other chemicals, their area of expertise depends on where they are getting their products. It may be a masonry yard or even the manufacturers. There are usually a relatively small number of contractors who do this type of work and because their focus is on paint removal, in many cases they may not be involved in painting at all.

Continued on Page 2



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So, how do you know if any of your existing customers are involved in restoration, and how do you reach those that are but aren't buying from you? Look through the yellow pages under restoration and masonry contractors. As you are driving around town, pass by the area where there are a lot of masonry buildings. Look for signs on contractors trucks, go up to the trailer on site and knock on the door. Send out flyers with your statements to your industrial customers. Utilize the relationships with your existing contractors by asking them if they are involved in restoration or if they know any other contractors that are. Keep in mind your city or town doesn't have to be a historic area for there to be an active restoration market. Wherever there are masonry buildings, bridges, highway noise barrier walls, etc. there is a restoration market.

Once you have identified your potential customers, you need to assess their needs. Find out what chemicals they are buying and see if any of your current suppliers can supply you with these products. Once you have established which products are being used and the sources to acquire them at the right pricing, start marketing to the restoration contractors.

One independent paint store chain that got plugged into their local restoration market is Ricciardi Brothers located New Jersey. Ricciardi Brothers recently hosted their annual Contractor Show wherein a number of restoration chemicals and Rock Miracle brand products were displayed. Ricciardi Brothers was surprised by the amount of interest that was generated in these products. In all honesty, there wasn't a large amount of product sold that afternoon, but we did sell some restoration products that night. Enough, in fact, that it got

Ricciardi's interested in learning more about restoration products and contractors. They were surprised to learn that many of their contractors would and do buy restoration and cleaning products. They just weren't buying those items from their stores.

That night Ricciardi Brothers stuck their foot into a new area, seeking incremental volume. They found that it really wasn't that hard; it just took some confidence in their people, a good working relationship with suppliers, a solid line of products, and a willingness to go outside the box of normal business. It has been over a year since that night. This program at Ricciardi has grown and grown. Success at the counter level has grown as well. Counter people have called with leads; contractors have brought other contractors into Ricciardi to buy from them.

Is your business different? Are your employees not as good? Are you not willing to put the time and effort into growing your business? Find something new and exciting that will bring new sales into your store; find something new that will challenge you and your staff. Something that will bring new and incremental volume into your store.

The era of the big box stores is here to stay; you, as the independent, will need to seek out new areas to offer your customers that which the big box stores do not cater to.

Whether it is restoration, custom window treatments, or faux finishes, you will need to find and develop new markets that service a niche. That is where you will find a new opportunity to grow your business and earn those extra dollars of profit.

Chas Wolfson represents the Rock Miracle brand for Samax, Inc. He knows everything you'd ever want to know about restoration, paint stripping and deck preservation. His articles and observations about the industry are informative and funny, and he manages to bring a lighthearted touch to the heavy duty world of restoration. You can find his articles in various publications to the trade.