

COMMERCIAL PAINTING

2026 | VOL. 6

ISSUE NO. 1

ADVANCING OUR INDUSTRY

THANKS FOR
ALL THE FISH!
**EXECUTIVE
RETREAT
RECAP** P28



OPENING A
**SATELLITE
OFFICE**

P36

EXPERIENCES WITH
**AI ESTIMATING
SOFTWARE**

P32

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YEARS

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COMMERCIAL PAINTING
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WE ARE A
**CHANGE
COMPANY**

HOW KUNST PAINTING CONTINUES
TO EVOLVE AFTER 125 YEARS

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Meaningful Connections Among Peers

As we continue to build on the strong foundation of our association, I am pleased to share the remarkable momentum and growth we are experiencing across every facet of our organization. Over the past year, we have not only seen growth in membership but, more important, increased membership engagement, expanded educational offerings, and a renewed sense of collaboration among these industry leaders. This progress is a direct reflection of your commitment to excellence and your willingness to invest in the future of the commercial painting industry.

Our association is not only growing in numbers, but also in influence. We are strengthening our voice on key issues, advancing best practices, and creating more opportunities for meaningful connections among peers. This collective progress positions us to better support your businesses and elevate the standards of our profession.

Annual Conference

A cornerstone of this continued success is our CPIA Leadership Conference. This annual event remains one of the most valuable opportunities we offer — bringing together top professionals from around the world to share insights, discuss challenges, and explore innovative solutions.

The conference is designed to deliver practical takeaways that you can immediately apply within your organization, while also fostering relationships that last well beyond the event itself. If you have not yet

registered, we strongly encourage you to do so at thecpia.com. Your participation not only enhances your own professional growth but also strengthens the collective impact of our association.

Benchmarking Survey

We are also in the data collection process for our second CPIA Annual Benchmarking Survey. Our objective with this research project is to provide the membership with empirical data on the structure of a commercial painting contractor business. This data allows our members to improve performance measurements and goal setting; and this benchmarking allows businesses to compare financial metrics, operational metrics, and organizational structure against competitors and industry leaders.

There is no other resource like this available in our market, and the research will be made available to all of the CPIA contractor members who fill out the survey. If you are not a current CPIA member, join today at thecpia.com/plans/contractors, and gain access to this critical research.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication. Together, we are driving our industry forward.

Sincerely,

Mike Stanley
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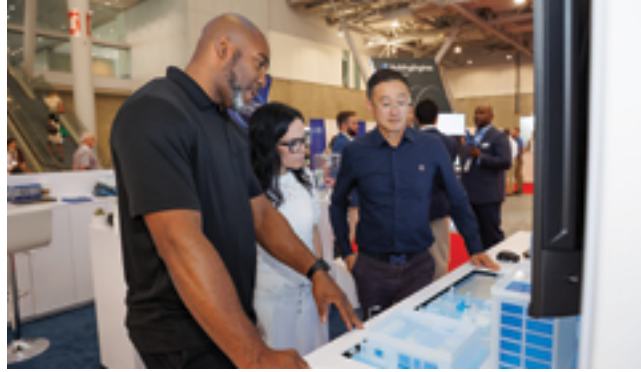
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Commercial Painting is published for the Commercial Painting Industry Association (CPIA) by ProConnect 360, 1063 Summer Place, Pittsburgh PA 15243-2073, Pittsburgh, PA 15243-2073, USA, 2026. Printed in the USA. Views expressed by authors or advertisers in *Commercial Painting* do not necessarily reflect those of the association, its publisher or its editors. *Commercial Painting* subscriptions are tied to memberships of the CPIA. To sign up, visit thecpia.com. **POSTMASTER:** Address changes to *Commercial Painting*, 1063 Summer Place, Pittsburgh PA 15243-2073. Customer Care Center: *Commercial Painting*, 1063 Summer Place, Pittsburgh PA 15243-2073.



2026 INDUSTRY CALENDAR

Plan for conferences, exhibitions, and other industry opportunities coming up this year. Be sure to watch your email for updates on CPIA events and activities.

American Coatings Show + Conference

May 5-7
Indianapolis, Indiana
american-coatings-show.com

AIA Conference on Architecture & Design

June 10-13
San Diego, California
aia.org/community/events/aia-conference-architecture-design-2026

BOMA 2026 International Conference & Expo *(photo, above)*

June 27-29
Long Beach, California
boma.org/events/conference-detail

CPIA Sixth Annual Leadership Conference

Sept. 27-30
Nashville, Tennessee
thecpia.com

Healthcare Facilities Symposium & Expo

Sept 28-30
Charlotte, North Carolina
hcarefacilities.com

Healthcare Design Conference & Expo

October 25-28
Kansas City, Kansas
hcdexpo.com

IFMA World Workplace

Nov 18-20
Anaheim, California
worldworkplace.ifma.org

Are we missing an event that should be in this calendar?
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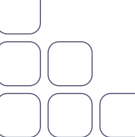
Cover Story

How Kunst Painting has survived and thrived for 125 years.

Emily Howard talks with John Busick, President



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KUNST PAINTING



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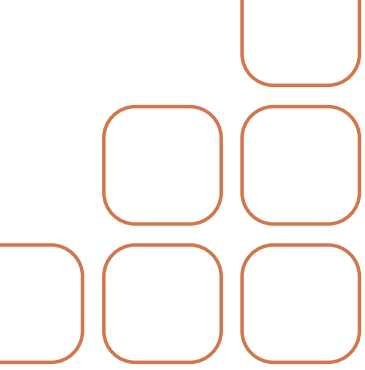
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PHOTOS: (COVER) COURTESY OF KUNST PAINTING; (THIS PAGE, FROM TOP) COURTESY OF A&K PAINTING; COURTESY OF THE CPIA



CPIA Binder

CURRENT EVENTS, UPDATES AND MORE



MEMBER NEWS

Cherry Coatings Announces Two New Acquisitions

Cherry Coatings (cherrycoatings.com) has expanded into Oklahoma City (photo, left) Indianapolis (photo, right).

Cherry Coatings, a national commercial painting and floor coatings company headquartered in Dallas, Texas, announced two acquisitions in Q1, increasing its local presence to 15 cities across 10 states.

EXPANDING TO OKLAHOMA

In January, the company announced the acquisition of Masterpiece Painting in Oklahoma. Masterpiece will now operate under the Cherry Coatings name, and the current team members will continue in their roles, with Jeff Martin as Vice President of Oklahoma City and Shawn Martin as Preconstruction Manager.

“This partnership with Cherry Coatings gives us the opportunity, through their support, to take on bigger work while keeping the same standards and commitment to our client relationships that got us here,” said Jeff Martin. The strategic move strengthens Cherry Coatings’ presence in the region and brings together two organizations that, they say, share a dedication to craftsmanship, customer service, and community relationships.

“Partnering with Masterpiece Painting allows us to combine their local expertise with our national scale — keeping safety and quality at the forefront of everything

we do,” said Zack Cherry, CEO of Cherry Coatings. “This collaboration marks an exciting step toward fulfilling our long-term goals.”

A VISION FOR INDIANAPOLIS

In February, Cherry Coatings announced the acquisition of Vision Painting, noting the Indianapolis company’s integrity and people-first culture, as well as the high-quality commercial, institutional, and multifamily projects that have built Vision’s reputation over the past 25 years.

“Our goal is to learn from Vision, come alongside their team, and thoughtfully combine the strengths of both organizations,” said Cherry.

Vision Painting will operate under its existing name and maintain its leadership team. Cherry Coatings will provide expanded resources, training, and operational support to help Vision grow and pursue new opportunities.

“We’re excited to join forces with a company that genuinely shares our values,” said Todd Gates, Chief Operating Officer of Vision Painting. “This partnership allows us to preserve what makes Vision special while gaining the backing of a national leader that believes in investing in people and doing things the right way.”

PHOTOS: SEANPAVONEPHOTO AND FILIPPHOTO / ADOBE STOCK

Share your news with CPIA members! Send press releases, information, and photos to Emily Howard, ehoward@thecpia.com.

A night-time photograph of the Nashville skyline, featuring several illuminated skyscrapers and buildings. The scene is reflected in a body of water in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue, and the city lights create a vibrant, colorful glow.

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

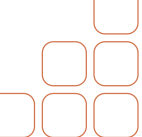
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SIXTH ANNUAL

CPIA

LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE

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SEPTEMBER 27-30, 2026



Inspiring the Next Generation

In March, roughly 225 middle schoolers participated in an interactive construction career exploration event, called Construction Wars, hosted by the Keystone chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). The three-day, biannual event, held in the spring and fall, introduces 75 kids per day to the skilled trades. Volunteers from local construction companies act as trainers and facilitators.

Throughout each day this spring, students were able to experience carpentry, masonry, electrical, plumbing, excavation, and HVAC at different demo stations. Since there has yet to be a painting station at these events, volunteer Brian Fisher, Estimator from Hursh Painting Co. Inc.

(hurshpainting.com) served as Group Team Leader, ushering the participants to the different stations and answering their questions.

"They got to build a wooden bench, put together a toolbox with sheet metal pieces, put together plumbing pieces, and lay brick," said Fisher. "They even got to get on a little excavator and pick up a golf ball and drop it in a hole."

"One person asked about the types of weather excavators work in," he continued. Fisher also reported questions about hours, working year-round, pay, training, and even about the cost of training. "They're a little young, but they're still thinking about what it's going to cost to go to college versus the trades."

Besides the spring and fall Construction Wars, ABC Keystone also hosts its All 'Bout Construction girls camp, bringing in area women in construction to lead the program.

"It's a pretty neat event that a lot of local construction participants feel is very important," said Fisher. He also credited Hursh Painting Company, Inc., as it was a paid day of work for him to participate in the event.

"This is just something that is in our company DNA. My father, the founder of Hursh Painting Company, Inc., was always generous with his resources, including paying our employees to work on painting service projects and any other means we could help with in the community when it made sense to do so," said Phil Hursh, President. "I'm honored to continue that tradition, and we are doing things like this regularly."

To learn more about Construction Wars, visit abckeystone.org.

About 225 students had the opportunity to learn about work in many of the skilled trades.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ABC KEYSTONE CHAPTER

Get a Whiff of This!

Hester Painting & Wallcovering (hesterdecorating.com) recently completed a wallcovering project that not only looked great, it smelled great, too! Triggering memories of elementary school notebooks dressed in scratch-and-sniff stickers, this wallcovering — B-A-N-A-N-A-S! by Flavor Paper — smells like bananas when you scratch it.

Flavor Paper is the Brooklyn-based brainchild of Jon Sherman. Opened in 2003, the company is known for unique hand-screened and digital wallpapers. To create the line of scratch-and-sniff wallpaper, micro-encapsulated fragrance oils are infused into ink. Scratching the surface breaks the encapsulation, and the scent is released.

Despite its aesthetic and olfactory allure, this wallcovering isn't for the inexperienced installer. A delicate copper foil finish with paper backing requires extensive prep and detailed installation. The Hester team gave meticulous attention to the preparation of

the underlying substrate, as any imperfection would show through the foil. The area was brought to a level-five finish and sealed with Zinsser Gardz Problem Surface Sealer.

Special care was taken to ensure that the corners of each panel were made sharp, square, and right. Then each panel was measured to achieve the perfect cross-over alignment of the paper's drop pattern.

After each sheet was measured and cut, it was pasted and left to book for 10 minutes to allow the adhesive to soak in.

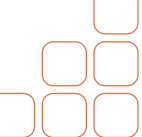
Seams are another special challenge presented by copper foil finish paper. To obtain the tightest seam possible and decrease its visibility, sheets were installed with edges overlapping and then double cut.

Project partners included Partners by Design, Redmond Construction, and RIVOT. The finished project adorns a speakeasy in the tenant's new office space in Chicago's Fulton Market neighborhood.

Hester Painting & Decorating installed scratch-and-sniff wallcovering by Flavor Paper in a Chicago office space.



PHOTO: ROSS FLOYD PHOTOGRAPHY



Expanding Charitable Giving

After its successful Buckets of Love initiative last year, the leadership team at North Carolina-based A&K Painting Company decided to raise the bar on its charitable giving. The company had done sponsorship programs in the past to raise funds for charity, but they'd been on the hunt for a way to make more of an impact.

"We wondered how we could go bigger and better this year," said Gray Riley, Vice President of Sales and Marketing. "We considered golf, but golf isn't fun for people who don't regularly play."

As members of Meadow Wood Farm, he and his colleagues have had the opportunity to enjoy all that the private shooting preserve offers, and the A&K team believed this would be the

perfect place for an event. They introduced Clays for a Cause, bringing together contractors, developers, property managers, customers, and members of other trades for a day of shooting clays to support their chosen charity, Classroom Central (classroomcentral.org). The Charlotte-based nonprofit provides free supplies to teachers and students in need through its free store, mobile free store, and other community-supported programs.

Thirty teams of four each participated in the shoot, but the day also allowed for interaction outside of these foursomes.

This cause has become even more urgent, as the Education Law Center's 2025 "Making the Grade" report shows North Carolina dropping to 50th in its ranking for public school funding.

"Someone once told me that the average teacher spends \$1,300 a year out of their own pocket on their classroom," reflected Riley.

Currently, A&K Cares donates 400 buckets, each filled with \$80 of school supplies. A&K and Classroom Central have been exploring the best way to utilize the additional funds from the Clays for a Cause event.

"We want to help take things to the next level for teachers in the area," said Riley.

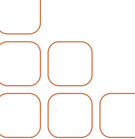
The event kicked off with a breakfast by The Wafflery, followed by the shoot, and then lunch catered by Jon G's BBQ N.C.



Thirty teams of four each participated in the A&K Clays for a Cause shoot.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RUBEN COSME



Find information about A&K and its charitable events at akpainting.com.

Attendees walked away with some pretty slick swag, including camo hats with a leather logo, and custom Yetis.

Sponsors included Sherwin-Williams, NexcomMSP, United Rentals, Climate

Systems, Choate Construction, and Hood Harget. With a mix of networking, outdoor activity, and community impact, Clays for a Cause turned a day on the course into meaningful support for local classrooms.

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The CPIA Heads to Nashville!

FOR THE SIXTH ANNUAL
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE,
SEPTEMBER 27-30, 2026

BY BRION D. PALMER, PROCONNECT 360

The Commercial Painting Industry Association will host its annual Leadership Conference, Sept. 27-30 at the W Nashville. More than 250 commercial painting professionals will unite for three days of forward-thinking education, peer collaboration, industry connection, and plain ol' fun.

A PROGRAM BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

This year's curriculum places a strong emphasis on artificial intelligence and its growing role across the commercial painting industry. From estimating and project management to workforce planning and customer engagement, AI is rapidly reshaping how contractors operate — and the CPIA is putting that transformation front and center.

Sessions will be led by peers who are actively implementing these technologies in their own businesses, offering practical, real-world insights rather than theory. Attendees can expect candid discussions, proven strategies, and actionable takeaways they can bring back to their teams immediately.

CORE DISCIPLINES STILL AT THE CENTER

While innovation is a major focus, the conference remains grounded in the fundamentals that drive successful painting operations. Attendees will also engage in content covering essential business disciplines such as financial management, field operations, quality control, and organizational leadership.

The W Nashville (*top*) will be the site of this year's Leadership Conference, where commercial painters will gather to share business and technical knowledge, and enjoy recreational events with new and old friends (*inset*).



PHOTOS: (TOP) COURTESY OF W NASHVILLE;
(INSET) ELEVATE COLLECTIVE, CHE WILSON



Every annual CPIA Leadership Conference features world-class venues, top-notch speakers, and memorable networking receptions, meals, and activities.

Find more information on the conference and register for the event at theapia.com.

The balance between emerging technology and core operational excellence ensures the conference delivers value to every segment of an organization — from executives setting strategy to managers overseeing day-to-day performance.

DESIGNED FOR THE ENTIRE TEAM

One of the defining strengths of the CPIA Leadership Conference is its broad relevance. The program is intentionally designed to serve both leadership and operations professionals, creating a shared learning experience that strengthens alignment across companies.

Whether attendees are focused on growth strategy, improving margins, optimizing crews, or enhancing customer experience, the conference offers targeted insights that address real challenges in today's market.

A DESTINATION THAT MATCHES THE ENERGY

This year's host venue, the W Nashville, sets the stage for an engaging and memorable experience. Located in The Gulch — one of Nashville's most vibrant and rapidly evolving neighborhoods — the hotel places attendees in the heart of the city's culture and energy.

Just steps away are some of Nashville's most iconic destinations, including Broadway's live music scene, Midtown, SOBRO, Music Row, the Arts District, and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. The setting not only enhances the conference experience but also creates natural opportunities for networking and connection beyond the meeting rooms.

MORE THAN A CONFERENCE

As the CPIA continues to grow, the Leadership Conference has become more than an annual gathering; it is a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and industry advancement. With a record-level focus on technology, a commitment to peer-driven learning, and a backdrop as dynamic as Nashville itself, the Sixth Annual Leadership Conference is positioned to be the most impactful yet. For those looking to stay ahead in an evolving industry, this is where the conversation—and the future — will take shape.

At every event, the CPIA and its industry partners introduce special networking and recreational activities, like last year's Wild West Paint Party, generously sponsored by Sherwin-Williams, to help members build ongoing friendships and develop professional support. See more event photos in the member gallery at theapia.com/members.



The Power of Participation

THE CPIA LAUNCHES ITS SECOND ANNUAL BENCHMARK SURVEY

As the commercial painting industry continues to evolve, access to meaningful, peer-driven data has never been more valuable. This fall, the CPIA will unveil its second annual Benchmark Survey — an initiative designed to provide contractors with real-world insights into how their peers are operating, managing risk, and planning for the future.

But this isn't passive content. It's built on participation — and access is exclusive. **To receive the results, contractors must complete the full survey.** Those who contribute their data will gain full access to the findings during the CPIA Leadership Conference, September 27–30 in Nashville.

BUILT BY THE INDUSTRY, FOR THE INDUSTRY

The Benchmark Survey is grounded in a simple but powerful concept: The most valuable insights come directly from those doing the work every day. By aggregating data from across the CPIA network, the survey creates a clear, honest snapshot of how leading commercial painting contractors are running their businesses.

Importantly, all data collected is proprietary and strictly confidential. Individual company names and specific data points will not be shared or identifiable in the results. All findings are aggregated and anonymized, ensuring participants can contribute openly while protecting sensitive business information.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL LEARN

The survey is structured to address the core questions every contractor is asking but rarely get answered with clarity:

- **How are top contractors organizing their teams?** Gain insight into leadership structures, field management roles and how responsibilities are distributed for maximum efficiency.
- **How are companies protecting themselves against market downturns?** Learn the strategies peers are using to build resilience and maintain stability in uncertain economic conditions.
- **What do cost structures really look like?** Understand what percentage of earnings typically goes toward labor and materials, and how your numbers compare.
- **How is safety oversight being managed?** Explore how contractors are structuring safety programs, assigning accountability, and maintaining compliance.
- **How are businesses planning for growth and succession?** See how peers are thinking about expansion, leadership development, and long-term continuity.

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS AT THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Results from the second annual Benchmark Survey will be released exclusively at the fall conference. This setting provides more than just access to the data; it creates an opportunity to discuss it, challenge it, and apply it alongside industry peers.

A COLLECTIVE ADVANTAGE

The strength of the Benchmark Survey lies in its collaborative nature. Every participant contributes to a stronger, more informed industry and, in return, gains access to insights that would be difficult, if not impossible, to gather independently.

For contractors looking to better understand where they stand — and where they can improve — the message is clear: Participate, contribute your data, and be part of the conversation shaping the future of the industry — confident that your information remains protected while we move the industry forward together.



FINDINGS ARE ANONYMIZED, PROTECTING SENSITIVE BUSINESS INFORMATION.



New Podcast Episodes

Looking to stay ahead of commercial painting trends and learn innovative business strategies? Hosted by Aaron Moore, Co-Founder of the CPIA and President of PPD Painting, and David Chism, owner of DC Marketing Group and Chism Brothers Painting, The Commercial Painting Podcast series explores strategies for overcoming the challenges standing in the way of your growth. Recent episodes cover a range of topics from developing sales teams to sectors poised for growth.

DEVELOPING SALES TEAMS THAT KNOW HOW TO HUNT AND CLOSE

Seasoned sales professional Mike Green, from Ironhead Roofing, discusses his journey from college basketball to the commercial painting industry and then to the roofing industry. Green discusses the importance of self-generating leads, maintaining a consistent prospecting routine, and the value of building a strong referral network. He also emphasizes the significance of having a structured sales process and the impact it can have on closing rates and overall business success.



Website: ironheadroofing.com



Website: dcmarketinggroup.co

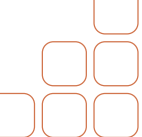
A SPECIAL EPISODE WITH DAVID CHISM

Aaron Moore turns the mic on co-host David Chism for an informative interview about his journey from San Diego to Maryland, the influence of faith on his business practices, and the evolution of marketing strategies in the painting industry. As a fifth-generation painter and marketing expert, Chism shares success stories from his marketing firm, the impact of AI on marketing, and resources for contractors to enhance their marketing knowledge.



bit.ly/CPP-episodes





HOW AI IS TRANSFORMING THE SEO WORLD

Aaron Cote, from A Visual Glitch, explains the intersection of artificial intelligence and SEO. Cote encourages commercial painting contractors to lean in to best practices for leveraging AI while continuing to keep a laser-sharp focus on authentic content. From truly understanding the challenges of your customers to the importance of quality reviews (over quantity), he challenges listeners to avoid losing the human touch in the age of AI.



Website: avisualglitch.com



Website: sherwin-williams.com

WHERE SMART COMMERCIAL PAINTERS ARE FOCUSING NEXT

Looking to land more contracting work and wondering where to look? Julie Zamski and Paul Trautmann from Sherwin-Williams discuss the pivotal role of Sherwin-Williams in the commercial painting industry, the current market trends, and sectors providing opportunities for contractors. They also delve into mastering products and techniques that are crucial to these sectors, as well as the importance of business development.

THE BLACK BELT MINDSET: WHAT JIU-JITSU TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE

Luke Rinehart discusses the world of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, how it can empower individuals, and how the discipline learned on the mat translates into valuable skills in business. Luke shares insights on building a successful martial arts academy and the importance of faith in personal growth. He dives into how consistency, intentionality, and failure are parallels between martial arts and entrepreneurship.



Website: clinchacademy.com

Want to recommend other podcasts that are relevant to our commercial painting community? Contact Emily Howard, ehoward@thecpia.com.

Mata Tape Joins CPIA as an Industry Partner

The CPIA is excited to introduce Mata Tape as a new Industry Partner at the influencer level. Many members may not be familiar with the new tape brand focused on high-performance masking tapes for painting professionals. While the company is new to the U.S., its experience with tape for the painting market is not, as the founders bring years of hands-on tape expertise and real-world operations experience.

The Mata Tape executive team says it's especially excited to introduce Mata Gold to the U.S. The company promotes its flagship premium washable tape as "next-generation technology," reflecting lessons learned from two decades of field experience, product development, and partnerships with professionals.

Members should stay tuned for announcements about preferential member programs (pricing and incentives), samples and pilots for evaluation on the jobsite, training and best practice resources, and ongoing technical content.


Welcome, Mata Tape! For more information, visit matatape.com.





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Embracing Change

KUNST PAINTING
CELEBRATES 125 YEARS.

THE CPIA'S EMILY HOWARD TALKS WITH
JOHN BUSICK, PRESIDENT OF KUNST PAINTING

Recently, John Busick, the owner of 125-year-old Kunst Painting (kunstpainting.com), walked me through how a family business survived disaster, internal conflict, and economic shifts to become a thriving commercial painting contractor today — and how a foundation of resilience and vision guides its future. — *Emily Howard*

Emily Howard: Tell me about Kunst Painting.

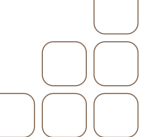
John Busick: In the office and the field, we have about 40 employees, and we've been in business for 125 years. We serve both residential and commercial clients for new construction and repaint.

Achieving 125 years in business is quite the milestone. Share some of your company history with me.

My great-great-grandfather, Henry Kunst, emigrated from Germany, and he got a job painting rail cars as he moved west. Later, in 1901, his two sons, John and Charlie, opened Kunst Brothers Paints. They manufactured paint and, over multiple

John Busick (*left*) is shown at the Tiburon Railroad & Ferry Depot. (*Below*) In the early 1900s, John and Charlie Kunst founded several paint stores throughout California, and they eventually opened a paint manufacturing company, Kunst Brothers Paints.





decades, grew it into a major factory in downtown San Francisco with seven stores in California.

In 1949, the main factory burned down. At the time, my grandfather, Bob Kunst, and his twin brother were planning to take over the family business when they came back from the Korean War, but there was nothing to take over. So they got into painting and started Kunst Brothers Paint Contracting.

They also brought in their half-brother, but my grandfather didn't get along with him very well. In 1958, my grandfather grabbed his briefcase, walked out the door, and said, "I'm going to start another company."

And he did. From 1958 to 2023, the two companies — Kunst Brothers Painting and Bob Kunst Painting — were two blocks from each other as competing painting contractors.

I joined Bob Kunst Painting full-time in 2008 and took over the company in 2021. It took a couple of years, but I struck a deal

and brought the two companies together again in 2023.

Now we're all Kunst Painting, back under one roof. It's been great for the family and great for the business. It's really improved our brand, and we've been in a growth pattern since.

Starting out in 2008 must have given you a crash course in navigating the realities of economic downturns. How did you find your way through the Great Recession as well as the downturn in 2020?

We're fortunate that we've been around for a very long time, and our brand has a substantial number of repeat clients. That really helped carry us through both of those.

When I came in in '08, I had a newborn, and I remember it was a scary time. We shifted more to commercial, and basically did whatever needed to be done to pay bills. People were going out of business left

PHOTOS (PREVIOUS PAGE AND THIS PAGE): JIM VETTER PHOTOGRAPHY



and right, and we were able to hang on. Several of us didn't take a salary for a couple of months, so it was ugly.

Then, during the pandemic, we were 50/50 residential/commercial. Where we are in the North Bay, we don't have a substantial amount of industrial or manufacturing around us. It's mostly concrete tilt-up warehouses for storage and office buildings, and during COVID, those were closing.

So we shifted to about 90% residential and really put a lot of marketing into it. We saw people staying home, spending money, so it was good that we shifted. Since then, commercial has been slowly picking back up, and we're probably about 60/40 now.

What are some of the exciting projects you've done over the years?

We just finished painting the inside of the Tiburon Railroad & Ferry Depot Museum. It's the oldest railroad depot in Northern California, built in the late 1800s.

It used to sit out on the water, but they salvaged it and put it on land in 1901. When you are working there, you can stare across the San Francisco Bay and see the Golden Gate Bridge, where our factory — also founded in 1901 — used to be. So 125 years later, we're painting a building with the same age as our company. Pretty cool.

We also just finished an 18,000-square-foot house for \$2.2 million. We were there for three years on and off.

You started a training program back in 2022. What prompted that?

We've always had an apprenticeship program from the local PDCA¹ chapters, so we used to send our top guys to that. My grandfather was one of the founders. But that faded, and we decided to keep our own apprenticeship program. In the beginning, we just said we were training. In 2022, I formalized it.

Many of the painters have been with Kunst Painting for 20, 25, even 30+ years. As a family-owned business rooted in the North Bay, said Busick, they take care of their team with health insurance, 401(k) profit sharing, and paid time off.



There are five painting positions in our company: apprentice, painter one, painter two, lead painter, and crew leader. We have different job descriptions that go with those that include specific skills that you have to demonstrate at each level. If you pass the tests, then you get to move up.

It gives employees a path. They can move up instead of feeling like they just need to grind out painting every day. I've seen an uptick in applications because we advertise it.

Any other strategies you use to find and keep talent in the company?

I think everyone struggles with labor in our market. For us, retention is high. Once you're here, we typically don't lose people. Since I've been here, two people have retired. Both were with the company for over 35 years. We have a Golden Brush Wall, and after 20 years of service, you go up on the wall.

I credit that to our perks and benefits. We offer 401K profit sharing, full healthcare, 5% cash bonus for hitting your annual numbers, and contests and opportunities throughout the year for cash and gift cards. We also do our best to ensure consistent hours year-round. People really want stability.

Of course, we've had a few people leave, but a lot have come back. I've also been really proud when I've heard murmurs through the company, "Don't leave because this is a great company."

Are all the benefits newer or something that you've always done?

My grandfather was instrumental in starting it. Back then, it was called profit sharing, but it was essentially a 401K. He was actually one of the first painting companies to offer it back in 1979. We had a guy who worked for us for 38 years and walked away with over a million bucks.

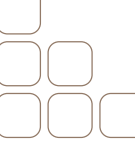
My grandfather really had a vision and was forward-thinking in so many ways. He was always leveraging technology and working out ways to be more efficient.

In the beginning, we were union painters, but when the roller and sprayer came out, the union was not a big fan of those because they took jobs away. When they told my grandfather he couldn't use these tools, he got out of the union.

Busick's team recently painted the Tiburon Railroad & Ferry Depot Museum, the oldest railroad depot in Northern California.

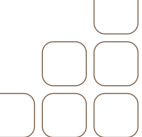
PHOTO: JIM VETTER PHOTOGRAPHY





125 YEARS LATER,
WE'RE PAINTING A
BUILDING WITH THE SAME
AGE AS OUR COMPANY.
PRETTY COOL."

— *John Busick on painting
the Tiburon Railroad & Ferry
Depot Museum*



He embraced every technology that could help the company, and it became a tradition. Now, we say it every week, “We are a change company. We look for change. We look for new technology. We look for anything to get a competitive edge and improve our company.”

It’s not just in Kunst Painting where you value technology. You also started Workglue, the online project management platform for contractors. Tell me how that happened.

Well, I’ve taken his methodology of leveraging whatever tool or technology we could find to improve, and that’s how Workglue was born. It was born by accident. It was built for my painting company to improve our processes and streamline workflow. When other people saw what I was doing, they were interested, and it snowballed from there.

Recently, Bill Curtindale and Mike Barrett from Pro Paint Solutions jumped on board with a few others, and we’ve rebuilt the platform and launched a 2.0 version. It’s been really successful.



Working with the property’s management team, Kunst Painting completed a full exterior repaint of this three-story apartment community — including the parking garage, stairwells, and upper stories, using a boom lift for access.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF KUNST PAINTING



When John Busick (*far left*) started, three generations were working side by side, including his grandfather Bob Kunst (*holding sign*), his uncle Tom Kunst (*second from right*), and his dad Mike Busick (*right*). Now John is carrying the torch forward.

When you look at 2026, what challenges are you preparing for at Kunst Painting?

The average person does not like change. It's just human nature. So even though we embrace it, change is still a challenge. At Kunst Painting, we've done a good job of leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) on the marketing side. But I see challenges, because there are so many options with AI, so many paths to take, that it's hard to make decisions on which is the right one. Plus, it's changing so fast.

Labor will also be a challenge. I don't see that going away.

In California, a big challenge that we're having right now is insurance. The price of insurance is going through the roof, both commercial auto and workers' comp, liability, and healthcare. Usually, those would go up between 8% and 10% a year, and now we're hitting like 20% to 30% on an annual basis, so costs are rising significantly.

Any plans for future growth or expansion?

We just opened a cabinet shop with a spray booth, so we're offering a lot of cabinets, doors, and shop work. I'm a big believer in

adapting, getting better, and offering new services to increase our brand and revenue.

We are also increasing our geography. We do about \$6 million in revenue, and we only work in a 15- to 18-mile radius. It's been pretty cool to be able to keep this much work flowing in that small of a geographical location. Our next leap is trying to hit \$10 million by 2030, and with that comes expansion into Sonoma and Napa. Possibly a satellite shop up there by 2028.

A lot of it depends on what happens over the next year or so in the economy. We were going to do it earlier, but Napa has taken a significant hit in the wine business. The industry seems to think that this is a typical haircut, and it will bounce back in the next five years. I want to be there when it does turn.

We've done a handful of wineries over the last couple of decades, and those are pretty good-sized projects.

What's changed in the painting industry since you started 20 years ago?

Managing client expectations is the biggest one. As AI and technology continue to evolve, so do the expectations of human beings. I think the good companies out there are going to set and manage client expectations. That and clear communication



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from the beginning is going to separate you from the competition and keep you from making false promises.

And on that front, I'm going opposite of everyone right now. I love AI for a lot of different things, but I'm going with the human touch. I've hired a second admin in my office. We eliminated the "press one to speak to so-and-so" from our phone systems. When you call, someone picks up the phone. I think people over the next decade are going to just crave that human connection. So I'm going human versus automation.

You've been a member of the CPIA for quite a while. What's your experience been?

I had heard good things about peer groups. Now that I have a peer group, I highly value it. I like having friends across the country who share the same challenges. We're all learning from each other how to improve. Our peer group is getting better and better because we're starting to hold each other accountable.

I also love the CPIA and what they're doing. They offer multiple peer groups, and you get a lot of value out of hearing the simple, small nuggets about the challenges others are going through. You can have one-on-one conversations about how others would tackle a problem or lead in a scenario you are facing.

In addition to the business conversations, we've become good friends. We all have our own personal issues that come with running a business, and it helps to have people who really understand what you're going through.

We talk about balancing family and the business and trying to do what's right for your employees, the family, and the brand. It's a delicate balance.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned over time is about leadership. We talk a lot about growth, but at the end of the day, if you are the person at the top, you have to be a good leader and be constantly improving as the business grows.

It can be hard to remember that it's a marathon, not a sprint, because we're all so goal-focused, but it's important.

1. Painting and Decorating Contractors of America



I THINK EVERYONE STRUGGLES WITH LABOR IN OUR MARKET. FOR US, RETENTION IS HIGH.

I CREDIT THAT TO OUR PERKS AND BENEFITS."

— John Busick

Trusted with a piece of history: Kunst Painting was selected to paint the landmark Tiburon Old St. Hilary Church, built in 1888. Patty Flax, Executive Director of the Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society, said, "It was important to find a company that would provide the level of service and care that a historic building of this caliber merits."

PHOTO: COURTESY OF KUNST PAINTING

Cabo Connections

CPIA EXECUTIVE RETREAT DELIVERS NETWORKING,
OCEAN VIEWS, AND UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

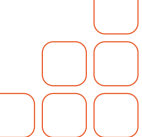
BY BRION PALMER,
PROCONNECT 360

PHOTO: BRIAN JURGENS



The 2026 CPIA Executive Retreat at the Hilton Los Cabos resort in Cabo San Lucas, Feb. 20–23, offered industry leaders a mix of business, camaraderie, and relaxation — all set against the stunning backdrop of the Sea of Cortez. Delegates from across the commercial painting industry gathered for the annual event, which has become a favorite for professionals looking to connect, share ideas, and gain insights in a relaxed setting. Many attendees brought their significant others and arrived early to enjoy the views, including whales breaching offshore, a natural welcome to Cabo’s winter marine season.





EXECUTIVE RETREAT RECAP

Craig Vialle (Realfine Painting Company) holds his prize catch alongside fellow fishermen: Frank Miles (Blair Commercial Painting), Jesse Ramos (TJ's Professional Painting & Construction).



Kevin and Gina White (Bazan Painting) enjoy the sunset with Carrie and Brian Shahan (Shahan & Son).



David Chism (above) enjoys the Cabo view on a 4-wheeler.

(Center) Commercial painting contractors join together in the opening reception sponsored by Pittsburgh Paints Co.

Networking with a View

The Hilton's terraces overlooking the sea provided a scenic spot for conversation and connection. From sunrise breakfasts to evening receptions, the setting made it easy for attendees to meet new peers, strengthen existing relationships, and exchange ideas in both formal and informal settings.

Opening Reception and Peer Group Experience

The retreat opened Sunday, Feb. 20, with a reception and dinner under the stars, sponsored by Pittsburgh Paints Co.



First-time attendees and long-time CPIA members mingled over dinner, enjoying conversation and the chance to catch up.

Monday morning featured the CPIA Peer Group Experience, a dynamic session led by CPIA co-founder, Aaron Moore and CPIA Peer Group Facilitator Leslie West, bringing together first-time delegates, industry suppliers, and significant others to engage directly in a CPIA Peer Group setting. The session also provided current Peer Group members with a valuable opportunity to reflect, reset, and adopt new strategies to strengthen their groups and maximize collaboration.

That evening, a reception and dinner sponsored by Graco provided another chance to connect.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DAVID CHISM; COURTESY OF THE CPIA; (FACING PAGE) COURTESY OF THE CPIA; COURTESY OF THE HILTON



Activity Day: Offshore and On Land

Activity Day, sponsored by Sherwin-Williams, offered delegates both adventure and friendly competition. Many boarded boats to fish, with several catching marlin under the guidance of local crews. On land, an ATV tour gave attendees a chance to explore Cabo's desert terrain, take in panoramic views, and enjoy some lighthearted fun together.



Whale Watching and Golf

A whale-watching excursion provided one of the retreat's most memorable moments. Humpback whales breached (see photo, left) and tail-slapped in the water, providing a memorable experience complete with photos and videos of the natural display. A few delegates also took the opportunity to play one of Cabo's world-class golf courses, Cabo Real.

Reflections on the Retreat

As the week concluded, attendees appreciated the mix of business and leisure. Many noted that the networking opportunities — from dinners to activities — were among the most valuable parts of the retreat. Beyond that, the chance to step away from daily routines and enjoy time with colleagues in a beautiful location offered both personal and professional benefits.

From marlin fishing and whale sightings to sunset conversations over the Sea of Cortez, the 2026 CPIA Executive Retreat left a lasting impression on participants. Sponsors Pittsburgh Paints, Graco, and Sherwin-Williams helped make the week both productive and enjoyable.

The retreat highlighted why the CPIA gathering has become a fixture on the industry calendar — a chance to learn, connect, and recharge in an environment that balances work, fun, and inspiration. Attendees left Cabo looking forward to next year's event and the opportunity to continue building relationships that will strengthen their businesses and their personal and professional development.

The Hilton Los Cabos Beach and Golf Resort (left) offered a stunning gathering place for company leaders to discuss business ideas and industry trends, network, enjoy planned recreation, and relax poolside.



A View from the Frontier

CONTRACTORS TALK ABOUT ESTIMATING WITH AI

BY EMILY HOWARD

To keep our readers on the cutting (but also realistic) edge of AI, we're covering AI use cases and sharing member experiences in every issue of Commercial Painting magazine in 2026. If you have a story you would like to share, email ehoward@thecpia.com.

Getting more estimates out faster can have a range of benefits, from increasing revenue to leaving more time for other tasks. The case for adding AI tools to achieve this goal is strong enough to garner curiosity, yet hesitation abounds. After all, we've all heard the warnings and horror stories about artificial intelligence going incredibly wrong.

As with any other tech implementation, planning, communication, and smart execution are critical to success. We talked with contractors in different stages of implementing AI estimating systems to get some strategic ideas, words of warning, and a view from the frontier of AI estimating.

Vetting Your Options

Service Contracting Solutions (SCS) in Florida fully implemented Kreo, a takeoff and estimating software, in July 2025. Now that they are safely on the other side of the transition, the team credited a thorough vetting process that began in January 2024 as one of the keys to their success.

"You don't want to waste people's time on everything, so take the time to weed things out, but get the right people involved," explained Kathy Ragland, Software and Implementation Manager at SCS.

Ragland began by identifying the team's goals, needs, and wants. After researching options through the internet, trade shows, contacts, and vendor marketplaces, she scheduled initial demos to identify software that met the criteria she'd gathered. Some key factors she was looking for included how the software handled interior and exterior wall surfaces, the ability to exclude windows and doors, turnaround time per blueprint plan sheet, and overall accuracy.

Once she whittled it down to three contenders, it was time for a new team to begin its part of the selection process. Jason Fike, Vice President of Operations, said, "It was important that I did not make the decision for the estimators, since I don't do the estimating." He selected the lead estimator and two others to test the remaining three software options over a 30-to-90-day period and give their recommendations.

At 30 days, the team was just getting comfortable with the different systems and the individual quirks, but by 60 days, they understood the values of the different systems. "I think 30 days isn't quite enough," Fike said, "but if you hit 90, you are likely being too hesitant—60 days is a sweet spot."

Get Some Help From Your Friends

Magnum Drywall started looking at AI later in 2024, and Painting and Wallcovering Vice President Jann Maxwell just completed his first bid using BuzzBID. After getting demos from four of their top options, Magnum leaned on their network, especially SCS.

Since SCS had already implemented Kreo, they offered to pass along their experience to Magnum and even hosted demos to show their process. “Kudos to SCS because this is the culture of the CPIA membership: helping each other,” Maxwell said. “I can’t say enough about SCS. I really thank them for their help.”

After learning from SCS, Magnum signed up for a three-month test period. During the test, they ran into a conflict with one of their divisions. “We use On-Screen Takeoff (OST), but our drywall division uses QuickBid for their pricing,” Maxwell continued. The QuickBid agreement prohibited them from sharing data with Kreo, making it unusable for the drywall division.

Seeking software that would work across all divisions, Magnum tried BuzzBID, which shares a creator with OST. “It’s not exactly AI estimating,” Maxwell explained, “but they use AI Assist to learn.” Because data could flow easily, this was a better fit. As an added bonus, since BuzzBID shares a creator with OST, it was more familiar and easier for the team to learn.

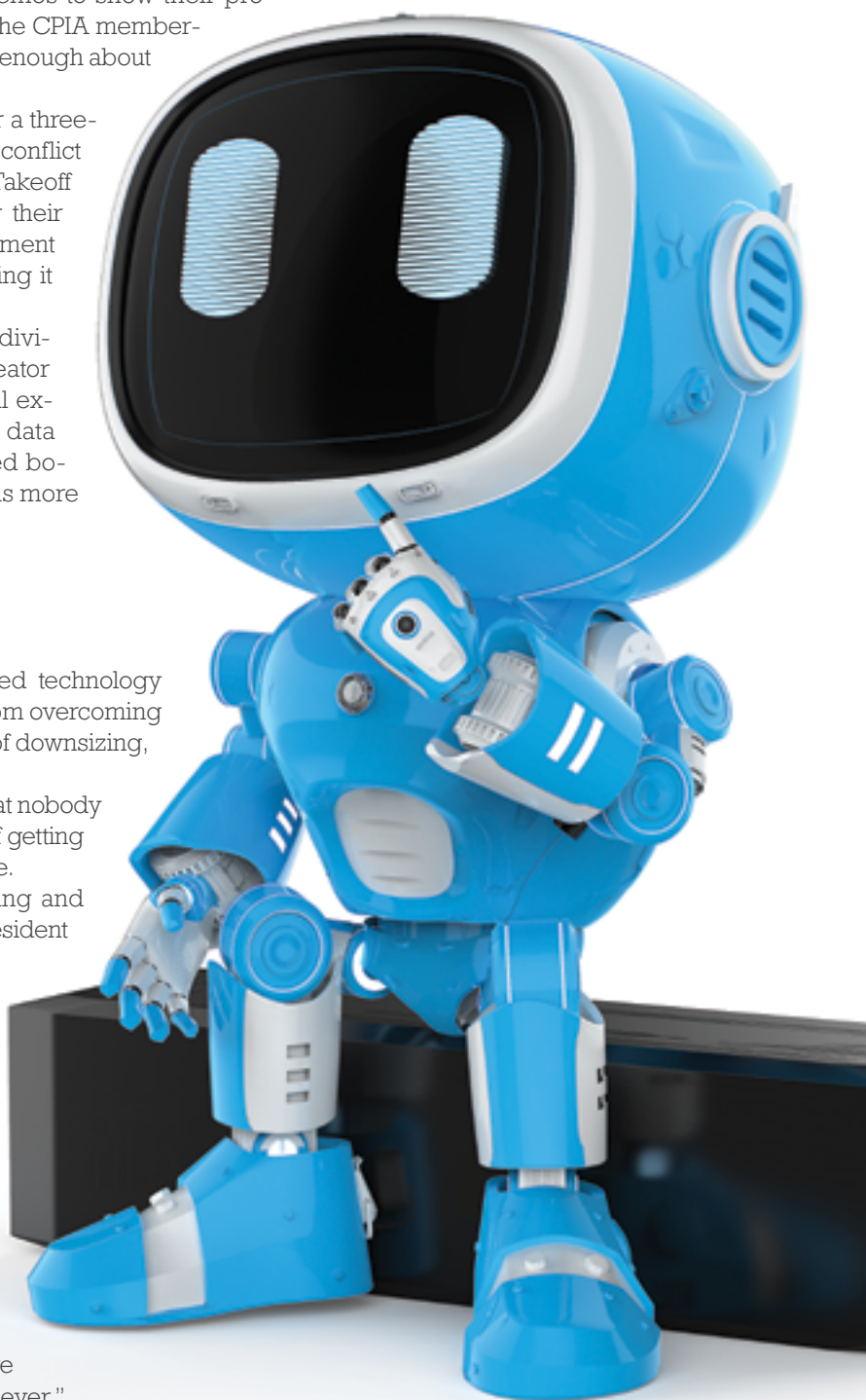
Getting Team Buy-In

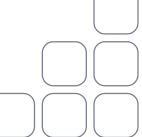
Painting business owners who have implemented technology have often cited the importance of team buy-in. From overcoming the mental hurdles of change to allaying concerns of downsizing, it’s important to get buy-in early.

“The biggest challenge is overcoming the fact that nobody likes change,” said Fike. He noted the importance of getting people to stay positive and give new things a chance.

“We communicate why we are doing something and how we think it will help,” added Liz Perez-Lavin, President of SCS. They also set aside time to listen to concerns. “I’m also honest that I’m willing to hear your concerns, but then we’re going to figure out how we work through those, because this isn’t going away.”

Lost time and extra work, especially during implementation and learning, are also common objections to new technology. “There was a little bit of concern that they might be slowed down by the testing and learning curve,” said Fike. In practice, the technology worked more efficiently than the process they were hoping to replace. According to Fike, “As we fully implemented the system to the entire team, there wasn’t a drop-off in our overall bid volume whatsoever.”





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Howard, owner of Sunflower Crafted Content, has had a long and rewarding relationship with the painting industry as both a freelance writer and as the former editor-in-chief of *American Painting Contractor*.

As for the rampant fears many humans face about AI replacing them, SCS was culturally positioned to overcome those fears. “[Fike’s] team is intentional about ensuring they get out and learn other facets of the project,” said Perez-Lavin.

This, combined with the fact that SCS promotes from within, means the proof is in the pudding. “I think that eases minds quite a bit. They’ve seen people promoted, so they know we are not looking to replace them,” said Perez-Lavin. “Instead, the goal is to make them more productive and create more opportunities.”

Was It Worth It?

In the end, all of this is a quest for a better result. “Our goal was to decrease the amount of time our estimators spent putting estimates together, so we could include them in more things,” said Fike. Getting the estimators more involved on the jobsite, helping with preconstruction meetings, and other improvements are on the table. That proved to be the primary benefit of this software. As Fike concluded, “The things we’ve been able to include now as part of their responsibilities have really made the difference.”

As for Maxwell, he completed his first bid and was impressed. He was able to use it for 100% of the design and development budget for the painting and wallcovering scopes of an upcoming project. “We’ve had two more training sessions with BuzzBID, and we are now working on the pricing elements,” said Maxwell. “We cannot believe some of the features and how fast this will make estimating takeoffs once we learn and use all of the components!”

Words of Warning

Even though both companies are happy with the results so far, there are still things to watch out for as contractors venture out into this new AI world.

Starting from the research stage, Ragland warns, is a daunting journey but doable: “Make sure that the company you’re working with is established. Do your research. Check references.” She also noted that a system’s capabilities often don’t match all the marketing language you see. “I will tell you that of the top 10 list of AI takeoff software I searched, there were only three that had any piece of AI in it,” she explained.

Fike said it’s imperative to remember that AI needs to be trained: “Initially, everybody has the same reaction, which is that it doesn’t do what they need it to.” However, once they realize that it needs to be trained, things get easier. Fike also notes that the selection of this technology is really a matter of preference, saying, “[Our choice] came down to some really subtle things that worked better for our team.”

Having experienced the outcomes when they didn’t communicate enough about changes in the company, Perez-Lavin advised, “Communicate, communicate, and communicate. When you think you’ve communicated enough, you probably haven’t, so communicate some more.”

AI tools and processes are evolving quickly, and no two road maps will be the same. But getting the lay of the land and some friendly tips for the trip may be all you need to begin the journey to your own new frontier.

Have an AI estimating experience you want to share? Join us in our CPIA LinkedIn Group as we continue the conversation.

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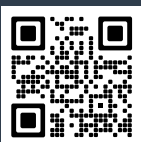
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A Tale of **Three Expansions**

EACH OF THESE PAINTING CONTRACTORS APPROACHED OPENING SATELLITE OFFICES WITH DIFFERENT STRATEGIES, GOALS, AND VALUES.

BY EMILY HOWARD

PHOTO: COURTESY OF INLINE PAINTING

Expanding geographical service areas can be a great growth strategy. Whether the goal is to increase revenue after cornering the current market, meet snowballing requests for remote work, or serve as a lifestyle choice, it's a decision that takes some thought and planning.

Just as the reasons for opening a satellite office differ, so do the approaches. Three contractors shared their experience during and after opening satellite offices, and they proved that there is more than one way to eat this proverbial elephant.

Roe Paint

Andy Roe founded Roe Paint (roepaint.com) as a one-man shop 25 years ago in Boise, Idaho. Today he serves residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Idaho and Nevada with paint and concrete coatings.

Just before the Great Recession in 2008, Roe Paint was focused on residential new construction projects with a crew of 12 to 14. "[The recession] kind of wiped us out, and I had to start all over as a one-man operation," said Roe.

In 2010, he relocated to Nevada to work on a project with an acquaintance, building new homes. After growing the Nevada

business, he moved back to restart the Idaho branch of Roe Paint.

In Idaho, he opted to refocus on commercial painting and slowly added industrial. "My goal after going through the crash of '08 was to become a diversified company, both in geography and services."

Today, the revenue split is 25% in Nevada and 75% in Idaho. "Idaho has a much denser population base; however, in those early years, many of the projects I did in Nevada helped fund some of the growth in Idaho."

STAFFING & MANAGEMENT

After nearly 13 years of operating offices in two locations, Roe has learned some important lessons along the way.

"We've had several times where a misstep or a bad hire cost us a lot from a reputation standpoint, and we had to rebuild," warned Roe. He noted that one of his biggest challenges has been finding the right person to handle sales and management. "Sometimes, that is the same person; other times, it's different people."

Roe tested multiple organizational structures, from working superintendents to area managers who never touched a tool. "You've got to be flexible and watch the business closely," he recommended.

Roe emphasized the importance of considering both revenue conditions and

(Facing page) Inline Painting is currently working on various projects in Ohio and Kentucky.

(This page) Andy Roe says it's important to remember that satellite offices require travel — not just for the owner but often-times for managers and team members.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROE PAINT



Inline Painting works on an interior painting project.

employee strengths when building out the different roles. The company has experienced years when revenue could support an area manager who didn't work on the jobsite, just as it experienced years when revenue required a superintendent who could both manage and work on the jobsite.

The different iterations of the organizational structure also forced Roe to consider KPIs: "If you don't have very finite metrics to manage, you start flying blind at a certain point."

A few of the things the company tracks today include individual project gross profit, overall area gross profit, and non-billable hours (shop and maintenance time).

MARKET DIFFERENCES

For Roe, his two locations serve two very different economies. The service area in Nevada is supported mostly by mining, while Boise is a more diverse, growing city. This means he needs to be prepared to meet the different needs of each market simultaneously.

In addition to different needs, each market experiences different ebbs and flows. "You hope that the weak times don't happen in both markets at the same time, although we've gone through that." On the opposite end, there are times when he says both markets are strong at the same time.

"I think, if you are going to have a satellite market, you need to ask yourself some important questions, like 'What's your reason for being in that market? Are you prepared to ride the ups and downs of that area?'" advises Roe.

Inline Painting

While Roe Paint opened its satellite office out of necessity, Inline Painting opened its satellite office to overcome operational challenges and to create a better customer experience.

Inline Painting (inline-painting.com) was founded in 2007 by father-son duo Sean and Larry Armstrong. In 2022, Larry retired, and Chris Neeson, Vice President/General Counsel, came into an ownership position. The company serves hotels, hospitality, health care, and retail with a staff of 100.

The main office in Indianapolis, Indiana, houses operations, and in 2025, they opened two satellite offices in Columbus, Ohio, and in Louisville, Kentucky.

Inline Painting had been servicing Columbus and Louisville remotely for years when they began to note challenges with the distance. "The biggest challenge with projects as we got further and further away was really about the quick needs of a project," said Neeson.

While large production elements made it easy to plan and mobilize a crew, the smaller, unknown tasks of a job created challenges. Neeson said, "It's harder to get out and do those items quickly when you need to plan a full-day trip for a crew." The new offices have made them more nimble.

With a mix of word of mouth and ZipRecruiter ads, they were able to staff the satellite offices. "I feel like the people we've been able to bring on board fit our culture very well," noted Neeson. Though they received referrals through suppliers and partners in the new locations, he noted that those networks could have been utilized sooner. "They have more knowledge of boots on the ground."

As for the management of remote staff and crews, the systems they built for the Indianapolis teams were designed to be judged remotely. Neeson said, "A lot of our processes for remote project managers are really similar to what we have with our local project managers."

Currently, they meet with each of the project managers to make sure each is effectively managing their projects. "We're looking for gaps in service, areas of opportunity, and assurance that no project is falling through the cracks."

They track job size, job volume, revenue, and profit margin for each location and have KPIs that are specific to each project manager.

A&K Painting

A&K Painting Company, Incorporated (akpainting.com) is just beginning its foray into a satellite office, but the team has been building a plan to utilize new local knowledge while preserving the company's existing culture.

In business for 32 years, A&K Painting began as a new residential construction paint company and moved to all-commercial construction in the early 2000s. With annual revenue at \$25 million, they serve new commercial construction, commercial maintenance, and industrial maintenance throughout the Carolinas, venturing beyond for special projects.

Headquartered in Charlotte, they've seen significant growth in the projects in Raleigh. "We are opening up the second office in Raleigh, North Carolina, as we speak," reported President Kevin Robbins. Two estimators and an assistant project manager have already been hired for the Raleigh office, and the field team is in the process of being built.

STAFFING

A&K Painting utilizes a multi-layered approach to build its staff. Using a recruiter combined with in-house talent in charge of networking with GCs, subcontractors, and partners has proved successful thus far. "You have to work recruiting like a full-time sales position. Without a multi-pronged approach, you run out of people you know quickly," warned Robbins.

Robbins also credits a focused effort on the company's online public reputation for attracting talent. "We have worked

A&K Painting serves new commercial construction, commercial maintenance, and industrial maintenance throughout the Carolinas, venturing beyond for special projects.

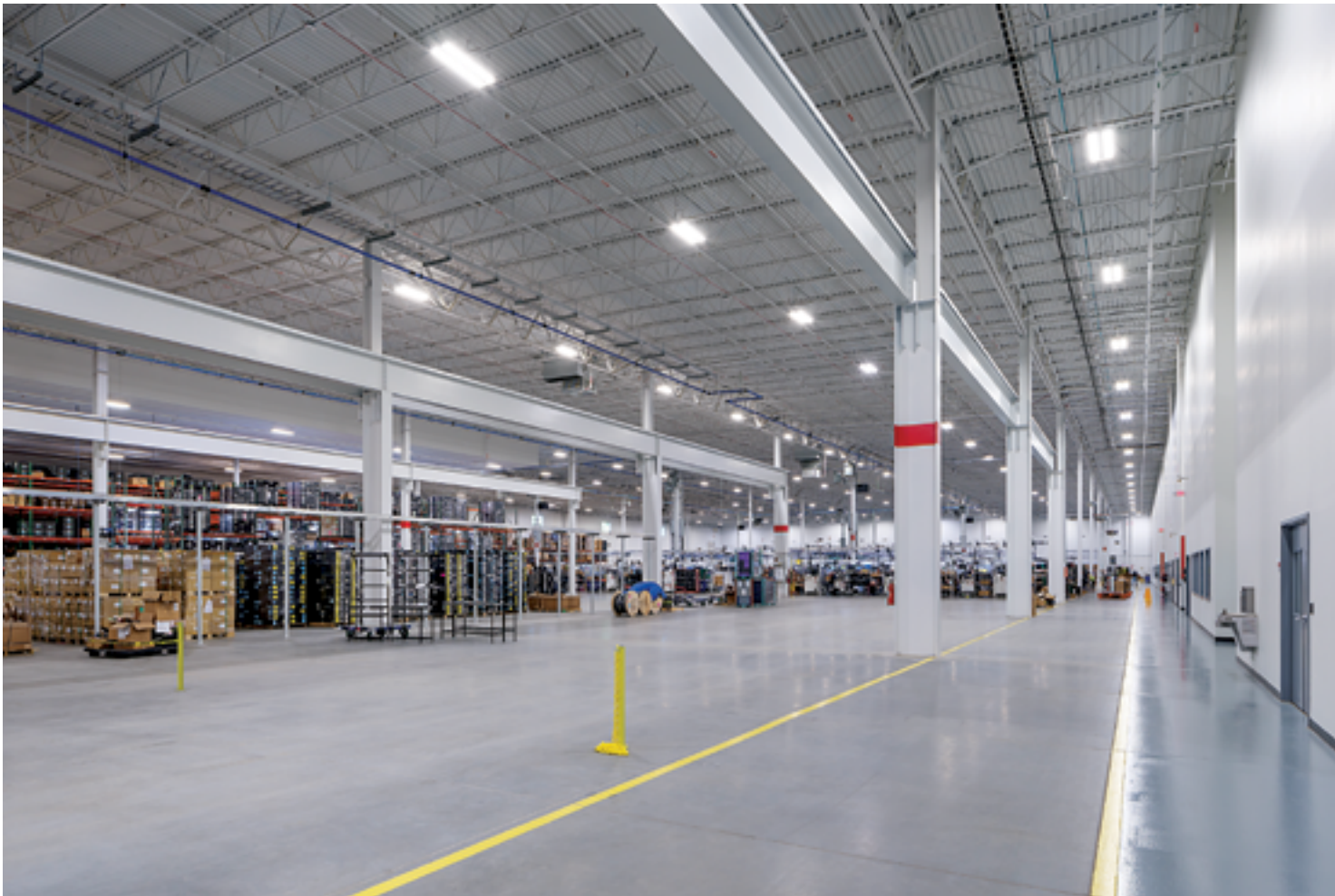


PHOTO: COURTESY OF A&K PAINTING

tremendously hard on our social media presence,” said Robbins. “We want people to see that this is a good place to work.”

CULTURE

Providing a consistent experience for customers and employees is difficult in a single location. Doing it from a remote location can be an even bigger challenge, but A&K Painting is meeting the challenge head-on.

Three years ago, they began implementing an Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), and Robbins believes it has helped them clarify their vision, eliminate silos, and work together better to solve problems. “It has changed our company,” attests Robbins.

As the culture became clearer, it also became more important. To ensure that culture

During one of his many trips between Idaho and Nevada, Andy Roe found an abandoned dog (now best friend), whom he adopted and named Maverick.

is maintained in a new location, interview questions were designed to determine whether applicants fit their core values.

In addition to ensuring the Raleigh team fits the culture, Robbins also deeply values local knowledge. He said, “Even though Raleigh’s only three hours away, it is different.” Charlotte is known as a hub for logistics and distribution, whereas Raleigh has many universities and a strong pharma presence.

It’s not just the segments that are different, but the people are different too. “If you’re working for Acme Construction in Charlotte and you call Acme in Raleigh, they probably operate a little bit differently. You also don’t have the years of credibility and history built up as you do in your current market. You have to go in aiming to impress.”

Both of these reasons led A&K Painting to look for staff with local knowledge. “We were fortunate that we found a few local people in Raleigh that we felt matched our core values, had the local knowledge, and might have the ability to be a general manager one day.”

Final Thoughts

After managing different staff and structure in their Nevada office, Roe emphasized that it’s important not to become cynical but also not to be too trusting. “You have to be good to people and trust your team, but you also have to check in on them and verify.”

As for Neeson, he stresses the importance of local connections as you build your local staff and presence.

As Robbins navigates growth and change, he’s focused on clear and transparent internal communications. “Without the transparency, sometimes you experience unnecessary pushback from employees on certain decisions you make. If they know where you are going, they’re going to jump on board, because it makes more sense.”

Opening a satellite office is not for the faint of heart, but done well and diligently, it can have a multitude of benefits. Roe called the early years his “Maverick Years,” “but they’ve been some of the best, most fulfilling years of my life. They forced me to grow a lot as a leader. They asked a lot from me, and I don’t think I’d change them for the world.”



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROE PAINT

7 Software Considerations To Avoid Disaster

When I first started in the painting business 20 years ago, our systems looked a little different than today. Estimates were done on triplicate paper, production scheduling lived on a whiteboard (Surprise! We lost track of jobs all the time), and customer and crew communication happened on a flip phone. Today software exists everywhere to help run a painting company. Estimating, scheduling, customer communication, payroll — you can find a system for almost anything. But that creates a challenge: The number of options can feel endless.

At some point, you have probably had this thought: “We need better software.” So you start looking. You go online, find a few options, and book a demo. The demo looks great. Everything appears polished, and it feels like the system will solve all the chaos.

Then reality hits. Setup takes longer than expected. The software doesn't quite work the way you thought it would. The team doesn't use it consistently. Six months later, you're still texting job details and tracking things in your head. Software can help, but it only works when you're clear about the problem you're trying to solve and how to choose the right system. Before selecting your next piece of software, here are seven things worth thinking through.

BY JON BRYANT,
PAINTSCOUT

1 Don't buy software until you know your problem.

One of the biggest mistakes I see contractors make is buying software without being clear about why. I've done it myself. The first software I purchased was FreshBooks. I bought it because I wanted to clean up our estimating process, but what I actually bought was accounting software.

One benefit was being able to see when the customer viewed the estimate and keeping all the information organized in one place. But I still had to build the estimate somewhere else. I improved the *delivery* of the estimate, but not the process of creating it. Software works best when it is aimed at a specific problem. If you can't clearly identify the problem you're trying to fix, the software probably won't fix it.

2

Swiss Army knife or chef's knife?

When evaluating software, it's important to think about how good the system needs to be at solving your specific problem. I often compare this to choosing which knife to use. A Swiss Army knife can solve a lot of problems, but it's rarely the best knife to prepare a serious dinner. A chef's knife does one thing extremely well — but it won't help you file your nails.

Some software systems are built to solve one problem extremely well. Others claim to do everything — estimating, scheduling, CRM, payroll, marketing, and reporting. When software tries to do everything, it often ends up doing a lot of things just okay and nothing particularly world-class.

If it's built for everyone, it's built for no one.

Not all software is built the same. Some products try to serve every trade — electricians, plumbers, landscapers, HVAC companies, and painters. Other software takes into account the specific needs of painting contractors.

When software is built for everyone, it usually fits no one perfectly. Painting companies have their own rhythm. Estimates are done differently than in other industries. Work orders need to be clear for the crew doing the job. Crews move around more frequently.

When software is designed with painting contractors in mind, it tends to feel intuitive. When it isn't, your team ends up forcing their workflow into a system that doesn't quite fit. When software doesn't match how your company actually works, people usually just work around it.

3

4

Make sure it works for 20 crews, not just two.

A system that works great for a two-crew operation might break down once you're running 20 crews. Growth creates complexity quickly — more jobs, more crews, more customers, and more moving parts.

Before committing to a system, it's worth asking whether it will still work when the company is far bigger in size. Switching systems when the business is larger is far more painful than choosing the right one the first time.

One helpful way to evaluate this is to ask who the largest customer in your industry is that uses the software. That gives you a sense of what the system can realistically handle and how it performs in a bigger operation. What works when you're small can quietly become the thing that slows you down later.

5 Your data should belong to you.

This is a question most people never ask during the demo, but you should. Over time, your software ends up holding a huge amount of information about your business: customer lists, job history, project notes, contacts, and communication records. You want to know that the information belongs to you. If you ever decide to change systems, you should be able to access and export your data.

If it's hard to use, it won't get used.

A system might look powerful during a demo, but that doesn't mean it's easy to use in the real world. Your estimators are moving quickly during appointments. Your office staff is juggling calls, customer requests, and schedules. If the system is complicated, people will find ways to avoid it. They'll text, write notes, or keep things in their head.

6

7 Your software programs should work together.

Very few painting companies run their entire business on one piece of software. You might have one system for accounting, another for estimating, and something else for payroll or marketing.

The question is whether the new software works well with those existing systems. If information has to be entered multiple times, or if the programs don't talk to each other, things quickly get frustrating. When systems don't talk to each other, the office unfortunately becomes the integration layer.

Final Thought. There's more software available to painting companies today than ever before. That's a big improvement from where many of us started, but it also means there's more noise. The goal isn't to collect software, it's to choose the tools that actually help your team stay organized and keep jobs moving. With a clearer way to evaluate these systems, my hope is that choosing the right one becomes a lot less overwhelming.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Bryant is CEO and Co-Founder of PaintScout (paintscout.com), a web-based platform designed to make the estimation process easier and more efficient for painters.

Scaling a Commercial
Painting Business with

Remote Talent

BY ANNIE NEWTON, PROFITWORKS



Growth in the commercial painting industry rarely stalls because of a lack of opportunity. If anything, many mid-sized contractors face the opposite problem: more bids, projects, and client demands than their internal teams can comfortably manage.

As companies move beyond a few crews and begin managing multiple projects simultaneously — often across larger geographic areas — administrative complexity increases dramatically. As estimating pipelines grow, communication requirements expand, compliance documentation multiplies, and coordination between field teams, clients, and vendors becomes more demanding.

To scale effectively, many commercial painting contractors are beginning to rethink how their operational teams are structured. Increasingly, they are turning to remote talent as a strategic way to expand capacity, improve responsiveness, and support growth without dramatically increasing overhead.

The Operational Ceiling Many Contractors Hit

Mid-sized commercial painting firms often reach a point where operational capacity becomes the limiting factor to growth. It typically shows up in familiar ways:

- Estimating departments buried under bid requests;
- Project managers overwhelmed with documentation and coordination;
- Administrative teams struggling to keep up with reporting and client communication;
- Leadership spending excessive time on operational tasks instead of business development;
- Chasing money due to a lack of support with AR processes;
- Slow implementation of AI due to the lack of time to own it;
- Slow or late adoption of new technology because the operational bandwidth is not large enough to support the growth.

Commercial painting projects involve far more than paint application. Between bid preparation, submittals, safety documentation, scheduling coordination, and closeout packages, a significant portion of the workload happens away from the jobsite.

The question many contractors begin asking is simple: Does every one of those responsibilities require someone sitting in the office? In many cases, the answer is no.

The Rise of Remote Support Teams

Remote talent refers to professionals who work with your company from outside your physical office using digital systems and collaboration tools. While this model has long been common in industries like technology and finance, it is now gaining traction in construction and specialty trades.

For commercial painting companies, remote team members can support a wide range of operational functions, including:

- Estimator (estimating and proposal preparation);
- Estimating admin (bid document organization and bid board management);
- Project administration;
- Appointment setters (inbound and outbound calls);
- Vendor and subcontractor coordination;
- Accounting support;
- Marketing and business development support;
- Business systems implementation (automations, AI and workflow architecture).

Rather than expand office staff locally for every new operational need, contractors can integrate skilled remote professionals into their workflows to support core business functions.

REMOTE TEAM MEMBERS CAN SUPPORT A WIDE RANGE OF OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS.

SHIFTING PREPARATORY TASKS AWAY FROM SENIOR ESTIMATORS ALLOWS THE MOST EXPERIENCED TEAM MEMBERS TO **FOCUS ON WHAT THEY DO BEST.**

Supporting the Estimating Pipeline

In commercial painting, estimating volume often determines growth potential. Many firms receive far more bid opportunities than their estimators can realistically pursue.

Remote team members can help streamline the estimating pipeline by assisting with tasks such as:

- Organizing bid invitations and documents;
- Extracting project specifications and scope requirements;
- Preparing takeoff files and documentation;
- Drafting the estimate and building 2D models;
- Owning the estimating software build-out (parts and assemblies);
- Formatting and assembling proposal packages;
- Tracking bid submissions and deadlines.

By shifting these preparatory tasks away from senior estimators, painting companies allow their most experienced team members to focus on what they do best — analyzing scope, pricing work accurately, and building relationships with general contractors.

There is a science to shifting a senior estimator into a leadership role and integrating remote estimating support. Done correctly, the result is increased bid capacity without compromising accuracy or risk management. Here are eight things to consider:

1 ALWAYS HIRE FOR A ROLE — NEVER FOR A TASK OR PROJECT.

When it comes to estimating, each bid carries financial exposure, and the estimating process must remain consistent. Treating estimating work as freelance or project-based support introduces too much risk and too little accountability.

2 INCORPORATE A DEDICATED ROLE THAT SITS FULLY INSIDE THE COMPANY'S SYSTEMS.

The person in that role should follow the same procedures you use in your company.

3 INSIST REMOTE WORKERS HAVE THE SAME DAYS AND HOURS AS YOUR TEAM.
Availability is key!

4 MAKE CLEAR THAT LANGUAGE FLUENCY IS EXPECTED.

Comprehension is everything! The culture you have so carefully created can be damaged if comprehension is missing.

5 PRIORITIZE CANDIDATES WITH INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE.

Experience matters. Seek candidates who have previously worked with US-based contractors. Differences in measurement systems, construction terminology, and documentation standards can create unnecessary friction.

6 KEEP BID SELECTION FIRMLY IN THE HANDS OF EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP.

Bid selection is one of the most important drivers of profitability.

7 BEFORE AN ESTIMATE IS SUBMITTED, EVERY BID SHOULD BE REVIEWED.

A Senior Estimator needs to sign off.

8 CONSIDER ADDING INCENTIVES FOR THE SENIOR ESTIMATOR.

Adjusting the senior estimator's compensation structure may be beneficial as remote support is introduced. When incentives are aligned with the success of the estimating team as a whole, senior estimators become more invested in mentoring, refining processes, and maximizing the effectiveness of the support role.

For firms pursuing hundreds of bids annually, this kind of operational support can significantly increase estimating capacity while preserving the rigor required in commercial bidding.

Strengthening Project Management

Once projects are awarded, administrative demands accelerate. Project managers are responsible not only for field performance but also for documentation, coordination, and communication with multiple stakeholders.

Remote project support can help manage responsibilities such as:

- Submittal preparation and tracking;
- Document control and file organization;
- Scheduling updates and coordination;
- Vendor communication;
- Safety documentation management;
- Progress reporting and meeting notes.

When project managers have reliable administrative support, they are better able to focus on site visits, quality control, and maintaining relationships with clients and general contractors.

In large commercial environments, those responsibilities are critical to repeat business. Maintenance accounts will make or break over the strength of the project management.

For contractors seeking to strengthen their reputation with general contractors and property owners, operational responsiveness can be just as important as field performance.

Managing Growth Without Expanding Overhead

Expanding office staff locally often comes with significant costs, including salaries, benefits, office space, equipment, and long-term commitments. For growing commercial painting firms, this approach creates an important advantage: the ability to scale operational support in step with project volume.

Instead of waiting until internal teams are overwhelmed, contractors can add remote support proactively as workloads increase.

Improving Responsiveness to GCs

General contractors increasingly expect subcontractors to respond quickly and professionally during both the bidding and execution phases of a project.

Delays in communication — whether responding to bid invitations, submitting documentation, or providing updates — can impact how subcontractors are perceived. How many times is your estimating plate full, and then a request comes through for a project bid over a year ago, with some amendments that have to be turned around quickly? Most of the time, that's a great sign that you have a great chance of landing that job! Yet the opportunity is missed because you have other critical deadlines.

This is where remote operational support can help commercial painting companies maintain responsiveness by ensuring that:

- Bid invitations are reviewed promptly;
- Documentation requests are handled quickly;
- Communication with project; stakeholders remains consistent;
- Administrative backlogs do not slow down project progress.





Technology Is Making Remote Collaboration Seamless

The growing use of digital tools in construction has made remote collaboration increasingly practical. Commercial painting companies commonly use platforms such as:

- Cloud-based project management software;
- Estimating and takeoff tools;
- Document management systems;
- Communication platforms like Google Chat, Slack, or Microsoft Teams;
- Shared cloud storage for project files.

With proper systems in place, remote support can function as a natural extension of the company's operational team.

Building an Effective Remote Team

Integrating remote talent successfully requires thoughtful planning and a clear operational structure.

Contractors who see the most success with remote teams typically follow several key practices.

1 THEY DOCUMENT PROCESSES CLEARLY.

Operational tasks such as bid tracking, document organization, and proposal preparation should follow standardized procedures. Clear documentation ensures consistency and simplifies training.

2 THEY DEFINE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES.

Remote staff perform best when they have clear ownership of particular functions rather than loosely defined administrative roles. Just because a role is remote, it should not be without clear expectations and KPIs

3 THEY MAINTAIN CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION.

Regular check-ins, shared dashboards, and structured reporting keep remote team members aligned with the company's priorities and project timelines.

4 THEY TREAT REMOTE PROFESSIONALS AS PART OF THE BROADER TEAM.

Inclusion in meetings and communication channels helps maintain alignment with company culture and performance expectations.

5 THEY PARTNER WITH A REMOTE OFFSHORE PROVIDER.

There will be small, nuanced cultural differences. Choosing a provider ensures:

- Performance reviews are regular with HR support;
- They have community while working the graveyard shift with their peers,

- celebrating the wins, and boasting about the company they have joined;
- You are able to provide, at very low cost, a top-shelf offering of benefit packages that makes it a competitive offer and reduces the chance of losing a valuable team member due to an absence of medical and retirement benefits.

A New Model for Operational Scale

Commercial painting will always remain a field-driven industry. Skilled crews, experienced foremen, and strong project leadership remain the foundation of every successful contractor. However, the companies that scale most effectively build strong operational infrastructure behind their field teams.

Remote talent offers a practical way to strengthen that infrastructure.

By supporting estimating pipelines, assisting project management, improving responsiveness, expanding administrative capacity, and adding in-house AI and process optimization, remote professionals allow commercial painting firms to operate with greater efficiency and agility.

For mid-sized contractors looking to compete for larger projects and manage growing portfolios of work, remote operational support is becoming less of a novelty — and more of a strategic advantage. Said differently: Most likely, the people you are competing against have already deployed some of these strategic tactics.

As the industry continues to evolve, contractors who combine strong field execution with scalable operational systems will be best positioned to capture the next phase of growth. With the expansion of AI, automation, and global talent, the pressure is real to reduce our costs!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Annie Newton is owner of ProfitWorks (profitworksusa.com), CFO Services for commercial painting companies.

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ALEX SCHMIDT

President, District Painting, Portland, Ore., districtpaintingco.com

Following his career as an estimator, Alex Schmidt opened District Painting in 2018. He's passionate about his role at the head of the company, as well as working alongside painting pros to deliver exceptional results.

About the Company: Based in Portland, District Painting Co. provides detailed interior refinishing to large-scale exterior and commercial projects. Combining technical expertise with an artist's eye, they enhance and protect every surface they touch.



KOSTANTINOS (GUS) KOUKIDES

Vice President at Ploutis Contracting, Alexandria, Va., ploutiscontracting.com

About the Company: Ploutis Contracting is family owned & operated. For over 60 years, they have worked to develop reliable and professional methods to ensure guaranteed customer satisfaction. Their fundamental

principle is to provide valued clients with the personal attention they deserve, quality work in a timely and efficient manner, and excellent results.



ROSS MISHEEV

Owner and VP, Pat's Painting, Denver, Colo., pats-painting.com

About the Company: Since 1996, Pat's Painting has served Colorado with commercial painting, coatings, and wallcovering solutions. Providing the state with dependable, high-quality work that stands the test of time, this woman-owned company has built

its reputation on integrity, craftsmanship, and consistent project delivery. The experienced team collaborates with Colorado's leading general contractors to complete projects on time, on budget, and with exceptional results.



OLEKSANDR (ALEX) STETSENKO

CEO, S.A.I. Construction Service, Columbus, Ohio, saiconstruction-services.com

Alex founded S.A.I. Construction in 2016 and is now celebrating 10 years in business. After starting in the residential market, he successfully transitioned into commercial work. Today, he focuses on innovation to better serve customers in Columbus, Ohio, and Tampa, Fla., while working to inspire the

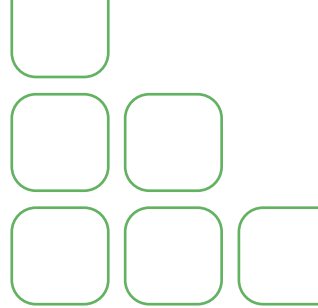
next generation of painters to take the next step. **About the Company:** S.A.I. Construction Service is one of the top-rated family-owned and -operated painting companies, helping customers with all aspects of their projects. From color consultation to general cleaning, the team takes pride in all projects.



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