

the Paint
Contractor's
Contractor
of the
YEAR
2011

The Paint Contractor presents its Contractor of the Year award to the entrant that most exemplifies the qualities we believe make for a great painter. We take into account factors such as motivation, customer service, marketing, growth, skill, and overall attitude. 2011 saw twice as many entries as 2010! A great big thank you to Kilz/Masterchem for sponsoring this award the third year in a row. We appreciate its support of North America's great painters!



KILZ

Congratulations to **Ken Kozak** and **Christian Brothers Painting,** **2011 Contractor of the Year!**

Click up "painters" in Oklahoma City on the internet and about the first listing you'll come up with is Christian Brothers Painting at christianbrotherspainting.com. That's convenient, we say—how did that happen?

Company owner Ken Kozak might not be a web expert, but he knows a few people who are. They help him market himself so he can paint. After all, what's a great painter without customers? Plus, the 2011 Contractor of the Year should know how to delegate. If he can't do something, he'll find someone else who can.

"I'm on various web sites across cyberspace," he says. "Yelp, Leapfrog, Kudzu... there are several of them and that leads to a higher ranking on Google. Also, upon completion of a job, I ask my customers if they would be so kind as to leave a typewritten referral, and they usually do that for me—I think that's a factor also."

These days, everyone's a critic, and a customer's bad experience can forever become part of your online persona. Fortunately, same with a good one.

Besides, unlike the Yellow Pages, these services are largely free. "I think soon Christian Brothers will be strictly online and get away from its very expensive Yellow Pages ad," Ken postulates, "or I will considerably shrink my ad size in the Yellow Pages."

Not that it's always been that way. Ken started out in business with his brother Larry, whom he credits as teaching him most of what he knows about painting. "When we had our first Yellow Pages ad, it did terrific. We got huge paint jobs and it paid for itself easily." But the web is making a splash. "There's not a painter in Oklahoma City that does not know my name! Yellow Pages gets to be extremely costly and I think I've milked it for all it's worth. With a web page and my Google ranking and referrals, I think that will keep my small company plenty busy."

BY JERRY RABUSHKA, EDITOR

Customers matter—finally

Painting has changed Kozak—unlike contractors who started painting very early in life, Ken's background was in selling large ticket items, followed by an immediate disinterest in customer satisfaction. "Cars, furniture, appliances—I sold washers and dryers," he recalls. "But I didn't care in the least what customers thought, what they told their friends about me, or if they were happy the next day. I only wanted to close the deal and get the commission."

Now, all that matters. If the paint job is bad, who are they going to blame? The brush? The paint? The drywall? "Honestly, I am proud of my profession," says Kozak. "It matters to me what customers think. I want them to be thrilled that they hired CBC for their project. I want them to tell their friends how happy they are and for them to call me next time. I take pride

in my work from the bid to the day of payment."

Kozak has taken his small company—himself with the occasional hired hand—to some high-profile jobs. "There was an absolutely famous barbecue joint that had been in Oklahoma City since the early 1930s," he said. "We did that—then a month after we got it finished they closed."

His favorite project was a volunteer operation. As you can see from the cover shot, Ken likes to take a boat out every now and then, but he also likes a good old train ride. "I'm a member of the Oklahoma Railroad Museum out here, and I paint for them for free," he said. "We restored a Chicago and Northwestern passenger car to its original green and yellow. It's a phenomenal piece. Now we run passenger trains using that car."

He painted it using Sherwin-Williams Industrial



Ken Kozak waves to the camera.
Hi back at ya!

Enamel, and for once, he got out a sprayer. "I was on the board of directors at the museum at the time, and I talked them into buying a nice and costly HVLP spray rig," he says. This was unusual for him. He doesn't normally spray, and while it was necessary for a railroad car that's 80 feet long and 15 feet high, he still would rather paint by hand.

"I close a lot of deals bragging on the fact that I'm old school and use brushes and rollers," he says. "For that reason alone, many customers decide to choose me as their painter. I think you get a better paint job and you can cut in fast and easy. I challenge any guy with a spray rig that if I can get there at the same time I'll be gone with my brushes washed and he won't be done yet! I use good paint and good brushes and good technique, and the results speak for themselves."

Kozak also makes sure people like him and trust him. He shows up on time or early, he wears painter's clothes and he makes sure all surfaces are touched up and all detail work is detailed before he calls a job finished. "I joke around with customers and everyone has a great time."

Color me... well, just color me

He's also not afraid to give his opinion on color—the more you know about color and how your customers relate to it, the better you can be of assistance. Sometimes knowing their culture can help



Above: Re-painted railroad car; below: Kozak's daughter at work.



make the right choice. "I had a Mr. and Mrs. from Ghana that chose a basketball-pumpkin orange in a high gloss for the master bedroom color, finished with a white ceiling and white trim," he recalls. "If Mr. and Mrs. Smith from Oklahoma City would choose that color, I'd have tried to talk them out of it.

But based upon their culture and decorating items of African art, it all came together.

"I had another family from India, and their culture uses what we might feel are some extreme colors, but they loved what we came up with!" Even with the natives, a bit of understanding can't hurt. Are you selling to a cowboy, a conservative older couple, a younger 'hip' person?

"I look around at their carpet and their furniture," says Kozak. "I'll tell them if they pick a dark color that they don't have a lot of light as it is and it will close up the room, or if it's the other way around. I always give my honest opinion. Most of the time they go with it, but if not, and they want a really intense color, at least my conscience is clear."

Speaking of young and hip, at age 19, Ken's daughter Dallas seems ready and able to follow in his footsteps. "She will help me out, and I'm trying to get

her involved in what may be a career. She can actually cut in almost as good as dad, and she's not afraid to get up on a ladder and get paint all over herself."

So what advice does our Contractor of the Year have for other aspiring Contractors of the Year? Or even Contractors of the Week? Or you can be Contractor of the Day for every customer you meet!

"Show up on time. Do what you say you're going to do. Do the best job you can. Keep in the back of your mind that your customers know a lot of people, and if you make them happy they may tell several of their friends. It's an honest profession and you can make a very good living at it. I am absolutely proud to put my name on any job!" **TPC**



Christian Brothers Painting makes the "after" much nicer than the "before."



How to Navigate the RRP Rule

The first step to lead-safe practices and a winning bid starts with a simple \$5 test

If you're a renovation or repair contractor and you've worked in a pre-1978 home, school or daycare center, chances are you've already had first-hand experience with the EPA's Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) Rule.

The RRP rule was created to protect children and adults from the dangers of exposure to lead-based paint, which can lead to learning disabilities and brain damage. Common renovation activities such as sanding, cutting and demolition can create hazardous lead dust and chips by disturbing lead-based paint. Now, under the RRP Rule, contractors performing renovation, repair and painting projects that disturb lead-based paint in homes, childcare facilities and schools built before 1978 are required to be certified and must follow specific work practices to prevent lead contamination.

And while the cause is worthy, contractors are asking, "How do I continue to win bids against competitors who are not complying with the RRP rule?"

What this means for your business

As the EPA and other organizations spread the word about the dangers of lead paint poisoning, more homeowners will seek out contractors who are knowledgeable and responsible when it comes to lead-safe work practices. Contractors who are not compliant with the RRP rule may bid cheaper, but for most homeowners, it will be worth the extra money to safeguard their families from the dangers of lead.

The easiest way to compliance

3M™ LeadCheck™ Swabs make lead testing quick, simple and accurate.* At less than \$5 a swab, it's a tool to help RRP-certified contractors win jobs. When a swab turns red, that means lead is present*, and you can use the visual result to educate homeowners on the harmful effects of lead and lead poisoning. Then bid the job accordingly using RRP lead-safe work practices.



3M™ LeadCheck™ Swabs only turn red when lead is present. So there are no false positives from your customer's point of view.

3M LeadCheck Swabs were the first EPA-recognized test kit for use by certified contractors on wood and metal surfaces. They can also be used on drywall and plaster and are currently in the EPA-approved lab testing process and pending recognition for these surfaces.

Why you should test for lead

Any amount of lead is hazardous.* Whether the test comes up negative or positive, it provides the opportunity for an accurate job bid. It also opens the door for important lead safety

conversations to help you win the trust of your customers. It's another way to establish your company as a professional, reliable and knowledgeable contractor – leading to more winning bids and referrals.

3M LeadCheck Swabs only turn red when lead is present, so there are no false positives from your customer's point of view.

Why you should care

Non-compliance with the RRP Rule can affect your health and your business. Lead testing and using lead-safe work practices are the right things to do for the health of your customers, their neighbors and your workers.

Your business also depends on your safe work practices. Contractors in violation of the RRP Rule can be fined up to \$37,500 for each violation, per day.**

Take the first step to compliance by checking for lead. If lead is found, 3M offers a line of lead-safe work products to help you with your renovation, including respirators, safety eyewear, coveralls, duct tape and more.

For more information, please visit 3MLeadCheck.com. For RRP compliance questions, find more information on the EPA website and its section on lead: <http://www.epa.gov/lead/>

* 3M™ LeadCheck™ Swabs can test to 600 ppm.
** Small Entity Compliance Guide to Renovate Right. EPA's Lead-Based Paint Renovation, Repair, and Painting Program Guide.



Easy to Use. Instant Results.

3M™ LeadCheck™ Swabs are a quick and reliable test that can help RRP-certified contractors win jobs.

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