PaintBusters Australia

FREE MINI GUIDE

PAINTING BUSINESS SYSTEMS

Less Chaos. Better Jobs. More Control.



PAINTBUSTERS AUSTRALIA | BUSINESS GUIDES

START WITH WHAT GOES WRONG

A busy business can still be a disorganised business



You can be a first-class painter and still spend your evenings chasing messages, finding missing job details, ordering forgotten materials and wondering when the customer will pay. That is not a painting problem. It is a business systems problem.

A system is simply an agreed way of doing something important, every time. It might be a one-page checklist, a standard email, a job folder or a regular ten-minute review. It does not have to be expensive software.

The goal is not more paperwork. The goal is fewer avoidable mistakes, clearer responsibility and less dependence on the owner remembering everything.

Start with the expensive mistakes

Think about the last three jobs. Was a colour unclear? Did the crew arrive without the right materials? Did extra work go ahead without written approval? Did an invoice sit unsent? Each repeat problem points to a system worth improving.

THE TAKEAWAY If the same mistake happens twice, fix the process—not just the immediate problem.

Your quick check

- ☐ Name the three problems that waste the most time or money.
- ☐ Pick one to fix first. Keep the solution simple enough to use.

FROM THE FIRST CALL

Give every enquiry a clear next step



A painting job starts well before anyone opens a tin. A customer makes an enquiry, you decide whether the job suits your business, gather the details, inspect where necessary, prepare a quote and follow up. If any step is missed, good work can disappear before it begins.

Record the customer's name, address, contact details, job type, timing and next action in one place. A notebook can work for a small operation. A shared system becomes more useful as the business grows. What matters is that the information can be found.

A simple enquiry-to-job pathway

1. Enquiry received — capture the details
2. Job qualified — decide whether to proceed
3. Scope confirmed — inspect or review documents
4. Quote issued — record the date and follow-up
5. Acceptance received — open the job file

A quote sent without a follow-up date can be forgotten. A job accepted without a clear scope can become an argument. The next step should always be visible.

THE TAKEAWAY **Every enquiry needs an owner, a record and a next action.**

BEFORE THE CREW ARRIVES

One job file. One agreed scope.



The person who priced the work often knows things the painter on site does not. If those details stay in someone's head, the crew can deliver the wrong result while believing they are doing the right thing.

Once a quote is accepted, put the approved information into one job file. Include the customer's contact details, site access, agreed scope, exclusions, colours and finishes, coating systems, relevant specifications, programme, site hazards and payment milestones. Use current manufacturer instructions where applicable.

Make sure the team knows which surfaces are included, what preparation is required and who can authorise changes. If the customer requests extra work, document the change and agree on price and timing before proceeding.

The five-minute pre-start conversation

Before work starts, confirm the right property, the right areas, the right colours and products, the expected finish, access arrangements and the plan for protecting the customer's property. Check that required safety controls are in place.

Your quick check

- ☐ Can the crew find the latest approved scope and colours?
- ☐ Are exclusions and access arrangements clear?
- ☐ Does everyone know who approves variations?

THE TAKEAWAY A clear handover prevents expensive assumptions.

ON SITE, EVERY DAY

Make good work repeatable



Good painting depends on sound preparation, suitable products, correct application and quality checks. Your production system should support those things—not bury the crew in forms.

Use short pre-start and end-of-day routines. Check access, protection, substrate condition, weather where relevant, product suitability, required preparation and the day's priorities. Record significant issues while they are fresh. Follow the project specification, manufacturer instructions and applicable safety requirements.

At the end of the day, note what was completed, what remains, any materials needed and anything that could delay tomorrow. On a small job, a brief written note and a few dated photographs may be enough.

The practical daily rhythm

Start: confirm the plan and risks. During: check preparation and workmanship before defects are hidden. Finish: tidy the site, record progress and prepare for the next day.

When a defect occurs, correct the work—but also ask what allowed it to happen. Was the instruction unclear? Was the surface not assessed? Was the quality check missed?

THE TAKEAWAY The best system is the one the team will actually use.

KNOW WHAT EACH JOB COSTS

Control the cash, not just the paint



A full diary is not the same as a profitable business. You need to know what a job was expected to cost, what it actually cost and when the money is due to arrive.

Give each job a reference number. Keep its labour records, supplier invoices, purchase dockets and approved variations together. Compare the final labour and material costs with the estimate. Look for patterns: travel that was overlooked, preparation taking longer than expected, or materials purchased twice.

Keep business overheads separate from direct job costs so you can see the full picture. Owner's time, insurance, vehicles, administration and equipment do not disappear just because they are not written on a paint tin.

A simple weekly money review

Check invoices ready to issue, payments due, overdue accounts, supplier bills and upcoming payroll or subcontractor commitments. Invoice in accordance with the agreed terms, and follow up promptly and professionally.

Do not assume a deposit amount or payment clause is lawful everywhere in Australia. Check the rules that apply to the work and location, and put agreed terms in writing.

Your quick check

- ☐ Do you know the actual cost of your last completed job?
- ☐ Is every approved variation recorded and invoiced?
- ☐ Are unpaid invoices reviewed each week?

NO MORE “I THOUGHT YOU DID IT”

Give each responsibility an owner



As a painting business grows, jobs begin to fall between people. One person assumes someone else ordered the paint. The supervisor thinks the office confirmed the colour. The office thinks the supervisor sent the completion details. Nobody intended the mistake.

Assign a clear owner to each key task: enquiries, estimating, scheduling, purchasing, site supervision, quality checks, variations and invoicing. The same person can own several tasks in a small business. The point is that somebody is responsible.

Show staff and subcontractors where to find the current job information and how to report a problem. Explain the reason for each procedure. People are more likely to follow a simple system that helps them work than one that exists only to satisfy the office.

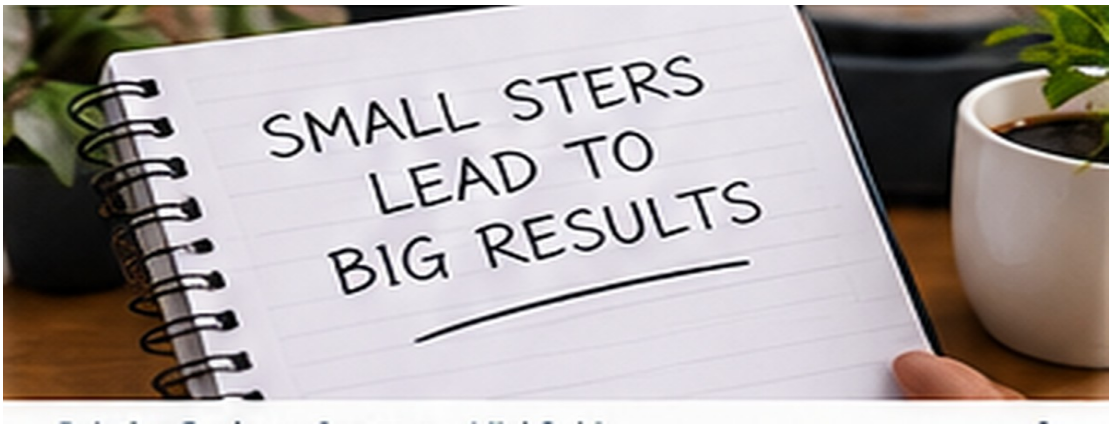
Train, then check

A system is not finished when you write it. Show the team how to use it, observe what happens on a real job and improve anything that causes confusion. Never treat an ABN alone as proof that a worker is genuinely an independent contractor; classification depends on the actual arrangement.

THE TAKEAWAY Clear responsibility beats constant supervision.

A SIMPLE STARTING PLAN

Build your system one step at a time



You do not need to rebuild the business overnight. Choose one recurring problem, introduce one simple process and see whether it improves the result. Once it works, move to the next weak point.

Your seven-day starting plan

Day 1 — List the leaks Write down the three recurring problems costing the most time, money or goodwill.

Day 2 — Pick one Choose the problem you can improve quickly and clearly.

Day 3 — Write the process Create a short checklist or instruction with a named owner.

Day 4 — Explain it Show everyone involved what to do, when and where to record it.

Day 5 — Use it Test the process on a real enquiry, job or invoice.

Day 6 — Check the result Ask what worked and what got in the way.

Day 7 — Simplify and keep it Remove unnecessary steps and make the useful version standard.

Good systems should make the working day easier, protect the customer experience and help you understand whether the business is making money.

THE TAKEAWAY Start small. Make it work. Repeat what works.

ABOUT PAINTBUSTERS AUSTRALIA

Build a business, not just a workload

PaintBusters Australia supports painters and painting contractors with practical industry knowledge, estimating education and business development. Our aim is to help you make better decisions, price the right work and build a business that can perform consistently.

How PBA can help

Estimating Service — independent estimating support for contractors who want to spend less time at the desk. You remain responsible for reviewing and adjusting the estimate to suit your own business before submitting a quote.

Estimating Course — practical training to help painters develop their estimating knowledge and confidence.

Business Training and Development — ongoing education and guidance for improving systems, financial discipline and the way a painting business operates.

PBA is an industry advisory and education organisation. It does not undertake painting contracts or manage painting projects.

Keep this guide handy

Use the seven-day plan on the previous page. When one improvement is working, choose the next. The extended edition will explore these systems in greater detail.

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