PaintBusters Australia

FREE MINI GUIDE

PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR PAINTERS

Plan Better. Stay in Control. Protect Your Profit.



PAINTBUSTERS AUSTRALIA | BUSINESS GUIDES

Start with a job you understand

A profitable painting job begins before the first brush touches the surface. The contractor needs to understand what is included, what is excluded, who is making decisions, when access is available and how completion will be judged. Poorly defined work creates arguments that no amount of hard work can fix.

Turn an enquiry into a clear scope

Walk the site where practical, inspect the substrate and record the coating requirements, preparation, access and site constraints. For plans-based work, read the drawings and specifications together. Do not assume that a quick conversation describes the whole job.

Separate assumptions from promises

A quote should identify important assumptions and exclusions in ordinary language. Examples include hidden substrate damage, access equipment, furniture movement, hazardous coatings, work outside normal hours and unforeseen repairs. An exclusion is not an excuse to ignore a known safety risk.

Know who can approve changes

Confirm the person authorised to accept the price, select colours, approve variations and sign off the finished work. The person on site may not be the person paying the invoice.

YOUR ACTION Before pricing your next job, write down its scope, exclusions, access arrangements and approval contact.

Plan before you promise a start date



A start date is only useful when labour, materials, access and other trades are ready. Overpromising creates rushed work, unhappy clients and pressure on the team.

Work backwards from the handover

Allow time for surface preparation, drying and recoat intervals, weather delays where relevant, inspections, rectification and final cleaning. Manufacturer instructions and actual site conditions govern coating application—not the date somebody would prefer.

Check the critical dependencies

- Is the site accessible, safe and ready for painting?
- Are colours, coating systems and finishes confirmed?
- Are the right painters, tools and access equipment available?
- Will another trade damage completed surfaces or prevent access?
- Is there an agreed process for weather or unforeseen delays?

YOUR ACTION Identify the three things most likely to delay the job and confirm them before mobilisation.

Put the right people on the right work

More painters on a job do not automatically mean faster or better work. Labour needs to suit the job sequence, site size, access and supervision available. Too many workers in a confined area can reduce productivity and increase rework.

Match skills to the task

Assign people according to experience with preparation, spraying, fine finishes, working at heights and occupied premises. Confirm who supervises the work and who checks quality. Where licensing or competency requirements apply, verify them for the location and task.

Give the crew a useful briefing

Before work starts, explain the scope, priorities, coating system, customer requirements, site restrictions, hazards and expected standard of finish. A five-minute briefing can prevent hours of misunderstanding.

Manage subcontractors consistently

When subcontractors are involved, define their scope, rates, responsibilities, insurance and reporting arrangements in writing. Avoid assuming they know what you promised the customer. Employment, subcontracting and workplace obligations vary by jurisdiction and must be checked.

YOUR ACTION Use one short pre-start briefing for every job, even when the crew has worked together for years.

Materials, access and site readiness

Missing paint, the wrong sheen or an unavailable access platform can stop a whole crew. Order and check materials before the start, then confirm that the site is ready for them.

Check materials against the specification

Confirm products, colours, sheen levels, quantities, primers and compatibility. Allow for delivery times and keep products stored and used according to manufacturer guidance. Do not substitute a coating merely because it is on the shelf.

Plan access and protection

Scaffolding, elevated work platforms, ladders, containment and protection of finished surfaces should be planned before work begins. Decide who provides and pays for access equipment, and document the arrangement. Use appropriate safe-work methods and follow applicable safety requirements.

Coordinate other trades

A good sequence reduces repeated masking, damage and return visits. Agree when carpenters, electricians, flooring contractors and cleaners will be finished in each area.

YOUR ACTION Create a short materials-and-access check before giving the crew the go-ahead.

Keep communication simple and recorded



Customers usually want to know three things: what is happening, whether the job is on track and what decisions they need to make. They should not have to chase the contractor for basic updates.

Agree how updates will happen

A brief phone call, email or message may be enough. Choose a method that works for the customer and keep a written record of decisions affecting price, scope, timing or finish.

Raise problems early

If preparation reveals damaged timber, water ingress or another issue outside the agreed scope, explain it promptly. Record what was found, what work is proposed and how it affects the price or program. Do not proceed with disputed additional work on an assumption that the customer will pay.

Use photos responsibly

Progress photographs can document concealed defects, preparation and completed work. Obtain permission before using client images in public marketing, and avoid including personal or sensitive information.

YOUR ACTION Choose one consistent update routine that you can maintain on every project.

Control variations before they control you

A variation is a change to the agreed work. It might be an additional room, extra preparation, a colour change or an unexpected repair. Small changes can become expensive when labour and materials are not recorded.

A simple variation control process

NOTICE	DESCRIBE	APPROVE	DELIVER
Identify changed work	Explain cost and time	Record agreement first	Update records

Describe the change clearly

Identify the work being added or removed, the cost adjustment and any effect on completion. Obtain approval from the authorised customer before starting the change wherever practicable. Follow the contract and applicable legal requirements for variations.

Do not rely on a casual conversation

A friendly discussion on site is useful, but it is not a substitute for a clear record when money or time changes. Written confirmation protects the relationship as well as the business.

YOUR ACTION For the next change requested on site, record the description, price, timing and approval before starting.

Check quality while work is underway

Quality is not something to inspect only when the painter has packed up. Catching an issue during preparation or between coats is usually easier than correcting it after handover.

Use practical inspection points

- Before coating: confirm preparation, cleanliness, dryness and substrate suitability.
- During application: follow the specified system and manufacturer instructions.
- Before final handover: check coverage, finish, edges, fittings, protection and cleanliness.

Treat defects as information

When something is wrong, determine the cause before repainting. The issue may involve preparation, moisture, contamination, application or product selection. Repeating the same process without understanding the cause may repeat the defect.

Keep the customer informed

If rectification is required, explain what will be corrected and when. Professional handling of a problem can preserve trust; ignoring it can destroy a referral relationship.

YOUR ACTION Build three quality checkpoints into the next job rather than relying on a single final inspection.

Finish properly, then learn from the job

A tidy handover helps the customer remember the experience positively. It also creates an opportunity to learn which jobs are worth pursuing again.



Close out the work

Walk through the agreed scope, address outstanding items, remove rubbish and protection, and supply relevant coating information or care instructions where appropriate. Issue invoices in line with the contract and agreed payment terms.

Compare estimate with actual result

Record the labour used, material costs, variations, delays and any callbacks. A job that felt busy may not have been profitable. Use the results to improve future estimating and job selection.

Keep the relationship

Thank the customer, resolve reasonable concerns and ask for a genuine review or referral when appropriate. Reliable follow-up is part of professional service, not an aggressive sales technique.

YOUR ACTION After your next completed job, note one process that worked and one that needs improvement.

The one-page job control checklist

Keep a simple checklist that fits the size and complexity of the work. A domestic repaint does not need the same documentation as a large commercial contract, but both need clarity.

Before starting

- Scope, exclusions and customer approval confirmed
- Colours, finishes and coating system recorded
- Start date, access and other trades coordinated
- Materials, equipment and safety arrangements checked
- Crew and subcontractor responsibilities understood

During the job

- Progress and issues communicated
- Quality checkpoints completed
- Variations priced and approved as required
- Changes, delays and significant decisions recorded

At handover

- Final inspection and agreed rectification completed
- Site clean, keys/access arrangements resolved
- Invoice and relevant documents supplied
- Actual labour, materials and outcome reviewed

A practical example: the repaint that grew

A contractor quotes to repaint the interior of an occupied home. On the second day, the owner asks for an additional bedroom and points out damaged skirting. Without a variation process, the crew may do the extra work to keep the customer happy and discover later that the original price no longer covers the labour.

A better approach is to inspect the additional work, explain the preparation needed, confirm the added cost and time, and obtain approval before proceeding. The contractor then updates the crew briefing and the job record. The customer knows what to expect, and the contractor protects the agreed scope.

The lesson is not to bury a customer in paperwork. It is to prevent a friendly request from becoming an avoidable dispute.

When one conversation can help

Some contractors are excellent tradespeople but find scheduling, quoting, staff coordination or customer communication harder to manage as work increases. The solution is not necessarily a complicated software system or a long-term coaching contract.

PaintBusters Australia offers painting-industry estimating, education and business consultancy. A focused paid consultation can help a contractor identify the most important operational problem and decide what to improve first. Additional assistance is optional; one session may be enough to establish a useful direction.

PaintBusters Australia provides advice and education. It does not take over management of a contractor’s painting projects.

Three questions worth asking yourself

- Do I know exactly what work and price the customer approved?
- Does my crew know what must happen next and who is responsible?
- After handover, can I tell whether the job was genuinely profitable?

If you cannot answer those questions confidently, start there. Better job control is often about consistent habits, not more paperwork.

Final word

Good project management for a painting contractor is practical: understand the work, plan the sequence, communicate clearly, control changes, check quality and learn from the result. The goal is not to create the biggest operation or the thickest file. It is to deliver the right job properly, at the right price, with fewer surprises.

For business education, estimating support and one-to-one advice, visit paintbustersaustralia.com.au.

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