

The Power Of Paint

Jeff Dover

A fresh coat of paint will help attract new customers, retain existing ones

Most restaurant facility professionals would like all their buildings to be constructed of brick and never have to worry about painting or upgrading the exterior. Unfortunately, restaurants are not all brick and most need to be continually refreshed both inside and out to send a message to potential customers that there is something different going on within the establishment.

Customers really do notice when there is a change to a facility, be it new signage, exterior coverings, lighting or a simple paint job. Since the Great Recession, many restaurant chains have reeled in their remodel (capital) spending due to lower sales and profits. This has left corporations lowering their sights a bit but still needing a facility change to aggressively go after new customers and retain existing ones.

Leveraging Paint

Painting a building is a very simple and inexpensive way to signal a change or upgrade, and its overall cost is relatively low from a marketing standpoint. Think how much it costs for TV advertising or direct mailing. Painting is less expensive, and it makes facility sense.

A Facility professional's mission is to protect company assets. Painting will accomplish this in the following ways:

- Extend the life of the exterior (and interior) of a building
- Save energy in cooling costs by using energy-saving reflective paint on various exterior surfaces, such as roofs
- Minimize wood rot in high-moisture and high-heat environments

Cost Considerations

Obtaining approval for painting a facility should be relatively easy. However, because it is often labeled as an "expense" item on the store's P&L, it's generally not happening often enough. Incorporating painting as part of a larger total remodel can be capitalized when it's included with new signage, furniture, floor and wall coverings. Painting does, in general, extend the life of the building but usually not substantially.

It is good business to repaint every three to five years, changing the colors a bit to signal a change to the community. In a perfect world, painting costs are expensed below a store's bottom line as to not affect the bonus potential of the restaurant managers (and other employees). Some forward-thinking chains do this.

Otherwise, painting should be budgeted every three to five years, depending on exterior conditions, such as weather variables and corporate marketing and design standards. It is recommended to discuss the potential painting cost with your internal accounting and budgeting departments to inquire about creating a special account that, when used, will not affect the store's bonus. Some companies call this account "major maintenance"—it's that important.

Decision Time

Work closely with the paint manufacturer to determine which type of paint to use. Consult them when choosing the proper sheen coverage (semi-gloss, eggshell, satin or flat); each has its advantages and disadvantages.

A building's surface material will also help determine what type of paint to use. There are so many exterior finishes, such as brick, stucco, wood, EIFS, cement and metal. Surfaces that expand and contract with the temperature will need a paint that is elastic in nature, otherwise it will crack and peel quickly after applying.

Is the area prone to graffiti? Does the surface need to be cleaned regularly? Is it in direct sunlight the majority of the day? What is the drying time? All of these questions need to be evaluated by a painting professional.

After discussing the specifics with a professional, prepare the RFP accordingly. To save contract dollars, it always makes sense to group stores geographically. This should keep the travel and expense costs for the painters to a minimum. Discuss the timing required when painting a facility, as some restaurants are open 24/7. Customers will understand if they are inconvenienced for a day while a new paint job is being applied.

Another way to save is to buy the paint and supply it to your painters. Granted, they need to make money, but paint markup can be high. Additionally, you will ensure the proper, specified paint is being used. In many cases, sly painters will substitute a cheaper paint that will lead to unacceptable results in the long term. Finally, for best results, paint during optimal weather. Painting really is a strong marketing tool.

Any comments would be appreciated. Feel free to contact me at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3 or email me at jeff@rfmaonline.com.

Dover and out.

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddrucker's and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as Energy Manager, Facilities Manager and Director of Facilities at the various brands.