



# Pathways to Greater Knowledge

**I**T'S OFTEN BEEN SAID that learning is a lifelong journey, and that's true no matter what you have chosen to do for a living. In order to grow and to better ourselves both personally and professionally, we must continue to move forward on a pathway to more knowledge. The journey itself never ends. The world

keeps changing, and there is always more to know.

When we are children, education is critical. Parents are our first teachers. They help us learn language, teach us to take our first steps, impart to us the difference between right and wrong. When we start going to school, we learn how to read, how to write, how

to add numbers, how to identify the 50 states and gradually how to observe the world around us to facilitate our own independent learning.

As we progress from elementary school to middle school to high school and in many cases to college, our education grows more sophisticated and our ability to learn and discern be-



● The PDRA Coatings Specialist Course is the first online training course offered by the association. An online Customer Service course will be unveiled shortly.

comes more advanced as well. We are able to function in the world, and then we start honing in on the specified education we need in order to become established in our chosen profession.

But once we have become established, education seems a bit like a luxury—something we can do in our spare time, if such a thing as “spare time” even exists for all of us leading our busy lives. We have to find time to work, to play, to enjoy our families, to pay our bills, to plan for our financial future, to maintain our homes, to stay

connected with our friends, to be in the know about current events and politics, and to look after our health and wellbeing. With all of this going on, is it any wonder that any thoughts of ongoing education may get postponed to another day, another month or even another year?

However, for those of you whose livelihood depends upon imparting their specialized knowledge to the general public—i.e., customers and potential customers—missing out on educational opportunities can be det-

perimental to your professional health. You do so at your own peril.

In the paint and decorating profession, there are multiple opportunities for retailers and their salespeople to learn more about the products, selling skills and business strategies that are needed to succeed in this competitive market.

Your suppliers offer tremendous educational opportunities on their specific product lines so that you will be able to understand the features and benefits of said products as well as how to apply or install them, how to use them under the proper safety precautions, how to properly dispose of waste and how to maintain them. This information is vital for you to impart to your customers if you expect them to have a good experience with the products you sell.

An important, all-encompassing resource for business people to tap into is their trade association. For those who sell paint and other decorating products in a retail setting, there is one best resource that will provide a wealth of information to retailers no matter what brands of paint or other products they sell. That resource is the Paint & Decorating Retailers Association, whose sole reason for being is to educate and support the independent paint and decorating retailer.

The association has done this in a number of ways over the past 60-plus years of its existence. Training vehicles have included in-person seminars, full-day training programs, books, manuals and monthly magazine articles in *Paint & Decorating Retailer* magazine.

With the emergence of new technologies, PDRA now offers online training courses that allow retailers and their salespeople to educate themselves on their timetable from the convenience of their stores or homes. The association also has placed increasing emphasis on social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and Linked In, as well as its online website and blog. With an online version of *PDR* magazine coming in 2012, PDRA has



● PDRA's foray into social media includes an active Twitter account.

definitely stepped up to the plate to utilize every delivery system possible to make sure that paint and decorating storeowners have a way to access education and to fit educational opportunities into their busy lives.

In addition, PDRA has teamed with the National Hardware Show® to offer a great venue for retailers to learn about new product introductions from key manufacturers in the industry. The show is also an important way to attend seminars on important retail topics and to confer face to face with fellow retailers and leading manufacturers.

## Fulfilling Its Mission

“We’re definitely fulfilling our mission statement, which is to educate our fellow retailers,” stated Dan Gould, a member of the PDRA Board of Directors who serves on the association’s education committee.

Gould explained that PDRA is placing added emphasis on online training opportunities because of the convenience factor that is so important to retailers today. Already, the association has introduced an online Coatings Specialist Program, which was introduced in Spring 2009 to great acclaim. A follow-up online program, to be introduced shortly, will focus on the importance of customer service.

“With our first online course, we hit a homerun, and I think we will have another homerun with our next course as well,” Gould said. “Independent retailers pride themselves on being customer service-oriented. It’s important for people in our industry to firm up their customer service skills.”

Also serving on the education committee, PDRA Board Member Charles Smith affirmed the importance of offering courses that are accessible from any computer with an Internet connection. “The fact that the courses are online is tremendous,” he said. “Employees can take the training at their own pace. In a total of eight to 10 hours, the product knowledge course covers a great deal of information on coatings, tools and surface preparation. Any employee,

● PDRA is keeping its members informed with a blog that details news and trends in the industry. You can access it at [www.pdra.org/blog](http://www.pdra.org/blog).



● PDRA’s commitment to education is evidenced by the awarding of an annual scholarship, generously sponsored by the National Hardware Show®. PDRA member Kerry Jones nominated his son, Adam, who received the 2011 scholarship at a special presentation at the show in Las Vegas. From left, PDRA President Jeff Baggaley and the National Hardware Show’s Ed Several present the scholarship ceremonial check to Adam as his father stands by proudly.

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new or seasoned, can get a lot of value from it.”

Smith predicted that the online customer service course will be just as valuable to retailers and their salespeople. “The customer service course is a great partner with the product knowledge course. I think it’s even more important than product knowledge because customer service is what sets us apart. The marketplace is changing. It’s becoming more challenging for us everyday. In

order to compete, you have to make yourself different and offer the product knowledge and customer service that the big boxes do not. Knowledge is power. You have to be the best that you can be.”

*“It’s important for people in our industry to firm up their customer service skills.”*

Smith and Gould are part of a nine-person board of directors—retailers like the membership of PDRA—all of whom are volunteering of their time to fulfill the mission statement of educating and supporting the independent component of the industry’s retail marketplace.

PDRA Executive Vice President Dan Simon stressed that the devotion to the mission statement is something that drives both the board and the staff as they go about producing programs, products and services that will benefit the independent retail segment of the paint and decorating industry.

“It’s great to be part of an organization (PDRA) that gives back so much to the paint and decorating industry,” Simon stated. “The funds that PDRA puts back into the industry help make the industry stronger and viable in the future for both the paint retailers as well as the manufacturers in the paint industry.”

### National Hardware Show

PDRA’s commitment to education also is evidenced through its partnership with the National Hardware Show®, which occurs annually in Las Vegas. The 2012 edition of the show will take place May 1-3 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Like past shows, this event will enable those in attendance to experience firsthand the depth and breadth of product innovations in the paint and accessories sector as well as in the categories of tools and hardware; housewares; lawn, garden and outdoor living products; plumbing and electrical; storage and organization; tailgate and outdoor recreation products; and international sourcing. It truly is nine great shows in one.

One or more days spent traversing the exhibit floor is an education

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in and of itself. Understanding product advancements is incredibly important in the paint and decorating industry, where innovations in low-VOC coatings formulations, new types of painting tools and better solutions for surface preparation are constantly emerging. New for 2012, there will be a section of the show that features new products—all in one area so that retailers can readily identify the latest innovations of their respective industries.

Beyond the trade show floor, the National Hardware Show offers a full slate of educational opportunities that are of great value to independent retailers who are looking to gain a competitive

advantage in the marketplace. Given that these educational opportunities are provided free of charge in one centralized venue definitely augments the value that retailers receive from attending the National Hardware Show.

“During this economy, it’s been tough for retailers to get out of their stores and invest in education,” stated Sonya Ruff Jarvis, Vice President of Attendee Programs for the National Hardware Show. “While at the National Hardware Show, independent retailers will be exposed to a litany of information regarding how to compete and optimize their performance without investing additional dollars.”

Ruff Jarvis explained that the National Hardware Show has teamed up with the non-profit North American Retail Hardware Association (NRHA) to provide a comprehensive package of education during the show that will be valuable to independent retailers of all sectors—whether they sell paint, hardware or other home improvement products.

This educational package will be delivered in a multi-faceted presentation that includes main stage presentations providing insights on how to stay viable in a competitive market as well as the NRHA Rethink Retail Conference featuring sessions on topics of vital interest to retailers. Highlighting this conference is the NRHA Retail Learning Lab, which will cover such diverse subject matter as how to create and maintain a compelling website, retail security and the latest developments in computer software solutions.

In addition, there will be a variety of learning tracks on such subjects as retail technology tools, profit benchmarking, succession planning, training best practices and industry-specific product discussions, including a paint

*“You have to offer the product knowledge and customer service that the big boxes do not.”*

The most successful manufacturers in the paint and decorating industry are not only devoted to producing quality products. They also are dedicated to providing quality education that will enable retailers to sell the products effectively. The manufacturers that are the sponsors of the PDRA Education Initiative are a case in point. They show their commitment to education not only by supporting PDRA's efforts

In the paint applicator market, Waksman noted that retailers need to be educated on new techniques of application as well as on new application tools. "We at Corona work with our dealers on a continuing basis to demonstrate how our brushes and rollers work, what makes them work better and how they work with today's paints."

Corona offers this kind of assistance on a continuing basis, holding

functional differences of the products they carry, especially in this highly competitive market where the need to know features and benefits is critical.

"By keeping the end users and store owners informed with the most up-to-date information, there's a direct correlation to increased revenue, higher turns and profit," stated Bruce Schneider, end user marketing manager and training coordinator at Purdy. "By focusing on education,

## Education Sponsors Show Dedication to Furthering Retailers' Knowledge

but also by offering their own training and product knowledge support to those who are on the front lines with customers every day.

"If you are going to be successful in any endeavor you need to constantly learn and re-learn your craft and skills," said Ben Waksman, president of Corona Brushes Inc. "This is true whether you are a doctor, a firefighter, a brushmaker or a paint salesman."

Waksman added that those working retail have a double duty: (1) dealing successfully with people, and (2) using your knowledge to make sure your customer gets the best product and service to meet his or her needs. "And it doesn't matter whether you are dealing with a paint contractor or a do-it-yourself painter. This is especially true with the changes in paints that have been going on for a few years and the elimination of oil-base coatings."

product knowledge sessions on an average of every 18 or 24 months—more often in the event that the company is introducing new applicators or techniques to apply new coatings. As an example, the introduction of new waterborne alkyd enamels or fast-drying acrylic exterior coatings warranted special product knowledge seminars. "This has to be ongoing, and this is a commitment that the dealer makes by allowing us time in which to convey our message with his staff as well as customers," Waksman stressed.

He added that demonstrations of product—i.e., paint-outs using the company's brushes and rollers with the newest paints—is one of the most effective ways to convey the message. "As they old saying goes, the proof is in the pudding—or in the brush," he said.

At Purdy, education centers around helping retailers to understand the

a relationship of trust is created between the manufacturer, the store owner and the end-user."

Purdy has devoted considerable resources to ensuring that retailers get access to the best quality information from the company's knowledgeable front-line staff. "Sales representatives and customer service agents are highly trained regarding every aspect of our product portfolio," Schneider said. "This includes everything from raw materials to application advice. This makes our team the best resource for storeowners and end users. Purdy also participates and supports apprenticeship programs throughout the U.S., Canada and the UK with training materials in print, video and live symposiums. Purdy participates in the education committees for the IUPAT, PDCA and FCA.

At PPG, a commitment to education

*(Continued on Page 34)*

trends panel featuring leading industry manufacturers.

"Through all of these complementary educational opportunities, retailers will be able to gain insights into best practices, share their own perspective and take home valuable information that they can use in their stores," Ruff Jarvis stated.

Concurring with this opinion was Dan Tratensek, Editor/Vice President of Publishing for *Hardware Retailing*, which is published by the NRHA. "One of the most important facets of the National Hardware Show is its ability to bring together members from across the home improvement industry to share ideas," Tratensek stated. "The

educational aspect of the show is so important because it helps promote discussion among industry peers in a neutral environment. Through this discussion, the industry can improve and new ideas and concepts can emerge.

The National Hardware Show's partnership with PDRA also shows a commitment to education via the

is one of the driving forces of the company. “PPG realizes the importance of training for our dealers and employees and offers several types of educational programs that are conducted by a professional training team for both hands-on and classroom learning,” said Tony Jager, Sales Planning Manager for the Dealer Channel.

Jager added that a full offering of online training materials are being developed so that the dealer will

opinion as well, and these face-to-face interactions allow us to obtain ideas to help improve our position and communication within the industry.”

Shurtech supplements face-to-face communication with DVDs, flyers and in-store signage as well as a state-of-the-art website and an 800 number through which callers can get feedback on specific questions (1-877-FROGTAPE). “We include a QR code in our graphics to allow for quick access to valuable information via smartphones,” Kasl added. “In all

be very sharp. FrogTape® is treated with PaintBlock® technology which seals the edges of the tape, preventing paint bleed.”

Kasl pointed out that many end-users rely on store employees to help them choose what is right for their painting needs. “Customers may consider upgrading their product selection if they are educated properly on how it will improve their experience and/or the output of a project. This could result in higher sales for the stores and improved customer satisfaction,” she said.

Another category that requires great knowledge is faux finishing, where understanding products, techniques and application methods spells the difference between success and failure. To ensure paint store personnel understand the many capabilities of its product line, Faux Effects International Inc. offers free product training in both Vero Beach, Fla. and Dallas, Texas. The company also offers retailers online access to its resource center, “Faux Effects-University” for authorized users. In addition, FEI provides “live” technical assistance online and by telephone for all paint store retailers, staff and end users.

“If one desires success, clearly education has always been the key for any paint contractor, store operator and staff,” said Raymond Sandor, Founder & President of Faux Effects International Inc. “Without focused industry knowledge, the end result will equal loss of sales and repeat business.” ■

*“If one desires success, clearly education has always been the key . . .”*

be able to access training tools at their convenience. Topics available both online and in the classroom include residential repaint product training; commercial maintenance and contractor product and sales training; industrial maintenance and contractor product and sales training; as well as safety training.

Shurtech Brands, LLC offers educational tools to meet the various needs of the industry and retailers. “Our company provides in-person seminars, including product demonstrations, as it allows to answer questions ‘on-the-spot’ and cover a broader range of topics,” said Laetitia Kasl, Senior Category Manager—Painting Tapes for the company. “Our company values the store employees’

of these efforts, we strive to provide a cohesive, easy-to-understand and easy-to-share content and format.”

Within the painting tape category, Kasl observed that educating store employees is essential so they can help guide their customers to select the right tape for their job. “The tools used in the painting project, including painting tape, affect the experience during the project and the quality of the results,” she said. “To help someone select the right painting tape, store associates should inquire about the type of surface being masked (painting tape adhesion levels range from light to high), whether the tape will be exposed to direct sunlight (some tapes are UV-resistant while others are not) or whether paint lines must

annual PDRA scholarship program. Generously sponsored by The National Hardware Show, this \$5,000 annual scholarship competition provides one individual, nominated by a PDRA member store, with assistance in financing his or her higher educational ambitions. It’s just one of many ways that the PDRA-National Hardware

Show partnership has its eye on ensuring the future of independent retailers in the paint and decorating sector.

### The Supplier’s Role

Industry suppliers are a vital component of the PDRA effort to education industry retailers. The association would be unable to provide the depth

and breadth of education currently available without the valued support of its PDRA’s generation education initiative sponsors: Benjamin Moore, Corona Brushes Inc., Faux Effects International Inc., FrogTape® from Shurtech Brands, LLC, the National Hardware Show®, PPG Architectural Coatings, Purdy Applicator Brands

and Zinsser Brands from Rust-Oleum Corporation.

The education sponsors have a commitment to educating retailers through their own efforts as well as by supporting the efforts of PDRA. See accompanying article starting on page 32 to learn about the education sponsors' commitment to education and their own efforts to education retailers in the industry.

Also playing a key role in determining PDRA's future direction is the association's Advisory Committee, whose members provide a much-needed perspective from the supplier side of the industry (See box showing members of the Advisory Committee on page 30).

Dave Garland, who serves as the PDRA Board of Directors' liaison to the advisory committee, observed that

the association has been moving forward with its vision on such initiatives as social media and online education courses. "The Advisory Committee has the opportunity to be an important part of that vision," said Garland, who previously served as PDRA President and has returned to the board as Director-at-Large. "Coming back on the board after a bit of an absence has allowed me to work with the Advisory Committee from a fresh, new perspective."

The relationship between PDRA and the Advisory Committee is a two-way street. It's not only about what the Advisory Committee can do for PDRA, but as Garland explained, "We're also addressing the topic of: What can PDRA do for you, the industry's suppliers?"

As an example, Garland pointed out that PDRA's social media initiative could be structured not only for the benefit of retailers but for suppliers as well. "A lot of the larger companies already are participating in social media, but many smaller companies are not," Garland said. "One of the things we'll be exploring with the Advisory Committee is whether a social media program is something we could set up as a service or benefit to suppliers in our industry."

Several of the companies represented on the Advisory Committee have active social media programs, and Garland observed that it would be extremely useful to get the input of the individuals who have put those programs together. "Our thought is to draw out the people from these companies who can be a link to the industry we envision for tomorrow. We're taking a slightly different but dynamic approach to where we want to be in the future."

One thing is certain about PDRA's future: Education will continue to be an important emphasis in ensuing years. The delivery systems may change, but no matter where the industry heads, your trade association will continue to move along a pathway of providing education to ensure greater knowledge. ■



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- Completely unaffected by UV rays, making it perfect outside jobs
- Free live online training available



Wood Sealer

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# Educational Resources of PDRA

## Paint & Decorating Retailer

Monthly magazine devoted to keeping independent paint and decorating stores abreast of industry trends, product innovations and news of the industry.

## PDRA Website

Visit [www.pdra.org](http://www.pdra.org) for information about industry events, dealer education, membership benefits as well as access to an online store and a dealer locator.

## PDRA Blog

Visit [www.pdra.org/blog](http://www.pdra.org/blog) for PDRA's online blog, which provides access to late-breaking news and trend information from the paint and decorating industry.

## Twitter

Follow PDRA on Twitter to receive timely updates about what is happening in the industry as well as to receive quick access to useful information via freshly tweeted links to articles and websites. Follow us at the following accounts: @PaintDecoRetail, dan\_pdra and tina\_pdra.

## Linked In

Paint and decorating store owners are invited to join the new Linked In group for Paint & Decorating Retailers Association (PDRA). Follow the instructions on page 16 of this issue and join a conversation with fellow retailers about issues that are important to you.

## Courses & Seminars

Visit the PDRA website to learn more about the Coatings Specialist Course, conveniently offered online. A new online course on the subject of customer service is coming soon. Attend the National Hardware Show®, where PDRA sponsors the Paint & Accessories section, for additional educational opportunities.

## PDRA Scholarship

Generously sponsored by the National Hardware Show®, this scholarship program supports the future of our industry by providing a \$5,000 scholarship to a young person nominated by a PDRA member in good standing.

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