

# HOW DISTRIBUTORS CAN ACHIEVE PEAK PERFORMANCE IN THE INDUSTRIAL PAINT SECTOR



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## ACHIEVE PEAK PERFORMANCE

Succeeding as an industrial coatings distributor requires the same tools as any other paint sector — superior product acumen and the right manufacturing partnership. But what does this look like with industrial coatings? What knowledge from other sectors crosses over, and what characteristics are different? What qualities should distributors look for in their industrial paint manufacturer?

Whether you're a new distributor of industrial paint or are seeking to boost your sales presence in the field, this guide will answer these questions and set your sales team up for success. In part one of this guide, we'll describe the fundamentals of industrial coatings and give insights that will ensure a successful addition of this sector. Part two will share tips for finding an industrial paint manufacturer who will best fit your coating needs — and guarantee a long-standing, lucrative relationship.

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO INDUSTRIAL COATINGS

For distributors coming from an architectural or commercial coating background, this section will be an important primer on industrial paint. But even if you've worked in the space, feel free to use this part of the guide to brush up on basics or share with sales team members who may not be as familiar with high-performance coatings.

## THE FUNDAMENTALS

### High-performance products

Industrial coatings are high-performance formulations with a focus on durability and longevity. These products can provide corrosion protection, UV stability and color-retention in [extreme environments](#) such as fuel tanks, marine settings, chemical-processing facilities and more. Aesthetic considerations can also play a part, depending on the project and the desires of the asset owner.

Common coating chemistries you'll come across include [epoxies](#), [polyurethanes](#), [zincs](#) and water based, and each coating type offers a combination of advantages for specific industrial environments and asset conditions. For example, polyurethanes provide superior, long-term gloss and color retention for high-visibility projects, whereas zincs provide excellent galvanic protection in particularly abrasive environments.

In addition to the coatings themselves, supplementary sundries are important for industrial coatings. If you already stock paint tools as part of your offerings, consider adding safety tools such as respirators; if you don't, be prepared to direct your industrial coating customers to a quality vendor.

### Surface preparation

Surface preparation for industrial coatings goes beyond the basic designations of "clean" or "smooth." The surface preparation mentioned in the specification will call out characteristics such as surface roughness, degree of cleanliness and existing coating tolerance. These requirements are a result of the interplay between the product required (i.e. What kind of protection does the asset need and for how long?), the environment in which the asset resides and the surface itself (i.e. Metallic, tank, concrete floor or wall, etc.).



These varying levels of surface preparation are [designated standards from NACE/SSPC](#) and give clear instructions as to what levels of cleanliness are allowed. For example, SSPC-SP5 White Metal Blast Cleaning calls for a surface uniformly free of all foreign matter, while SSPC-SP1 Solvent Cleaning just calls for soluble matter, such as grease and oils, to be removed from the surface. As a distributor, a strong working familiarity with the various surface preparation standards will set you up for success to provide best-fit products that correlate with a customer's substrate conditions.

## Specifications

The specification is a detailed roadmap for an industrial coating project; it will outline the product, surface preparation and other details about the project as well as high-level information. Because of the inherent complexity of industrial coating projects — you may encounter a customer needing to coat or line hundreds of thousands of square feet of interior for fuel tanks, for instance — these specifications will also be more involved than their commercial counterparts.

Distributors should also note the difference between [performance-based specifications and specifications that call for named products](#) and be prepared to address either format. Essentially, performance-based specs list a series of performance requirements to which the proposed system must comply. Just as it sounds, specifications calling for named products have already determined that the products listed will satisfy the needs of the owner.

A quality specification will be clear and concise — calling for specific NACE/SSPC standards of surface preparation for instance. As a distributor, you may encounter completed specifications from your customer, but you may also encounter documentation still in the works. Understanding industrial specifications will allow you to be more helpful and offer greater expertise to your customers.

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## THE INDUSTRIAL COATING MINDSET

Once you understand the basics of industrial coatings, the next step is to adopt an industrial coating mindset. This will help you maximize opportunities as you integrate this sector into your offerings.

To illustrate this point, here's an example of a distributor assuming an industrial coating mindset: If a commercial paint salesman approaches a school construction project, they likely see the standard drywall surfaces for which they can sell paint. This will get them, say, 90% of the project's paint sales. But a paint salesman with expertise in both the commercial and industrial sector will look at the same project and see not only the drywall surfaces that need to be coated, but the handrails, the outside steelwork, the concrete surfaces. By being able to see the potential for projects that need industrial coatings — storage tanks, bridges, water tanks, floor coatings — you can tap into new markets right in front of you and land not just 90% of a project, but satisfy 100% of their coating needs. It's a new lens through which to view your offerings, and one that will help grow your bottom line.

This also leads into our second piece of advice for breaking into or growing your presence in the industrial coating sector: The easiest place to expand your offerings is within spaces in which you already sell paint, such as the school construction example above. Industrial coating opportunities are plentiful, with common industrial environments including:

- Factory equipment
- Marine environments
- Chemical processing plants
- Warehouses and flooring
- Metal bridges
- Oil and gas, refineries
- Power facilities
- Wastewater and sewage facilities

By adopting an industrial coating mindset and utilizing your presence in previously established domains, you can increase your chance of success and growth in the industrial coating sector.

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# EVALUATING INDUSTRIAL COATING MANUFACTURERS

Now that you understand the fundamentals of industrial coatings, it's time to seek out an industrial coating manufacturer. Whether this is your first foray into an industrial coatings partnership or you're looking to begin a relationship with a new provider, the following characteristics will help you establish a long-lasting, service-driven and profitable relationship.

## THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

These are the characteristics your industrial coating manufacturer must possess; anything less and you shouldn't consider them a viable distributing partner.

### **Coatings that meet your needs**

Before evaluating an industrial coating manufacturer, you first need to reflect on what your industrial coating needs will be. Are you looking to work with a manufacturer of marine environment products, or a manufacturer only competitive on price point? For example, a distributor in California — a state with extremely stringent VOC requirements — would need a coating manufacturer who could provide low-VOC products. Clarify your needs before beginning your search; doing so will greatly streamline the process.

Additionally, evaluate potential providers' abilities to make modifications for your customers. For instance, a client may require a product to dry in a specific amount of time that differs from the standard product. To make that sale, you need a manufacturer who will not only offer the coating, but can also offer the flexibility to modify the product to best fit your customer's needs.

### **Industry certifications**

An industrial paint manufacturer can say they're experienced — but the best way to verify this is with trusted industry certifications. NACE credentials, SSPC certifications and CIP inspector programs clearly demonstrate that the manufacturer invests in its people and encourages implementing the highest industry standards. Ask about your potential partner's industry certifications; if they aren't able to share them, consider a manufacturer with more verified expertise.

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# THE ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

Once you've established the manufacturer has the fundamentals, look for these traits to separate the "good enough" from the best.

## Extensive customer support

Distributing products is one thing; knowing your products inside and out, how to best apply them and how to best sell them to your customers is quite another. The difference between the two? A manufacturer who offers extensive training, support and guidance.

Seek out an industrial coating manufacturer who takes the time to schedule training — ideally classroom sessions as well as hands-on demonstrations so your sales team can fully understand how the products are applied. They should actively and enthusiastically provide answers to questions such as:

- Who buys the products?
- What industrial situations are the products used in?
- How to approach different surface preparation scenarios?
- How do the products stack up in corrosion protection, UV protection and other high-performance traits?

And after an initial training, the manufacturer should still play an active role in your product distribution. A quality coating manufacturer will want to help you sell products and provide you with the necessary tools. Evaluate their customer support capabilities by asking:

- Will I have a dedicated support representative?
- Will you provide assistance with specification writing?
- Are you willing to do joint calls with customers?

If the manufacturer doesn't have an involved training and support program, it may be wise to consider other manufacturing partners. A support-oriented manufacturer can make a significant difference in your success as a distributor. End customers don't always know exactly what traits they need from their coating or how the factors of surface preparation, substrate environment, coating durability and more interact; that's where an informed coating manufacturer comes in.



The additional — and essential — support will facilitate your ability as a distributor to give correct product recommendations, talk through projects with end customers and ensure a high level of technical ability is brought to every project. With fast and accurate responses from your industrial coating manufacturer comes fast and accurate responses for your customer — and successfully completed sales.

### **Collaboration, not competition**

It's a simple question: How are you going to compete with your supplier? Or rather, are you going to compete with your supplier? Breaking into or expanding a new market sector is difficult, so consider a supplier whose main interest is supporting and growing your business.

Ideally, your industrial coating manufacturer won't compete in the same geographic area in which you do business. And, in a best-case scenario, they should support your business by sending you leads in that region. The goal of your manufacturer should be to make your business as successful as possible, leading to a positive and lucrative working relationship. Ask your potential manufacturing partner about how they plan to support your foray into this new market and see if their goals align with yours.





# THE BEST RESOURCE IS YOUR COATING MANUFACTURER

You've already taken the first steps to a successful addition of the industrial coating sector to your distribution offerings – understanding high-performance coatings and evaluating manufacturing partners.

Still have additional questions about succeeding in this market? [Reach out to a US Coatings industrial paint expert.](#) We'll answer your questions on products, provide insight on reaching industrial customers and set your sales representatives up for success.

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