

HOW TO SET UP AND RUN — A SUCCESSFUL — PAINTING & DECORATING BUSINESS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO STARTING, RUNNING
AND GROWING A PROFITABLE DECORATING BUSINESS



START YOUR BUSINESS
THE RIGHT WAY



PRICE WORK
PROFITABLY



MARKET YOUR
SERVICES EFFECTIVELY



WIN CUSTOMERS AND
BUILD A GREAT REPUTATION



GROW YOUR BUSINESS
AND YOUR INCOME

★★★
PRACTICAL
ADVICE
REAL-WORLD
RESULTS

★★★



TRADE SKILLS
— HUB ACADEMY —

Copyright Page

First Edition

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Other Trade Skills Hub Academy Publications

Trade Skills Hub Academy produces practical training resources, business guides and educational materials designed to support tradespeople, students, apprentices and business owners.

Titles include:

Trades Business Start-Up Series

- How to Set Up and Run a Successful Handyman Business
- How to Set Up and Run a Successful Gardening Business
- How to Set Up and Run a Successful Dog Walking Business

- How to Set Up and Run a Successful Painting & Decorating Business

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Disclaimer

This book provides general guidance regarding self-employment and the painting and decorating industry.

Business requirements, tax regulations, insurance obligations and legal responsibilities may change over time. Readers should seek professional advice from accountants, insurers, legal professionals or relevant authorities where appropriate.

Examples, pricing figures and case studies are provided for illustration purposes only and may vary depending on location, market conditions and individual circumstances.

Success in business cannot be guaranteed and will depend upon factors including effort, skill, market demand, customer service and financial management.

About Trade Skills Hub Academy

Trade Skills Hub Academy was established to provide practical, accessible and affordable educational resources for tradespeople, apprentices, students and self-employed business owners.

Many technical and business training resources are written by academics or consultants with limited experience of working in the trades.

Trade Skills Hub Academy takes a different approach.

Our resources are designed around real-world trade experience, practical application and straightforward guidance that can be used immediately.

Whether you are:

- Starting your first business
- Learning a trade
- Developing your technical knowledge
- Improving your profitability

our aim is to provide resources that are practical, relevant and easy to understand.

We believe that success comes from combining technical skills with strong business knowledge, professional standards and continuous improvement.

Who This Book Is For

Before we begin, it is worth taking a moment to explain who this book has been written for.

The painting and decorating industry attracts people from a wide range of backgrounds. Some enter the trade straight from school, while others arrive later in life after working in completely different careers.

Regardless of your starting point, the principles in this book are designed to help you build a professional, profitable and sustainable decorating business.

This book is for:

People Considering a Career in Painting and Decorating

If you are exploring the possibility of entering the decorating trade, this book will help you understand what is involved and whether self-employment is likely to be the right path for you.

Career Changers

Many successful decorators started in completely different industries before deciding to work for themselves.

If you are looking for a practical trade that offers flexibility, independence and the opportunity to build your own business, this book will help you understand the journey ahead.

New Self-Employed Decorators

If you have recently started taking on decorating work, this guide will help you avoid many of the mistakes commonly made during the early stages of self-employment.

You will learn how to:

- Price work correctly
- Find customers
- Market your services
- Manage your finances
- Build a strong reputation

Existing Decorators

Perhaps you already have practical decorating skills but feel less confident about the business side of things.

Many decorators are highly skilled tradespeople but have never received formal training in:

- Marketing
- Quoting
- Customer service
- Business management
- Financial planning

This book aims to bridge that gap.

Sole Traders and Small Business Owners

The guidance within this book is particularly relevant to:

- Sole traders
- One-person businesses
- Small decorating companies
- Family-run businesses

The focus is on practical, real-world advice rather than corporate management theory.

What This Book Is Not

This book is not a technical decorating manual.

It will not teach every painting and decorating technique in detail.

Instead, it focuses on helping you build and operate a successful decorating business.

You will find practical advice on:

- Starting your business
- Pricing your work
- Winning customers
- Delivering excellent service
- Building your reputation
- Growing sustainably
- Maintaining work-life balance

Technical skills and business skills are equally important.

This book focuses on the business side of the equation.

Contents

Introduction	ix
Chapter 1 – Is This the Right Business for You?	1
Before You Get Started	1
Chapter 2 – Learning the Trade: Training, Qualifications and Practical Experience.....	10
Part 1: Getting Started in the Trade	10
Chapter 2 – Developing Your Skills and Confidence	18
Part 2: Learning Through Practical Experience.....	18
Chapter 2 - Moving From Learner to Professional Decorator	29
Part 3: The CSCS Card and Commercial Work	29
Chapter 3 – Planning Your Decorating Business.....	42
Chapter 4 – Setting Up Legally: Insurance, Tax and Paperwork.....	55
Chapter 5 – Tools, Equipment and Setting Up Your Kit	61
Chapter 6 – Pricing Your Work: Quoting for Profit	69
Chapter 6 – Pricing Your Work: Quoting for Profit	80
Part 3 – Pricing with Confidence and Maximising Profit	93
Chapter 7 – Marketing Your Decorating Business	104
Chapter 8 – Delivering Outstanding Customer Service and Handling Business Challenges .	121
Chapter 9 – Real Decorating Business Success Stories	135
Part 1 – Different Paths to Success.....	135
Chapter 9 – Real Decorating Business Success Stories	142
Part 2 – Different Ways to Build a Successful Business	142
Chapter 9 – Real Decorating Business Success Stories	151
Part 3 – The Common Traits of Successful Decorators	151
Chapter 10 – Creating a Business That Works for You.....	163
Maintaining Work-Life Balance and Avoiding Burnout	163
Chapter 11 – Your First Year in Business.....	175

A Roadmap for Long-Term Success.....	175
Book Summary	187
Conclusion.....	188
Appendix 1 – Twenty Seven Lessons Learned the Hard Way.....	192
Appendix 2: Links to Calculators and Templates.....	202
Appendix 3 – Practical Decorating Skills Video Library	204
Introduction	204
Appendix 4. Resources	208
Appendix 5 – 90 Day Business Launch Checklist.....	209

Introduction

Starting a painting and decorating business can be one of the most rewarding decisions you ever make.

The decorating industry offers opportunities for people from many different backgrounds.

Some enter the trade through apprenticeships.

Some retrain later in life.

Some begin by helping family and friends before turning their skills into a business.

Whatever your route into the industry, one thing remains true:

Running a successful decorating business requires much more than the ability to paint walls and ceilings.

To succeed, you must also understand:

- Pricing
- Marketing
- Customer service
- Financial management
- Business systems
- Professional standards

Unfortunately, many excellent decorators struggle because nobody ever teaches them the business side of the trade.

This book aims to change that.

It has been written as a practical guide for anyone wishing to start and run a successful painting and decorating business.

The advice contained within these pages is based upon proven business principles and real-world trade experience.

You will learn:

- How to set up your business correctly
- What equipment you need
- How to price work profitably

- How to market your services
- How to build a strong reputation
- How to attract repeat customers
- How to avoid common mistakes
- How to create a business that supports the lifestyle you want

This is not a book about becoming rich overnight.

It is a book about building a professional, sustainable and profitable decorating business step by step.

You do not need to know everything before you begin.

You do not need expensive equipment.

You do not need perfect circumstances.

What you need is a willingness to learn, a commitment to professional standards and the determination to keep moving forward.

Whether your goal is to:

- Earn additional income
- Leave employment
- Build a full-time business
- Create a flexible lifestyle
- Grow a larger decorating company

the principles contained in this book can help you get there.

I hope this guide provides you with the knowledge, confidence and motivation to take the next step in your journey.

Your future business starts with a single decision.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be read from beginning to end.

Each chapter builds upon the previous one and follows the natural progression of setting up and growing a decorating business.

You may also wish to revisit individual chapters as your business develops.

Particular chapters such as:

- Pricing Your Work
- Marketing Your Business
- Customer Service
- Work-Life Balance

are likely to become valuable reference guides throughout your self-employment journey.

Consider making notes as you read.

- ✓ Highlight ideas.
- ✓ Create action plans.
- ✓ Most importantly, apply what you learn.
- ✓ Knowledge only becomes valuable when it is put into practice.
- ✓ The decorating businesses that succeed are rarely those with the most information.
- ✓ They are usually the businesses that consistently take action.

A Final Word Before You Begin

Every successful decorating business started with a single customer.

Every experienced decorator was once a beginner.

Every established business owner faced uncertainty at the start.

Do not allow fear of making mistakes to prevent you from moving forward.

Mistakes are part of the learning process.

What matters is continuing to learn, improve and take action.

The opportunity exists.

The industry needs professional, reliable decorators.

The question is not whether success is possible.

The question is whether you are prepared to take the first step.

Turn the page and begin your journey

Chapter 1 – Is This the Right Business for You?

Before You Get Started

Before you buy your first tin of paint, invest in tools, or register your business with HMRC, there is one important question you need to answer honestly:

Is running a painting and decorating business the right path for me?

This chapter is not designed to put you off. In fact, quite the opposite. It is intended to help you understand what the trade really involves so that you can make an informed decision before investing your time and money.

Many people are attracted to painting and decorating because it appears to be a relatively simple trade to enter. While it is certainly one of the more accessible trades, building a successful decorating business requires far more than simply applying paint to walls.

Successful decorators combine practical skills with customer service, organisation, reliability, and business knowledge.

The good news is that most of these skills can be learned.

The Qualities of a Successful Decorator

Many people assume that the best decorators are those with natural artistic ability. While having an eye for colour and design can certainly help, the reality is that successful decorators share a number of other important characteristics.

Self-Motivation

When you work for yourself, nobody tells you when to start work, where to go, or what needs to be completed.

You become:

- The decorator
- The business owner
- The salesperson
- The estimator
- The bookkeeper

- The customer service department

Success depends largely on your ability to motivate yourself and stay productive, even when no one is watching.

If you are someone who takes pride in getting things done and can work without constant supervision, you already possess one of the most important qualities required for self-employment.

Attention to Detail

Painting and decorating is a trade where small details make a huge difference.

Customers notice:

- Paint runs
- Uneven cut-in lines
- Missed areas
- Poor surface preparation
- Visible brush marks
- Wallpaper joins that don't align properly

The difference between an average decorator and an excellent decorator is often found in the finishing touches.

Customers may not understand exactly why one room looks better than another, but they immediately recognise quality workmanship.

Good Communication Skills

Many new decorators are surprised to discover how much time they spend talking rather than painting.

You will regularly need to:

- Discuss customer requirements
- Explain products and finishes
- Manage expectations
- Arrange appointments

- Provide quotations
- Resolve problems
- Request reviews and referrals

Good communication builds trust and trust wins work.

Customers often choose the decorator they feel most comfortable dealing with rather than simply selecting the cheapest quote.

Reliability

Reliability is one of the most valuable assets in the decorating trade.

If you:

- Arrive when you say you will
- Return phone calls
- Keep customers informed
- Complete work on schedule

you will already be ahead of many competitors.

A reputation for reliability generates repeat business and referrals, which are often the most profitable sources of work.

Physical Fitness

Painting and decorating is physical work.

You will spend long periods:

- Standing
- Climbing ladders
- Reaching overhead
- Bending
- Kneeling
- Carrying materials and equipment

You do not need to be an athlete, but you do need a reasonable level of fitness and stamina.

Using the correct tools and working methods can greatly reduce physical strain, but there is no escaping the fact that decorating is an active profession.

Resilience

Every business owner faces setbacks.

You may encounter:

- Difficult customers
- Quiet periods
- Delayed payments
- Unexpected expenses
- Jobs that take longer than expected
- Mistakes that need correcting

Successful decorators understand that problems are part of business ownership and learn how to deal with them professionally.

Resilience is often what separates those who build successful businesses from those who give up too early.

What Does a Typical Working Day Look Like?

One of the attractions of decorating is that every day is different.

However, a typical working day may look something like this:

7:00 AM

Load tools and materials into your vehicle.

Review the day's work and travel to site.

8:00 AM

Arrive at the customer's property.

Discuss the day's work.

Protect floors and furniture using dust sheets and masking materials.

Prepare surfaces ready for decoration.

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Carry out decorating work such as:

- Painting walls and ceilings
- Glossing woodwork
- Hanging wallpaper
- Filling and sanding
- Applying specialist finishes

12:00 PM – 12:30 PM

Lunch break.

12:30 PM – 4:30 PM

Continue with decorating work.

You may also:

- Meet potential customers
- Measure rooms
- Prepare quotations
- Visit suppliers

4:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Clean tools.

Tidy the work area.

Discuss progress with the customer.

Evening

Many self-employed decorators spend 30 to 60 minutes dealing with:

- Emails
- Quotes
- Invoices
- Social media updates
- Bookkeeping

The decorating work may stop at 5pm, but running the business continues beyond that.

Common Myths About the Trade

"You Need Years of Experience Before You Can Start"

Not true.

Many successful decorators began by:

- Decorating their own homes
- Helping family and friends
- Taking short training courses
- Learning through practical experience

Everyone starts somewhere.

The key is to develop your skills gradually and never take on work that you are not capable of completing to a professional standard.

"The Market Is Already Saturated"

This is one of the most common concerns among new decorators.

The reality is that there is always demand for reliable tradespeople who produce quality work.

Homeowners continually redecorate properties.

Landlords require maintenance between tenants.

Estate agents need properties prepared for sale.

Businesses regularly refurbish offices and commercial premises.

There is plenty of work available for decorators who provide a professional service.

"You Need Thousands of Pounds to Get Started"

Compared with many trades, painting and decorating has relatively low start-up costs.

Many decorators begin with:

- Basic hand tools
- Dust sheets
- Ladders

- Brushes and rollers
- A suitable vehicle

A professional starter kit can often be assembled for a few hundred pounds rather than thousands.

You can expand your equipment as the business grows.

"Customers Only Use Large Companies"

Many customers actually prefer dealing directly with an individual tradesperson.

They appreciate:

- Personal service
- Direct communication
- Flexibility
- Accountability

Small decorating businesses regularly compete successfully against larger firms.

The Financial Reality

Before starting any business, it is important to understand the financial realities.

During the early months:

- Work may be inconsistent.
- Income may fluctuate.
- Marketing costs may be higher.
- You may need to invest in tools and equipment.

Ask yourself:

- Do I have savings available?
- Can I start part-time?
- Do I have another source of income while I build the business?
- Am I comfortable with irregular earnings initially?

The good news is that painting and decorating is one of the faster trades to generate income from because overheads are relatively low and payment is usually received soon after work is completed.

Self-Assessment Checklist

Answer each question honestly and score yourself from 1 to 5.

1. I am comfortable working independently.
2. I communicate well with people.
3. I pay attention to detail.
4. I am reasonably fit and active.
5. I can handle setbacks and problems.
6. I am willing to learn new skills.
7. I take pride in producing quality work.
8. I can manage my own time effectively.
9. I am prepared for the responsibilities of self-employment.
10. I am excited about building my own business.

Scoring

40–50

You appear well suited to running a painting and decorating business.

30–39

You have strong potential but may need to develop a few areas before starting.

20–29

You may benefit from additional preparation, training or experience.

Below 20

You should spend more time considering whether self-employment is right for you at this stage.

Try Before You Commit

If you are still unsure, there are several low-risk ways to test whether decorating is right for you.

Consider:

- Decorating a room in your own home.
- Helping friends or family with decorating projects.
- Taking a short painting and decorating course.
- Shadowing an experienced decorator.
- Joining online decorating communities and forums.
- Undertaking small weekend projects while remaining employed.

These approaches allow you to gain valuable experience without making a major financial commitment.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have covered:

- The skills and personal qualities needed to succeed.
- What a typical working day looks like.
- Common myths about the decorating trade.
- The financial realities of starting a business.
- A self-assessment checklist.
- Practical ways to test whether the trade is right for you.

If you have read this chapter and still feel enthusiastic about becoming a decorator, that is an excellent sign.

The next chapter will explore training, qualifications and practical routes into the trade, helping you develop the skills needed to build a professional and profitable painting and decorating business.