



A Passion *for* Painting

The power of hard work and positive attitude in an economic downturn



Garret Abeyta's Tucson-based painting contracting company brings high-quality coatings and colors to a wide range of Arizona projects, including private residences, colleges and the Anza Marketplace in the historic town of Tubac (left). His crews used a combination of ProMar 200, SuperPaint, Color Accents and All Surface Enamel to achieve the striking look at Maynard's Market & Kitchen in Tucson (facing page).

PASSIONATE. DRIVEN. TIRELESS. Ask people to describe Garret Abeyta, and those are words you'll hear over and over.

In particular, the hard-working 40-year-old Arizona native is determined to find success with his company Abeyta Painting. With a dedicated staff of 19 by his side, that attitude helped him turn it into a \$1.5 million-a-year company in less than five years, and 2009 sales are on track to reach that level despite the economic downturn.

"I refuse to participate in the recession," Abeyta explains. "That's a phrase I first heard from my Sherwin-Williams sales rep Marc Boykin, and it's a perfect reflection of my attitude."



After spot priming with Loxon Conditioner, Abeyta Painting repainted Tucson's Christ the King Episcopal Church with A-100 Exterior Latex.

Getting off the ground

Abeyta got started in the paint industry in 1988. A friend with a wallcovering business hired Abeyta to work part time as a prepper and painter while he attended college. Over the next five years, he accepted small paint projects as his schedule allowed, working alone or with one helper. "After encouragement from friends and family that had seen my work and knew my passion for paint, I began Abeyta Painting LLC in 2001," he says. "My wife Kim has a business/marketing degree and together we prepared a business plan. We obtained all of the necessary licenses and insurance and started to slowly acquire equipment, keeping our

Abeyta Painting LLC

Tucson, Ariz.
Founded 2001
19 employees

BUSINESS MIX:
40% residential repaint
30% commercial
20% property management
5% new residential
5% industrial/specialties

costs as low as possible. I got a contract on a small apartment community of less than 100 units. We were off and running."

Finding the right focus

While painting that first apartment job, he got some advice from a veteran Tucson painter that changed his business. "I had three painters on staff but always relied on myself as the main painter on a project," he says. "One day I was up on a 24-foot extension spraying the stucco when an older painter stopped by and said, 'You'll never be successful unless you take the brush out of your hands.' I laughed, nodded and kept working."

But the unsolicited advice stuck in his mind, and shortly after he hired a lead sprayer to take his spot and free him to focus on sales and running the business. "I went within a mile of this project and introduced myself to the neighboring communities," he says. "I explained how our company works, the quality we offer and how we bring a custom product to commercial repaints. I invited them to come by and take a look." By the time this two-month job was completed, he had landed three more apartment repaints totaling 600 units.

The trust factor

The next turning point was learning to trust that his employees could care as much as he did about the finished product. "The phone was ringing and jobs were coming in but I was having a hard time getting to all my calls," Abeyta says. "After consulting with my wife, I hired three more managers that would take our company to another level." First on board was his father Steve.

"He had recently retired and was getting a little stir crazy being home, so it worked out for us both when I asked him to help out," Abeyta explains. "He is bilingual and extremely organized. He helped us develop new forms and procedures, such as time cards, new-hire packets, keeping track of our pumps and repairs, servicing the vehicles, managing commercial projects and vendor quotes." Not long after, the younger Abeyta hired two more project managers, Charles Lopez and P.J. Clarkson, who are still with the company today.

Abeyta Painting soon became a major player in the Tucson multi-family residential market, but with the building boom came increased competition. Con-



PREFERRED PRODUCTS

EXTERIOR: A-100 Exterior Latex Flat, Loxon Conditioner and Masonry Coating, Sher-Clad Acrylic Latex, Sher-Cryl HPA, DeckScapes line, All Surface Enamel.

INTERIOR: ProMar200 series, ProClassic Enamel, ColorAccents Interior Latex.

cerned about market share and price-driven bidding, he decided to focus more on residential repaint, industrial and specialty customers.

“I found this to be a very important lesson,” he says. “It’s good to be diversified so that you can respond to market changes.”

Supply-side economics

The high-quality coatings and product knowledge of Sherwin-Williams has been vital to the growth of Abeyta’s business. “The Tucson Oracle Road store manager Jason Counts and his crew are big on detail and customer service,” he says. “When I have a large project or a difficult residential job, my rep Marc Boykin provides a written specification after a pre-job walk through, and follows up as the job progresses. The customers like his professionalism and his proven expertise.”

The company, he says, has become like an extension to his staff.

“Over the past holiday season, we donated our labor to paint the exterior of three children’s playhouses for a local charity,” Abeyta says. “We partnered with Sherwin-Williams, who donated the paint.” The Junior League of Tucson auctioned off the

playhouses to raise money for charity. Clearly, the potent combination of cooperation and competitive drive has made a difference not just for Abeyta but also for his hometown community.

“It has always helped that I have a great family that has supported me and given me confidence,” Abeyta says. “My wife Kim is tremendous on the business side of our company. It’s important to have balance. Because she handles the bills and paperwork, I can concentrate on the proposals, jobs and doing what I love to do – painting.” **PPC**

Painter to Painter

Garret Abeyta’s advice for building a successful painting business

The most important part of good business advice is to actually follow it. I made a huge pivotal change in my business approach when I was told that to be really successful you have to take the brush out of your hands. Some of my favorite other bits of advice have been:

1. Keep your costs down but don’t bite off your nose to spite your face.
2. Surround yourself with good, positive people.
3. It’s not so much if you make a mistake, but what you do to fix it.
4. Pick your battles.
5. Perception is reality.