House Painting Business Startup Checklist

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Key takeaways

- Start with interior rooms, then grow into exteriors and cabinets
- Homes built before 1978 require EPA lead-safe (RRP) certification
- Estimate by room or square foot and include prep time
- Give written estimates that list exactly what's included

1. Plan

- [ ] Choose your niche and the services you'll offer first
- [ ] Define your service area (keep it tight to cut drive time)
- [ ] Write a one-page plan: who, where, what you charge, how you'll get 10 clients
- [ ] Check local competitors' services and prices

2. Register & insure

- [ ] Pick a business name and check your state registry, trademarks and the .com domain
- [ ] Choose a structure (sole proprietor or LLC)
- [ ] Get a free EIN from the IRS (irs.gov)
- [ ] Check city/county business license requirements
- [ ] Open a separate business bank account
- [ ] Get general liability insurance before your first paid job
- [ ] Some states require a contractor license for painting jobs above a certain value. If you'll work on homes built before 1978, the EPA's Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) rule requires lead-safe certification. Carry general liability insurance.

3. Equipment

- [ ] Brushes and rollers in several sizes
- [ ] Extension poles and roller trays
- [ ] Drop cloths, painter's tape and plastic sheeting
- [ ] Ladders and a plank or step platform
- [ ] Scrapers, sanders, patching and caulk
- [ ] Paint sprayer (once you're experienced)

4. Pricing

- [ ] Track your real job times on your first jobs
- [ ] Set a target hourly rate that covers pay, taxes, insurance, fuel and admin time
- [ ] Create a simple price menu and a minimum charge

- [ ] Use estimate and invoice templates for every quote
- [ ] Check your numbers with the free calculator on ServiceStartKit.com

5. Get online

- [ ] Register a short domain and set up a professional email
- [ ] Launch a 4-page website: home, services & prices, reviews/photos, contact
- [ ] Create a Google Business Profile with photos and your service area

6. First clients

- [ ] Before/after photos of every room
- [ ] Google Business Profile and local reviews
- [ ] Partner with realtors for pre-listing touch-ups
- [ ] Offer landlords rental turnover painting
- [ ] Yard signs at exterior jobs (with permission)
- [ ] Ask every happy client for a review and a referral

7. Money

- [ ] Invoice every job and log every expense
- [ ] Keep a mileage log for business driving
- [ ] Set money aside for taxes each month
- [ ] Review prices at least once a year

General information, not legal, tax or insurance advice. Rules vary by state and city.