

# Not Just *One-Liners*

Diversification is today's key to success for spray-on bedliner jobbers

By Kristina Flees Yeingst



Kristina Flees Yeingst is the former editor and publisher of *Auto Graphics* magazine.

Not just the truck bed can get protection from abuse, so can a grille guard. Photo courtesy of GatorHyde.

It is unquestionably a recurrent theme for 2009: This will be a critical year for many businesses due to a difficult economy. And the aftermarket is no exception.

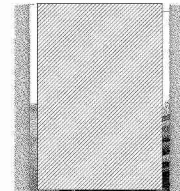
Despite the critical decisions being made every day where staff, inventory, advertising and sales are concerned, these challenges provide an excellent opportunity for restylers to take a close look at the work their shops are doing and get creative.

Fortunately, those who offer spray-on bedliners to their clients know just how much possibility this single service presents — there are so many more ways to use this versatile material than merely lining pickup beds.

### Different strokes

Technology has allowed the protection and coating options for this adaptable material to become nearly limitless. In addition to the more traditional (and most popular) applications for trucks, other items that can benefit from a coating include marine, recreational, residential and industrial items.

“Boat hulls and trailers, ladders, ATVs, motorcycles, work tables, park and golf course equipment, concert equipment, patio furniture, dog houses, fencing, and sound systems to name a few,” says Teppy Wigington, public relations manager for Line-X Protective Coatings, Santa Ana, Calif.



At Cloverdale, Ind.-based Scorpion Protective Coatings Inc., Clayton Tomasino notes that his firm's material "is used extensively in the trailer industry" because of its "bonding properties to wood." Moreover, he adds, "we have applicators in Canada that dedicate a majority of business spraying custom wood decks."

Tomasino says the company's website offers a section, "Application Oddities," that shows just how creative jobbers are. "Scorpion understands that a majority of the money any applicator is going to make is going to be on items other than trucks," he says.

And there's still absolutely no shortage of trucks on the market that need bedliners.

"Obviously with the slump in the economy, things have been tough for any automotive aftermarket business," says Jenny Clifford, marketing manager for Rhino Linings Corp., San Diego. "But with 1.2 million trucks still estimated to be sold this year, and last year approximately 40% of truck owners installed a spray-on bedliner, the potential is still huge."

One of the most important things to remember as a business owner is to look at opportunities to grow sales by increasing volume, which can be done most effectively where numerous vehicles are concerned. Dealership and fleet work are a great way to measure new business by the dozens (or more) rather than individual sales, and manufacturers agree that this is an area where the bulk of the sales opportunities will be this year.

"Dealerships are a great source for work," says Todd Ishmael, GatorHyde sales, Wagoner, Okla. "The trend of slow sales caused by high gas prices and a weakened economy is starting to fade away, and truck sales are coming back. Current new-model offers and factory



Branching out into light industrial work opens doors to jobbers in numerous industries. Photos courtesy of [Line-X](#).



Speaker enclosures/subs from Audio Assault are examples of a truck accessory/electronics store branching out and using spray-on protectants. Photo courtesy of GatorHyde.



A portable cabin/storage unit can use a spray treatment to keep it waterproof. Photo courtesy of Qwik Liner.

Outdoor speakers for many venues, public and private, benefit from a protective spray. Photo courtesy of Rhino.



incentives are paving the way for this trend.”

And dealerships aren't the only place to look for large-volume work, says John Jamroz, vice president of sales and marketing for Ultimate Linings/Qwik Liner, Houston.

“If I were looking for on-site work, I'd go to fleet and municipalities,” he says. “Our customers work with a lot of fleets that have around 250 vehicles. There is a difference between someone who owns a vehicle, and a person who leases or has a fleet.”

Still, opportunity for the individual consumer sale continues. “Needless to say, the spray-on bedliner market has had some regional contractions over the last year,” Tomasino says; but though “new-vehicle sales are down, used-vehicle sales are as strong as ever. Bedliners are a great way to make [a customer's] old truck seem like new and a new used truck seem even newer.”

Encouraging news to be sure, especially as businesses report walk-in business down when compared with previous years. And there are also non-automotive arenas where similar spray-on material can

be utilized to offer value to customers.

“Many of our franchisees are branching out into light industrial work, which opens doors to dealers in numerous industries,” says Wigington.

**Apply here**

“Yes, spray-on bedliners for domestic trucks are still the strongest application for our installers,” says Ishmael. “Other items that spray applicators should be on the lookout for to increase revenues are trailers. These would include all types such as horse, livestock, boat, dual-sport RV or utility types. And Jeep interiors and exteriors are also very popular. It offers the owner a rugged and durable finish to match the demanding needs of the vehicle.”

Be mindful, say our industry suppliers, of any spray-on work beyond the typical truck bedliner jobs you're used to.

“As with any spray-on system, overspray has to be a large consideration, so you will need some sort of containment. You just need to make sure you are not coating anything that the customer doesn't want a bedliner [material] on,” says Tomasino. “Outside of that there are no other special requirements. With no MDIs and very low VOCs, the immediate area remains safe from being unnecessarily poisoned.”

And while these types of automotive uses are still at the forefront of many installers' minds, there are other categories of items that can greatly benefit from spray-on bedliner material.

“Boat and marine applications are also good to keep in mind. Water and moisture wreak havoc on traditional coatings and carpets in these boats, and rapid-set spray elastomers are a perfect solution to this problem,” Ishmael adds.

One word of caution, however, is to be aware of any special certifications that may be required in order to coat certain items.

“You've got to be careful with marine, because you have to have a USDA Marine certification unless you're selling to the U.S. government,” says Jamroz. “We have a certified material for buoys, and (restylers) use the same high-pressure equipment they already have.”

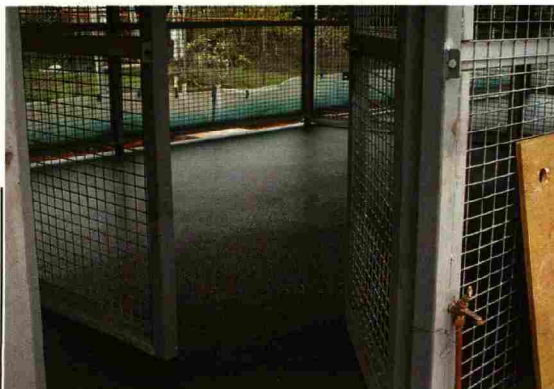
Another important point to keep in mind is that each new application an installer tackles may require a different type of spray-on coating, not simply the same material they already use in automotive applications.

“Many of our dealers spray semi truck trailers, end dumps, bus steps or ramps, stairs, animal enclosures, speaker boxes, lawn mover decks, hoppers, floors and more,” says Clifford. “Some applications may require a different product than what is sprayed in most truck beds.”

It's important to talk with your supplier and understand exactly what type of material will be required for the application in question.

“You need to know what material to use — how do you need that stuff to react?” says Jamroz. “There could be three or four ways to do it; just get with your chemical provider to understand how to use it, and come up with the best application method. And make sure you have the right insurance to cover your business when offering new types of applications.”

Another benefit of keeping in touch with your supplier is using them as a



A zoo certainly is a potential lucrative customer, such as this tiger cage getting a floor treatment; but also consider dog runs at a veterinarian's or a municipal animal shelter. Photo courtesy of Rhino.



Shower floors, residential and commercial, offer opportunity. Talk with home remodeling outfits. Photo courtesy of Qwik Liner.

resource to learn more about just how versatile this type of material can be — the possibilities seem endless — and suppliers assist other dealers every day in creative applications that you can learn more about, too.

“We’re working in the hooved animal arena with zoos to establish a better environment,” says Jamroz. “The enclosures are concrete. We have an expandable polyurea done in 10 coats and top-coated with bedliner material. It has the same properties as soft clay. The bedliner layer encapsulates the material.”

Adds Tomasino, regarding the makeup of his firm’s coatings: It “allows the applicator to apply it to virtually any surface

without any special processes or equipment. This means that the retailer or jobber can spray fiberglass, concrete, wood and even raw metal the same way they would spray a truck bed.”

**Survive and thrive**

Great insurance for a business facing a difficult economy is providing a service that is a no-brainer for customers to protect the items they already own.

“There is a strong market for our line of products,” says Wigington. “With the economy as it is, consumers are placing more value on assets they already own, whether they are recreational or used for work. They are looking for ways to pro-

long the life of their assets in place of purchasing new ones.”

Property owned by large companies is no exception, and this is one reason so many spray-on bedliner service providers are looking to the “light industrial” market.

“Right now the ‘light industrial’ market is expanding every day. Companies are realizing that by spraying a product, you can make it last years longer,” says Clifford.

And while consumer spending may be down, companies will always find a way to afford products and services that protect their valuable investments.

“Remember, if you are going to the consumer, their dollar may not be there,

Outdoor decks and stairs get the treatment. Photo courtesy of Scorpion.



but if you are going to large companies, and you show value, their dollar is going to be there," Jamroz says.

One industrial application that is rapidly growing is secondary containment. This prevents the spilling of petroleum products back into the environment.

"In an oil field, tanks have a berm that will contain the material if it leaks. Underneath is a liner that will deteriorate. They can avoid replacing that liner and digging up the tanks by coating with a polyurea product. A felt material is installed, and the material is sprayed right on top of it," says Jamroz.

This is another great example of how spray-on material and installer know-how can save companies money by protecting their assets — an easy sell in any economy.

Branching out into some of the popular new uses for spray-on material is great, but it's also important to remember that the lion's share of the spray-on market for restylers remains in automotive applications. And dealerships are perhaps the best avenue to secure strong sales numbers now and in the future. It's important, however, to know how to speak the dealer's language in order to convince them to buy.

"Installers should have an arrangement with local dealerships to pre-install so many bedliners in order for them to get a particular rate," says Jamroz. "Ask the dealer when you are making your presentation, 'What penetration are you willing to commit to?'"

Penetration is dealer-speak for the number of vehicles a dealership receives, based on allocation (which is bimonthly). Because the dealer's penetration is different for each model of vehicle it is selling, that is ultimately what dictates the number of vehicles a dealer has available. It's a good place to start when looking at how many potential installs that dealer can work with.

"If you speak the dealer's language, he knows you understand his market.

You might say, 'What's your penetration on (Ford) FX-4s?' Speak their language. Tell them, 'Let me show you how to get more gross margin per vehicle (GMPV) to increase overall invoice,' Jamroz adds.

Tomasino says that "we have always found it to be beneficial to have a sprayed vehicle on the lot, with payment not due until the vehicle is sold. Once the dealership sees that the first — or only — truck they sell has your bedliner in it they will start looking for you to do it more often.

"There are a lot of other options available in new truck sales, as well. Since the dealership has access to the tints for the vehicles, have them pay for the tint and do color matches for free or spray the rocker panels and the truck bed together for minimal extra costs to make it look great and protect against corrosion.

**Getting ahead**

Learn to take advantage of one of the greatest resources your shop has at its fingertips — your chemical suppliers. Not only can they offer you ideas on expanding your



Add a little extra marine life, and surer footing when the deck's wet. Photo courtesy of Scorpion.

business and new technology in the spray-on market, but they also offer tools to help your shop increase sales, from brochures and

samples to website creation and product training.

"We offer several different brochures based on specific applications, in addition to ongoing training at our corporate facility to help the dealer get to the next level," says Clifford.

Adds Tomasino: "Scorpion offers its dealers a wide array of point-of-sale marketing materials when they start business with us. Over the course of the year we will support our dealership network with a wide array of marketing support from print media to television spots to Internet marketing, which is the main focus."

Coupons and samples of the material itself are other ways to help convince a potential customer who is on the fence to invest in the product.

"Our marketing department provides traditional marketing supplies, at no charge, to each installer each time they reorder material," says Ishmael. "This complimentary service allows the installer to hand out brochures and samples of the material to try, and it promotes future sales to existing customers. [We] also offer new applicators "Grand Opening" artwork for fliers and traditional forms of assistance, such as co-op advertising, to be used by the installer on radio and TV."

It's important to know what types of marketing materials generate the most return in your area, and testing out a few different approaches is the best way to determine what works.

"We've recognized that not every type of marketing material works for every region, so we provide numerous tools for installers to choose from such as brochures, posters, banners, direct mail, print ads, radio ads, billboards and a variety of promotional items that they can use as giveaways," says Wigington.

“To complement these materials, we offer a very aggressive co-op program to our franchisees to enable them to use these materials effectively.”

Now more than ever, it seems a presence on the Web is critical. The Internet is the method so many people use to search for the products they need.

“We offer a website template they can put their shop info into,” says Jamroz. “In a down economy, spend as much as you can on advertising. The guys who are advertising, they may not have same sales they had two years ago, but they are looking at different sources of income. If you aren’t looking for that, it’s not a matter of if you fail, but when.”

Increasing the reach of your business,

many manufacturers agree, is how to thrive and survive in a challenging economy.

“They need to think about what else they can be spraying, but also, everyone needs to get back to basics when advertising and looking at what works and doesn’t work in your market,” says Clifford. “Are you asking, ‘Where did you hear about us?’ with every phone call? You won’t know what’s working unless you ask. Now is not the time to stop advertising.”

With all this talk about diversifying, expanding the scope of your business and doing more advertising, perhaps the most important piece of advice is to be smart about any growth and change your company does decide to pursue.

“What do you do now? What are you

looking to do? Are you mobile? Why do you want to be mobile? Restylers need to understand their situation and focus on that, without going in 15 different directions,” says Jamroz. “There are so many things you can do. You really still need to specialize, because if you try to be a jack of too many trades it’s not worth it.”

Adds Tomasino: “The potential applications for retailers are endless so it is important for them to always think outside of the box and let their imagination wander.”

Responsible growth — now that’s an important theme, in any market.

**COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS ARTICLE?**  
E-mail *Restyling's* editor at [reeditor@nbm.com](mailto:reeditor@nbm.com)

