

Designer Boards

Interior designers usually present clients with the types of items they want to use in their designs—paint chips, fabric for chairs, the curtains, pictures of fixtures, maybe a chunk of granite to be used for countertops, and perhaps a drawing of an area showing wall and door changes. These items are often shown to clients one at a time from a pile.

Broadway Gallery of Alexandria, VA, has developed a better way called designer boards. They help designers make more sales to clients, and they lead to more business for the gallery.

"When you frame these pieces properly, it makes a much more effective presentation," says General Manager Kimberly Huebbe. "We put the fabrics together with a complementary mat so a client can picture how things will look on the wall. Sometimes all a designer has is a catalog photo of curtains. We cut that out and put it next to a small fabric sample. Put that and the other pieces into a nice frame, and it makes for a more cohesive presentation."

Each board is custom designed for the samples a designer brings in, but the framing is usually done with simple materials. "Many of the materials we use are scrap, including metal moulding and matboards," says Huebbe. "Now and then, a designer may want a specific wood moulding. One client was so thrilled with her two designer boards that she insisted that her clients give them back so she could display them in her office!"

Most designer board sales have come by word of mouth from one ASID member to another. "They've worked really well," Huebbe says. "We've put them on our website. We have a flyer about them. And we have a couple of them hanging in our gallery."

Because of the jobs that the designers get by using the boards, the gallery is also finding that framed art is more in their minds. "Plus, their customers come in to have their other framing done because their designers used us," Huebbe says. "While we make money on framing designer boards, it's the follow-on business that is the primary benefit. The boards help designers close the sale, which benefits us by bringing in more framing. They also help us maintain a good relationship with our designer clients. They know they can trust us to help them make a sale and provide them with an excellent source of picture framing."



Framing presentation boards for designers leads to follow-on business.



Adding Income With Classes

Last fall Deb Derbonne, owner of Village Gallery, in Orange Park, FL, started offering stained glass classes in her gallery as a way to create extra income. "As it turns out, it has helped keep us going," she says. "We also think classes will be a growing business in the future. With cut-backs in funding for school art programs, we see more parents wanting to give their kids private lessons."

The gallery is moving into a new location that will provide space for more classes. "The classes have actually allowed us to move," says Derbonne. "We will now have up to 20 people in a class, depending on what's being taught and how much individual attention is needed. We have studio space for a clay artist, who teaches children and adults. Besides stained-glass classes, I'm also looking at teaching picture frame design for adults. I'm active in the local art guild, and it's something the artists will be interested in learning. People have also asked if they can take classes with their kids or if they can take separate classes at the same time that their kids are taking their own classes."

Derbonne says there has been steady interest in the art sessions. "Before we started moving I was getting at least two calls a day just from a sign out front. We've also passed out flyers at the county fair, and we're now planning to advertise, send out e-mails, and do some networking to build attendance."

Bringing in people for classes has another benefit. "While we basically do this as second stream of income, people also look around the shop at the framing we do when they're here," she says. "I also plan to offer framing specials using lower-cost moulding for the kids' art class projects. The more people you bring in, the more chance you have to sell framing."



Forget the Flattery

A recent study has found that sales staff would be better off keeping their mouths closed rather than offering flattery to their customers—even when they are genuine.

Peter Darke of the Florida State University's College of Business says, "Before consumers even set foot in a store, they already are inclined to mistrust the use of flattery by salespeople." The school's study on reactions of consumers to flattery from store clerks found that "Even when it was obvious that a compliment didn't serve any underlying sales motive, they still didn't trust the sales clerk."

The study goes on to add that, "It has become the consumer's default position to react negatively to what is perceived as any attempt to manipulate him or her. We are programmed to assume the worst."

So the next time you're tempted to compliment a client on their taste in art, framing, design, or even their stylish dress, remember that if it sounds like a line, they'll probably feel like you're just trying to manipulate them for a sale.

Local Businesses Pool Resources

"Twice a year—in the spring and during the holidays—our neighborhood association hosts a Promenade, a giant open house in which all the stores in our neighborhood open their businesses for three hours on a Thursday evening," says Heidi Knodle, owner of Cadre in San Francisco. "We have food and drink and music."

There are 40 businesses—antiques stores, print shops, bookstores, clothing stores, galleries—that pool their mailing lists and send out 10,000 cards, drawing in thousands of people. "It's a great way to get new clientele into your shop by working with someone else's mailing list," Knodle says. "I always get new clients who haven't known about us."



The semi-annual Promenade draws crowds into Cadre.

"We make it a special event by limiting it to two times a year," she says. "Sometimes we extend it over the weekend in the spring to include lectures. Maybe I'll do a lecture on period framing or antique frames. Other people down the street may do lectures on English antiques, collecting art, or vintage posters." The lectures are staggered over Friday and Saturday, and Knodle says that a lot of people come into the shop to learn about things like the history of frames.

The schedule of lectures is posted on the association's website and on the invitations that are mailed. "We send one big group invitation postcard listing the lectures on each day, with the times listed on the website," she says. "We also do a mini-poster that lists all the stores that are open, a map, and a flyer listing the lectures. We also list any special shows, sales, or exhibits businesses are holding during the Promenade. This is our neighborhood association's thank-you to our customers and a way of getting people to visit stores they've never been in before."

Swapping Vignettes

"We've been generating new business through an exchange of in-store displays with a drapery company about a mile away," says Kevin Colbert of Colbert Custom Framing in Naperville, IL. "The owner of that store, Roseland Draperies & Interiors, also has a wall in our frame shop decorated with a little set of furniture including the things she sells—fabric, pillows, and chairs. They also have their cards and information. We added our framing to their vignette, so it helps sell our framing, too."

Colbert, in turn, has a custom framing display in the other company's showroom that includes their information. "There are examples of our own custom canvas art printing and some regular framing, such as a Monet poster. We used something generic like that so people wouldn't think we only did one thing. We've also got a sign, a brochure, and our cards there."

One of the real attractions for the drapery shop owner was to be able to partner with Colbert on in-home consultations. "We help them with consultations on what size pieces will fit and provide a good idea of what a customer's home is like. We deal directly with customers or with the interior decorators who work with the drapery shop. This exchange has generated business for us as we get calls from their designers and customers. It's a great partnership."



The display in the drapery shop includes framed art pieces with Colbert's contact information.

Expand Your Corporate Horizons

If you do framing and art placement for corporate clients, it pays to create good relationships with other contractors who work with those companies, says Lyn Holt of Harris Holt Gallery in Charlotte, NC. "For example, there are companies that provide plants to corporations. We had one of their service staff—we call her Betsy the plant lady—recommend us to other corporate clients when she was talking with staff members who told her they didn't know what to do about their art. In another case, a woman who does the signs for one of our clients, the Bank of America, called and needed a frame for a map she was doing for the city of Charlotte."

Project managers and construction site coordinators for real estate management companies are also good to know. "Project managers often are involved in jobs other than the one that you might be working on at the moment," says Holt. "If you get to know them, they will call and tell you that they are renovating a space that needs artwork to be hung or re-hung. After you get the installation job, you try to get them to reframe some of the artwork. You can also give your cards to anyone there. I always talk with everyone—with administrative assistants, CEOs, even the people who clean. A lot of time people will also ask if we can do their personal framing. Most come to your store because they have a connection with you and feel that if their company is using you, you're probably reliable."

Also stay in touch with corporate contacts even after they've moved on. "One of our contacts is the former corporate art program director for Bank of America. She had a new contract to catalog and move corporate art to a new headquarters in Richmond. She had us come and install it. We always worked together well at the bank. If I hadn't kept in touch after she left, this job wouldn't have happened."

Tying Windows Into Town Events

"My windows create interest and draw people into our gallery, so I don't do window displays without a lot of thought," says Janet Berry of Frame Masters Gallery in Shelby, NC. "I also try to tie them into things that are happening in the community whenever I can. For example, April was the Great American Cleanup. We're in the center of an historic area that is on the upswing, and people are interested in what's going on here, including cleaning



The Frame Masters window featured art made from recycled materials to tie into the community cleanup effort.

everything up and making it look really nice."

To highlight the connection between the gallery and community events, Berry created a window showcasing work of a local artist who makes her art from recycled materials. "The window was especially appropriate for the month," Berry says. "We highlighted that, including framed pieces, and I added a Keep Shelby Beautiful sign that I cut on my CMC to tie things even more to the Cleanup. Everything in the window, even the tree branch, was also recycled. And the people who came in talked about that. We had a lot of people come in not just because they were interested in the artwork but also because of our support of the community."

SEND US YOUR TIPS

Do you have a successful technique that you're using to bring in more customers? Share it with your fellow framers by sending it to mailing it to Tips&Trends, PFM, 207 Commercial Ct., Morganville, NJ 07751. Or e-mail it to pfmreditor@hobby-pub.com. Just identify it by using "Tips&Trends" as the subject line.

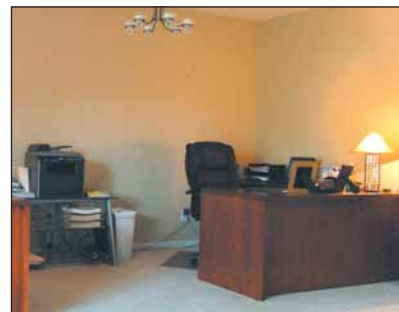
Art Rentals

In these days of a weak real estate market, home sellers are looking for something that will set a house apart and make it more appealing. One way to do this is by adding art—on a rental basis.

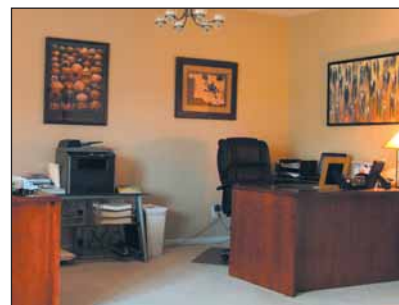
Marc Udell, owner of Queenstown Gallery in Hopewell and Pennington, NJ, says a real estate company, home stager, or homeowner can rent art from his gallery for three or six months. "A house may not be bad, but it may have nothing interesting on the walls to make it feel warm and cozy," he says. "The focus is generally on the living room, dining room, and maybe a hallway and stairwell. Art rentals also tend to be for mid- and lower mid-range homes since upper-end homes usually have nice art already. The number of pieces placed depends on the home size and on where a real estate agent feels art is needed. I also make on-site visits and provide recommendations."

Udell uses a PowerPoint presentation to show clients artwork, artist, size, retail price, and rental fees for pieces from his galleries. "I also show rooms with and without good framed art to demonstrate how it can enhance a home or office. The fee is typically 20 to 30 percent of the retail value of the piece. A customer pays the rental fee upfront, leaves a credit card imprint, and signs a waiver stating that if the piece is not returned at the end of the term, they will be charged full retail price."

Udell says art rental programs also work for corporate clients. "An attorney came to me recently who needed art in his new office but didn't want to invest in owning art. He wanted to know if I could put art in his office that would be available for purchase by his customers. The chances of selling it that way aren't very good. Instead, the company he uses to handle his art now pays a rental fee based on the number of pieces and retail price, and they swap the art once or twice a year."



To make the point of how rented art can add to the visual appeal of a space, Udell shows photos of rooms and offices without and with framed art.



Easy E-Mails

"Everyone needs to be sending out professional-looking e-mails to their clients," says Gary Blitsch, owner of SouthWind Gallery in Topeka, KS. "We are currently using Constant Contact, which costs us about \$250 a year plus a small amount based on the number of e-mails we send out. This includes as many e-mail blasts per year as we want."

Blitsch says he has found it so much cheaper than using direct mail that he doesn't even pay attention to the cost. "We do supplement it with some direct mail because you need to do that to reach clients who are not on your e-mail list."

The e-mail provider service creates a standard design template that remains the same from one e-mail to the next. They always have the same color scheme. "We just replace the old copy and images with new ones," Blitsch says. "It takes about an hour. We do it once a month because we don't want to overdo it. Two times a year we feature a framing sale; the same for a vintage art sale. And there is the late night art walk on the first Friday of every month that we always try to include."

There are other e-mail service providers out there, but Blitsch says he's had a good response with the one he uses. "These e-mails are always very attractive," he says. "People who get them say they enjoy receiving our e-mails. We rarely have anyone tell us to not send them, and they bring people into our gallery."