

Mat Cutting à la Carte

by Anne Vazquez

If you're like most framers, you've learned that the key to profitability is increased production and better efficiency. We're often looking for ways to make backroom operations more efficient by investing in both good employees equipment. And as you know, any equipment investment requires that you weigh the pros and cons of purchasing—or even leasing—something new for your backroom.

Many framers have considered putting a computerized mat cutter (CMC) in their shop. The promise of faster, more efficient, and more creative designs has certainly drawn attention to these machines. When you compare their design capabilities and efficiency to designing and cutting mats by hand, it's obvious that the CMC can do the job faster, with less chance of error.

Yet even if you recognize its advantages, you may be reluctant to invest in a CMC. Perhaps cost is an issue, or it's simply a matter of space. Recognizing that many custom framers share these concerns, The Fletcher-Terry Co. has created Framersolutions, an online, business-to-business custom mat cutting service developed exclusively for professional custom picture framers.

Similar to an online "chop service for mats," Framersolutions allows framers to design an order custom mats utilizing free proprietary software. Once their designs are complete, the framer submits the order to Fletcher-Terry (via the internet web site, Framersolutions.com). Mat designs are cut at Fletcher-Terry's facility in Connecticut on F-6100 CMC's and then shipped to the framer. According to Fletcher-Terry, orders are

scheduled to ship from the factory in two to five business days.

The online service offers over 2,400 matboards from four manufacturers—Crescent Cardboard, Nielsen Bainbridge, Tru Vue's UltiMat line, and Larson-Juhl's Artique line. In addition to regular and conservation matboard, specialty surface mats are available to encourage design freedom.

Although not the first to offer such a service, Fletcher-Terry has created a program that is unique due to its technology, its scope, and its potential. Participation for the retailer is simple: in order to become a user, you must first install the free custom software

on your computer. (This can be done either from the Framersolutions website or from a CD-ROM provided by the company.) There is no subscription fee to use this service and no minimum order. Curt Brey, director of marketing at Fletcher-Terry says, "Framers can order two mats a week, one mat a week, or 100 mats a week, and get exactly what they want for their framing jobs."

Fletcher-Terry provides a catalog of 50 design patterns, corner samples to aid in the design process, the 24-hour ordering capability of the Internet, and a full customer service staff.

Planned for release to the industry on August 1 with a launch at the Atlanta Expo show in September, Framersolutions was first tested through a program that involved 15 custom framers nationwide. During the six-week test period, these framers used the service in their day-to-day operations to see how Framersolutions measured up to its goals, as well as how beneficial the service was to their business.



Fletcher-Terry hopes to combine the 24-hour order capability of the Internet, the efficiency of their computerized mat cutters, and the flexibility of a "chop service for specialty cut mats" with Framersolutions.

