

Merchandising the Frame Shop

by Greg Perkins, CPF

A frame shop can exist with just a design counter and a few corner samples, but in the highly competitive world of retailing today, savvy consumers expect more. A frame shop is seen by the same potential customers that shop in professionally designed department stores. It may not be enough to have the best looking frame shop in town. Consider how your stacks up against all the other retail businesses in your community. How does your store rate?

Most consumers have a fixed amount of disposable income to spend after paying their bills. You have to do your best job of taking your fair share of the pie away from other framers, but also from all other stores. Getting your name in front of the people in your surrounding area through a good advertising campaign is an important start, but once you've brought people to your store, it too has to hold up to their scrutiny.

Have you noticed how many businesses other than custom frame shops are selling framing and photo frames? Mass merchants often see opportunities to expand their volume by adding additional goods and services. This allows them to bring in more people who may not have been customers previously. You should also be looking for ways to grow your sales.

In recent PFM articles, I've written about the importance of merchandising in terms of actual displays of framing-related products. This time I'd like to expand into ways that supplemental accessory items can be used to your advantage. Remember that you are paying rent or a mortgage for every square inch of space that you have. Displays of custom framing generally fill the walls, but leave a wide open expanse of floor space. In order to make the most of what you have, try adding other types of merchandise, or additional fixtures, that



Don't let your walls do all of the work. Here a variety of pedestals of different sizes are used to display framing and gifts below the area where the framed art ends on the walls. This makes better use of the overall space you are paying for, and the additional merchandise means more sales.

allow you to show more product. Either way it begins to fill in the void.

There is a large segment of the population that has never been into a custom frame shop. Partially this is due to a lack of knowledge regarding what custom framing is. For this type of person, they may fear looking or sounding stupid if they do come in, so they don't. For some it may be a pre-conceived notion that all custom framing is expensive. It is easier to break down the barriers if you can lead them in for another reason.

For example, when I had my retail frame shop, I had baskets, pottery, silk flower arrangements, and a few small pieces of furniture that were all for sale. By incorporating these items into my displays, including the one in the front window, people who may have walked by came in to take a closer look at something that caught their eye.

Once inside the store, a lot of people began to notice the framed pieces on display. It wasn't uncommon to hear comments like "I didn't realize a christening gown could be framed" or "I have to bring one of those in" or then "How much does it cost of have something like that framed?" I'm not saying that all of these people came back to have something framed, but at least I had a chance to talk to them about it. This is more than I may have had otherwise.

When properly merchandised, secondary product lines remain ancillary items, not detracting from your mainstay, custom framing. In fact, good cross-merchandising displays often enhance the main product, making it even more appealing and therefore more likely to sell. As soon as I began to accessorize my displays, I sold more framed art off the walls.

I once came across a floral watercolor that happened to

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Add furniture, accessories, and other types of merchandise to your store to enhance the overall appearance of your displays. This diversifies the look of the store, making it appealing to a wider range of people.



This baker's rack provides an excellent place to display gift items in close proximity to the framed art they harmonize with. By displaying items in this manner, you are more likely to make additional sales, since people who are attracted to a particular type of product see related items at the same time.

nearly match a silk flower arrangement I had in the store. I framed the picture and put the two items side by side in the window display area. Immediately I began to receive compliments on the display and on how good the flowers looked with the artwork. Days later a woman came in who wanted to know the cost of the flowers. She said they would look perfect on the dresser of her bedroom. At first, she was focused on the flowers, but suddenly it occurred to her that the picture would look great in her room, too. She ended up buying both pieces! Better yet, I gained a new customer who started having things custom framed.

I tried my best to purchase accessory items that would directly tied to the framed art in order to achieve harmony in the gallery. I found a line of upper end stuffed animals worked well with the children's art.; painted wood items for the country area; rustic baskets and decoys with the wildlife art; etc. People started thinking of my store not only as a frame shop, but also as a place to find unique gifts and spe-

cial things for their own homes.

From time to time I also bought some furniture that gave the store a more professional and finished appearance. It was also practical because I could place a framed picture on an easel on top of a table, full a hutch with photo frames, or have some of my other merchandise sitting on a bench.

If you prefer not to expand beyond custom framing, take a look at how you can do a better job of utilizing space to sell more framing. Can you add some portable partitions or perhaps even add permanent walls which will offer more display space?

As time permits, go on a shopper excursion. Other than time and gas, you won't have to buy anything on this trip. You will be shopping for ideas. Look at how other retailers cross-merchandise and create displays using secondary product lines. After you've seen what others have done, take time to come up with a plan for your store. As we've all hear before, "nothing ventured, nothing gained." Good luck! ■