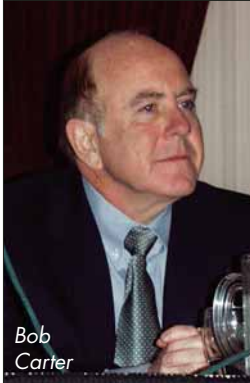


Successful Retailing: The Business of Framing

Part Six: Marketing on the Internet



Marc
Bluestone



Bob
Carter



Bruce
Dale



Jay
Goltz



William
Parker

The transcript of the annual breakfast panel discussion held at the **2002 West Coast Art and Frame Show**, and sponsored by **The National Conference**, has appeared in the last five issue of PFM. This marks the final installment.

Panelists:

Marc Bluestone, president and owner of Frame Group, Inc.; St. Louis, MO
Bob Carter, owner of Frame Up; Phoenix, AZ
Bruce Dale, president of Aaron Brothers; a retail chain with 150 U.S. locations
Jay Goltz, president and founder of Goltz Group, Inc.; Chicago, IL
William Parker, owner of Ambiance by Parker; Nashville, TN

Moderated by **Bruce Gherman**, publisher, PFM

Question:

“What role does the Internet play in marketing your business?”

Jay Goltz: Since I started FramerSelect—an Internet site we attempt to drive consumers to—I’ve done a lot of research on the Internet.

The Internet has been a phenomenal failure for a lot of companies that got into it with absolutely no idea of what they were doing. It’s also been a phenomenal success for certain companies who have used it as part of their marketing strategies to support their already-strong businesses.

Eighty-seven percent of the population with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more is on the Internet regularly. That’s an astounding figure that you can’t ignore. It is said that the Internet influences 15% of purchasing decisions.

I don’t think that it would be imprudent to take your advertising budget and set aside 20%, or 15%, or some portion of it to use it for something that gives you Internet exposure—even if it’s just a web page with your name, your address, and an explanation of what you do. People are on the Internet everyday. They might see your store while driving home one day and then go on-line to see if you have a web site and find out if you can provide what they need.

It’s not very expensive to get a web page done. Soon it’s going to be the way people now ask, “What is your fax number?” instead of, “Do you have a fax machine?” These days, people *expect* you to have a fax machine. The day is coming, very shortly—if it’s not here already—when customers will simply ask, “What’s your web address?”

You might as well get ahead of the curve. Maybe it’s not the top item on your list today, but by the end of the year [2002], you really should try to set up a least a simple web page.

Bob Carter: We don’t offer any Internet access to our store right now. But because I am a firm believer in wanting to have a highly

visible location, and because I know this is something for the future, I've joined FramerSelect. I believe it's an opportunity for those of us who have very little e-business savvy. I look for people who are good at marketing on the Internet and try to learn from them when I know there is no way in the world I could do it on my own.

There are some who don't think that our industry is a prime candidate for Internet selling because of the "feel, touch, and see" interplay of the senses that you've got to have for the transaction to work. I tend to agree. But I want to keep my options open, so I have tried to align myself with those who have a lot more savvy than I do.

I would tell you that the Internet is a consideration that you might want to think about. It may not pay any dividends today, but you have to plan for the long-term.

Bruce Dale: We have a web site that has several thousand visitors each week that spend 20 to 30 minutes at the site. And we won't sell framing on our web site—ever.

We know what parts of our site people are looking at and spending time at. Most people use the site selection page where they can type in their zip code and find the [Aaron Brothers] store closest to them. We also use the site for education, providing information such as store locations, hours of

operation, and the kind of work we do.

We once thought, during the craze of the late 1990s, that we would sell framing on the site, but that's not where the opportunity is.

William Parker: One additional point... you should know, first, that I was asked here not because I am wildly successful, but because of what I've learned from all the mistakes I've made. And there were a lot of those mistakes; the ones I really liked, I made twice.

We wanted an informational web site; we launched it two years ago and it functions as it should. The problem we ran into was with our domain name. If you type in "ambiance [part of the name of the gallery] .com," you are directed to the site with the largest selection of adult toys in North America.

So my one caution to you is about domain name; it could be important.

Marc Bluestone: I think everyone should have a web site. They are inexpensive to do. There are opportunities there—if nothing else, the Internet is a way to offer customers additional information about you.

When people think of the Internet, they think about how it is supposed to be worldwide, a global connection, and that you have to sell something. The reality is that people can look you up on the Internet just as easily as they

can look you up in the Yellow Pages. If your Internet address is in your advertising, then you can provide consumers with a lot more information.

For example, one of the problems with newspaper ads is that you are rewarded for being concise. You can only have a couple of words—and you have to get their attention in a half-second. You also have to give them a reason to think about framing and to think about you.

On a web site, you are rewarded for being thorough. You can also use more visuals on a web site, and a lot of our business is related to being visual. You can deliver that into consumers' homes along with information about your business for a very low cost over the Internet.

My caution to you would be to make sure the look of the web site has the image you want to portray for your business. If you design a black page with white type to talk about how visually creative you are, you have a problem. Similarly, you will have a problem if the site is so beautiful and complex that it takes five minutes to load. You'll never get the viewer to click onto a second page.

You have to walk that line; say what you want in an appropriate manner. Otherwise, the site can actually end up hurting you. ■

This year's breakfast discussion at the 2003 West Coast Art & Frame Show is scheduled for Saturday, January 18, 2003 from 8-10 am. The event will feature a select panel of leading retailers and successful marketing professionals in the framing industry. Tips for successful retailing, as well as tactics in a tight economy, will be discussed. This event is free, but be sure to register early because seats are limited.