



The latest addition to franchise framing, Image Arts Etc., provides a multitude of services under one roof.

Where Etc. Means Framing

Image Arts Etc. Combines Services Into A New Trend

by Margery Schwartz

When we talk about trends in the art and framing industry, we tend to think of changes in design, decorative accents, frame styles and colors, and creative alternatives in matting and mounting. Other trends—business trends—have been emerging as well. Image Arts Etc., a franchise combining a digital portrait studio, art gallery, business graphics center, and custom frame shop under one roof is a prime example of one new trend of thought for the industry.

Image Arts Etc. has been devel-

oped over the past five years in a series of six concepts. It began as a mall kiosk that offered large format printing and limited portraiture with digital photography. As the next five steps, ready-made frames, a full-size portrait studio, an art gallery, and custom framing were added to the services offered. Mall locations moved to grocery-anchored strip centers and steadily increased to stores that currently can be up to 1,800 square feet.

Founder Tony DeSio, who also started Mail Boxes Etc., felt the concept of “everything under one roof” would be lucrative for the

franchisees and a benefit to their customers. Consumers could develop their photos and portraits, or transfer artwork to canvas, and then have them custom framed on the same premises while they developed a rapport with the employees and had their work professionally handled.

DeSio’s resume is impressive. He graduated with an electrical engineering degree from the University of Connecticut. He worked for Hughes research and development laboratories and went on to Lockheed for the next 15 years. Then, in 1973, DeSio went to

General Electric and established the company's first digital imaging process laboratory. He founded Mail Boxes Etc. and sold it for \$300 million in 1997 after recovering from heart surgery. DeSio took

Image Arts Etc. center. Included in the training is one week dedicated to custom framing. Ongoing training occurs in the store and franchisees are encouraged to attend additional educational classes. The

Some franchisees are offering positive feedback for the framing division of the company. The average store is 1,500 square feet and 25 percent of the floor space is devoted to framing. The company has noted that overall 25 percent of the revenues are generated by the custom framing department. Framing services offered include shadow boxes, preservation framing, matting, fabric mats, various glazing choices, lamination, canvas stretching and gallery wrap stretching, brushstroke effects, collage creation and framing, and consultation services for corporate art and hotels and interior decorators.

Rich and Paula Hempel, owners of a Carrollton, TX, store have only been open since August 2001 but already consider themselves successful. Prior to opening the store, Paula was a market researcher and full-time mom and Rich held a corporate position. Paula handles the framing in the store while Rich oversees the other business aspects (although he is qualified to do framing as well). Paula, who has an art background, found the perfect niche for herself. Plus, the training she received for being a franchisee enhanced her ability to help customers select designs and colors.

Paula feels Image Arts Etc. is competitive with local custom framers and other chains. The store advertised its opening, including using doorhangers in the neighborhood. In addition, coupons were offered before this past holiday season. After the holiday rush, Paula planned to create even more samples to be hung on the wall showing the gamut of styles and designs available.

She is finding that the draw into her shop is that a person can stop in for a digital art print and then be presented with the option



The custom framing department takes up 25 percent of the selling floor.

his knowledge of technology and retail operations and Image Arts Etc. was born.

On December 7, 1999 the first full-service corporate store opened. The first franchised store opened September 1, 2000 and there are currently 10 locations in operation with 14 more in the works. The company's goal is to reach 1,000 franchises by 2005.

Set up cost is about \$110,000, not including working capital. Services that the franchise offers include portrait and product photography, digital film processing, digital film editing, photo restoration, photo scanning and transfer to CD-ROM, posters and banners, dye sublimation printing (i.e. mugs, photos on T-shirts), canvas art transfers, art posters, custom framing and resale products such as tabletop frames, albums, and other photo related items.

Franchisees are required to finish five weeks of initial training before owning and operating an

basic training course allows franchise owners to market and supervise the framing process in their shop. Franchisees have the option of hiring experienced framers and often do.

DeSio states, "What distinguishes us from most other frame shops is the variety of services we offer. Shortly after Image Arts Etc. opened its first digital photography studio, we realized that we could operate on the digital images we captured in our computers to change ordinary photographs into beautiful works of art. We also found that we could print on canvas utilizing the new wide format printing devices. It was an easy decision to add framing to our retail concept, since customers needed a frame to display the personalized art we were creating for them. The name of the game in retailing is to generate as much revenue per square foot of retail space. Adding a framing capability to our shops helped us do just that."

of framing it at the same place. Paula also emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships with customers. "I spend a lot of time with each customer, no matter if it's to frame a simple poster or original artwork, to create a design for the whole piece. Customers come back even if our prices are higher because of the quality of our customer service."

Shawn May, owner of a franchise in King of Prussia, PA, opened his store in April 2001. Shawn has extensive business experience and previously owned a food chain. He learned about Image Arts Etc. from an article in a franchise magazine.

Shawn began doing his own framing in the shop but now has a professional framer take care of the larger, more complicated jobs. Shawn states, "Framing is the final touch that Image Arts needed for the other services offered such as digital printing, canvas printing,

and trade show graphics. It only makes sense to offer the customer everything in a one-stop shopping environment."

What concerns some retailers is the intrusion of Image Arts Etc. into strip malls and shopping centers that already have independent custom framers as tenants. Unless the retail custom framer has about 20,000 square feet of space the landlord is unlikely to grant an "exclusive" in their contract to exclude other frame stores. This creates competition within the same shopping area which can or cannot be favorable to the independent.

In the case of Shannon Richard, owner of Picture Perfect Framing, O'Fallon, MO, the Image Arts Etc. in the same strip mall as hers closed its doors within six months. Shannon states, "The negative aspect was that Image Arts Etc. was in the front of the shopping center and prospective

customers were confused about where custom framing was available. Though the franchise did take some business away, it did not have a major impact. I am relocating to a larger store since I am much busier now."

It seems that the "Etc." in Image Arts Etc. really does apply to custom framing and design. Framing is labor-intensive requiring both creativity and business acumen. What Image Arts Etc. will have to do to keep up with independent custom frame shops is not only continue their education but live up to a high level of craftsmanship. It will be up to the consumer to decide if the convenience of one-stop shopping is an equally valued service. ■