

Selling Decorative Art

by Deborah J. Salmon

Decorative, preframed art and gift items can be an additional source of income; but before you can add to—or increase—decorative sales, you need to consider a few aspects of your business. Factors such as the time constraints for completing the actual framing, your space limitations, and the wholesale prices you are able to buy at, will all greatly affect your ability to generate these sales.

Although the same approach will not work for every shop, it's safe to say that your buying, pricing, and selling practices need to differ from your custom techniques if you want to develop a steady source of income from preframed sales. Review your shop, consider your competition, and then make a plan to add or increase preframed art sales.

Preframed inventory needs to be treated differently, and separately, from custom framing orders. It's a big mistake to treat an inventory item of preframed art in the same way as a custom framing job. Consider the type of shop you own. Is it handling framing orders in a timely manner? Do you have nonproductive time in the framing area? Are you watching TV at the shop?

If your business is not easily meeting completion dates, you shouldn't slow the production of custom framing orders to have a store piece done. It wouldn't be wise to invest time in something that you haven't sold when you don't even have time to complete something that is sold. Guaranteed income from custom framing has to be a priority.

At the same time, you need to have the framed deco-

rative art if you're going to sell it. Empty wall space is a potentially lost sale every day it stays that way. Until you fix any time limitations or back room workflow problems you have, you'll need to do what other non-framing retailers do: buy the finished product from a wholesaler. This will result in a smaller profit, but that's better than no profit at all.

Wholesalers of decorative art will offer quick delivery, limited frame choices, and a large selection of art.

Preframed
inventory needs to
be treated
differently, and
separately, from
custom framing
orders.

Resist the temptation to reject the option of buying from a wholesaler just because you are paying for a service you can do yourself. By doing a little research, you will find that the cost is only slightly higher. For example, the profiles used by wholesalers are usually readily available from your local sources. Using that information, price the job as if you are going to do it and compare that with the wholesaler's price.

You should purchase from the wholesaler as soon as space becomes available on the gallery walls. When selling, treat the preframed art as the lowest available option. You can then upgrade the customer to your custom framing services. This works well because both the customer and the retailer win. The customer wins because they have quality options. The store owner wins because they don't lose sales just because of price. The shop maintains a good reputation of reliability to deliver because customer pieces are the priority.

If you have time to frame store pieces, you must act like the wholesaler. Framers tend to want to display their advanced mat cutting skills or a new elaborate profile.

Selling Decorative Art

This is fine for samples that you will use to sell customers your custom framing techniques. It is inappropriate for items you are attempting to resell because now you have taken a custom framing job and must try to fit it to a (generic) customer. It's the equivalent of putting custom-size drapes on the shelf and trying to sell them to every customer that walks in. Retail items must remain simple to make and inexpensive to produce. It needs to indicate, visually, to your customers the difference in value between "preframed" and "custom."

When creating your own preframed pieces, the cost of supplies is of the utmost importance. Buying your frame chopped will make the cost too high. Store pieces should only be done from length molding, even if it's the only time you consider length. Typically, you will save 40% from chop pricing to small quantity length pricing. Shop for the best per foot price on simple profiles. Simple and versatile profiles are quite competitively priced from a multitude of suppliers in the industry.

There are definite regional differences in popularity of art. This should be reflected in your inventory choices. Certain profiles will be used frequently because they work well with the subject matter popular in your area. Consider stocking one or two profiles that will accommodate the majority of your decorative art. Oaks and pine finishes will go on almost any wildlife scenes, and black mica will almost always work on contemporary and modern theme pieces. Quantity discounts on length will further bring down your cost.

Controlling the cost of matting is also an issue. Keep it simple and neutral. Consider buying in the quantity of one white, one cream or tan, and one black. These neutrals will be the top mat. Check with your distributor for discontinued colors, damaged mats, or special sales for additional colors. Use the fallouts too, as long as you don't waste time searching for the perfect color combination.

After planning how you will purchase and/or frame the inventory, competitive pricing is the next issue to consider. Do you know how this product, a framed decorative piece, is priced elsewhere? Consider other sources of preframed art available to your customers. Shop the department stores like J.C. Penney's; they now offer quite a selection of framed art. Furniture stores, gift shops, and office supply stores also offer framed posters. The suggested mark-up percentage may mean you cannot compete in price with these other retailers, and that will result in less turnover of your inventory.

When selling a service such as custom framing, the framer's ability to design and the quality of the workmanship are the reason to buy.

Value is the concept to point out when selling the preframed art. Openly express to your customer that this is not custom framing. Have pride that your skill as a framer is a specialized service and will cost more than a basic framed item. For those customers that then choose custom framing, you have established that your expertise is worth more. Fewer price objections will follow.

Reducing the cost of producing your finished product—preframed art—is the key to making more profit from it. You also can't sell what you don't have ready. Whether you simply review your suppliers or decide to purchase from a wholesaler, decisions need to be made based on the cost and time. Competitive pricing may mean taking less than desired on your resale items. But, satisfied customers will refer new business. With a little review and preplanning, profits and increased sales will come. Time, cost and competition will make or break your framed art sales. It is time to do a little homework, be prepared, and bring customers back to the galleries for their decorative needs. ■

Value is the
concept to point
out when selling
preframed art.

Deborah J. Salmon is a former gallery owner and custom framer. She is currently an art sales consultant and owner of DJS Art Search Inc.