

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

A Growth Opportunity for Frame Stores

by Jim Daniel

Look into any frame store these days and it's not surprising to see yourself looking back. More and more frame shops across the country are featuring mirrors as part of their product mix.

Mirrors have become big money-makers for framers. In some shops, mirror sales now account for as much as 15 to 20 percent of business, according to Jim West of Cash Moulding, a framing distributor in Birmingham, Alabama, where mirrors have been sold for more than 10 years. "Mirrors are a positive influence on sales," West says. "In our stores that offer mirrors, their sales are a direct improvement to the bottom line."

At TC Moulding, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, mirror sales went up a whopping 208 percent within a one-year period, says John Richards, Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Despite this fact, mirrors still represent an untapped resource for many frame shops. "When my sales reps go see framers who haven't yet sold mirrors, they offer to send them a framed mirror to hang in the store. Usually, that results in a sale, and the framer realizes the potential."

Mirror sales are growing at frame stores for two primary reasons--the use of mirrors in room decor is a huge design trend, and

frame stores are uniquely positioned to deliver this product to consumers.

Home Design Trends

Pick up a design magazine, and you'll see that the use of mirrors in home decor is one of today's hottest

The use of mirrors
in home decor is
one of today's
hottest decorating
trends.

decorating trends. Mirrors not only provide a open and airy feel to a room, but a hint of elegance as well. And as mirrors become an integral component of interior design, furniture stores and home decorating chains have responded with larger selections. As a result, consumers are more exposed to mirrors as a decorating option.

Richards is even seeing framing designs that combine mirrors and artwork into one piece as well as mirrors framed with sconces and candelabras for maximum play with light reflection. These unique design ideas highlight the consumer's inter-

est in mirrors as a decorative tool.

Why Frame Stores?

Customers are realizing they can get the best mirror selections at frame stores, where moulding in a variety of sizes and styles is readily available. Better prices and endless design options are also key reasons customers are heading to frame stores.

Consumers are also flocking to frame shops for their mirror purchases because they can match mirror moulding to other framed artwork for a unified decorative look. While furniture stores and chain stores compete for mirror sales, they can offer only ready-made products; therefore, an integrated design look with other framed artwork is not possible. In frame shops, mirrors can be custom-designed or ready-made, giving customers a greater variety of options.

"As a designer and educator in the framing industry, I stay abreast of up and coming trends as well as the trends that slip up and surprise us," says Kaye Evans, CPF, a design and educational consultant. "Selling mirrors is just such a niche trend. Framers should be able to sell custom-framed mirrors for a lower price than most stores sell ready-made mirrors. Most important, the consumers receive the same valued trust

Mirror, Mirror

as with custom art framing. This very profitable niche could be 'just what the doctor ordered' to spark current business."

Benefits of Selling Mirrors

Richards says there are three reasons frame store owners should consider selling mirrors:

- The high perceived value of mirrors, particularly those with ornate or custom designs, allows framers to increase their profit margins.
- Mirrors diversify a frame store's product selection and position the store as a destination shopping location for home decor.
- Frame stores can offer better designs than the ready-made versions available at furniture and chain stores.

Ancillary benefits include the low labor investment in ready-made mirrors as well as the greater visual appeal of the frame shop with a variety of mirrors hanging on the walls. "Mirrors brighten and open up frame stores just like they do homes," Richards says. "They are good visual merchandising for frame stores."

Profits and Pricing

Mirrors can run the gamut in consumer pricing from \$150 for a ready-made, standard-sized wall mirror to \$800 or \$900 for a highly ornate mirror. The benefit to frame shops is in the profit margin, which can be as high as 70 percent.

As a result, glass suppliers have started offering mirrors as part of their product lines so framers can

receive them as part of their regular glazing product orders.

How to Sell Mirrors

Promoting mirror sales can be as simple as putting a sample on display in your store to let customers know decorative mirrors are available and can be matched to other frame jobs. Some frame shops use direct mail and coupon offers to bring customers into the store. Because the demand for decorative mirrors is high, simply incorporating them into normal marketing efforts often brings about immediate results.

So if you're looking for a profit-

Because the demand for decorative mirrors is high, incorporating them into your marketing efforts could bring about immediate results.

builder that's easy to order, market, handle and sell, just look in the mirror. ■

Jim Daniel is President of Operations for Sandel Glass, Clovis, California, a full-line glass supplier to the picture frame industry.