

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

by Kaye Evans, CPF



Photo 1: Consumers appreciate a custom framer with knowledge of the latest trends.

From the fashion runways of Elsia Klensch to the narration of home decor by Martha Stewart, the introduction of new trends is all around us. We read daily of how a new body style will be making a car buyers storm the showroom for a “new” trend of “old nostalgia” in automobiles. But what of the framing industry? How do we identify, evaluate, initiate, and articulate our trends?

Trend or Fad?

A critical aspect of tracking trends is to know the “real” stuff when you see it. Knowing whether it is a real trend or a passing fad is vital to the success of a business. A fad is a product that hits with tremendous impact, gains popularity instantly, soars to the surface quickly, and descends just as rapidly. An example of a fad is the “hidden image” prints. Remember them? They were a series of tiny dots placed onto a canvas or paper in such a way that once the viewer focused the eye in a

certain way, a hidden image would appear. (I always felt like a failure since I could never see anything in these prints.)

Once an actual trend is identified, it's important to be able to track it and react to it at store level. The American consumer is extremely sensitive to trends and will have an immediate reaction if the retailer sets the stage correctly.

Identify Trends

Let me share some of the most recent trends in an effort to help you hone your ability to identify a new trend. Perhaps the hottest new trend to hit the home decor market this past April was metal; shiny metal, dark gunmetal, and the most popular, brushed metal!

Furniture companies are mixing metals with many other substrates and among the most popular looks

is metals mixed with woods. Beds, tables, lamps, sofas, and artwork are just some of the products targeted for this look.

Framed pictures are framed with a metal moulding surrounding the art and a furniture-finished wood surrounding that to enhance the total look. Metal frames inside metal frames are also popping up in places like the Pottery Barn.

The Home Furnishing News, a weekly publication for the furniture market, recently reported on a new trend. Framed art and pre-finished art are selected by the consumer to achieve a specific look. It gives the customer an opportunity for an impulse purchase.

Another so-called "new" trend is adding value to framed art. The economy is in pretty good shape, and consumers are more willing to purchase better materials to have the artwork last longer.



Photo 2: Cross-merchandising with other shops in your area can be a great way to generate interest and increase sales.

Accessories Become A Trend

Accessorizing means, "to add adornment or decoration to the original design to enhance it." In fashion, this means adding jewelry, a bag, or shoes to an outfit to make it more appealing. In custom framing, it can be a set of decorative corner ornaments on the frame to influence the style, drawing a gold French line to accent value, adding tasseled cords to designate a design period, or incorporating a small porcelain shoe to a shadow box design.

The professional framer can become a master at adding value to the presentation by accessorizing the design. With the right accessories, any design can look better and the job of the framer as design consultant is to know what to offer and when to offer it.

Most people are better able to accept change early on in the design process. Therefore, the framer should always offer the accessory as the design is being created and not wait until the design has been completed.

Having a set of accessory examples at the design counter is essential. An example of this would be to

have a small metal frame with the corner ornaments in place so the client can see exactly what is being explained. This could be a small 10"x10" sample that shows many items, such as a gold French line, corded tassels, corner ornaments, and an example of a porcelain shoe installed at the lower portion of the shadow box frame.

Some framers are not comfortable adding anything to the design that increases the price. However, accessorizing does not mean that you are padding the bill. When the client feels they are receiving something of value, they are usually not resistant to the addition if the price is considered fair.

Remember that an accessory should never be given away as the client will not appreciate its value. Always use the proper mark up on this addition. Many retail stores use a one-and-a-half to two times mark up. In specialty stores, like custom framing shops, this mark up should be higher since you must account for the special handling. ■

Evaluate Trends

The job of a successful retailer is to keep the display areas of the store exciting, giving the customer a reason to return again and again.

There is a current trend towards total visual displays. The consumer becomes stimulated to buy when looking at tastefully presented vignettes first-hand.

What is a vignette? It is a small display of a style or new concept in framing that sparks the consumer's interest by imagining how the setting would look in their home. It is not enough to simply hang models on a wall; they need to tell a story to be successful.

Vignettes

Trend vignettes can be made by simply putting a few pieces of one style together to show the consumer the visual result of adding framed art to the presentation.

Contact a local furniture store and put together a plan of action for the styles of vignettes to present in upcoming months. Offer free space to cross-merchandise and, almost always, the other shop will be willing to participate (see Photo 2).

It's probably not feasible to set up whole rooms in your shop, but it is a possibility to look for a great example in a magazine and frame it up to display the look. Imagine this scene in Photo 3 framed in an impressive presentation of mats, metal, and wood moulding set up with a display of the corner samples similar to what is in the picture. Suggestive selling is the instant result.

When setting up displays, backdrops can be easily created by

using the foamboard in your shop. Try scoring and bending a piece of 40"x60" foamboard off center, the full length of the board. This will allow the foam display to stand on its own (see Figure 1).

Finishes can be added using paint or wallpaper to achieve the atmosphere of an actual room. (Don't forget to slightly dampen the backside of the foam before painting to prevent the board from cockling.)

Initiate Trends

Clustering is an exciting trend that groups several pieces of art framed in eclectic styles together in a cluster. This is a powerful look and best of all it sells multiple frames.

Learn to change the look on the display walls to achieve this powerful selling tool. Don't forget that hanging installation services would be welcomed by a busy consumer and also gets you into their home where there are more pieces of art to be framed. Initiating a trend can almost always generate new business.

Articulate the Trend

Talk about the trends! Seeds of wants and desires are planted in advertising campaigns everyday. Telling the consumer about a new trend is the best use of marketing.

An example: "Mrs. Jones, you may want to frame this signed and numbered print in one of the latest



Photo 3: While you may not be able to set up whole rooms to display framed artwork, a color photo like this displayed prominently can give consumers ideas for their own home.

trends in custom framing. We can blend a metal and wood together to achieve this exciting look for your home. An added benefit is the protection the metal (aluminum) moulding adds to the presentation!"

Trends are fashion and fashion is what the consumer wants, so gain the power of knowledge. Can you see a trend here? ■

Photos in this article courtesy of Nielsen & Bainbridge.

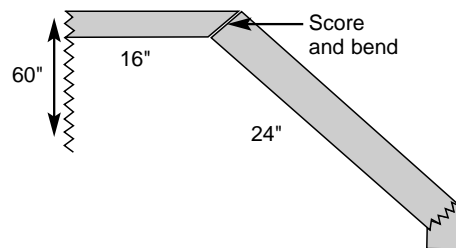


Figure 1