

Successful Retailing: The Business of Framing

Part One: Forging Ahead



Marc Bluestone



Bob Carter



Bruce Dale



Jay Goltz



Jeannette King

Question:

2002 was a difficult year. What did you do that made a difference?

This series of articles is a transcription of the National Conference Annual Business Breakfast Panel at the 2003 West Coast Art and Frame Show. Look for additional discussions from the event in the next few issues of PFM.

MODERATOR:

Bruce Gherman, Publisher, PFM

PANELISTS:

Marc Bluestone:

president and owner of Frame Group, Inc.

Robert Carter:

owner of Frame Up (with two retail locations)

Bruce Dale:

then president of Aaron Brothers; now CEO of Frank's Nursery and Crafts

Jay Goltz:

president and founder of Goltz Group, Inc.

Jeannette King:

president of SpecialtySoft

Bob Carter: I survived! That might sound flippant, but we did survive; and we found out that we needed to start thinking more clearly, and in a more defined way, about marketing.

The fact that all of you are here at this event shows that you survived, too! That's what will help you make it in the next year. You've got to think; to learn lessons; to apply new principles and refine old ones.

You've got to find some way to survive. There's no magic answer of how to do it.

Jeannette King: Because we [at SpecialtySoft] are software developers first, and retail framing is our secondary focus, our retail



Bruce Gherman (far left) moderated the panel discussion with five industry veterans who discussed various aspects of the retail side of framing.

business doesn't always get the attention it deserves. So in 2002, I dedicated myself to proper planning. I set goals and found that it is amazing how powerful a written goal is.

It's important to set annual goals, strategies, and tactics. Write them down and check them frequently. Formalize the process so that, on a quarterly basis, you can evaluate where you are.

Don't keep this information to yourself, either. Share it with your employees and make them part of the process.

Bruce Dale: Let me add to that. In sales, if you plan on a decrease from the previous year, then you'll get one. And if you plan on an increase, and check your goals (I would suggest monthly, not quarterly), then you can achieve it.

You also have to get really good at the little things—all the basics. That will be good for your business now and will make you even better when the economy turns around.

Jay Goltz: I want to emphasize something Jeannette said earlier: Grow up. Fire someone that shouldn't be working for you, even though it is painful.

Before, I said that I lost employees due to attrition—but I also had a few nasty, painful firings. These were long-term employees that really cared, and really tried, but weren't competent. It's the kind of firing you put off while things are okay, but then you say to yourself, "I can't afford the luxury any more off keeping people on who can't do their jobs."

I'm sure half the people in this

room have employees that shouldn't be working for them. Here's the litmus test I always use. If you go into work tomorrow and one of your employees says, "I'm sorry to tell you this, but I am giving my notice today," and inside you think to yourself, "Woo-hoo, lucky day!" then that is a bad sign. There shouldn't be anyone working for you that you'd be happy to see leave.

Now is the time to do something about it. Sometimes it's the pain of a bad economy that gets us to do painful things, but that's part of being the boss.

Marc Bluestone: I'd like to expand on that. Sometimes, it's not just incompetent people who lose their jobs in a tough economy. One of the things that a successful business person does in a tough economy is realize that it all becomes about the numbers—all about the financial statements, about the bottom line, all about whether the company is going to keep operating.

In good times we get fat with staff; we might even get used to other luxuries. And the staff that we are heavy with could be made up of great, hard working people. But in a tough economy you must make the numbers work—for yourself. Do the budgeting and the planning and you can find out today whether or not you are going to have a good year.

If you see red ink, you need to start adjusting how your company works—whether or not people are competent, whether or not things are necessary. You have to figure out how to be a solvent company.

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