

Displays for Small Retail Spaces

by Greg Perkins, CPF

Whether your frame shop is large or small, you may have some awkward little spaces that challenge your merchandising skills. Having a small space... it is a poor excuse for not merchandising. Even framers who have an abundance of space should think through all the odd corners and unusual areas where additional displays can help promote more products and techniques.

When the word “display” is mentioned in the context of a frame shop, it is easy to envision an attractive vignette in the front window. But displays can become an integral part of the entire retail space. A good display, even if it’s small, can serve several purposes, including:

- Pulling people into your store
- Improving the appearance of your store
- Exciting consumers about your products
- Helping you showcase a brand new product
- Elevating the perceived value of your products
- Getting people interested in making a purchase
- Helping you sell upgrades
- Increasing your average ticket

Let’s look at some interesting display ideas for places throughout the frame shop...

Windows

There are many different types of displays. Perhaps the most talked about are those in the front window. In my



Maximize wall space with framed designs to spark ideas.

past articles on window displays, I’ve talked about building a backdrop wall on which to display framed art, and a raised platform to define the display. I still believe that is ideal, but if your front window is small or you don’t have the floor space to build a display area out from the glass, you still have viable alternatives.

Many retail stores today are using graphic images in their windows, featuring photos of the products, rather than the products themselves. Check with sign companies or printers to see if they offer this type of service. If you are concerned about blocking incoming light, inquire about printing the photo image on a mesh banner. Photos provide you a chance to show small pieces in a larger scale and you can add a small sign message to go along with it.

In a very narrow store, leave the entire window wide open so your store becomes the display. Just be sure to

hang framed art close to the glass so passersby can see the quality and details of the framing. Also, be sure the inside of your store looks great since it is the center of attention.

You can also “frame” the store by hanging a beautiful frame in the front window. Make the frame almost as big as the window opening. When hanging it, back it up from the glass so condensation can’t get trapped between the front of the frame and the glass. Paint out the rabbet and back of the frame in black so it is inconspicuous.

If you have a narrow storefront, but it extends deep, you may have enough room to build out a display ledge in the front window. Rather than blocking off the storefront with a backdrop wall, the ledge leaves the space open, but still allows you to display things up close for passersby to see. Make use of easels for displaying art or build a backdrop wall that is just a few feet high. This will give you a spot to lean framed art without blocking the view in and out of the store.

Design Counter

In most frame shops, the design counter is the heart of the shop. It is the place where customers typically spend the most time and it is the area where the most income is generated. It pays to make the area

attractive and informative.

Place a special framed piece on an easel right where you have a captive audience. Change this piece often so people will see a



Use ledges for display space on walls, as well as in your front window.

new display when they return to pick up their order. Some framers choose select pieces they have framed for their customer and display them until they are picked up. In most cases the customer will be thrilled that you are proud enough to display their art. Just be careful to avoid displaying something that you know is a gift or anything very personal.

A vase of fresh flowers may not help you sell more, but it can enhance the look of your store and get people to linger. A display that simply adds ambience can indirectly boost your sales, too.

Corner Sample Display

In a small retail space, you may not have the room to display all the corner samples you would like to. Alternatives include the use of revolving towers, allowing several

rows of samples to fit into just a bit more space than a single row takes up on the wall. Sliding panel systems or some sort of cabinet where samples hang both in and on the fixture also increase the number of samples you can show.

If you already have framed art on display, another thought is to expand the space allotted to corner samples, but include some framed art in between rows of samples. For example, place a framed piece in a shadowbox by the matching shadowbox corner sample.

Wall Above Corner Samples

The small space above most corner sample displays is a prime spot for merchandising. In many frame shops, this is the area customers are facing throughout the design process. The space should be utilized to communicate important design messages. Some framers avoid hanging framed inventory in this space because it can be an awkward place to get things down from. However, the things you display here do not have to be for sale.

Some framers who have won awards in framing competitions use this key area to show off their award-winning framing, including

the ribbons. It is a great credibility builder for your customers to see. It also gives you a chance to showcase creative and upgraded designs they might otherwise not see.

Another good way to use the space over your corner samples is to feature a variety of framed models representing things you frame on a regular basis, such as a diploma, wedding invitation, a piece of needleart, a canvas, etc. Frame them all in upgraded frame designs that will help you sell better framing.

Use some of your own family memorabilia and bring the pieces home after awhile. Or, if a customer has a particularly nice wedding invitation, ask if they have an extra you can use for one of the display samples, and offer them a gift certificate in exchange.

Tabletop

Any open surfaces in your retail space that are not used for specific purposes can be turned into valuable merchandising areas. The corner of a large design counter may be a great place to focus on new moulding collections. Create a display panel to place the samples on along with a sign saying, "New," or something that will attract attention. Or a tabletop version of a spinner rack like many framers use for metal mouldings can be a great way to keep fillet samples on hand.

If you have a small amount of empty floor space in the middle of your retail area, set up a small round table. Place two or three easels on it with small, but nicely framed artwork. It helps bring dimension to your shop and provides extra display space.



Small tabletop displays can grab attention.

Hang on a Door

If you have a door that leads to a utility closet, or any door that isn't used regularly, you can use it for additional wall space. The same technique is also great for your customers who have little wall space in their homes. You may even include a sign saying, "If you are running out of wall space, open the door to a new display area." If the door is opened and closed often, you can still display on it, but should use security hanger to keep the pieces safely in place.

Suspend From the Ceiling

I have seen some framers make use of empty air space as another area for displaying framed art. The ideal set-up is to display two pieces of the exact same size, back-to-back, so the dust covers won't show. If you place strap hangers near the outer edges at the top of each frame, you can hang them from cable up to the ceiling. (Be sure you are attaching the cable to

something in the ceiling capable of holding the weight.) The photographic banners mentioned earlier for window displays may also fit here, especially if you have high ceilings.

Cash/Checkout Desk

Think about all the impulse items other retailers display at their cash registers. Magazines, candy, and batteries are common. In a frame shop there may not be much in the impulse price range, but one idea is different types of hangers. Since they don't make for an attractive display, use the side of the counter that faces the least conspicuous direction where they are convenient, but not the first thing everyone sees.

A small display of art cards may be another good choice. The ideal is to have one card framed and on display on a small tabletop easel, along with a sign saying, "Affordable art for those small spaces."

Back Wall

If you have a long, narrow frame shop, it can be a challenge to get your customers to walk to the back of the store. One approach is to move the design counter and corner samples into that rear area so the majority of the people who enter the store end up walking through it.

But, if you'd rather have your frame design area visible to the sidewalk traffic, you can use a dramatic display to pull people to the back. Paint the back wall of the frame shop a different color than the rest of the store. Hang large scale or boldly colored pieces there that will attract attention.

Idea Walls

If you have a four- to six-foot long wall that is separate from the rest of your displays, use the area to showcase some creative framing ideas. Include a sign saying, “Framing Ideas,” that will attract your customers to see what the ideas are.

Art Ordering Areas

Any small cubbyhole can be a great place to put in some shelves for print catalogs. There, your customers can see what prints and posters you can order for them. If there is room for a monitor, you could also use CDs available from the various companies to show the art that way.

Also Consider...

All of your merchandising areas should be well-lit, but perhaps it is even more important for these smaller scale displays. Retail designers actually use lighting to pull people throughout stores. Use different types of light to

brighten a dark corner or add a warm glow in an area your customers seem not to notice. The key to a good lighting plan is flexibility so it can change when your displays do.

The great thing about small displays is the ease with which they can be changed. If you plan to make a change here and a change there each week, it is amazing how many of your customers will believe you have sold half of the merchandise in your store. If you fail to change displays in a timely fashion, your business can appear stagnant. If necessary, schedule the time on your calendar for changes.

Also, when you plan out your displays, they are generally more effective. If they are better, more people respond positively to them and you increase your chances of making additional sales. That is what business is all about, right? ■

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*For more about merchandising, read these articles on the PFM website Article Index at www.pictureframingmagazine.com—
“Merchandising the Frame Shop,”
by Greg Perkins, August 1996
“Organize Your Moulding Wall,”
by Kaye Evans, July 2000*