

# What's In A Brand?

Relating it to the Consumer Can Be Key to Increasing Recognition (and Sales)

by Anne Vazquez

Attracting and retaining customers is a basic goal for any business. Competition for consumer dollars is an ongoing fact of life, and it's no different in the custom framing industry. What *is* different about our industry from many others is that, for the most part, custom framing is not a necessity. Consumers patronize a custom frame shop when they have an item that they want to display, that they want to preserve, and that they want to give special attention. They also purchase custom framing when they have space to fill on their walls. In either scenario, it's not a necessity. Hence, the challenge is to not only motivate consumers to purchase custom framing, but also to purchase it from *you*.

While you may not have the power to make people purchase custom framing, you can certainly promote the idea by including in your marketing plan ideas about what to frame and how to frame it, as well as the advantages of custom framing. One of those advantages is the individualized attention your business offers, as well as expertise. And when it comes time to put that attention and expertise to work, the materials available at a custom frame shop are another attraction. The quality and selection of materials that are both visible and "behind the scenes" in a frame design are usually not available to consumers when they purchase pre-framed art, or when they purchase do-it-yourself framing supplies.

Throughout the industry, efforts are ongoing to raise consumer interest and awareness of custom framing. The Art & Framing Council, for instance, focuses on using marketing and advertising campaigns to promote the industry as a whole. Meanwhile, Larson-Juhl has increased the visibility of its moulding products by advertising in consumer home magazines. FramerSelect,



*Loose dot patterns arranged in larger checkerboard grids comprise the "Connections" design (seen here in Slate).*



*The "Cornucopia" pattern exudes an organic feel with hand-drawn oak leaves set upon a textured background.*

a network of independently-owned frame shops, also places ads in home décor magazines to help consumers find a member custom framer in their area. These efforts promote the industry, both directly and indirectly. And that's a good thing. But there's another dimension to this—promoting *your* individual business to build your customer base and become a household name in your area.

Establishing a "brand" and an identity for your busi-

ness is one way to get recognition. For example, you can set you business apart with the complicated mat designs you can create with your computerized mat cutter (and marketing that fact), or perhaps you have found a niche with creative shadowbox designs. You can also utilize the many framing materials available that tie into the latest interior designs. Industry suppliers study the trends to ensure that, in addition to tried-and-true designs, they provide custom framers with fresh styles to offer consumers.

Teaming up with designers from other arenas of consumerism is one strategy that can be put into practice to further the awareness of custom framing. Crescent did just that when it collaborated with Michael Graves, the internationally renowned architect and designer. Perhaps best known by the "average" consumer for his line of home and office products at Target Stores, Graves collaborated with Crescent to design a collection of matboards for custom framers. This past spring, Crescent introduced The Michael Graves Collection line of matboard.

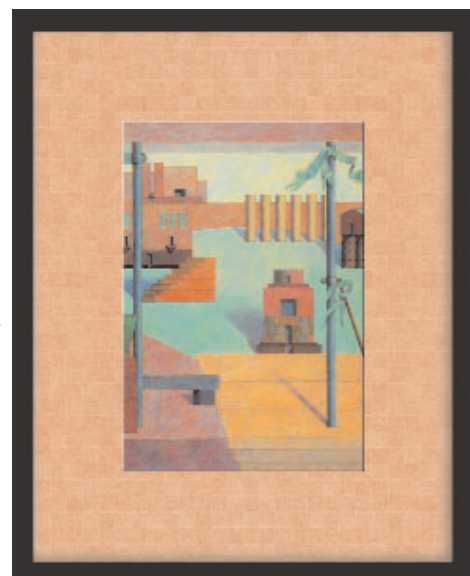
Commenting on the collaboration with Graves, Kate McCarthy, Vice President of Marketing at Crescent, says, "We wanted to provide the custom framer with a unique product to offer their customers. Additionally, we wanted to enable the framer to offer a compelling brand."

For the many consumers who know of Michael Graves and his designs, this line of matboard may catch their fancy. The collection consists of three motifs—Connections, Cornucopia, and Renaissance (see photos). While each motif is different, all three reflect the subtle richness present in so many of Graves' creations.

Connections is a loose dot pattern arranged in a grid. Cornucopia is an organic motif, featuring hand-drawn oak leaves upon a textured background. Renaissance features squares placed in a grid pattern, and has a metallic quality. Each design is available in five colors for a variety of choices at the design counter. In keeping with the quality brand name of the Graves collection, Crescent placed the designs on its Rag Mat line to provide both a design-savvy and conservation-quality product.

Describing the thought process that took place before Graves set to work for these designs, McCarthy explains, "First and foremost, the designs had to be scaled and appropriate for matting artwork. We wanted the designs to reflect Michael Graves' signature style...

*Characterized by a reflective metallic surface, "Renaissance" (seen here in copper) features a grid pattern designed to enhance the artwork it surrounds without overpowering it.*



architectural, clean, and, yet, organic."

The Graves Collection is not Crescent's first collaboration with a designer. In 2002, the company teamed up with Elizabeth Dow, a designer of high-end wallcoverings to create a collection of matboard bearing her name.

McCarthy says, "Going forward, we believe that our industry and products have to compete with all of the other retail venues available to the consumer. Most of the retailers that compete for expendable dollars have not only provided good products but have created and/or sell brands that add value for the consumer. It goes well beyond clothing... paint, carpeting, and furnishings have all added more and more brands to their lines."

It's often been said that the "experience" of custom framing is a significant factor in the sales transaction. The atmosphere of your shop, the rapport with your customer, and the options available to them work together to make it not only a purchase, but an "event." Along the same lines, offering a brand name product that many of your customers recognize can add to this experience. Those that choose these products will also enjoy the connection they feel with the brand, and will enjoy their framed piece all the more.

Both quality and originality are important factors in custom framing. Combined with your own special brand of framing, the materials and designs that suppliers create can help you provide your customers with dynamic framing that will make them come back for more. ■