

# Successful Retailing: The Business of Framing

## Part Five: Keeping What You've Got



Marc Bluestone



Robert Carter



Bruce Dale



Jay Goltz



Jeannette King

### Question:

What are some of the ways that you have managed to keep and maintain your customer base?

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 information about the 2004 Business Breakfast event at the end of this article.

#### **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

**Marc Bluestone:** I talk to them! Keep a customer list. Have a list of every customer that has ever shopped with you at your store and talk to them, mail to them. Do it frequently. You may have customers you send gifts to and customers you send cards to.

Come up with a way within your company that fits your own personal style and character, and use that method to talk to your customers so that they *remain* your customers.

**Jeannette King:** If you're automated [with a POS system], you'll know who your top customers are. You'll know where you are getting 80% of your revenue from and



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

where to focus your energies. With that kind of automation, you'll be able to respond to your best customers with direct mail campaigns, e-mail messages, telephone calls, and, in general, keep in close contact with them.

**Bruce Dale:** You know, it's interesting that we sometimes treat a new customer better than an old one. We'll give them a better deal just to get them to shop with us. Aaron Brothers doesn't do that. Keeping what you've got is more important than getting something new.

It's not just about price; it's about the service you give to customers when they come in. Don't ever risk the possibility of losing a person as a customer.

For example, if they initially selected mat colors that now they don't like—you need to change those mats for them, for free. Don't let that customer walk out saying, "This is not as good as I expected." Do what you have to in order to make sure they don't go somewhere else.

**Jay Goltz:** I'm going to say something a bit controversial: being a professional and being a retailer aren't always the same thing. I grew up in my father's dime store; I've been in retail since I was five years old. And I think that being a professional means that you do things right—and we should all try to be great framers.

But we're not doctors. When you go to the doctor, if you say, "I've got a pain here, and I want

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**—Bruce Dale**

an appendectomy," the doctor may say, "No, I won't do that." He won't perform a procedure that you don't need.

But when a customer comes in and says, "I want an orange mat on my red picture," then a good retailer shouldn't say, "No, I won't do that," and let the customer go somewhere else.

I think that there is an attitude, at times, that says that we're smarter than the customers and that they should do it our way because we are "the professional." I don't buy into that.

I have a customer-driven business. We give the customers what they want, even if, once in a while, the customer wants a design that doesn't look so hot. I know that there is a fine line between customer service and selling your soul—but that choice really doesn't happen very often.

**Bob Carter:** I'm a big fan of customer reward programs. There is no greater incentive, for example, than getting free plane tickets just for using my American Express card. We are trying to find a similar vehicle for our store; but

that's still in the planning stages.

What we do now is offer a lot of small, indulgence-type rewards. Clients that have been good customers in the past, but that we haven't seen lately, get a \$25 gift certificate mailed to them. A customer gets the same thing after they give us a particularly large work order. If there was problem with a work order, then after the fact we'll send them a gift certificate.

A lot of those come back, and it's great to get a \$200 sale out of a \$25 certificate. We need to keep our name out there so that our name is the first one they think of.

**Jeannette King:** I like the idea of giving a gift certificate instead of a discount on the current sale. It gets the customer to come back again; that's a really smart strategy. ■

*This year's breakfast discussion at the 2004 West Coast Art & Frame Show is scheduled for Wednesday, January 28, 2004, from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. The event will feature a select panel of leading retailers and successful marketing professionals in the framing industry. Tips for successful retailing will be discussed. This event is free, but be sure to register early because seats are limited.*