

# Merchandising Ready Made and Photo Frames

by Anne Vazquez

With the holiday season fast approaching, many of your customers will be coming to you for some of their gifts. A renewed focus on connecting with family, friends, and community, means that custom framed items (or gift certificates) will be on the giving list of many this year. For the person who “has everything,” a framed piece of artwork or collection of personal items can be just the perfect gift. No doubt, you are ready to serve this need as you are during the rest of the year.

In order to give the best service to your customers this season, and maximize your sales, assess your position as a destination for holiday shoppers. If you sell more than custom frames, take a look at the other frames that you sell and make sure you are highlighting their presence. Photo frames are often purchased as gifts themselves, and ready made frames can be purchased to house a special portrait to be given as a gift.

Create displays to make these items visible to even the casual shopper. Create themes when applicable. For instance, if you carry a line of rustic wood photo frames, you can create an “outdoorsy” vignette. Holiday-themed frames would be a natural item to promote within your shop as well.

All of these items can be merchandised to encourage customers to buy items in addition

to their custom framing. To demonstrate the fact that photo frames can live in harmony with custom framing, you can create display vignettes that incorporate both custom frames and photo frames. While an eclectic mix of mouldings can be used, some industry suppliers produce photo frames with the same moulding designed for custom framing. With some artful arrangement, you can highlight these lines to the customer.

But selling photo frames is not just a holiday season product. These items can boost sales of a custom framing shop all year long. Some framers shy away from photo frames because of competition with department stores, gift shops, and the like. However, if your inventory of photo frames is unlike anything those types of stores sell, then your selection will stand out. While the quality of photo frames may be high at those other venues, access to photo frames from industry suppliers will put you a cut above.

Photo frames run the gamut in quality and price, from several dollars up to several hundred dollars. Knowing your market should work into your buying strategies. Don't underestimate what your customers will want in a photo frame. They may replace their photo frames several times a year, or they may be looking for a frame to be a permanent fixture.

Photo frames may not be custom in the sense of custom framing, but there are some ways to infuse the personal touch. Rob Markoff, owner of Artrageous! in San Diego, CA, tells shoppers about a service he offers with signage in his shop that reads, “It's OK to trim your photos! Let us help you fit your photo into the perfect frame.” Markoff says, “People are afraid to cut their pictures,” he says. “What if they have a 4"x6" photo, and the peripheral image is not so great? We can crop it right there in the store to fit into, say, a 3"x3" photo frame.” The result is a customized photo in a photo frame, and a satisfied customer.

You can also offer pre-cut mats that will fit standard-sized photo frames. For instance, stock mats with 8"x10" outside dimensions for a 5"x7" image. If a customer is looking for a frame for the smaller size, but doesn't like any of the 5"x7" frames, they can purchase the mat and they're all set. To keep this simple in terms of stocking, you can display neutral color mats.

Anyone who has hired a photographer for a special event, such as a wedding, knows about the stack of photo proofs they will receive. A number of these images will, of course, be made into larger portrait photos. Oftentimes, there are several images among the left-over proofs that the person still wants to display. The traditional

proof size for photos is 5"x5". Markoff points out that a new proof size, 4"x5" has begun to emerge, and framers would do well to carry this size as well.

Inform your customers that you have photo frames that can house these proofs. Whether you are the one framing their 16"x20" wedding portrait, or simply by creating a display showcasing these frames and the possibilities, you will maximize the visibility of these products.

### **Ready Made (to Order)**

The ready made frame is another item that can be utilized to complement, rather than compete with, your custom framing services. These frames are already joined, and usually come in standard sizes (5"x7" up to 30"x40"). Available from a variety of suppliers in the industry, ready made frames can give the customer just what they are looking for. The variety of finishes and styles in the industry today give the custom framer many choices in terms of what to carry in the shop. As with photo frames, custom touches can be added such as liner inserts that many suppliers offer with their designs. The upcoming holiday season can be another time when ready made frames come into play.

Like so many other aspects of running a shop, it's important to get inventory levels right so you're not out of an item when a customer wants it or, worse, sitting on leftover stock. "If the retailer can stock as many as five or six frames of each style and size, the merchandising works best," says Steve Marcus, president of Blue Ridge Moulding & Frame in

Roanoke, VA. "Then, the customer has more choices."

The selection of photo frame and ready made frames that you offer should reflect the character of your store. Those who purchase custom framing from you will expect to find the same quality and aesthetic in your photo and ready made selection as they do with your custom work.

Whether you've been stocking these items for years, or you're considering adding them to your product selection, an important thing to remember is that people won't know you offer them unless you show them. Utilize your front window and showroom space to display these items and be a destination for all types of framing needs. ■