



Goltz by Jay Goltz On Business

I Don't Mean To Metal, But...

Most people would agree that design is a critical element in running a successful frame business. Framing has become much more sophisticated with the use of fabrics, fillets, and many more color options for matting, in addition to the many shapes, sizes, and finishes of moulding. Good design not only includes the choice of materials and the size of the mats, but personal tastes and consideration of where the picture will be eventually displayed.

Whether or not you think about it, there is also business design. Decisions you make, consciously or unconsciously, are going to determine how your business works. Are you positioning your store to go after high-end, mid-range, or economy framing? Are you going after all of these? Do you only want to do conservation framing? Do you want to make as much money as possible or do you just want to frame what you enjoy?

You probably have answers to these questions, but the real issue here is whether or not you have designed your business to meet these goals. If you're like many people that I've talked to, you have made some critical decisions in your business that run contrary to what your goals are. While eating a doughnut when you are trying to lose weight is obviously not going to help you achieve your goal, these business decisions may not be as obviously linked to the consequences.

For instance, you decide you want to cater to as many people as possible to grow your business. Along with this, you want to be customer-driven—giving people what they want instead of what you think they should have. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't employ an intelligent sales process where

you educate the customer and give them the opportunity to change their mind.

I have a friend who owns a frame shop whose intent is to grow her business and make more money. I have been counseling her on how to increase her profit. So far, we have had excellent results. She has visited me in Chicago, and I have talked to her numerous times on the phone. During one of our phone conversations, she mentioned that she was concerned that chain stores were taking away some of her poster framing. We talked about the fact that she offers better framing design, better materials, and better service—all of these fit under what I would call business design.

Then, I was surprised to hear that she doesn't display metal frames because she doesn't like them. Well, while there is certainly some overlap in the customer segment that she and the chain stores are going after, independent frame shops have their niche and chain stores have theirs. There's a big difference between accepting some loss of business to a competitor and shoving it out the door. That's like a chef not having potatoes on the menu because he doesn't eat them!

I see a problem with her decision not to show metal frames. First of all, let's address the phrase, "I do not like metal frames." Whether it's the framer or the customer that says it, what they could be referring to is a #11 silver moulding that we all had 20 years ago. The metal frame of yesteryear bears little resemblance to the metal frame of today.

Another factor is that some people still feel that metal frames are for amateurs. (That's hardly the case.) Or that you can't make enough money selling them. (Maybe they have a broken calcula-

tor.) They can take the same markup as a wood frame and many are similar in price—and worth it.

A bigger selection of profiles, more architectural designs, many interesting colors, and different finishes, including cross-hatched and frosted gives a whole new meaning to the metal frame. Do they look better on a piece of art than a wood frame? Sometimes they do. Other times, they do not.

From my experience, 10% to 15% of what comes in for framing is best framed in a metal frame. To not carry them would risk losing some of that business. Again, this would be inconsistent with the stated desire to grow the business to its fullest potential. Even if you lose only 5% of business to a chain store or some other competitor, it is a huge amount of business.

You might say, “Oh my customers don’t mind. Nobody’s complaining.” I’ve heard this when I talk about slow delivery times, messy stores, bad lighting, and inconsistent pricing, among other things. Here is the big secret. Most people do not like to complain. It’s easier to go to a different store next time, especially when it’s open until 9 pm and on Sundays, like chain stores are.

The customers are not mad—they’re just redirected. This is by design, albeit unintentional design. Your customer is not going to tell you, “Lyn, I have a poster for my kid’s room that I just want a metal frame for so I’m going to “Craft World,” but I’ll continue giving you the better stuff.” This is not what I have in mind when I talk about “customer-driven.” The customer is supposed to drive the business decisions you make for your business; you are not supposed to drive your

customer to your competitors.

Things change. Even the sales process has changed. Fifteen or 20 years ago, it was not uncommon to start a sale with, “Would you like a wood or metal frame?” This brings me to my next point. The relationship between materials and perception has changed dramatically. It used to be that if you wanted a good shirt, that meant it was 100% cotton. A good coat was 100% wool. Some would argue, those were the good old days.

These days, my 19-year-old son, Mitchell, loves to buy Kenneth Cole clothes. If you’ve read any magazines lately or you have been in a men’s department, you will have noticed that Kenneth Cole has become one of hottest labels and is now opening its own stores in prestigious areas.

Mitchell recently announced to me that his new shirt is polyester—like it was something to be proud of! I laughed. It used to be that when something was made of polyester, it was cheap. Now, it’s the design that counts. And it counts in a big way. People are buying design. And a beautifully framed picture in a metal frame is a beautifully framed picture.

Prada is a high-end designer for many accessories. I recently saw a Prada purse that sells for \$565. And what’s it made of? Nylon. Special Prada nylon. Years ago, if you bought an expensive purse, it would be made out of leather. But not just any leather; it would be the finest, softest leather—but not nylon.

Now, to be fair, some of the man-made materials used today are of a higher quality than they used to be. Science and technology have improved many things. Polyester is not what it used to be. Nylon is not what it used to be. And metal

frames are not what they used to be.

Some of us old-timers (I remember when metal frames were thin metal wrapped over wood and nailed together) are at a disadvantage because we remember what they used to be, not what they are. That’s just one more advantage that teenagers (and other open minds) have—they don’t have any preconceived notions. They just have a lot of interesting experiences (that their parents pay for, in the case of teenagers).

Some people prefer metal frames not only for the look, but because of how they work. They screw together; it’s easier to adjust the wire; and the picture can easily be changed. There are very few customers who only want metal frames. By designing your business to eliminate that kind of sale, you might suffer the unintended consequence of losing a good customer who has plenty of framing to do—in metal *and* wood.

Design your business to meet your goals in the new year. And be successful by design. ■