



Goltz by Jay Goltz On Business

Is Your Business Customer-Driven?

Back in the 80s, the phrase “customer-driven” became popular in business circles. It is used to describe businesses that are sensitive to their customers’ needs and whose mission is to serve those needs. Many businesses over the years have become fabulously successful by fine-tuning their approach to customer service, selection, and merchandising.

The question is: Is your custom frame store customer-driven? Before you are quick to answer, “Of course,” let’s take a pause. In talking to many framers, I have noticed stark contrasts in their approaches to business—in particular, their approach to customers. Many custom frame shops *are* customer-driven. The decisions made in the store keep only two things in mind: What does the customer want? How can I best deliver that?

I have observed three other things that affect the decisions made in a frame shop that are *not* customer driven. Before I go any further, I want to be perfectly clear: I am not casting judgment; I am not criticizing; I am not telling anyone to change the way they do business. I am, however, illustrating that for a business to be its most financially successful, it is best to be customer driven. You’ll notice I said “financially” successful.

So if your business is not customer-driven, what’s driving it?

Art World-Driven. What does that mean? That means the store is driven by the same things that make the art world go round. Maybe it’s art conservation—whether the customer cares if the piece

will survive the next 100 years is not of your concern; saving the art is. You only use the highest level of conservation quality materials, which also happen to be the most expensive.

The samples in your store are not only beautifully framed, but they are mostly original artwork. You don’t hang any framed posters in your store because it’s not “real” art. (The fact is most art that’s framed in the world is not original. People frame a lot of things. Lots of posters. Lots of photographs. Lots of stuff that will never end up in a gallery or a museum.)

Interestingly enough, I find that many frame shop owners say that they own galleries and do framing. Upon further review, in many cases 90% of their revenue is from picture framing. But they want to own a gallery. As a result, their entire business runs like a gallery. They show art. Talk about art. Are immersed in art. Conserve art. Art is running the show.

Self-Driven. This one’s tricky. People frequently get into the frame business for personal reasons, not just financial ones. They want to control their own destiny. They want flexible hours. They love picture framing. They love art. They want to make money—though this is not necessarily the primary motivation. To some degree, everyone has aspects of their businesses that are self-driven. If they weren’t, they’d be open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. to take care of customers.

There are other things, though, that don’t require working any harder, but do require being more objective. In some cases this is a matter of

being more sensitive to the customers' needs and wants. Whether it's not recognizing that our customers' tastes are not the same as ours, or that customers can have very different income levels. Here are some examples of being "self-driven":

- You don't carry metal frames because you don't like them. Given that a significant segment of the population likes metal frames for their home or office, this is certainly not catering to their wants or needs. Metal sells everywhere to varying degrees. Metal moulding sales reps are visiting other frame shops. If your customer wants a metal frame, they will get it from you, or from your competitor.
- "My customers want conservation quality." Or just the opposite, "My customers don't want conservation quality, they just want it cheap." The answer is somewhere in the middle. No one's neighborhood is all one or the other. And very few customers are all one or the other. Each frame job is unique, and "customer driven" means considering both the art *and* the customer.
- Then there's the case of, "My customers won't spend that much on framing." It is very unlikely that you don't have customers that won't spend more money on framing. Do you offer fabric mats, 8-ply mat board, anti-reflective glass, magnificent moulding? There are very few custom framers in impoverished areas. Most frame shops have some segment of

their surrounding area that wants better framing and is willing to pay for it. You'll notice that I didn't say "of your customer base" because if you're not offering it, they're going to your competitors. You can count on that! Or more accurately, your competitors can count on that.

- Finally, there's the, "I don't like the way this person treats me. I don't need their business." You probably *don't* need their business. The question is: is it profitable business? Everyone has some difficult customers. And there's no question that some are not worth dealing with because they cause so much grief that they are not profitable, or they're going to give you an ulcer. If you are customer driven, you put up with most of them. You don't take things personally. You don't need to like every customer.

Employee-Driven. Employees are great. Good employees are loyal and helpful and smart. They are a critical element in growing your frame shop successfully. They are not necessarily business consultants. They do not necessarily have the business experience or knowledge to be making critical business decisions.

Their income level is probably much lower than your average customer, so they might think in different terms than your customer does. The customer may think that a \$400 frame job is inexpensive, while it may represent a week's take-home pay for the employee.

Some of the same problems of

being self-driven can be applicable for the employee that you rely on. Whether it's the owner or the employee who is "driving" the business, it's not the customer. In essence, we have two opportunities to be sidetracked: first by our own misconceptions or prejudices; next by our employees'.

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Successful retailers are always analyzing the market, are constantly re-evaluating their assumptions, and are hypersensitive to customers. Customer-driven is good. Because when they get what they want, you get what you want—financial success.

To truly be customer-driven, you need to get out of your own way and recognize that customers will never tell you, "I'm not coming back. You don't have what I want." Instead they'll say, "Thanks for the quote. Let me think about it." Sound familiar? ■