



## “Corner-ing” the Market

**B**ack in the old days of picture framing, probably in the '70s and before, if you had a corner sample on the wall it meant you actually had moulding in the back room. These days, most people buy chop service. Without the need to maintain inventory, and with the free corner samples provided by suppliers, the number of corner samples, on the average frame shop wall has increased dramatically. Not only are the walls filled with corner samples, but there are usually boxes of samples in the corner that are also filled.

The question is: Is more better? Is less better? How much is enough? Five hundred? Eight hundred? Two thousand? From my casual observations, I've noticed that most frame shops carry between 500 to 2,000 corner samples. While I can't prove it, I doubt that there is any relationship between the number of corner samples shown and the sales volume of a store. Since I inventory everything I show on the wall, it costs me thousands of dollars every time I add a few corners. I need to balance the cost of inventory with having a great selection. I carry 800 mouldings. If you only buy chop service, you may want to carry 2,000, figuring the better your selection the more money you'll make. I don't believe so, for the following reasons:

**Corner samples.** You are more impressed with the number of corner samples than your customers. A number of framers advertise the number of corner samples they have, but I don't think the customer cares whether you have 500 or 2,000. A carefully selected 1,000 corners is more efficient than that casual 2,000—many of which are old, don't sell, or are of lesser quality.

**Wall space is valuable.** Rather than hang up a bunch of corners that don't sell, it's better to use that space to highlight beautifully framed pictures, showing people what the finished product could look like.

**The sales process.** Part of the secret of doing higher volume framing is keeping the sales time as short as possible. Overwhelming customers with too many choices works to your disadvantage. It's like that with anything you buy.

**Ordering efficiencies.** It is more cost effective to place three orders a week with three suppliers than ten orders a week. It takes less time, and the freight charges will be less.

**Buying power.** You are never going to get any sort of discount from suppliers if you remain a very small customer. You are better off being important to three companies than insignificant to 15. Given that most of your suppliers are distributors, they have already chosen from many different manufacturers. I can't imagine why you would have to buy from 15 different distributors to get a good selection. If you do, you probably suffer from “I-Have-To-Have-It-itis.” *You* might have to have it, but your customer doesn't.

Making money requires both offering a great selection to customers and being efficient. Doing both requires setting aside some time to do a careful and intelligent analysis. The whole process probably will take six to 12 hours of analyzing prices, quality, colors, styles, and other intangibles such as salespeople's personal preferences.

Here's one last hint: Once you determine what corners you are discontinuing, throw them out! Leaving them in the dark under the counter won't make them grow into small frames! ■

by Jay Goltz

GOLTZ ON BUSINESS