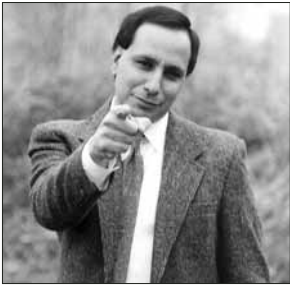


# The Guerrilla Framer



by  
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## *Tune-Up Tips To Improve Performance*

**I**t's coming. Before you know it, the busy holiday season will be upon us. During the all-important fourth quarter, many frame shops achieve sales of double to triple their normal volume. Sadly, many of these same businesses could do even better if it were not for inefficient production methods, poor advertising decisions, and a general lack of preparedness.

Framers sometimes get under the ether when it comes to holiday sales, counting how much business they're doing while failing to notice how much is slipping through their fingers. Instead of trimming trees, we're trimming profits.

To prevent this from happening, there are three areas you must address as you prepare for the holidays: advertising and promotion; production efficiency; and sales counter awareness. Let's think of our business as a vehicle that we intend to use to take us on vacation in January, after the holiday rush is over. To prepare for our trip, we'll need to perform a tune-up on our vehicle.

Advertising and promotion is perhaps the most overlooked area in maxi-

mizing holiday sales. "But I advertise," you say. Sure you do and you should. But when and how you advertise is important too. That's because the custom framing business is unique in that we must produce what we sell.

Restaurants have a similar problem; they solve it by taking reservations. Unfortunately, we have to use other

means to regulate the flow of sales traffic in our business. One way to do this is through the use of controlled advertising.

Think of advertising as the throttle of our vehicle. It lets us control sales and produce an orderly and manageable workflow. Press harder on the advertising pedal and sales take off. Ease up and they slow down.

When used properly, advertising can effectively regulate sales, which in turn controls production demand.

There are three ways to accelerate sales through advertising. One is simply to advertise more. Another is through the judicious use of the offer, which is the incentive you are providing prospective shoppers. The highest octane offers include the not-so-secret ingredient, free.

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Free is the most powerful ingredient you can use. It's so powerful that it can actually create traffic jams. Unfortunately, the engine of your vehicle (where profits are produced) will not perform efficiently if you use too much "free." The dark cloud you'll see in your rearview mirror will be all the residue of your profits going up in smoke.

However, we can dilute free with other, less potent ingredients to produce safer blends, such as the popular, "Buy One, Get One Half Price," or even the anemic, low-octane blend known as "10% Off." These blends, which are available in an almost unlimited number of formulations, let us balance sales with profit, to produce a less powerful, but longer lasting vehicle.

The third way to use the advertising throttle to control sales and production is by altering its timing. You can be sure of arriving at your destination on time if you get an early start in October. Advertising in October flushes out business early. Never wait until December because then you'll have trouble getting the work out the door. December should be reserved for serving last-minute shoppers (like me) who are not as concerned with price as they are with performance.

December customers don't ask, "How much?" Instead, they ask, "Can you have it ready by Christmas?" And they always say, "Please."

A good method for maximizing your holiday sales is to encourage your past customers to shop early. This will reduce production

demand in December. You can do this with a simple mailing in early to mid-October. Then, follow it up with another mailing in late October or early November.

We often think of advertising as only having two positions: on and off. But it's truly a variable speed throttle that can help us manage and maximize our holiday sales.

## **Production Efficiency**

I've written about production efficiency in the past, so I won't dwell on it too much here. Let me just say that a clean vehicle not only looks good, it runs better and provides a smoother, more comfortable ride.

If your shop is so cluttered that it's hard to walk around without going over, under, or around things, it time for The Big Clean. In general, I'm a slob. However, I do have one rule that relates to cleaning: If I haven't used it, worn it, or sold it within a year, it goes in the dumpster.

Tools and equipment also affect productivity and profits. Any vehicle can roll downhill, but going up hills is much tougher. Make sure your shop is properly equipped to handle the production peaks, not just the valleys. Frame shop equipment is like tires, eventually it wears out and must be replaced.

Also, as your business has grown so, too, have your production needs. The equipment needed to keep pace in a startup business is different than the higher volume demands of an established business. Periodically, equipment needs to be replaced or upgraded to keep

pace. For safety reasons and efficiency, make certain that all of your shop equipment and tools are in good working order.

## **Adjusting the Volume**

The first, and perhaps best, line of defense to prevent production backlogs comes from the sales counter. The sales counter is the sound system of your finely tuned vehicle. As with any good sound system, there are controls that let you adjust the volume and also filter out interference.

Not all December orders are holiday gifts. Determining which ones are can help you manage work flow better and let you continue to accept holiday orders later in the season. Your sales staff can help control volume by using a filtering process that separates holiday orders from non-holiday orders.

For years I've used a simple technique that increases December sales as it also reduces production jams. Beginning around early December, I begin asking customers if the order they are placing is a holiday order. If it's not, I ask if it would be convenient for them to pick up their finished order the week after Christmas. Usually they agree. Sometimes I offer an extra mat at no charge to show my appreciation. This technique really helps increase sales and also makes it easier for those doing the framing.

As you can see, reaching your vacation destination in January is easier if you get an early start and drive a well-tuned vehicle. I hope your journeys are always safe and enjoyable. ■