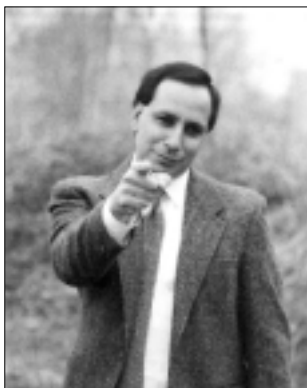


The Guerrilla Framer

by
Paul Cascio



Eight Magic Words

You want the money. You need the money. You know it's good business to collect a reasonable (50%) deposit at the time an order is placed. But, do you do that? No! Why not?

Do you have difficulty asking a customer for payment at the time an order is placed? Many framers do. I've known many framers who are, in all other respects, good at selling, who can close large sales with ease, yet still find themselves tongue-tied when it comes to asking the customer for a deposit.

If this describes you, you're not alone. For many framers, the mere thought of asking a customer for money, even a deposit on a custom order, causes their heart to race and their palms to sweat.

Fortunately, your suffering is over. I will share with you eight magic words that, after you use them a few times, will improve your cash flow, reduce your anxiety, increase sales, and virtually assure that completed orders will not remain in your store for more than just a few days.

Before I reveal the magic words, let's examine some of the reasons why it's so important to collect full, or at least half, payment with every custom framing order.

1. The most obvious reason is because it is custom. You are making a frame exactly to your customer's specifications. This frame is highly unlikely to have any value to anyone except the person placing the order. Order anything custom—a suit, a sofa, anything—and you expect to pay a substantial deposit with the order. Your customers expect to pay a substantial down payment on anything

that is custom made. Don't disappoint them and don't cheapen the perceived value of your product by failing to collect a deposit.

2. A custom framed photo of Johnny's third birthday party has no value except to Johnny's mom, the person who placed the order. Although she may fully intend to pick up and pay for her custom frame upon its completion, financial circumstances occasionally change for the worse.
3. A sale isn't really a sale until the customer has made full, or at least partial payment. Failing to collect some money at the time the order is placed is one of the biggest mistakes a framer can make because it encourages buyer's remorse. Buyer's remorse results in order cancellations. I'm sure you'll agree that nothing can ruin your week faster than a Monday morning order cancellation from the customer you spent an hour with on Saturday.
4. The customer benefits. People purchase custom framing when they have disposable income available to them. Even though they may pay with a credit card, mentally they are purchasing at the time when they feel they can afford it. If you fail to take that extra cash off their hands, you are doing them a disservice by forcing them to manage their extra cash until their order is ready. When you do this, you'd better hope it doesn't burn a hole in their pocket because you'll both lose.
5. Take a look at the long-finished orders that are gathering dust in

Paul Cascio, "The Guerrilla Framer," owns and operates A-Frame New & Used Equipment (www.framingequipment.com) as well as a retail custom framing business. Paul also conducts sales, management and marketing seminars for the framing industry. He will be teaching at The National Conference at the West Coast Art & Frame Show in Las Vegas, January 14-17, 2001.

your store. I'm willing to bet that at least 75% of your 30-day-old unclaimed orders have a full or significant balance due. Collecting a 50% deposit at the time the order is placed virtually ensures that completed orders will be picked up within days of notification.

6. Payment in hand is always better than a balance due. This is the money you will use to meet payroll and pay for other necessities such as champagne, theater tickets, or a big-screen television. (You could order framing materials, too.)
7. Finally, (and a reason that is often overlooked) when your customer returns to pick up a completed order, she is far more likely to bring in a new order if she doesn't owe you money on the previous order.

No Deposit, No Return

Whenever I train new employees or students at my school, I try to impress upon them the importance of obtaining full or partial pre-payment for custom framing at the time the order is placed and explain the reasons why. My philosophy is simple: "No Deposit, No Return." Always collect money with the order.

Don't Be A Deposit Wimp

Once you learn the eight magic words, collecting deposits will be as easy as cutting glass, and collecting full prepayment on many orders will become the rule rather than the exception.

Okay, here are the eight magic words: *"How would you like to pay for this?"*

Practice repeating these words

out loud. Then, say them to your next 10 customers. These eight words are a powerful sales close, but only if used properly.

The key to using them confidently and effectively is that after you say them, you must train yourself to remain silent. That's right. Do not say another word until the customer responds to your question. You must let the customer speak first. If you speak first, you lose. However, when the customer speaks first, no matter what the customer says, you win. Even if the

Guerrilla Tip

When you notify a customer that his or her order is ready, be sure to mention how great it looks and how much they will love it. Many times, customers will drop whatever they are doing and rush to your store to pick up their order immediately. Also, remind them to bring their next framing order with them.

customer asks a question or voices an objection, you still win as long as you can handle the objection effectively.

The use of this type of question is called an "assumptive" close. You are not asking the customer if she wants to buy. You assume she does. You are only asking how she will pay.

A percentage of customers respond to this question by asking, "Do I have to pay for the entire order now?" My response is to the point. "Many people prefer to pay the full amount now. When you do this, you'll be able to zip in and zip out when you pick up your frame. However, if you're not com-

fortable with that, you can pay half now and the remaining balance at pick up. If I'm not with another customer, it will only take a few minutes."

Now, let's examine my response. Notice that what I've done is given my customer two, and only two, options. Pay half or pay in full. While either of these is acceptable to me, naturally I'd prefer to receive full payment with the order. To increase my chance of receiving full payment up front, I've explained to the customer why that option benefits her and also implied that a wait is possible if I'm busy with another customer.

If a customer asks, "Why do I have to leave a deposit?" my answer is simple. "I'm sure you can appreciate that this is a custom order, made especially for you and to your specifications. Like anything that you custom order, a deposit is, well, customary." This usually produces a laugh—and a deposit.

Few customers will balk after this explanation. However, if they do, you have a judgment call to make. You could offer to accept a smaller deposit or allow the customer to pay at pick up. The value of the object being framed can be your guide.

Remember, the key is to remain silent after speaking the eight magic words. You've asked a question and you expect an answer. Don't let a few seconds of silence bother you. No matter what, let the customer be the next to speak. Use this technique and you are certain to close more sales, expedite the pick up of completed orders, and increase the number of new orders you receive at the time the completed order is picked up. ■