

The Guerrilla Framer



by
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Get Your Share of Corporate Sales... I Did

In today's economic climate, if you're not actively pursuing corporate sales, you are missing out on one of the most lucrative areas of custom framing. Although corporate purchasing has slowed due to the current recession, there's still plenty of business out there for the aggressive and creative framer.

What's so great about corporate sales, and why should you pursue them? Well, there's lots of things that are great about corporate sales and almost as many reasons why you should target corporate customers. In general, if you have more available time than you do money, that's the only reason you need to start pursuing corporate sales dollars.

To grow during the current economic slump, businesses need to find new markets for their products and services. Those framers who are used to sitting on their duff, waiting for the door chime to ring, are going to have a tough time surviving even a moderate recession. Corporate sales can make up for sagging retail sales and help you weather the storm by providing additional financial security for your framing and art business.

Who doesn't like large orders? Businesses are far more likely than retail customers to place orders ranging from ten pictures to several hundred. An average retail customer buys just one or two frames at a time. Corporate customers often need to decorate an entire work area that may be several thousand square feet or more.

Many retail customers consider art-

work an option, but to an image-conscious business owner, artwork helps define its public image. Displaying quality art and framing makes a business look established, successful, and permanent. This is especially true of professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, and financial planners.

A fine restaurant uses artwork to create atmosphere, define its status, and distinguish itself from a run-of-the-mill pizza joint. Walk into any pizza parlor and you will likely see buckled and faded posters of the Mediterranean in inexpensive plastic frames. But walk into an elegant restaurant and you will probably find high quality art displayed in custom frames. If you don't, make it a point to contact the owner ASAP. You've found your first sales prospect.

As a child growing up in Baltimore, one of my favorite restaurants was a renowned establishment called Hausner's. The menu was a thick, small book and the walls were covered with fine art from around the world including, I believe, an original Rembrandt. Hausner's was as much a museum as it was a restaurant and was high on the list of places to eat for out-of-town visitors. Sadly, Hausner's closed its doors recently, but remains an excellent example of how art can help define a business image.

Another nice feature of corporate sales is that your corporate contacts and other employees frequently become your retail customers as well. When your work is on display in a business, many people

see it, ask about it, and want to know where they can purchase similar art and framing for their home or business. When you complete a corporate order, be sure to leave plenty of business cards.

Guerrilla Tip: Leave a print or poster catalog along with an ample supply of sales literature in the corporate lunchroom after you've delivered an order. You'll be surprised how much additional business this will generate.

While retail customers frequently purchase only framing, businesses buy the artwork too. Many large companies use a standard frame for most prints and posters, generally in shiny silver. This allows you to purchase materials in quantity, thus increasing your profit.

Developing corporate clients involves an investment of time, creativity, and perseverance, but the rewards justify the effort. Once you establish a corporate relationship, the sales keep flowing month after month. It can take only a few large customers to help you reach your breakeven point each month.

Most corporate sales begin with a simple telephone call to a purchasing agent, business manager, or owner. Don't be put off by the fact that you're a small business. I remember my first corporate sales appointment 15 years ago when I was operating out of my basement. I had arranged a face-to-face meeting with Joe Canny, a buyer from Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, the jet engine maker and Connecticut's largest employer. The meeting was held in a large and intimidating conference room at P&W's sprawling facility.

I brought along samples of my work, and favorably impressed him. I reviewed the services that I would be able to provide and quoted a few sample prices that compared favorably to those of their current vendor. My confidence was starting to build as I sensed the possibility of some corporate business coming my way, when suddenly Mr. Canny said, "This looks great. Now we would like to tour your plant."

I nearly fell out of my chair. Instantly, my confidence evaporated and I became distressed by the

fact that my "plant" consisted of a basement in an old house—a basement with very low ceilings, stone walls, and none of the amenities that would impress a buyer from a Fortune 500 company.

Apologetically, I explained to Mr. Canny that I worked from home—my basement, in fact. By now I was feeling very small and was certain that my chances of making a sale had completely evaporated, as had my optimism. To my surprise, he didn't seem at all fazed by my low-class digs.

"Don't worry about it," Mr. Canny said. "Pratt & Whitney started from a garage."

"Really?" I replied. Suddenly there was new hope, but I still wasn't brimming with confidence. So I asked the question that eventually won the sale, "One car or two?"

A few weeks later, three representatives from Pratt & Whitney toured my "plant." We drank coffee in my kitchen/conference room and consummated the deal in my living room/office. I had my first corporate account. My business was off and running. ■