

by  
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## Is Your Team Ready Fourth Quarter Action?

**W**hat do professional basketball and custom picture framing have in common? Most of the real action takes place in the fourth quarter.

And the fourth quarter is about to begin! Is your business ready to handle the action? Let's find out.

For many frame shops, the final three months of the calendar year are like harvest time, providing an opportunity to produce sales and profits that could equal or exceed those of the entire rest of the year. If your staff isn't ready to handle the workload at the sales counter and in the shop, then you could lose out on a golden opportunity. Production bottlenecks in most frame shops typically occur as a result of three things: poor planning; inadequate equipment; and inability to adjust to a faster pace.

Planning involves many things, including ordering materials in a timely manner, scheduling advertising and promotions in such a way that you maximize sales without exceeding production capacity.

Not having basic materials on hand is a cardinal sin that results in avoidable production backups. Foamboard, glass, and fitting hardware and materials, such as putty, should always be kept in stock. If you're not going to carry a full line of matboard, I advise keeping a supply of basic colors, such as white, off-white, black, and gold.

While it's practical to order frame

moulding as needed, having the necessary materials to start and finish jobs is critical to avoiding production backups. There's nothing more frustrating to a framer than having to set aside a work in progress due to lack of materials.

Many suppliers increase their delivery schedule in November and December. You can take advantage of these more frequent deliveries by ordering materials twice a week, rather than the usual once per week. The faster you get work out the door, the later and more frequently that you'll be able to advertise and accept holiday orders.

Now is a great time to upgrade equipment. Increase production speed capability by investing in better, faster equipment and it can pay for itself in just one season. High quality joining can save valuable time by reducing the need to putty frame corners and nail holes. Double miter saws can dramatically cut production time and reduce profit lost in scrap.

During much of the year, advertising drives production; in the fourth quarter, the opposite is true. If you've ever had to curtail an ad campaign because you couldn't get the work out the door, you know what I mean.

The best advice I can give is to advertise early for holiday orders. The more sales you make in October and early November, the more orders you'll be able to take in December. Get busy.

Plan advertising promotions to

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encourage early holiday purchasing. Offer greater incentives earlier in the season. Use mailings to your past customers to encourage earlier purchases. Reduce discounts as the holidays approach. Announce, but do so a couple of weeks in advance, the temporary suspension of any discount programs you provide at other times during the year.

Don't wait to hire until you are overwhelmed in the fourth quarter. Hire people in September to train them for when it does get busy. You will have showed them

the way you do things and they will get to know the way your shop works. People hired early will adjust to a faster pace as they are trained.

The keys to maximizing fourth quarter success are to bring holiday orders in as early as possible and to maximize production capacity so as to extend the selling season as late as possible. If you follow both of these rules of the season, your profits will reach new highs and your stress level won't. Have a great fourth quarter. ■

### **Guerrilla Tip**

Unlike most retail businesses, in custom picture framing, everything you sell must be produced. This basic fact of life in the custom framing industry means that the holiday sales season is shortened by the length of your production cycle. Reduce the length of your production cycle and you increase the holiday season.