

# The Guerilla Framer

Because It's A Jungle Out There

by  
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## Guerilla Advertising Tips

**W**hen a group of frame shop owners gets together, invariably the topic of conversation at some point will turn to advertising. This should come as no surprise. After all, advertising is considered to be the lifeblood of retail businesses. Each month we dutifully reinvest a significant portion of the previous month's revenue into new advertising to continue a vicious cycle that seems never-ending. Unfortunately, many of our advertising dollars are wasted and almost all represent a gamble of unknown odds.

Despite the many books that are available on the subject, the art (some like to believe it's a science) of advertising remains both a mystery and a gamble—yet it is a necessary evil.

Complicated and expensive, advertising decisions involve many variables, such as when to advertise, where to advertise, what media to use, how often to advertise, and what message to deliver.

Beginning this month, and continuing periodically, I'll present a series of what I hope you will find to be informative and useful articles devoted to advertising for the retail framing business. And while there are no guaranteed formulas for successful advertising, I hope to provide you with some guidelines and suggestions that can help reduce the risks and expense of

advertising and at the same time improve the results you receive.

I'll begin by sharing some of the basic advertising strategies and rules that I teach in my seminars. I should point out that even though I worked in the advertising industry for a while, because custom framing is such a unique service catering to a select portion of the population, most of what I've learned has come from my 13 years of framing experience and experimentation.

During those 13 years the majority of my advertising experiments were successful. Admittedly however, many were not and turned out to be a complete waste of money. Fortunately, I've learned as much from the failures as from the successes. Through my framing equipment business, A-Frame New and Used Equipment, I've also had the opportunity to speak with many framers around the country who have most generously shared their experiences with me.

Here are what I consider the "13 basics of Guerilla advertising.

1. Maintain a constant advertising presence. Keep in mind that advertising has a cumulative effect. Keep your name in public on a regular basis and you'll not only build name awareness, but also hopefully become part of the public consciousness.

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*Guerilla Tip: The worst excuse I've ever heard for not advertising is from a framer who said his shop wasn't busy enough to afford advertising.*

2. Determine your logical market area, and then focus your advertising on that area. Don't waste your advertising dollars in towns that are outside your market area. Select advertising media that focuses on your geographic target. Avoid those, such as broadcast television and radio stations, that spread your message to unlikely prospects in faraway places.

Keep in mind that many customers choose a framer based on proximity. Unless you can offer a compelling reason why someone should travel a great distance to patronize your business, you are probably better off concentrating your advertising on potential customers who live or work near your store. Later, when you've established local dominance, you can begin to broaden your reach.

3. Timing is everything: Go hunting when the ducks are flying. Advertise more during the peak seasons, which are spring and fall in most parts of the country. Look to the furniture stores for guidance; advertise when they do. Spend less during traditionally slow periods.

4. In print advertising, use large ads. Many businesses waste money on business card-sized ads in their local newspaper, and then complain that print advertising doesn't work. Of course it doesn't work; no one saw it!

Try running an ad that's large enough to be passively visible. That is, at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a page or larger. Sure it costs a lot more to run large ads, and you may not be able to advertise quite as often, but the results will justify the expense. Large ads also let you convey more information about your business.

5. Institutional vs. promotional advertising. Institutional ads don't include special offers such as sales or coupons. Promotional ads announce sales, special discounts and other limited-time offers.

Although you won't get the same immediate response

from institutional advertising that you get from running promos, institutional ads can provide a greater cumulative effect.

Promotional advertising, such as coupons, can produce immediate, even dramatic results, on a short-term basis. However, you should be aware that such promotions will reduce your normal profit margin. They also have other hidden costs.

For example, if you run a big sale this month, you may create a strong immediate demand for framing but you'll also mortgage some of next month's sales. And, if you run sales frequently, your customers will eventually become conditioned to wait for a sale before making a purchase. Before you decide to run a sale, study the long-term effects.

6. Make compelling offers. If you decide to use coupons, be sure your offer is dramatic enough to excite the customer. Few people will be motivated by a 10% discount or a \$5 coupon. Follow the lead of major retailers in other industries. Use short expiration dates to produce immediate action. Longer expiration dates give customers an opportunity to procrastinate.

7. Use the Yellow Pages to anchor your other advertising. Many prospects will remember your name from a newspaper, radio or television ad, but often they'll forget your address or phone number. They'll turn to the Yellow Pages when it's time to make a purchase. If you're not a Yellow Pages advertiser, you may be spending money to provide customers for your competitors.

*Guerilla Tip: Even if you have a large ad in the Yellow Pages, it may be worthwhile to include, "Look for us in the White Pages," in all your other advertising. This keeps potential customers away from your competitor's ads.*

8. Track the results. Ask each customer why he or she chose to do business with you.

9. Never pay full price for advertising. Advertising is a perishable commodity. This is particularly true with radio and television where unsold airtime is lost forever. Ad

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agencies typically receive a 15% discount on advertising. If you are acting as your own agency, there's no reason why you shouldn't expect and receive the same discount.

10. Don't be afraid to experiment. Try new offers and media. Billboards, mass mail coupons and cable television are all worth a try.

11. Your best future prospects are your past customers. Maintain an in-house mailing list of all your customers and send mailings to them on a regular basis. For example, *Picture Framing Magazine* provides a quarterly newsletter customized for the framer to send out to their customers. Never ever run an ad that offers savings for "new customers only." Why penalize someone for being a good customer? If I were a loyal customer and I read that in an ad, I'd become an ex-customer.

12. Never run phony sales. I know of many business-

es who markup prices before running a sale. One of my competitors does this. I know because I "shop" my competitors on a regular basis. This person even notes in her promotional ad for the sale, "applies to incoming orders only." In my opinion, this is not only dishonest, it's ridiculous for two reasons. First, consumers are much smarter than many of us realize. They can recognize these nonsale sales. Secondly, she is penalizing customers who purchased from her without special incentives.

One deceptive tactic that is sure to backfire over time is to run a sale continuously. This same framer ran a 20% off spring special earlier this year that lasted from March through August.

13. Always honor your competitor's coupons. The value of a new customer is far greater than the face value of the coupon. ■