

Mastering Mounting



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Golden Profits

When I think of gold, I think of success. Gold nuggets unearthed by eager miners; 24 karat gold jewelry worn by everyone from a happy young bride to a Fortune 500 CEO; the gold medal at the Olympics; and the symbolic gold coins of profit. Profits are the prize which all small businesses strive for, and the proof of their successes.

Old School Profits

According to my father, profits are the money left in the bank account after all the bills are paid—after the overhead, in other words. Being a second generation, self-employed, small businessperson is that was the basic concepts I learned. It means you charge the customer for the items, pay out to make the business run, and only then check to see if there is any money left for personal draw at the end of the month.

Now, many years after my father's death, I've learned there is a better way to run a business, and that profits, (as well as owner salary), are all part of how to price a product or service in the first place. It seems my father never thought his labor was really worth anything. (It was only what made him a craftsman and in turn earned him a living.)

Today, we all realize that we need to consider our income as an integral portion of business expenses, then plan on paying that expense every month like rent or electricity. Note that I'm not writing about pricing, (that's not my specialty), but how to recognize available income by delving into mounting.

Mounting is Part of the Whole Picture

When designing any custom framing project, whether a single job or large production job, selling the concept of mounting should not be much of an option for the customer. Yes, we need to discuss conservation/preservation issues, but when the project is an inexpensive poster print, there are more mounting options.

There are an assortment of products and methods for cold, hot, or conservation mounting—all of which may all be used to affix an image to a substrate. Regardless of technique, if it looks good, the customer will be happy. However, if it bubbles or cockles, then your customer may not bring you future framing projects. The customer has no way of knowing the ill fated mounting might be the result of the wrong mounting technique rather than the expertise of the framer. Quite honestly they don't care. In most cases they just wanted it flat.

Choose the Right Technique

Knowing which mounting method is the correct one is the framer's job. If a customer does not tell you that this poster is to be hung in the bathroom and subjected to extremes of heat and humidity, how would you know that dry mounting should be done rather than spray mounting? You need to ask. It's imperative to find out at the design counter where the piece will be hung, as well as the more traditional facts concerning color, lighting, and furniture styles.

After preservation mounting techniques have been set aside, the decision of which mounting technique to use should be left to the framer, not the customer. It is not that any mounting process is better than another, but that one might be better suited for the job.

For example, high humidity versus dryness impacts board expansion and contraction which in turn reacts upon the item mounted. A resin-coated (RC) photograph is relatively stable in that it won't expand and contract much with intermittent excesses of humidity and dryness. On the other hand, a matboard which has no coated surface will expand a great deal when exposed to excesses of humidity.

The photo, being resin coated, will not absorb adhesives for maximum bond. Now, if that RC photo is mounted to a matboard or other solid paper board, its bond will be challenged in normal expansion and contraction variations. The environmental variations in a room such as a bathroom can cause the mounting to fail when the method selected is one weakened by such high humidity and lack of absorption.

Mounting Repercussions

When any mounting fails, it impacts profits. We all know that "redo" projects are a direct hit because it is not the customer's fault if our choice of mounting method was wrong. On the other hand, if the customer turned down your recommended mounting method, (even after you warned them of the

possible failures), you should consider charging them.

This whole situation may be avoided by showing examples, such as a small, buckled 8x10" half mounted sample, or a half rippled mounted 24x36" matted poster. Then the customer sees what could happen if they leave the image unmounted to save money.

Profits From A Press

Unlike any other form of mounting, when there is a dry mount press available, there are numerous ways in which to increase profits.

I've heard many framers who've purchased existing shops or had the opportunity to buy equipment from another business, say that they were "stuck" with a press. It breaks my heart to hear that.

After all, the profit potential of a hot vacuum or mechanical press may be double or triple over cold mounting techniques. Mounting is only half of the potential work any heat press can do; laminating is the other half. Both should be tapped into to realize total profit potential (see Diagram 1).

If your targeted market is mounting and there is a press operator working the machine every minute of the day, every day while open for business, maximum profits are indeed being derived from mounting alone. Most framers, however, only run their presses when projects are due. In that case, they aren't getting the most from that equipment.

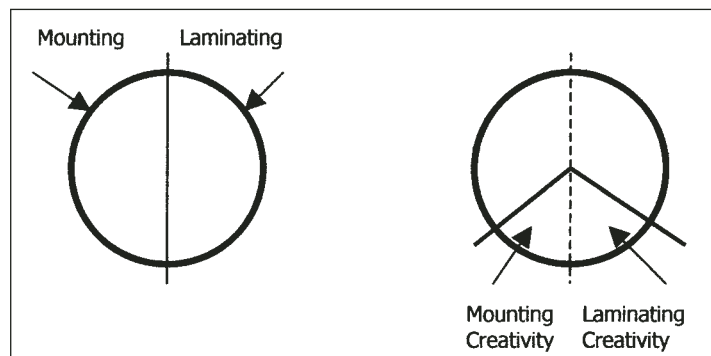


Diagram 1: Mounting represents only half of the potential use for a heat press. The other half is laminating. The overlapped wedge is creativity. It takes all three to maximize the gold in the press.

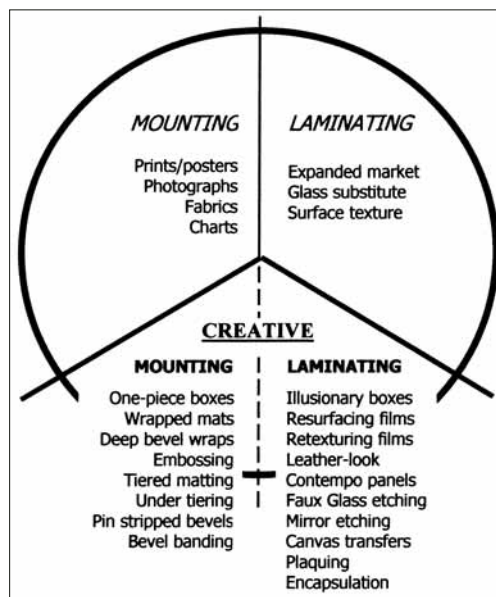


Diagram 2: Heat Mounting Equipment — When considering profit potential from a hot vacuum or mechanical press, the entire picture of mounting and laminating must be considered first. Then consider the additional potential for both mounting and laminating creativity.

Expand Into Laminating

The additional investment required to begin laminating with your existing mounting press is minimal. Simply by adding a roll vinyl laminate, overlay foam, and perhaps an optional perforator, you can begin. Laminating within a press uses vinyl films to heat-set a surface layer designed as a glass substitute. Encapsulation (or two-sided lamination) with polyester films is not recommended with this type of equipment, as it was designed for use with roller laminators and high tack pressure-sensitive adhesives.

Introducing laminating services

will also require additional marketing to ensure growth and public awareness. The Yellow Pages, mailers, and networking all provide good sources for telling the world of your new services. Press releases and promotionals are also good approaches, as you might do when introducing a new piece of equipment such as a computerized mat cutter. (See "CMC Series: Part 2", *PFM*, July 2001).

Potential sales for surface laminating can be found wherever glass is not desirable. Any place that deals with children regularly, such as day-care centers, preschools, nurseries, and pediatricians' offices would be perfect. The same is true for nursing homes and hospitals. Detention facilities and jails are also places where safety is an issue and glass is avoided.

Engineering and architectural firms, city, state, and federal offices may need laminating services to prepare materials such as charts for presentation. Real estate agencies need maps for pinning home locations and for drawing on with washable markers. Think of the market potential there alone! Also consider: sporting goods stores; hunting, fishing, hiking and camping information centers; or recreational areas. The possibilities are virtually endless.

Digital Image Alert!

The one thing you must be careful of is using heat-set vinyl laminates with digital images. Since high heats are used to set the laminates, the same warnings I issue for mounting digital images holds true for *laminating* them.

When digital manufacturers suggest surface laminating for their images, they are referring to cold lamination methods and high tack pressure-sensitive mounting with roller laminators. These are the kind usually found in large reprographics firms, advertising agencies, and photo labs, and are not generally in custom frame shops.

Reveling in Creativity

Once mounting and laminating are both offered and the press is manned continually during business hours, then full profit potential is present. However, if the press is still not utilized the entire time, there is yet another profit-making segment which still may remain untapped.

This is the creative portion of heat presses where the most fun and greatest profits lie. Creative applications are any use of mounting and/or laminating materials to cre-

ate an innovative design with a heat press. In Diagram 2, the mounting potential of a heat press is illustrated by a circle divided first in half, then subdivided into thirds. This new segment overlaps into both mounting and laminating.

Tiered matting with colored core boards and art papers; one-piece shadow boxes; and wrapped and embossed mats all fall into mounting creativity. Resurfacing, refinishing, and retexturing films; leather-look; contempo panels; faux glass etching; mirror designing; embossing; and canvas transferring of both photos and prints overlap into laminating creativity.

Selling mounting and laminating creativity can be quite simple. Embossed mats, shadow boxes, and faux glass etching are all the ultimate in custom framing and design. And as I've mentioned in previous articles, always sell the \$50.00 difference in price between a 16-ply tiered mat design and a standard double mat. Creative applications sell themselves as long as they are showcased.

Mounting creativity is not limited to heat presses only; heat only limits use of heat-set over laminates. There are many profit-producing techniques such as wrapped mats,

embossed mats, shadow boxes, and even tiered mats that can be made with cold mounting methods (see Diagram 3). Remember, time is money, and when cold mounting methods become too time intensive, profits go down. Yes, your labor is worth something.

The Whole Profit Picture

As long as any hot or cold press is used continually for mounting during the course of each business day, and if projects are priced appropriately for all materials and overhead, mounting alone is producing maximum profits. If heat equipment is used for both mounting and laminating all day, it is also used to its maximum profit potential. If, however, the cold vacuum frame or hot mechanical press sits idle part of the day and no creative applications are employed, then perhaps only one-half to one-third of the available profits are being realized.

When considering heat press profits, if you only take mounting into consideration, it could take

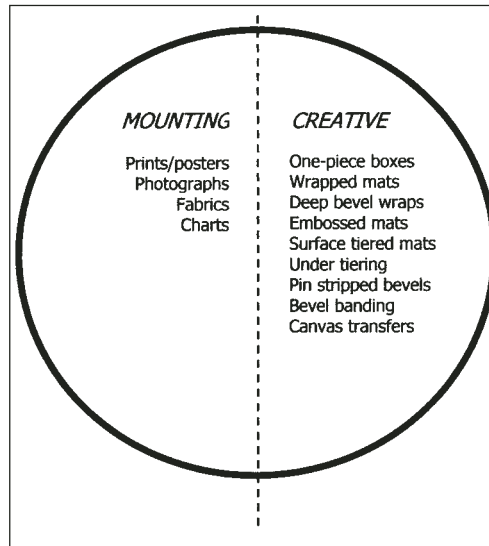


Diagram 3: Cold Mounting Equipment — With a cold vacuum frame, creative applications for profits are limited to cold adhesives and mounting one layer at a time. No use of heat-set laminates may be used.

twice as long to bring in \$1000 than if you include laminating in the equation. The whole picture cannot truly be viewed until the aspects of creativity profits are also added. Successful profit dollars comes with press usage that includes mounting, laminating, and creative applications. In turn, the whole profit picture cannot be viewed with a cold vacuum frame if both mounting and creativity are not included.

Added profits can be derived in many ways—selling up, selecting the correct mounting methods for the project, or using your mounting equipment in all ways possible. Profits aren't always a matter of thinking outside the box, but creative thinking may lead to creative designing, and in turn, may lead to those golden profits. ■

A more in-depth approach to the world of creative profits including projects, techniques, and pricing is found in my books Creative Mounting, Wrapping, And Laminating and The Mounting And Laminating Handbook.