

Mastering Mounting

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Can Mounting Sell Itself?

Once the value of an item has been determined (a topic I discussed in the last issue), determining how to frame it is the next step. This was also discussed in Part One of the “Essence of Design” series (*PFM*, February 2000) during the five stages of design explanation. But what exactly is “selling”? The act of selling is defined as the, “transfer of goods or services in exchange for money.” Many articles have been written and classes taught on how to sell, how to persuade a potential buyer, how to introduce him to the product or service he cannot live without.

So, does mounting actually fall into the category of something a customer cannot live without? The answer is yes—mounting is a requirement, a vital part of the framed presentation. There will always be some type of mounting required to suspend, display, or hold in place the item being framed.

Once the value of the artwork or collectible has been determined (Stage One: Definition), then consider whether it is to be treated as decorative or fine art (which is Stage Three: Analysis). Stage Two is Creativity, which is discussed in Part One of “Essence of Design.” At this point it should be determined whether the project

requires preservation mounting or if it may be securely attached to a backing board. Once conservation or preservation mounting methods are not a concern in the project, it is up to the framer as to how to approach the sale of a more permanent mounting.

Mounting Statics

If you own a mounting system of any kind, whether cold or hot, and you sell poster graphics, then 90% of these images you sell should be mounted when they are sold. Generally, these posters will also be framed, but when selling decorative poster art, mounting is not often discussed. Since it remains the job of framer to enhance and protect any piece of art (even posters), then mounting methods must be considered.

While either cold or hot methods may be used to affix any selected image to a substrate, the beauty of heat mounting includes three features: the speed and cleanliness with which prints may be mounted; the ease and repetitive predictability surrounding the process; and the long-term permanence of a professional presentation. Quite simply, if it looks good, the customer will remain happy.

However, if it bubbles or cockles, then your customer may not give you repeat

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business. Most likely, the customer won't know that it could be the particular process or selected mounting technique that failed, rather than the skills of the framer.

For example, if a customer does not tell you that a poster is to be hung in the bathroom, and therefore subjected to extremes of heat and humidity, how will you know that dry mounting rather than spray mounting should be done? At the design counter, it is imperative to ask questions, such as, "Where is this to be hung?" Also, find out about the colors, lighting, and furniture styles of the room for which it is intended.

Approaching the Sale

Consider the possibility of selling all framed posters mounted (open edition paper art, posters, and card images, not limited editions or photographs which may require special handling). Any time the act of selling has been engaged, it is the approach and language that controls the sale. Gaining control during the sale is easy to do, but it also easy to lose.

Asking a customer if (or how) they would like a project to be mounted relinquishes design and sales control to them. Believe me, if they could frame the project themselves, they probably would. They have chosen to bring the framing to a custom framer because they prefer a professional do the job.



PHOTO 1

The best ways to discuss mounting is to illustrate what can happen if an item is not properly mounted. The center left sampler was half dry mounted then dampened with a sponge to encourage warping. Far lower right sampler illustrates mounted damaged paper. Having samples that your customers can touch are worth a thousand words apiece, their weight in gold, and are priceless!



PHOTO 2

This is a Larson-Juhl ad that appeared in PFM. It is dry mounted across the top with the bottom left hanging free to gently cockle from natural environmental humidity. The thinner the chosen paper sample the better (or worse) it will look.

So sell like the knowledgeable professional you are!

Mounting is neither the most glamorous nor the most well understood part of frame design. During business classes we are often taught not to break down the total quoted price into individual portions, but rather to simply quote the entire job.

I suggest slightly modifying that "bottom line" technique, because first time frame customers have a hard time understanding the prices of what they may interpret as "the high cost of picture framing." Use the same basic pricing technique, but make it more palatable by keeping things grouped, like all matting as one charge, or the total of the stacked mouldings as one frame charge.

The Actual Sales Pitch

Once the total retail price of the framing has been calculated, turn to the client and present the total as, "Okay, Ms. Paschke, the total framing job comes to \$375.57. Now that includes \$150 for the custom sized barnwood frame (stacked, but not mentioned), \$25 for conservation glazing, and \$125 for the triple-tiered panel mat with accent strip and top fillet with spacers, as we have selected for you here, bringing it to the \$375.57, which of course also includes all mounting and fitting."

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One of two things will occur at that point: either they will go into immediate sticker shock; or they may not even notice your reference to mounting and fitting at all. If no questions are asked, there is obviously no additional discussion over the design. But deafening dead silence could also indicate a problem, so do not hesitate to ask for the sale, with, “That’s 50% down or you may pay the total now if you prefer.”

If Mounting Is Questioned

Usually, customers with higher end sales, even posters, are more concerned with the presentation and the framer’s expertise than with mounting. About 50% of the time your customers will indeed hear the entire verbiage of the pitch (including the sneaky mounting and fitting part), and elect to respond only to the total bottom line price.

Professional shoppers however, like the ones who spend time viewing and buying from the Internet and home shopping networks on television, have been trained to hear everything and question what they do not understand. Those are the ones who may question the difference between mounting and fitting and ask what they mean and why they are both necessary for their particular project. This is when a picture is worth a thousand words. The best way to sell mounting is through visual examples of poorly mounted items (see Photo 1).

The very best sample is a large 24” x 36”, dark, glossy, lightweight, and inexpensive poster. Mount only the top half, leaving the bottom to hang free behind a single mat. Then live with your new sample, and watch the lower half bubble and cockle as you shower with it for the next

week. An environment of extreme steam and humidity will accelerate the paper expansion and will illustrate the physical changes that occur in paper due to moisture absorption (see Photo 2).



PHOTO 3
This was a flier that Seal Products used to distribute. I found it useful as a display since it discusses exactly what is showcased in the 8”x 10” sample.

Most pricing objections are from people who want inexpensive, lightweight, and disposable posters and magazine prints framed for the bathroom, playroom, or basement. Any time a framed piece is placed in a moist environment, mounting warpage and paper cockling can occur. When framing for homes at Cape Cod or the Florida Keys, this may be obvious, but what about buildings with swamp cooling systems, or on private yachts? The cost of mounting should never be the issue in these extremes, though preservation could be.

Word of Mouth

Deciding where to hang a masterpiece mounting sample in your shop is also important. By displaying it high up the wall toward the storefront where reflection and glare is best, the cockling will be showcased even more. It should also be easy to see from the design area. That way, you can point it out when specific mounting questions arise. Also make it obvious that the cockling is intentional; maybe even with a sign noting the buckling. If it simply looks like a bad mounting job, that is not the best sales pitch for your skills.

It has been often said that word of mouth is the best advertising we can get. Well here’s one. I have had customers come in with friends and relatives who needed framing done and then when it came to the mounting, they

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dogmatically state, “Marge, make sure you get it mounted so it doesn’t end up looking like that one,” as they turn to point at the one on my display wall. So it works for me!

Additional Samples

If showering with your new poster sample is too much trouble or too time-intensive, simply mist or wipe down the unmounted half of the poster with a heavily saturated sponge. It’s okay if it looks bad; the worse it looks, the better it will sell the concept.

In addition to that large framed wall sample, you should have an 8”x10” sampler under the counter that the customer can touch and examine closer. This will make sales easier and will simplify the entire selling process (see Photo 3).

Another great use for samples, (either small under the counter ones or full wall samples), is to poignantly illustrate that, as framers, we cannot heal broken paper fibers. When customers come in with folded maps, aged nonvaluable folded papers, or rolled items, they will ask if we can flatten them. As framers, we realize we can mount them flat and that the broken fibers will still be visible. But if you tell that customer, “Why yes, we can flatten it for you,” and you do not show them a sample of a damaged mounted paper with the broken fibers still visible, they will expect the fibers to be invisible (see Photo 4). It will save you lots of headaches and will improve customer relations by having numerous samples on display.

So How Do You Sell Mounting?

First, make certain that 90% of the poster sales that walk out your front door have been mounted in some way. Second, never ask if they want it mounted. There’s always a 50/50 chance they might say no if given the option.

Quote prices by stating “This price of course includes all

mounting and fitting charges.” Third, create wonderfully cockled visual samples by showering with your favorite prints to best illustrate permanent paper damage from excesses of humidity and moisture.

Fourth, when making any sales presentation, always sell up. Start with more than anticipated, like the quadruple mat for the targeted triple or stacked mouldings for a single frame. But remember, this does

not apply to mounting. In many cases, the proposed location (whether it be bathroom or yacht) will dictate the proper mounting technique for decorative art.

And fifth, never hesitate to ask for the sale. The best frame design in the world can be sabotaged by a bad mounting presentation or “sales interruptus” (allowing the final closure of the sale to be taken over by the customer). Losing control of the sale might lose you the mounting sale, but could also cost you the entire job. A positive attitude, knowing what must be done to make the best presentation, and standing by your expertise is what will maintain control and win your mounting sale in the process. ■



PHOTO 4
A slightly different sampler, this one illustrates how much “healing” is actually possible when a customer brings in damaged paper, such as a worn folded map, and wants it flattened.