



STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Prints Charming Gallery in St. Louis, MO, uses attractive displays to appeal to customers and create additional sales.

By Greg Perkins, CPF

FROM RENOVATED INTERIORS TO CREATIVE MARKETING, HERE ARE SOME GREAT IDEAS FRAMERS CAN USE TO IMPROVE THEIR BUSINESSES FOR 2017

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all you had to do was unlock your door each morning and people with loads of money flooded in to purchase custom framing? In the real world, there are lots of things you have to do to make people aware your business even exists. Once people find you, there are still more things you have to do to get them inspired to do business with you, like an eye-catching window display. Once people decide to pay you a visit, it's also necessary to provide them with a great retail experience, including topnotch service and a store filled with exciting ideas and ambience. If you do this well, they may reward you with their future business. Here's what your peers have been doing to set their businesses up for success in 2017.

Create an Attractive Storefront

A good looking storefront can be as varied as the business within. Multiple factors go into planning the perfect look for your business. Ideally, your store's outward appearance should relate to your business image. The quality of the design and the materials can set the tone for your price points, meaning a discount framer typically doesn't need the same caliber of storefront as a higher-end shop. The idea is to create a one-of-a-kind look that meshes with your business, stands out from neighboring stores, and helps you achieve your goals.

D. Pratt Framers in Kittery, ME, is owned by David Pratt. His storefront is a prime example of how a well-designed façade can create

interest both during the day and in the evening, when the well-lit, stylish interior attracts the attention of passers-by. So, even for a store not open at night, the storefront can still be a great tool for promoting your business.

Similarly, Jaclyn Civins of Evalyn Dunn Gallery in Westfield, NJ, can attest to the fact that a beautiful storefront is important. When her

store was ready to take its business to the next level, they called on industry educator Stuart Altschuler to assist in a total store remodeling. The gallery added 900 square feet and now has a dramatically improved curb appeal. The changes resulted in a 33 percent increase in sales.

While attending last year's WCAF, Bob Woodrum and his wife, Teri, owners of Sausalito Picture Framing in Sausalito, CA, were motivated to give their business a facelift, including replacing their awning's fabric covering. "We had to be careful because city building codes would only allow an awning less than half the size of ours. We got around this issue and the associated \$2,200 permit fee by only replacing the canvas and leaving the frame attached to the building. We also repainted the trim around the windows to set the storefront off from the rest of a bland, landlord-owned building. The paint was a \$20 investment that paid off nicely. We've never been busier."

Before changing your storefront, be sure to read the fine print in your lease and be aware of city codes. Although there may be some restrictions, focus on what you can do to make your shop look its best. If you have a long track record, you may even consider going to the landlord or city offices to propose what you want to do, explaining that it is in the best interest of your long-term success. It is always possible to get a variance.

If there's no possibility of improving your store's exterior, think about what you can do inside that can be seen from the outside. Perhaps you can apply a large decal of a frame on your front window to create a grand scale, attention-grabbing border. Or, if you don't have a backdrop wall to display framed art in your window, add one and paint it



D. Pratt Framers in Kittery, ME, created a storefront that works around the clock.

a color that will help your displays stand out, giving them greater impact.

Outside the Box

Think beyond your exterior walls. If you're on a busy street, it's imperative to do something to grab people's attention. Your sign alone may not be enough, so think of other ways to stand out.

When Mikki Kavich of Mikki's Frames in

Crossville, TN, looked for ways to get people to notice her store, she added framed art on an exterior wall. Over the years, she has changed it, providing a fresh new look. Not only is it unexpected to have a grouping of frames on an outside wall, but it also helps people know what they will find inside. For a recent fall frame sale, Kavich also brought some sale items out onto the sidewalk and added a few unexpected elements, such as scarecrow mannequins, cornstalks, and pumpkins. The result was an eye-catching display that brought in new customers.

Unconventional ideas have also been part of Ed Pioli's plan for Walden Framers in Lexington, MA, since it opened two years ago. "Job one from day one has been to be seen and heard. Once we're found, it's just a matter of fit—do people feel good about giving us their framing projects? We want people to know what Walden Framers is all about before they open the door. We have a tiny neighborhood frame shop with an independent attitude. Our plan is to show people who we are and what we do. We're never going to get everyone's business, so we put our personality right up front," says Pioli. A flower-covered bicycle in front of the shop is just one example of his distinctive approach—something that can become a local landmark and a way to direct new customers to the business.

Pioli knew from the outset that he wanted to be different from other framing businesses. Rather than holding frequent sales or buying all of the latest computerized equipment, he intentionally chose hand tools to deliver old-time craftsmanship. And it isn't just his store that sets his business apart; it's also his unique marketing materials and personal appearance, which often includes wearing his

trademark kilts. There's also a consistency in how he projects his brand. Whether it's his brick-and-mortar space or website, you'll see Ed's clever marketing. His business reflects his personality, and he uses it to project a unique image. Likewise, once you develop your own distinct image, you should use it every day to tell your story.

Reduce Expenses to Increase Profits

It's common to equate business success with multiple locations, large retail spaces, or prestigious locations, but those things can be a big financial drain. In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards consolidating stores, reducing square footage, or leaving a high-dollar location for more reasonable rent in an area still convenient to current customers.

Donna Erwin of Columbia River Gallery in Troutdale, OR, made the decision to leave her highly visible street location and move around the corner to the lower level of the same building. Having already made a name for herself in the community, Erwin strengthened her overall business by reducing her overhead. She keeps a banner up by the previous space, directing customers to the new store, and placed a large sign on the building that can easily be seen by people looking for the new shop.

Sarah Beckett of SB Framing Gallery in Milwaukee, WI, chose to cut her business expenses by eliminating unnecessary space. Over time, Beckett had expanded as her business grew, but in 2016, she cut back to her original space to save money. She says, "The month I downsized, I saw a pickup in walk-ins and sales. I believe my customers are attracted to my shop as a one-person venture with an independent presence and unique merchandise."

Beckett also made some shrewd decisions when renovating her new space. Rather than building a more expensive, permanent wall with studs and wallboard, she wrapped Gator Board with fabric to serve as a divider to separate her retail space from the work room. The "wall" is securely fastened to sturdy shelving units immediately behind them. This added valuable space to display corner samples. A side benefit is the flexibility it provides, allowing her to move things around easily in the future.



Walden Framers in Lexington, MA, wanted to make a statement with a flower-covered bicycle, feeling that it didn't have to be related to framing.

Put a Face on Your Business

Along with the Buy Local movement, a lot of people like doing business with people versus corporations. In a world where it's difficult to even talk to a human when you call a business, many people are attracted to small stores where they can interact with the owner or staff. You can put a face on your business by using an image of yourself, your family, or your staff in local advertising, on your website, in social media posts, or custom framed and displayed on your front counter.

Bob Woodrum's kids have grown up in his store, so many customers know them. A family photo appears on his website. "We promote the family-owned aspect of our business," he says. "Most of the shops in our little tourist town are migrating to out-of-town owners, and we're one of the hold-outs. Locals appreciate it; they understand what it takes in terms of high rent, etc., to stay in our community."

Creative Custom Framing

A frame shop should proudly display great examples of the types of framing it offers. Be sure to frame a variety of things



By displaying creative framing ideas in the store, Picture Place in Brookline, MA, attracts more creative framing orders.



Sherry and Larry Pearl of Newburyport Framers in Newburyport, MA, use a photo of themselves on their website to personalize their business. Photo by Ebacher Photography



Bob Woodrum and his wife, Teri, of Sausalito Picture Framing in Sausalito, CA, use a family photo to promote their family-owned business.



The Framers' Outlet in Berkeley, CA, takes advantage of special opportunities to publicize the business.

people bring in regularly as well as a few unusual items. Be sure to show all the products you want people to purchase. Each time you frame something new, be strategic in how you frame it.

Tom Coppi of Picture Place in Brookline, MA, says, “One Star Wars framing project we did led to two other Star Wars shadowboxes, one military medal shadowbox, and a very large quantity order. Customer response has been very high, and people take photos of it almost daily.”

Some framers get more excited about challenging custom frame orders than others do. Woodrum says, “Don’t say no to difficult jobs! You never know when a new client will turn into steady income. We had a walk-in design client who was redoing a small hotel. She wanted a large, messy collection of cookbooks framed. Altogether, it would weigh about 150 pounds. My initial response to this complicated job was to pass, but I know that where there’s a trickle there may be a gusher, and I was right. This was the first of about 30 pieces we ended up doing for this project.”

Add Secondary Product Lines

There’s an old phrase, “You can’t be all things to all people.” In business, this usually means you should focus on a specific type of clientele—a certain income range, age group, or people with a particular interest. You can also create a niche, marketing things like conservation, framing objects, or needlework. If so, become proficient at it and market yourself as the expert. However, just because you have a specialty doesn’t mean you should stop promoting general framing. If you can make as much money as you want by narrowing your focus, that’s great—but survival usually requires more.

Today, it is more common to broaden your offerings than to narrow your focus. If you are looking for a way

to get more people in the door, try adding another product line or service. Some of the more common secondary product lines for framers include art, photo restoration, gifts, and digital printing.

Mikki Kavich at Mikki’s Frames took a different approach, bringing in a line of Milk Paint. Although it took time for it to take off, it is now an integral part of her business. The great thing is that it brings in new customers and helps form relationships because the people buying the paint generally have an interest in their homes.

A few years ago, Kirstie Bennett and Jeff Goldberg, owners of The Framers’ Workshop in Berkeley, CA, expanded their business with a new concept called The Framers’ Outlet, located in the adjacent space. While the original store maintains a focus on custom framing, the new venture is based on readymade frames, photo frames, and a number of “frameless” options, including canvas wraps and plaque boxes. A dynamic display on the store wall promotes these and other products.

Marketing

Through attrition, most framing businesses lose a few customers each year. To offset those losses and grow a business, it is necessary to do a good job of marketing. Some of it is through paid advertising, but there are also other methods to market your business. At Frame Makers of Powell in Powell, OH, Dave Wetterstrom has had success using color postcards. He says, “These went to 13,000 homes in our local zip code. It cost \$1,700 for printing and mailing for what the post office calls a DAC card. To date, it has generated over \$8,000 worth of framing.”

Amy Miller of Prints Charming Gallery in St. Louis, MO, recently updated her business logo. “I knew I wanted something to attract newer and younger clientele that still worked for corporate and healthcare clients. The colors of our old logo were dated, and the frog wasn’t the most

appropriate. Prints Charming Gallery was a recognized name in the area, so I had no interest in changing it—just a new logo. The marketing company created five options. I immediately loved the hand-written look we selected.”

Another type of marketing is public relations. Bennett and Goldberg had the mayor of Berkeley attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony when they opened The Framer’s Outlet. The resulting photo(s) from an event like this can be submitted to local publications as part of a press release about a new store opening. The photos can also be used for in-store marketing.

Another promotional idea was used by Columbia River Gallery when it moved from a street front location to a different space, losing visibility. To make up for that, Erwin sought new ways to remind people that her business was still there. One successful way was to have a nearby business, Firwood Design Group, display some of her framed art there.

Merchandising

It’s important for any business to match its image. That is even truer when the business is design-related, like custom framing. Merchandising is simply the act of bringing products and services to the point of sale through the way they are displayed. In a frame shop, you should be strategically merchandising your moulding and mat samples, framed examples, and any other products or services you offer.

Sherry Pearl of Newburyport Framers in Newburyport, MA, says that when she and her husband, Larry, took over the business in 2009, “We knew we needed to change things if we wanted to be successful. We quickly discovered that what we enjoyed most was working with customers who appreciated our higher-end frame selection, extra care, attention, customer service, and creativity. Our business is in an industrial condo with no curb appeal, but we wanted people to walk inside and say, ‘Wow, this place looks really nice!’ We changed everything to accomplish that.” They



Mikki’s Frames in Crossville, TN, carries secondary product lines to help pull in customers who haven’t been in before.

also wanted to emphasize the personal experience customers can expect at the shop and do this by posting photos of themselves and the stylish interior of the store on their website so people will see familiar faces when they come for their first visit.

At Prints Charming Gallery, Amy Miller says, “Merchandising is essential to our success because it sets the stage for a customer experience. We don’t have a ton of space, so we have to make everything count. When the store is full of beautiful, orderly, and creative displays, it creates client trust in our ability to provide exactly what

they need. People may not notice every detail, but they do feel the collective impact. Our showroom is completely rearranged every three to four months, but the front window is done monthly. Sometimes things in the window and the shop are sold in a week, so there is a partial rearrangement. We aren’t afraid to keep moving things or to put them away for a season.”

The cumulative impact of all these strategies is summed up by Ed Pioli at Walden Framer. “We need to use our brick-and-mortar location to our advantage every day,” he says. “Our storefront provides high visibility, so we create window displays having holiday/seasonal themes with a whimsical touch. The goal is to make people stop—to look, smile, be curious, and come inside.” **PFM**

Interested in learning more about enhancing the customer experience and design at frame shops? Greg will be leading a number of seminars at this year’s National Conference.



It takes money to make money, and that was the case with this post card sent out by Frame Makers of Powell in Powell, OH.

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Greg Perkins, CPF, is in his 44th year in the framing industry. Starting out as a retailer, he worked at Larson-Juhl for 24 years and is now an industry consultant, focusing on frame design and retailing. Greg is also an author, contributing editor, industry educator, and artist. He can be contacted at gregperkinsconsulting@outlook.com or 770-842-2028.

