

# Managing Customer Expectations

*Make sure you can meet—or exceed—what customers expect.*

**H**ave you ever had a customer expect you to make their custom frame for them while they waited? When customers don't know what to expect, they can often make difficult requests—which is why it is important to manage expectations.

There are four universal expectations that customers need to have answered:

1. Price—How much is it going to cost?
2. Design—What is it going to look like?
3. Quality—How long is it going to last?
4. Timing—How long is it going to take?

The answers to these questions are obvious for almost every retail customer experience except custom framing. It's even more challenging when you realize that today's consumer also wants things cheaper, better, and faster!

The absence of answers to these essential questions can easily generate feelings of uncertainty and anxiety for many consumers. In considering a customer focus, we need to keep in mind that the obvious is not always apparent. What we may take for granted may not be straightforward to our customer. For example, we know how long it takes to produce a beautiful, custom-made frame, but do they? Let's explore a few fundamental customer expectations for custom framing and how we can best



manage these for the best outcome.

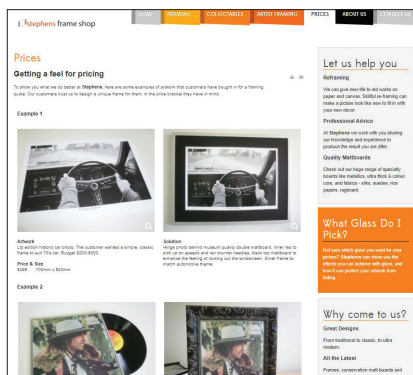
## Communication is Key

Before we delve into specific customer expectations, we first need to understand that the key underlying factor in managing expectations is communication. There are multiple methods of conveying information, including verbal, written, signage, and even your website. Your design consultant, whether it is you or a staff member, plays a pivotal role in being able to verbally convey most of the information required to satisfy a customer's expectations. Important and critical information like order confirmations should always be provided in writing. Signage can be a helpful method of providing essential and otherwise repetitive information like payment policies, and the copy on your website is often the first thing

*You know a high-quality custom framing job takes time, but do your new and potential customers? Make sure they understand from the outset what to expect in terms of the design process, cost, and turnaround time.*



**Jared Davis** has 30 years of industry experience and is the business development manager for Frames Now, Australia. Jared has previously worked in roles including business development, strategic marketing and product management for companies such as Larson-Juhl and Gunnar International. In addition to writing for PFM, Jared has traveled extensively as an educator and speaker, teaching framers at many industry shows and seminars around the globe, including The National Conference at the WCAF Expo.



Stephen's Frame Shop has a page called "prices" on its website. The page shows examples of many different custom framing jobs along with price tags for each to help manage customers' expectations before they come into the store.

potential customers experience about your business before ever stepping foot through the door.

It is always important to provide customers with honest, clear, and transparent information.

When it comes to difficult scenarios such as material delays or stock issues, you're either winning or losing in communication. If a customer has had to come into the store for a pick-up or calls you only to find out that their frame is not ready and is going to be delayed, then you've lost. The customer may also lose some faith in you, which can damage their trust in you and your business.

If you're aware of a delay, let them know in advance to manage their concern. Just be clear and transparent. Most customers are empathetic to these situations, and your proactive communication will maintain their faith in you because you appear to be in control. These types of situations can actually help you build a closer relationship with your customer. It is always better to be in front of this type of communication, rather than behind.

## Managing Price Expectations

It can be difficult to deal with a cus-

tomers' desire to immediately know a product's cost when that product is unique and custom-made to order. It is helpful to have a conversation about pricing as early as possible to help gauge your customer's mindset about pricing and to manage their expectations. This can be done by asking a question such as, "Did you have any pricing in mind for this project?" However, the answer is usually always less than reality. Another way to approach this is to provide the customer with a baseline price for a suitable design option during the early stages of the design process. You may want to aim for a little on the higher side of design and price so there is room to move downwards in case they suffer any "price shock."

With regards to payment policies, to help avoid any ambiguity or awkward conversation about deposits or upfront payment, you could just have a small sign positioned at the counter that says "Payment is required upfront for all orders." The question is then answered before it is even asked.

Stephen Boot of Stephen's Frame Shop, located on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia, has come up with an effective solution to help manage customers' pricing expectations before they even come into his store. Boot has created a dedicated page on his website called "Prices" which doesn't actually provide any exact or specific pricing. This page provides several examples of real framing projects presented as "before and after" with a brief backstory to each project and a price outcome for each job. These realistic examples range in price from \$125 to \$637 and help provide customers with a possible price range and expectation for their custom jobs before they come in.

Boot said 90% of new customers tell him they saw his website before coming into his store. Boot also observed that when he created the "Prices" page on his website, he had fewer pricing inquiries. He feels that this strategy has helped to pre-filter his customers. Because most of his customers' work is personal and precious, his customers are less concerned about cost and more concerned about the care and expertise he provides in looking after their piece.

## Managing Design Expectations

Design is the most important expectation to manage because a wonderful design can usually overcome any expectations about price or turnaround time. If it's going to look great, then customers are typically happy to pay more and wait a little longer for it.

Before you commence your design process, you want to ensure your customer understands how long the process may take. I've seen customers become edgy after five minutes of design time because they didn't know the consultation would take so long, and they only had 10 minutes before they had to be elsewhere.

At the start of the design process, find out what the customer's design expectations might be first. You can ask targeted questions such as, "Do you have a budget for this?" "Who is this for?" "How important is this to you?" "Where is this going to hang?" "What style of decor do you have?" The answers to these questions will influence the design options you provide. The goal here is to meet or exceed their design hopes and expectations. If a customer chooses a frame or matboard design option that doesn't make obvious sense to you,





**Frank's**  
FABRICS FOR FRAMERS

**LINERS/PANELS**  
Made to order in any width!

**FIBREMATS**  
Available in 5 thicknesses.  
No curling, up to 49 x 97 od.

You design it...  
We make it happen.

**FRANK'S FABRICS**

8101 Orion Ave #19  
Van Nuys, CA 91406

888.332.2749  
818.908.3700

info@franksfabrics.com  
www.franksfabrics.com

ask them why they like that option. Their answer might reveal an important consideration that you may not have been aware of.

When you're busy serving someone and another customer walks in, avoid making the customer feel uncertain or ignored. Sometimes just some eye contact and a smile to acknowledge them can be enough. It's even better if you can briefly excuse yourself and let them know you're going to be another 20 minutes. Most people don't mind if they know where they stand.

## Managing Quality Expectations

In most cases, a premium level of quality is assumed by customers unless otherwise specified. The best way to convey the quality of your chosen materials and methods is with your corner samples. Examples of your framing displayed in your store are also extremely helpful in providing an immediate impression of the quality and standard of your work. You can also include some insight into how you ensure top quality in your products on your website.

## Managing Time Expectations

Today's customer can be impulsive—they want high-quality items, and they want them sooner than ever! However, the expectation of getting products quickly can be managed.

The finer things in life are worth waiting for. For example, if you want a custom-made dress or a custom-made leather couch from Italy, you'll wait months for the privilege. You don't mind waiting longer for something nicer when you understand why. And when you under-

Reality  
- Expectations  
Happiness

*The safe way to achieve high happiness levels with your customers is to ensure their expectations reflect reality.*

stand why, you appreciate it more, too. It can help to explain how frame components are ordered and how a frame is made when trying to manage a customer's expectations about turnaround time.

When it comes to providing a job competition timeline, customers don't like ambiguity. It is better to provide a clear, fixed date rather than a "sometime around" timeline.

There are a lot of moving parts in assembling a frame and things don't always go to plan, so build in some extra time for yourself when giving deadlines to customers. Also, don't be afraid to extend deadlines during busy periods. Whenever possible, it's better to under-promise and over-deliver. You can always call a customer and tell them their frame is ready sooner, which will always be answered with delight.

Signage can also be extremely helpful. For example, you could have a sign on your counter that says, "Please note, our current production time is four weeks. This can help answer a fundamental expectation for your customer instantly.

It is important to provide every customer with a claim receipt and order confirmation that includes the details of their job, their payment status, and the pickup date. These could be either printed or emailed. This



is also an ideal opportunity to include important disclaimers such as “conservation recommendations declined,” or “not responsible for goods left after 90 days.” Disclaimers can be an important defense tool if a dispute arises, but these may also be subject to local and state laws. It’s a good idea to provide a work condition report as well whenever appropriate.

Whenever a job is completed, it is always good practice to advise the customer that it is now ready. One way to help create some positive anticipation is to provide a photo of the completed job via email or text.

## When Things Don’t Go Right

If something doesn’t go right and a customer is unhappy, their expectations have not been met. Regardless of cause, apologize and ask them what they would like you to do to make things right again. Find out their expectation for a suitable resolution. If you can resolve the situation to their expectation, great. If you can add something extra to exceed their expectation, even better. For example, you could offer a gift certificate for next time or throw in a free readymade frame. Sometimes these negative scenarios can actually be worthwhile opportunities where you can win a customer for life; or better yet, a vocal advocate of your business.

You won’t be able to meet everyone’s expectations every time, so be selective about what you can achieve. Always set expectations so you can exceed them. Exceeded expectations means happy customers—and happy customers means better business. **PFM**



**Perfection.**  
**It's Only Natural.**

**Picture Woods, Ltd.**  
Handcrafted in Colorado

Tel: 800.321.6522 www.picturewoods.com



**SPACEMAKER™**  
PICTURE FRAME SPACERS

**SOLID QUALITY - SOLID PLASTIC**  
Create a protective airspace between art and glazing.  
Prevent mildew and other contact damage.

- The best adhesive from 3M
- Archival/conservation quality, acid-free, no plasticizers
- Just score, snap & stick. It's that easy
- Use with wood or metal frames
- Clear, Smoke and Black
- 1/8-inch & 1/4-inch

CALL NOW FOR FREE SAMPLES and the name of your local distributor  
**800-332-2756, Pacific Time ARLO Spacemaker Products, LLC**

Labels in diagram: SPACEMAKER, GLASS, ADHESIVE, MAT BOARD, ART WORK, BACKING