

LARSON·JUHL®

BUSINESS
SUPPLEMENT
2020



Introduction



Welcome to the 2020 AFT Business Supplement, sponsored by Larson-Juhl, which I hope you will find an interesting read.

We worked closely with the Fine Art Trade Guild on this supplement to produce a broad spectrum of topics from across the sector. It features some of the industry's most respected experts and there is a mix of articles covering creative ideas, advice and best practice guidelines.

Additionally, the content is intended to encourage us collectively to all share the positives that art and framing can bring to the world.

We hope you find it an informative publication and do let me have your feedback on our social channels – @4wallsbyLJUK on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Alternatively, email me at Jonathan.Burrage@larsonjuhl.co.uk.

Many thanks,

Jonathan Burrage
Managing Director

The chess set by Ciaran Robinson, aka Lhouette, won the 2019 Get Framous competition



Get Framous!

WE WERE delighted with the response to last year's Get Framous initiative, which received around 250 entries in total. We shortlisted 10 submissions, which then went to the Master of the Guild, Jo Palmer GCF(APF) Adv, to be judged against the following criteria: creativity, engagement on social channels, media coverage, feedback from customers, footfall/website traffic and sales off the back of the entry.

Jo commented: "I had an interesting time reading through all the information from those on the shortlist. There was quite a range of things on offer and it was fascinating to read all the different approaches to marketing."

The finalists were all extremely impressive but the eventual winner was Lhouette, aka Ciaran Robinson, for his stunning chess set. Second place went to Rob Zanna at Easyframe for his selfie competition and five other framers also received a special commendation.

Jo's decision was hard, but her reasoning was quite simple: "After a lengthy thought process, my winner was Ciaran Robinson. Although the majority of the publicity was centred around the chess pieces themselves, it still meant that his framed creation was

on show in multiple places, which allowed him to use that in his own publicity. There are clear and easy-to-follow links to his marketing on his website and he had good follow-up with further sales, which were also displayed in prominent locations. Visually, it was the most eye-catching entry."

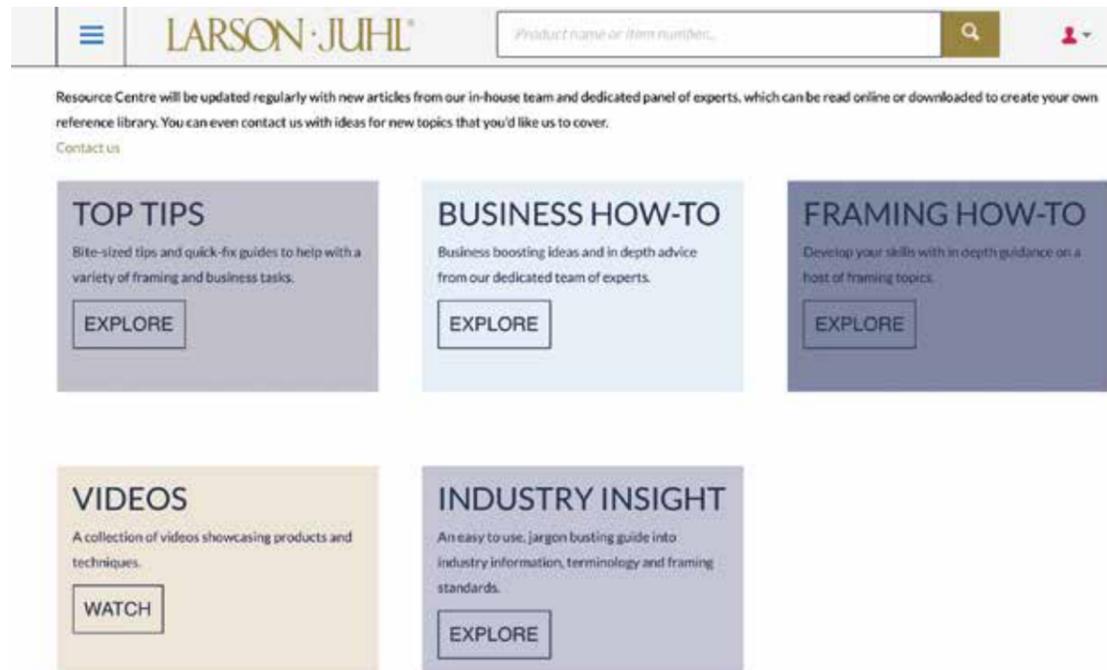
Ciaran was awarded £1,000 in cash; Easyframe received £250 in product; and £100 in product went to the highly commended Cath Friend GCF(APF) Adv (Emerald Frames), Ann Carrol (Picture This Art & Framing), Sarah Fellows GCF(APF) (Fellows Framing), Alex Mahoney (Bespoke Framing) and Joe Nicholson (Four Sticks Framing).

Ciaran's response was: "Amazing! Thank you Larson-Juhl – very flattered. It was a really fun and interesting competition to enter with some brilliant concepts and entries."

Get Framous is intended to provide ideas and content for customers' marketing activity, while promoting bespoke framing as a creative skill and championing best practice.

We are planning to run another Get Framous initiative later this year with a slightly different approach. We will be calling out across our social channels for weird and wonderful examples of framing, with a view to recognising those pieces that meet specific criteria and get the most engagement.

FREE RESOURCE CENTRE



Our Resources section on larsonjuhl.co.uk contains all sorts of free advice for framers:

Top tips: bite-sized tips and quick fix guides to help with a variety of framing and business tasks

Business how to: business boosting ideas and in-depth advice from our dedicated team of experts

Framing how to: develop your skills with in-depth guidance on a whole host of framing topics

Industry insight: an easy to use, jargon-busting guide on industry information, terminology and framing standards.

Videos: showcasing a vast range of products and techniques including: constructing a mount package, using mount slips, stacking mouldings, shadow mounting, mountboard cover and framing a canvas.

We will shortly be launching six more videos, covering mixing mouldings, mountboard design, premium glass, how to capitalise on trends, and PR/marketing and social media.

All our videos are on YouTube as well as at larsonjuhl.co.uk/haven/vids

To get in touch with our experts (opposite page), go to: larsonjuhl.co.uk/ask-the-experts

MEET THE EXPERTS



Lyn Hall GCF (APF)ADV

Lyn is a multi award-winning framer and is well known for her individual and creative approach to framing over a 35-year period. She is an examiner for the Fine Art Trade Guild Certified Framer Programme and also has a training school.



Jon Price GCF(APF)

Jon took over Handmade Framing & Gallery (Bude, North Cornwall) in 2013 after nearly 20 years as a professional trainer, examiner and course designer/presenter. Having been awarded a Larson-Juhl Scholarship in 2017, Jon achieved Guild Certified Framer (APF) status and was invited to sit on the Fine Art Trade Guild's Framing Standards & Qualifications Committee. Jon has produced all our recent how to videos.



David Wilkie GCF

David founded The Eagle Gallery Epsom, an art gallery and framing workshop, in 1993. Since then, he has been a regular winner of many framing competitions, including eight Fine Art Trade Guild awards. In 2016, David relocated back to the Midlands to concentrate on framer training.



Mal Reynolds GCF(APF) ADV

Mal has been the owner of Harlequin Frames since 2000. As a GCF-qualified picture framer and one of few framers holding all three advanced accreditations, he is a member of the Fine Art Trade Guild and was chair of the Framing Standards & Qualifications Committee between 2014 and 2018. He is a trainer and lecturer, working both at home and abroad.

SALES DIRECTOR



Larson-Juhl's sales director, Matt George, (pictured left) joined the company at the end of last year.

He brings with him a wealth of experience in business development, having spent 20 years in retail and also food and drink manufacturing, working on brands such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Heineken and Britvic.

Since starting his new role, Matt has been talking to many people up and down the country across all types of businesses to immerse himself in the world of art and framing.

Matt can be contacted at matt.george@larsonjuhl.co.uk



DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Standing out from the crowd isn't just desirable for businesses – it's essential.

Guild business owners reveal how they have developed their unique selling proposition

A CHALLENGE all businesses face, regardless of sector, size, age or location, is how to stand out from the competition. How can art and framing businesses achieve this? One of the most important ways to stand out in your market is to develop your 'unique selling proposition' (USP).

Graham Perryman GCF (APF) is a framer who knows well how art and framing businesses can develop their USP. Before

he established his business, Dragonfly Framing, he was for many years a senior marketer for Nottcutts garden centre chain and prestige fashion retailer Hobbes.

He says: "Your USP is all about what makes you unique in a way that is relevant and appealing to your target market. It conveys your core company identity and values. It's your company's reason for being."

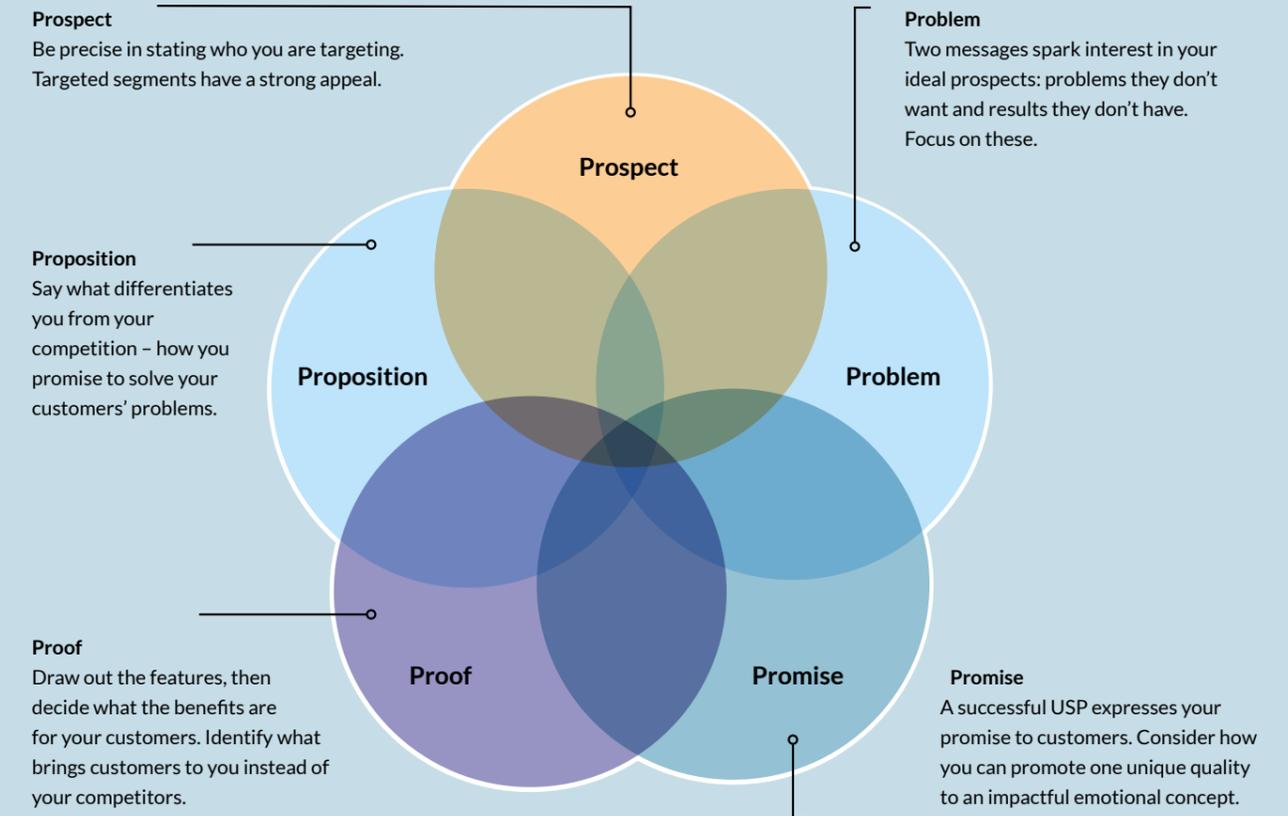
But there is no point in proclaiming that your business is 'The best [framer, for example] around'. People have heard this claim all too often; it isn't credible and it doesn't present any evidence as to why customers should choose you over your competition.

Graham explains: "Imagine you are a cafe owner. Given the vast array of tastes of a city of people, being the 'best cafe in town' would be far less productive and more arduous than becoming 'The place you must visit for [pancakes, for example]'.

Find something you do better by doing it uniquely.

"Differentiation is a vital strategic activity," he says. "What traits does your business have that deserve the time, trust and money of your potential customers? Craft your USP so that it is compelling, different and memorable, so they can see exactly what your business offers that others don't."

How does this apply to framing businesses? Graham says: "In our industry, each of us satisfies a particular want, not a need. We must appeal to our customers' emotional and aspirational desires. Your USP doesn't have to focus on a particular product. It could encompass a unique aspect of your whole business. By playing up this quality to your target market, you can stand out. Think about how you can promote one quality with a striking emotional concept. Your proposition must be strong enough to attract new customers."



How to create your USP

1. Identify your target audience

Define precisely who your ideal customer is. You might narrow it down to achievers in sport or original art collectors. Your target market will save you money and resources in marketing, bring you the right customers and give you a better return on investment. Remember the 80/20 rule: 80% of your revenue comes from 20% of your customers, but 65% of sales comes from 4% of those customers.

2. What problems do you solve?

Put yourself in your target customer's shoes. What attributes of your products and services meet their needs or solve their challenges? Is it your design concept, for example, or your service, or that you carry specialist materials?

USPs need to provoke an emotional response. Find the emotional connection between your customers' problems and the benefits you offer. Focus on these

two messages: solving problems your customers don't want and providing results they don't have. Address the problems first, then the solutions.

3. What are you promising?

An effective USP must convey your promise to your customers, so identify your 'customer pledge'. How can you promote a unique quality or offer in an impactful and emotional way? When you do this, you must deliver on your promises consistently.

4. What differentiates you from similar businesses?

Research your competitors thoroughly and, with your customers' eye view, decide what differentiates your business from others. It's all about the **benefits** of what we deliver for our customers, rather than the **features** of our products.

To use a framing example, a great

feature of museum glass is that it offers 99% UV protection. But it's the **benefit** that connects emotionally with your customer: because it helps to preserve their artwork, we are protecting their treasures.

Think about these categories: price; quality; service; speed; selection; convenience; guarantee; customisation; originality; and specialisation. Choose one that you have true expertise or uniqueness in. Draw out the features and decide what the benefits are for your customers. Choose your number-one benefit. Stick to one category as this focuses attention on something unique to you.

5. Define your USP

Write out what you have worked on so far in a brief paragraph. Finally, to reach your USP, refine it to one or two sentences.

Graham Perryman GCF (APF)
dragonflyframing.co.uk



Achieving standout

< Aside from defining your USP, how else can you differentiate your business? Business consultancy Mazars conducted research into the performance of SMEs across Europe and identified the key qualities of the most successful businesses.

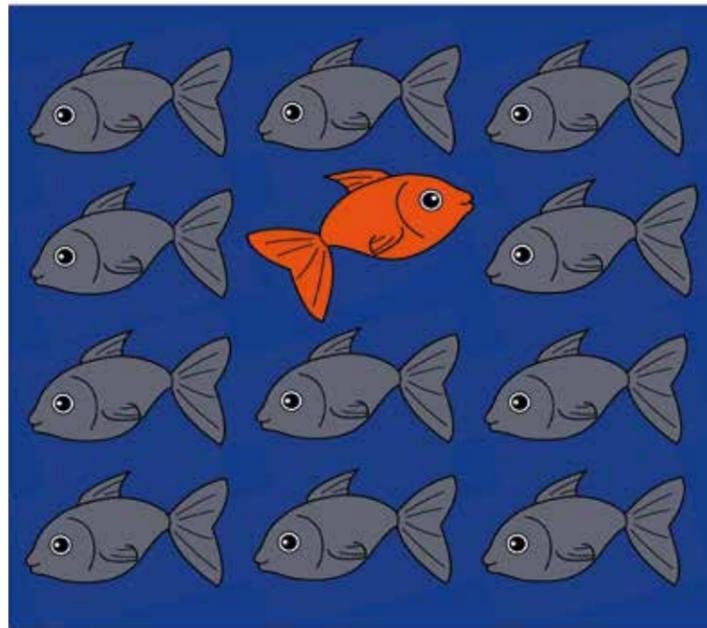
- **Maintain a sharp focus.** Small businesses need to be very clear on their target position in their sector and have a strong understanding of its dynamics and changes. They must understand their market position, undertake risk management and predict market trends. Local firms need to understand how they can add value and differentiate themselves in their market. As one commentator put it: “Don’t keep making hamburgers when a McDonald’s comes to town.”

Innovation is a key part of keeping up with market changes. This could mean building up your online marketing or improving your technology, such as your payment system and accounting software. It could also mean shifting towards an area with greater customer demand. For example, you might consider how to draw in an audience of younger professionals. Andrew Goodman GCF(APF) of London business Frame Set and Match says: “Most millennials find a picture framer the same way they find everything else: Google. So the first step to getting them into your shop is making sure they find you online. Keep your search rankings up by updating your online content regularly.”

- **Bring more to the party.** How much value are you adding through, for example unique expertise and customer experience?

GCF qualified framers can achieve expertise by gaining an Advanced GCF qualification, which puts them in a unique category of specialists. This promotes confidence in customers who have rare, valuable and delicate items that they want to have framed, and this category of customer is usually prepared to pay the appropriate rate for the service.

Lyn Hall GCF(APF) Adv of Fringe Arts in Surrey is a specialist in textile framing. She says: “My business has been built on framing in an individual, high quality and creative style. Customers seek me out, rather than the other way round. I have always made time to hone my skills, develop ideas and make these ideas marketable. Businesses stagnate without new ideas.”



Conservation framing specialist JG Braticius GCF(APF) Adv adds: “Having a GCF Advanced qualification doesn’t just benefit your business – it’s a whole business in itself. I would advise all framers to take an advanced qualification to consistently raise the standard of their work to as near technical perfection as possible.”

In terms of customer experience, it goes without saying that your service should be exemplary. Your retail space should be attractive, clean, uncluttered and consistent with your overall brand. Your staff should be not just

friendly and polite but equipped to answer any questions customers might have. Your communication with customers should be seamless. Let them know straight away when their work is ready to pick up, or if there will be an unavoidable delay. Inform them about the Guild’s Five Levels of Framing and why they matter. Tell them what the benefits are of using a GCF qualified framer. Encourage them to engage with you on social media, especially Instagram and Facebook.

“GCF qualified framers can achieve expertise by gaining an Advanced GCF qualification, which puts them in a unique category of specialists”

Conclusion

Identify what makes your business special and develop that into your USP. If you struggle to identify anything that makes you stand out, do what is necessary to make it happen. Sharpen the focus of what your business is about. Consider developing your skills with an Advanced GCF qualification. Think about how you can make your customer experience positively memorable. Even if you are the only framer or gallery in town, you can widen your audience through your online presence and strengthen your position against future competitors and market challenges.

PRICING FOR PROFIT

Pricing is a key element of your bottom line. Ian Kenny GCF(APF) Adv explains how to factor in all your overheads and resist pressure to sell yourself short

One of the most common questions asked by new and established framers is: “How do I price my work correctly?” In this article, we will look at five key areas where mistakes are often made. There is no catch-all for pricing. Every business is individual and will need to meet different criteria to make a profit. It’s important to remember that profit is not a dirty word. We don’t set up our own businesses with the intention of struggling.

1. Calculate the basic cost of opening your door for business

What is your cost just to open the door? Add together rent + rates + insurance + utilities (gas, electricity, water, phone, internet), card terminal rental, gross cost of wages, and anything else you pay a bill for. Divide that figure by 46.5, and then divide again by the number of hours a week you are open to customers. This will give you the hourly cost of opening. Why divide by 46.5? If you employ someone, their paid holiday entitlement is 5.5 weeks per annum. You should factor that in for yourself too. Don’t forget that the hourly cost to open your door is paid for out of your profit figure, not your takings, and applies for every hour of the working day.

2. Set a realistic hourly workshop rate, and charge it

How long does your window cleaner take to clean your windows? How much does he charge? Probably 80p to £1.20 a minute, or £48 to £72 an hour. And that is mostly labour. You should charge your workshop time at around what your window cleaner charges you. And why not? He has already worked out what the local market will bear. How many times have you had a customer say: “You’re the expert”? That expertise should come at a cost.

3. Set realistic waste levels and factor in the cost of your waste

Don’t hoard piles of moulding, mountboard and glass ‘just in case’. It looks bad, it’s inefficient and hunting through a mass of scraps wastes your time (and therefore your money).

Factor-in waste realistically and the hoarding instinct becomes less attractive (and your workshop more attractive) since the waste has been paid for by the customer. Why should you pay for it? Think about how much you really should throw away. Experience gives us figures of 30% moulding, 40% mountboard, 30% glass and 30% backing.

4. Discounting, and why not to

“Is that your best price?” “If you give me a good price for this one, I’ve got lots more at home!” “I’m a pensioner.” Have you heard those ones before? Discounts need to be well thought through. For example, a 10% discount on a £200 job is £20. Not that bad, you might think. It’s only £20 less turnover after all. But wait! Where



“You should charge your workshop time at around what your window cleaner charges you. And why not? He has already worked out what the local market will bear”

does that £20 come from? Let’s assume a notional bottom-line profit of 22.5%. That’s £45 profit on the job. Take the £20 discount off that bottom-line profit and suddenly, your net profit has almost halved. Discounting can be dangerous for your wealth.

5. Invest in a computerised pricing program

Before computers became mainstream, pricing was done by scribbling figures on a scrap of paper or using a grid chart consisting of ‘size bands’ and ‘moulding price bands’. You would work out the price by sliding your finger along one band and then down the other.

In a frame shop today, a pricing program is as essential as any other piece of equipment, and there are plenty to choose from. You can choose outright purchase for some programs, or a subscription model for others. Whichever you choose, everything mentioned in 1, 2 and 3 should be factored in. Moulding can be priced on an individual basis, and endless options are there for additional services to be added. The frame size is priced exactly, rather than on an approximation. A pricing program will return consistent results, and our experience shows that customers are less likely to question the price because it has been calculated on-screen.

ON OR OFF THE HIGH STREET?

In response to media reports of the high street's demise, we asked framers both on and off the high street about their location and its benefits and drawbacks. By Lynn Jones

There is no denying retail has undergone a sea change in the past decade, driven by the rise of online retail and fallout from the global economic crisis of 2008. One effect on the art and framing industry has been that many framers are rejecting the

traditional high street shop in favour of premises on a trading estate or in their own homes. In the retail sector in general, there has been widespread prediction of the 'death of the high street' (as AFT reported in January 2019).

We asked a panel of framers on and off the high street what they have found to be the advantages and challenges of their business location. As their answers reveal, it would be premature to suggest the high street's days are over just yet.

ON THE HIGH STREET

Steven McKee GCF(APF) Adv: We are a high street business, having started from a home-based workshop.

Lawrence Robinson GCF(APF): We are on a busy 'A' road with a shop front and window display.

Mark Wallington GCF(APF): We're on the high street in Tetbury.

Jon Price GCF(APF): We're on the main street of a large village with a lot of people driving past but a lot less walking. So we're sort of half and half!

Steve Hible GCF(APF): We are on a high street in the southern Cotswolds.

What are benefits for you of your type of location?

SM: We have a lot of footfall and passing traffic as we sit on the main road into and out of town. We have a small, private car park and we are near the town's main free car park. Because we have a large side window, we have high visibility, and we are on the lighter, brighter end of the street.

LR: Our shop front and window display mean that we are easy to recognise and locate.

SH: We are in an old building, which

suits the expectations of customers (traditional craft, bespoke work). Thanks to a high street scheme, we pay no business rates.

MW: We see lots of footfall and opportunistic shopping, so we make sure we sell products that take advantage of that position, such as art, greetings cards and ready-made frames.

JP: Our location means lots of people see us – having large shop signage helps. However, we don't have lots of people coming in to browse. If we were on a town high street, we would need a different approach, with more emphasis on ready-made frames and gallery art – products more suitable for passing trade. We would also pay a lot more rent.

What are the challenges?

SM: Keeping the two window displays fresh, with frequent changes. Close proximity to the road means the windows and shop front need cleaning frequently.

LR: Keeping up with the workload! We need more space.

SH: The limited size of the premises

and workshop, which make it difficult to keep abreast of the volume of work.

MW: It's expensive to be in a high street. Rent and rates are major cost factors. Parking can also be a problem. And the necessary footfall of people coming in just to look can be distracting.

JP: People tell me they have been driving past for years and didn't know we were here, despite the five metre-high signage and eye-catching window lighting and displays. People also walk past every day and never come in, even just to be nosy. So the biggest challenge is creating awareness.

How are you overcoming those challenges?

SM: Changing the window displays frequently and having a good window cleaner, who keeps the windows, shop front and signage clean and tidy.

LR: Working ever-longer hours!

SH: Outsourcing some of the work. Working extra hours in busy periods.

JP: Good signage and window displays, as well as other forms of marketing and advertising. We have also held local artists' exhibitions and sent



The Frame Gallery in Odiham, Hampshire

press releases to local papers. In a rural area, word of mouth is very important. It just takes time to spread.

Do you envisage staying with your business location in the future or changing?

SM: We will be staying here. We have recently moved from a nearby three-floor location to premises on one floor with three times the space.

LR: We will be staying. This is our 25th year in business. It is profitable and I would sooner sell the business than relocate.

SH: We will definitely be staying as we own the premises.

MW: I would like to stay in a high street location but we never really stop looking at new opportunities.

JP: We are staying where we are.

If you are considering a change, what would you be changing to?

SM: We moved partly due to health issues – my wife, Sharon-Lee, fell down the stairs in our old shop. A big improvement since we moved is that customers now say they can see us working. The old shop always looked dark and people often thought we were closed. At least 70% of custom since we relocated is new. A staggering number of people have said they didn't realise there was a picture framer in the town.

LR: We have considered moving to larger premises, not in a prime location, with more showroom space to sell art prints in the region of £100 to £200. But finding somewhere is difficult. There are dual carriageways in the UK that could provide partial

corridors for retail businesses with parking, as they do in to US.

JP: If we were ever to consider moving, it would be to a busier town high street location and with a revamped business model.



High street shops are well placed to sell extra lines, such as greetings cards

OFF THE HIGH STREET



Ian Dixon GCF(APF) Adv: We have a separate studio next to the house with its own access, established in 1991.

Hope Elletson GCF(APF): We are on a trading estate.

Mal Reynolds GCF(APF) Adv: Home workshop.

Bev Saunders GCF(APF): Home studio.

What are benefits for you of your type of location?

ID: There is no rush-hour traffic and customer parking is available. I can work flexible hours if needed.

HE: We have parking on-site and a proper industrial workshop space and facilities, including a loading bay and three-phase power. The cost per square foot is much lower than for high street premises.

MR: I prefer to have flexibility in the hours I work. I make appointments to see customers at times that suit me. Working at home allows me to freely practise and



Left, Lyn Hall GCF(APF) Adv, and opposite, Graham Perryman GCF(APF) in their home studios

develop my skills. I have fewer overheads than a high street business and no problems with parking.

BS: My premises are easy to find and there are no parking issues. I can work without distraction and don't have any time wasters. Having no business rates and not having to commute are definite advantages. I can be flexible about seeing clients – for example, on weekday evenings. I have good security, which is aided by supportive neighbours.

What are the challenges?

ID: Discipline – not playing golf! People think you are on hand seven days a week, 24 hours day. You're not! Having no passing trade is an issue. You have to work harder at pulling in customers and enquiries.

MR: It can be difficult to establish a customer base. Customers also turn up outside working hours. Having enough space and a healthy work-life balance are also challenging. The privacy issues of seeing customers at home might not be acceptable for some people.

HE: The main drawback is that we don't have any passing trade.

BS: Working at home means you have no passing trade and no shop window. Space is limited and there is little scope for merchandising. Also, my business is never included in any high street marketing by the local chamber of commerce.

How are you overcoming those challenges?

ID: Get a separate business phone line and don't answer any calls or messages out of hours. State your opening hours clearly. Only see customers out of hours by appointment. Attend networking events: join your local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club and so on. Get involved with the local community. Use local advertising, your website and social media to drive people to you. Recommendations are the best business enquiries. Join the Guild and take all the exams – you have to be better than the high street framer down the road. When you talk to a client, give them the best possible service. Be confident, share your knowledge and create the desire to have quality framing by a certified framer. Selling is a skill that needs to be perfected. You are not a self-service store: you are there to serve the client, so give them guidance and advice. Have plenty of examples of different kinds of framing. It makes your life easier and gives customers ideas for something else to be framed.

MR: It's important to have a good advertising strategy. I advertise in local magazines, distribute flyers and attend local events. An 'A' frame outside



the workshop is essential. I have an appointment system and window/door blinds that indicate when I am closed. Plan your work space with an eye to future expansion. For your personal wellbeing, establish a good work-life balance and stick to it.

HE: We have prominent signage and we work hard at our marketing, online and at events, trade shows and so on. Word-of-mouth is a crucial part of our publicity.

BS: I do lots of networking with other creative businesses through local initiatives. I send out newsletters and regularly update my social media and blog. It's still important to have a well-designed website that is easy to navigate.

Do you envisage staying with your business location in the future or changing?

ID: We are staying put.

MR: I'm going to remain as I am, with a home workshop.

BS: We will be staying for the next three to five years, after which we plan to move north.

CONCLUSION

The most heartening conclusion of this (admittedly small) survey is that art and framing businesses both on and off the high street are seeing healthy volumes of trade. A recurring theme is the need for more space. High street framers don't appear to be suffering from a mass exodus to online or out-of-town buying, while non-high street businesses are resourcefully marketing and networking, on and offline, to offset their lack of traditional footfall.

A significant number of framers are entering the profession as a second career, and it makes sense to start with a home workshop to keep overheads down. High street businesses, meanwhile, report working longer hours and even outsourcing to keep up with demand.

There is no definitive answer as to which is the more lucrative or 'safer' business model. It depends on the circumstances of the individual, where they are based and the type of clientele they serve. It remains to be seen whether the UK's departure from the EU brings new changes, good or bad, to the outlook for art and framing retailers.

CONTACTS

Ian Dixon GCF(APF) Adv
Dixon Frames, East Horsley, Surrey:
dixonframes.com

Hope Elletson GCF(APF)
Picture Frames of Shaftesbury, Dorset:
pictureframes.co.uk

Steve Hible GCF(APF) Adv
Right Angle Picture Framing,
Corsham, Wiltshire:
rightanglepictureframing.co.uk

Steven McKee GCF(APF) Adv
Dromore Picture Framing,
Northern Ireland:
downschoolofpictureframing.co.uk

Jon Price GCF(APF)
Handmade Framing and Gallery,
Bude, Cornwall:
handmadepictureframing.co.uk

Mal Reynolds GCF(APF) Adv
Harlequin Frames, Lincoln:
harlequin-frames.co.uk

Lawrence Robinson GCF(APF)
Pictor Gallery Custom Framing,
Manchester:
pictorgallery.co.uk

Bev Saunders GCF(APF)
The Edge Picture Framing,
Folkestone, Kent:
edgeframing.co.uk

Mark Wallington GCF(APF)
8 Bells Gallery, Tetbury, Glos:
8bg.co.uk

SELLING AT THE DESIGN BENCH



Framing Workshop, Bath

Your design bench is an important platform from which to make sales. How you use it to sell to customers can make a big difference to your profitability, says Annabelle Ruston

Lighting

A good starting point in making your design bench an effective selling tool is to get your lighting right. Daylight bulbs – now available cheaply in LED form – render colours accurately, helping to ensure your customers will stay happy with their choices. Keep clean glass paperweights handy with which to hold down customers' artwork, which often arrives rolled up. Your design bench should be kept clean and uncluttered.

Put the customer at ease

When customers bring in their artwork, put them at their ease. Compliment the items they place before you, and be enthusiastic about how great it will look when framed. Ask about the story behind the work – their comments may give you some good framing ideas. A cheery hello and a few quick comments about local issues help to break the ice. Offer hot or cold drinks and provide ways to keep children amused.

Don't start with price

Don't immediately ask: "How much do you want to spend?" The customer probably doesn't know, and if they say: "Oh, not very much," that most likely means: "I don't want to be ripped off!" No-one wants to over-pay, of course, but most people who have gone to the trouble of taking artwork to be framed want it to look as good as possible. Don't interpret "I don't want to spend very much" as "I want it to look mediocre". Who knows what the customer's idea of 'not very much' is?

Leave talking about price until the end. The client can't make an informed decision on price until you have explained the options.

Where will it hang?

Many framers start by asking where the frame will hang. A picture that will be the focus of a living room may need different treatment from an item to be hung in a spare bedroom. With framing for a kitchen, for example, ask about the colour or finish of the units.

Ask for the customer's thoughts on the frame. They may mention that their taste is modern or traditional, or that they want a dark or light frame.

Enquire about the decor style and colours of the room, and what other frames are already hung there. Assess how the art and frame will work with the existing decor. Will it stand out or blend in? Will it tie decor elements together?

If the frame is a gift, find out if it's to mark a significant event. Ask about the recipient's taste and home decor. If it is to hang in an office, ask whether it will be in a reception area, work space or boardroom. Find out whether the offices are minimalist, funky or traditional.

Customers often say their home is "fairly modern, but not minimalist". Most family homes include a mixture of styles. Ask about the colour of the sofa or curtains. When you have an idea of the customer's home and where the picture is to hang, it's time to look at framing ideas.

Complement, don't dominate

The frame should emphasise the best features of the art, rather than make a statement of its own. When gallery customers say they really like a framed picture but they aren't 100 per cent sold, it's usually because the frame is not to their taste.

Think about the mood, style or taste of the art and what the owner is trying to express.

Your trademark style

Framers tend to develop a trademark style. Some are said to be 'mount people', while others are 'frame people'. Some are fascinated by intricate mount design or gilding, while others focus on hand-finishing plain wood. They might display hundreds of mouldings or a single carousel of chevrons, myriad subtle mountboard shades or little other than off-white and black

Customers are drawn to framers who work in a style they relate to. Stylistically, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to display artwork.

Choice

When you show customers framing and mounting options, watch their reaction. If they pause, ask what aspect of the design they don't like. Is it the proportions? The colour? The pattern?

Some framers say never show a customer more than three options at once because too much choice is confusing. You don't want to bombard them with too much information, but you might need to work through a range of options before they find what they want. Keep any 'shortlisted' options to one side.

When showing an initial selection of frame chevrons, some framers throw in a wacky option to gauge the customer's reaction. This is a way of assessing how extrovert their taste is.

When a customer says "I'm not sure", they may just need reassuring. Show them a couple of similar options and they will often choose the first one: the alternatives serve to confirm that their original choice is right.

It is important to involve the client in the design process and ensure they feel the decisions are their own. Compliment them on their good taste. Comments such as "That's an excellent idea!" or "You're right – that's really going to work" help the process run smoothly.

Time well spent

All this working with the customer sounds very time-consuming, but it doesn't need to be. Once you know what questions to ask and how to read customers' reactions, the design process usually runs smoothly.



As you develop repeat business, customers will start to trust your expertise and leave more of the decision making to you. Experienced framers say regular customers often leave work with them and are happy for the framer to make the design choices.

Your labour charge should cover time spent talking to customers. Your clients are paying you for your design advice as this is built into the price. Of course, some customers ask for advice and then leave without placing an order, but this too should be built into your pricing.

Frame pricing software helps you to determine what your charge for labour should be and prompts you as to what should be included.

A framer with 30 years' experience told me she guarantees that if a customer hates a frame, she will change it free of charge. Only one customer has ever taken up the offer, but it gives her clients confidence.

Managing inappropriate decisions

Framers sometimes have to manage situations where the customer's design requests are inappropriate. If you take the stance that 'the customer is always right', the client will most likely get the picture home, realise it looks awful and blame you – even though it was their idea. To avoid this, lead the customer towards a better choice. You can't tell them their idea is awful, of course, so

acknowledge their views. Try showing them three options including their original choice, but with two much more attractive options.

There are times, though, when the framer should do what the customer wants. Some people have very singular taste. Their home may be in a highly distinctive style, or they may have pictures already framed in a certain way.

Conclusion

Good lighting is important to make your products look their best and ensure colour choices are accurate. Put customers at ease by chatting to them, offering refreshments and having items on hand to amuse children. Start by asking where the picture will hang and find out about the decor style of the room. Find out what you can about the personal tastes of the client. Explain that a frame should complement, not dominate the artwork. The time you spend with the customer at the design bench should be included in the final price – they are paying for your expertise. Steer them away from inappropriate design choices by offering a few other options. If they are very clear that an unusual choice is what they want, go with it.

**We are all born to drift.
Catching the waves
on distant shores.
Before we find our way home
with hearts full of memories.**

Introducing Driftwood.

Inspired by the sandy beaches and volcanic rocks of the Canary islands, Driftwood comes in a monochromatic choice of black or white.

FSC accredited and available in seven sizes, Driftwood has been finished with water-based gesso, stripped manually to create an effortlessly chic texture. A foil on top produces slight brown flexes which enables the range to transform any piece into a statement.

Because everyone's view is different.

larsonjuhl.co.uk | 01234 852777



LARSON · JUHL®

