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How to Sell Conservation Framing

In an often price sensitive market 'selling the difference' between regular and conservation framing will save a customer much more than money in the long term. To help you present yourself as a conservation specialist we will look at the areas that are essential to sales success in this expert field.

The basis for all selling – relationships

There are some immutable rules for successful selling that transcends most industries and ours is no different. The most important skill is probably one that is down to common sense more than any taught skill - that is, establish a relationship of trust based on your personality, skill and the fact you and your client have a mutual interest... the best possible job.

There are many factors that contribute to this aspect of selling but it is definitely the one element that will form the base for the skills we outline below. The correct manner, tone and approach add up to the basis for good customer service. We are not advocating either a subservient or overbearing approach, rather a middle ground where the customer feels they are valued and that it is ultimately their informed opinion that counts.

First things first

There have been many examples through the years where sellers launch into the well-worn sales script almost without even realising it. Your customer may only visit occasionally, or be coming to you for the first time, but you may be dealing with similar queries ten times a day.

The temptation is always to tell a purchaser what they need given your superior level of knowledge and experience. This approach has some inherent dangers. What if they are a keen amateur framer coming in for an expert job? What if they have already been to ten other framers with the same job? Or what if they have never had anything framed in their life and wouldn't know the difference between mount board and mouldings? Clearly the approach with each will be different. But which approach to take?

The key is to start each contact by making sure you ask enough questions to get to the bottom of exactly what your prospect knows and what they think they might want. Only once you have done the full list of questions must you proceed to the second vital but again often overlooked skill - listening to the answers! This may sound like common sense but reacting to the

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information a new client gives you rather than running to that well-rehearsed script is the only basis for effectively sharing your expertise.

So you have spent the first ten minutes asking and listening. How often does that happen to you nowadays when you make a purchase? How do you think you might feel if someone took this approach with you? You'd probably feel you were talking to someone who at least cared a little, enough at least to engage you properly. That's the key; you have now established a connection where the customer feels you want their business.

Demonstrate your expertise

Having established yourself as the caring listener it's time to lay the foundations that demonstrate why your prospect needs conservation framing. We do this by carefully demonstrating our expertise.

This is not a one of exercise but something we will practice throughout the sales process. You must be able to illustrate;

1. Your technical knowledge
2. Your practical skills (craftsmanship)

A good example of technical knowledge may be a succinct explanation of how you set about choosing the correct materials. An explanation of The Fine Art Trade Guild's 'Five Levels of Framing' and an illustration of the difference between Minimum, Budget, Commended, Conservation and Museum materials will inform the customer and help them decide on the level of conservation they need.

In terms of your practical skills you need show little more than examples of artefacts framed under the different regimes you have just explained. Examples of how poor craftsmanship can actively detract from a job can be used to illustrate specific points.

Finally it's important not to blind clients with too much science but simply to demonstrate your expertise. Samples are a useful sales tool as there is a huge visual element to what we do. What better way to sell the benefits of Conservation grade materials than to show identical pieces using materials and techniques at either end of the quality spectrum?

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Education, Education Education

You have asked, listened and your prospect is beginning to get the idea you may know what you are talking about. The next question from them is normally 'What do you think?' Our advice would be to avoid giving an opinion wherever possible in favour of informing a client of their options and helping them make up their own mind. This has several advantages.

Firstly the client feels empowered and empowered people like to think they are choosing the best given their newly found knowledge. Secondly, when you go to close the deal the prospect won't feel that they are being sold something, instead you are informing them in making up their own mind.

Finally the prospect turns into a customer in the full knowledge that they know what they are achieving with their purchase.

So to the question; 'What do you think?' you may answer – 'Well you have several options with different benefits to each.' Having asked the right questions at the beginning of the process the correct way forward usually reveals itself quite quickly. Educated clients will normally return to the best place to service their requirements – You!

Language

In framing like any other form of retail you should always try to accentuate the positive rather than dwelling on the negative.

Saying 'A specialist glass will help preserve your item' makes you sound much more approachable, credible and non judgemental than a crushing 'Not using UV glass will ultimately ruin your framed object'. The negative approach tends to make people feel that they are being painted into a corner rather than actively being given a choice of the best of everything.

Remember that trying to build a bond of trust should first and foremost be a positive experience.

And finally...

In what is perceived as a highly price sensitive market small differences in price or even giving price are perceived as undesirable activities. By sticking to your guns and using price to help position you as the best you may find you can command a bigger margin from a better client base.

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You should be confident in your product and skills, hold your nerve and avoid being haggled on price. Easier said than done? Here are a few tips:

- Negotiate on quality rather than price. If you take the position that to do the job cheaper means compromising quality a client will often take the better quality job. At the very least you will not lose margin.
- Go back to educating. If a client has bought a limited edition print or wants to frame a valuable family photo with more sentimental than monetary value, choosing the right level of conservation framing will add much more to the overall value. It's ultimately your job to help them see how what you do enhances the value of their investment.

In summary remember that your client is investing in a specialist and that's how you should act. Know your stuff, sell the benefits, promote your skill and always try to talk in terms of value rather than cost.