

LARSON · JUHL®

How to Stand Out From the Competition

When you need to buy something, what factors do you consider when selecting the place you will buy from? What do you look for from an optician, for example? Hours of operation, convenient location, fast, friendly service? And what do you look for from a clothing store? Large selection, mannequins that show the clothes being worn, a clearance rack?

What does this have to do with your business? Okay, try this one... What do you look for in a moulding supplier? Large selection, prompt and reliable service, guaranteed quality? Every time any of us makes a purchase, we consider a variety of factors that include all of those listed above and many more. We choose who we do business with based not just on the product they sell, but by the way they sell the product.

The process by which a business causes you to select them over another competitive business is frequently referred to as “adding value.” Value is added to a product or to a sale when the seller bundles services, enhancements and conveniences to their core offering, causing you to want to buy from them. Frequently, these bundled services include things that make the consumer’s buying process easier, faster, more pleasant, and less risky.

The framing business is increasingly competitive. Price competition and discounting are huge issues for many framers. Here are some ways in which you can add value to help retain and grow your business.

1. Be open when your customer wants to shop

While working 10am-5pm Monday to Friday might be appealing to you, it is probably not the most convenient time for many customers to shop. You need to be open when they’re not working.

2. Make your store pleasant to shop

What can you do to make your store more pleasant for the customer? Do you offer coffee, bottled water or other soft drink? Do you have toys for kids to play with? Stools at the design counter for people to sit on? Think of all the things you don’t like about the large impersonal department store you are competing against; then commit to offering the experience they don’t.

LARSON · JUHL®

3. Make the experience quick

People want the whole story from you, but they appreciate when it is condensed. More often than not, getting something framed would be on a person's daily list of chores, not their list of treats. In other words, your customer greatly desires the finished product, but the process of designing the frame at your counter can be time-consuming and overwhelming.

Establish a relationship, but do it quickly. Do a complete design presentation, but keep it focused. Calculate pricing accurately, but without apparent effort or deliberation. People lead busy lives. If you can do a great job quickly, then you are adding value.

4. Fulfill your promise

Every time you take an order, you are essentially making a promise to do a certain thing by a certain date. Value is added when you fulfill your promise.

Deliver every order on time and complete the order for the promised price. If you can't complete the order for some reason, including out-of-stock mouldings, contact the customer immediately. Have proposed solutions before you contact them. Realise that they care little about your supply problems.

5. If you screw up, FIX IT!

Every once in a great while, framers damage art. When this happens, there are a few things to remember:

- Immediately develop a plan for how you can make the problem right. Find a replacement for the damaged item, contact a conservator, or do whatever else you can to fix the problem.
- Contact the customer immediately and let them know what has happened. Let them know what you intend to do about it. Assure them that you will assume full responsibility.
- Do not try to figure out how you can save money while extracting yourself from the fire. This causes a fight that you almost never win. Instead, just do the right thing and your customer will
- appreciate the effort and probably return to you in the future.

LARSON · JUHL®

6. Guarantee your customer's satisfaction

How do you feel when you buy something and it doesn't end up being as great as you hoped? Many customers have very little idea what their finished frame will look like based on a 6" corner sample. If the customer doesn't like the finished result, you need to have a policy about what you will do, and won't do, to address the situation. It does you absolutely no good to have a dissatisfied customer leave your store. One of the biggest ways you can add value to a customer's experience is to assure that they receive what they hoped for.

Customers are risk averse. They will shop at the store where satisfaction is most likely to be achieved. Consider promoting your satisfaction guarantee. It might be the factor that causes someone to choose you.

7. Guarantee your quality

If a hinge slips, if a mount lifts, if a corner pops... It goes without saying that you should fix these problems quickly, without charge to the customer, and with a smile and a heartfelt apology.

8. Thank your customer

The small amount of effort expended in thanking each customer can increase their likelihood of recommending you to a friend or returning the next time they need something framed.

9. Add Extra Services

Anything you can do that makes your customer's life easier adds value to the experience. If you can effectively provide services that others do not, then you are establishing a competitive advantage.

Many shoppers benefit from delivery and installation services. Custom frames can sometimes be too large and heavy for people to carry home and hang themselves. Stores that provide these services make themselves indispensable to customers requiring that level of care.

Many shops successfully offer "shop-at-home" services that provide added convenience for home or office customers. You might also offer to pick-up items that are too large for your customer to carry easily.

LARSON · JUHL®

Some customers require shipping for their finished frames. You can add value for your customer by offering packaging and shipping services. They will appreciate not having to make a separate trip to the post office.

Be sure that you earn a profit on added services. Delivery, installation, on-site visits, and shipping are services that should be a profit centre for your business, not giveaways.

10. Make an offer

The previous nine suggestions are about adding value through service. Here are a few thoughts on adding value through price.

It is undeniable that consumers have been conditioned to expect periodic offers from stores. Even Rolls-Royce dealers do an occasional mailing with a discount on maintenance or accessories. Even if you never discount, there may be some value to offering an incentive to customers. Have you considered sending a gift certificate to those in your database that haven't made a purchase in three years? If you are doing direct mail to customers, or potential customers, an offer of some kind is often the difference between the success and failure of the effort.

Operating a successful business is all about finding and satisfying customers. In many cases, whether or not you get that customer depends not only on the product you are selling, but also the way you sell the product. By bundling your product with convenience, a good experience, and a minimum of risk to the consumer you are adding value in a way that is likely to produce more and better sales.