

Sales Strategies



by Jared Davis

Selling Preservation Framing

Doing the right thing usually comes at a price. Whether it's eating healthy, saving the environment, or framing artwork, doing things “the right way” potentially means more effort and inevitably more cost. Preservation framing is among these things. It requires special materials and techniques, which can be more expensive than regular decorative framing practices and materials. As a result, it can be harder to sell.

Why Sell Preservation Framing?

Past PPFA consumer surveys have regularly shown that the biggest reason consumers buy custom framing is to “preserve the artwork,” which proves there is strong demand for this service. Preser-

vation Framing is also the ethical thing to do. And shop owners who care about their businesses' reputations should also be concerned about doing the right thing. It is hard to ignore the fact that you have an obligation to offer your customers the best

possible options to achieve the “right” outcome.

When it comes to offering preservation framing, whose choice should it be—yours or your customers? A good rule is to give your customers the choice, but always offer them the best first. Beyond ethical reasons, preservation framing is also potentially higher value framing because it uses higher quality materials and takes extra labor, which is potentially more profitable. Depending



David Schummy of Fix-A-Frame with his in-store, self-made preservation framing display.

If you want your customers to go for preservation framing, you have to sell them on the concept

on your local market, preservation framing can also help set your business apart from your competition.

Selling Preservation Framing

Preservation framing requires a more specialized knowledge, materials, and techniques that are largely unseen by most consumers. This makes it a harder sell than a typical “what you see is what you get” custom frame. There are many different ways to sell preservation framing to overcome the potential price objections. Before you can sell any product or concept, however, you need to first be able to sell one important product—yourself!

Assuming you've learned everything you need to create and sell preservation framing, you still

must convince your customers that you're an expert they can trust, someone with the knowledge and experience it takes to provide the quality they want. The easiest way to do this is to promote your industry credentials and qualifications, such as CPF and MCPF qualifications, along with any awards you have earned. You don't absolutely need these credentials to sell preservation framing, but there's no doubt that having them adds to your credibility.

Your knowledge and experience for specializing in preservation framing needs to be promoted in your print ads, store signage, business cards, press releases and newsletters, and website. And rather than just using basic tag lines (“We Specialize in Preservation Framing”), try triggering an emotional response with taglines like “We Specialize in Preserving Your Memories.” This strikes a more emotional chord. And the more emotion you can include in the process, the less important price becomes.

Educating Customers

Education is an essential part of selling, and a majority of customers don't mind paying more—so long as they understand what they're paying for. Most aspects of preservation framing require explanation because customers are usually unaware of the concept. As a result, you need to provide useful information that explains the benefits of preservation framing. Be prepared to spend time with customers to explain the difference that preservation framing can make and take them on a small “tour” showing them examples of good framing.

Using the Verbal Approach



A visual timeline display shows consumers an example of an aging photograph over time without preservation framing.



A printed display poster is useful in showing consumers the different types of glass and the benefits of UV-filtering glazing.

When it comes to selling the concept of preservation framing, verbal sales pitches are largely confusing and unconvincing to typical first-time framing customers. Instead, try to describe outcomes rather than the process, especially explaining what can happen if they choose non-preservation framing.

While educating customers is important, using industry terminology to do it can be intimidating. Always use simple words and ideas that people can understand. For example, it's not effective to explain pH factors and buffering and why alphacellulose mats are preferable. Instead, tell them about the benefits of those processes and materials. For example, say something like, “These matboards are museum quality, so they won't stain over time and eventually damage your artwork, and the bevel cuts on these will always stay white and never discolor.”

When you explain why you are recommending a particular product and how it will benefit the artwork, a customer will be more likely to

appreciate your knowledge and trust your expertise.

Show It and Sell It

By far the quickest and easiest way to sell preservation framing is to use the basic rule of retailing, “show it and sell it.” One framer with over 20 years industry experience, David Schummy from Fix-A-Frame in Queensland, Australia, does this effectively with in-store displays and merchandising tools. Here are some of his successful selling methods and tools:

In-store Feature Display – David has created an in-store display promoting his EnduraArt™ process, which is a brand he created to describe his use of preservation framing techniques and materials. By creating his own brand to describe the process, he provides a natural point of difference between his business and his competitors. It also adds credibility to the concept of preservation framing in the eyes of typical consumers, who psychologically prefer to trust a brand rather than a process.

Visual Timeline Display – A visual timeline display demonstrates how a piece of art or a photo can be affected by age and non-preservation framing. Schummy used a photograph over 50 years old to create a display, digitally restoring the original photograph and capturing images of the restoration process in reverse to show the aging

process when preservation framing isn't used.

Before and After – Showing before and after comparative imagery is a very convincing visual tool that instantly shows the difference between preservation framing versus non-preservation.

Diagrams – Drawings and diagrams help show the difference between products. Having real, physical examples for salespeople to use and refer to is even more convincing.

Cut-Away Display – Another useful display is a cutaway frame display combined with a legend of clearly labeled reference points. This physically reveals what's inside a picture frame to customers, showing and explaining the proper components of a typical frame job. This type of display can be used effectively for other types of artwork, such as needlework or canvas.

Brochures – Free brochures are helpful in explaining the technical aspects and benefits of preservation products and techniques. They help customers understand that there is more to custom framing than just four pieces of wood and a pane of glass. Many preservation product manufacturers have their own brochures you can give your customers, or you can create and print your own with your own branding to add credibility to your business. Photos, illustrations, and diagrams sometimes work better than words. Schummy offers brochures not only at his front counter but also on the outside of his front door for people passing by.

Website Information – Add a preservation framing FAQ page to your website or an “Important



A display that shows a cutaway frame with a legend for each vital element helps customers understand what goes into preservation framing.



Tri-fold information brochures can help customers learn more about the value of preservation framing.

Things You Should Know About Custom Framing” page to provide information and diagrams for customers to read. You can also provide links to preservation product manufacturer sites and offer informational brochures to download. **Use examples** – Keep a range of real examples at hand to demonstrate damage caused by non-preservation framing methods and materials. An old mat with yellow acid burn is great, and so is an old print or artwork that shows signs of acid damage and/or fading. Most customers are not really convinced of what can happen to their artwork unless they see a real example.

Free Conservation Checkup – Advise customers to bring their artwork in for a conservation checkup once every three to five years. Besides adding this suggestion to your label on the back of a frame, set up a system to automatically

send postcards offering a free check-up in the future. This creates two more opportunities for a customer to walk through your door—one to drop off the artwork for the check-up and one for picking it up later. It also creates an opportunity to upsell the matting to new season colors or upgrade the glazing. It also can get a customer to think, “Is there anything else I might need framed while I'm there?”

Anticipating Objections

Once a customer genuinely understands what they are paying for, rarely does a price objection come up. If it does, it is nice to be prepared with a response that helps justify your commitment to preservation framing. Here are a few responses that can be used in those situations:

- “It's up to you if you feel you need to compromise. But in my opinion if you are going to have this hanging on your wall for many years, then it really makes sense to do it properly.”
- “We can certainly look at using non-preservation materials. That will make it cheaper, but I guess it just depends on how long you want your memory to last.”
- “As a professional framer, I'd rather not do anything that I would be ashamed of. I care about my customers and my reputation, which is why I'm still in business in these tough times, and if we keep doing the right thing, we will still be in business in the future as well.”

These words are just suggestions, and you can change them to fit your own way of talking. But the ideas behind them are designed to

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get customers to think about something other than price.

The Emotional Angle

Whenever there's a strong emotional aspect to the artwork or other items you are framing, preservation should be important. And when emotions are in play, customers will pay. The bottom line is that preservation framing is about doing the right thing. But just using the right framing methods won't ensure that your customers will go for preservation framing. You have to sell the idea to them as well. ■

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