

---

## From Front to Back – the Little Things make the Biggest Difference Profile Magazine April 2006

If someone conducted a survey, you will probably find that more than half of your custom framing customers will feel that the cost of custom framing is “more expensive than they thought”.

What most custom framers don't realise, is that the second these customers receive their framed job from you, it will be critically assessed, judged and justified for its cost.

Now, we all know the majority of their cost of a custom frame is the labour, not really the materials, however many consumers judge the materials for their outlaid cost, because they cannot “see” or value the labour.

One simple way to ensure that your work is highly “justified” by the customer in a positive sense is to simply ensure that the presentation and quality of the materials you use are the best...and not just what is seen from the front of the frame.... but also the back.

Unfortunately, most custom framers I know are guilty of neglecting the rear side of their product, and choose to “economise” on fittings and components for the back of a frame.

The most common excuse given by the framer is that “no one sees that, so it doesn't matter”.... well, at least one person sees it.... and that usually happens to be the person paying for it.... and as we all know, that is the one person that it matters the most to.

As framers, we should always assume that our work will be closely assessed from the back as well as the front. For this reason, it makes sense to use the best possible components for the back of your frame..

As retailers, we should understand the need to distinguish our products from the standard cheap Chinese import ready-mades, and one of the simplest and easiest ways we can do this is to improve the presentation of our product, and its perceived quality.

### **CORD VS WIRE?**

The most prominent and usually “the cheapest looking” item on the back of an average custom frame is the cord. I shake my head when I see a heavy custom made picture frame with cheap Venetian cord doubled and tripled over on the back. It just looks messy, it doesn't convey and consumer confidence, and definitely looks cheap.

Wherever possible, Use high quality wire, not cheap “stretchy” venetian cord. I can hear some of you say, “Oh, but I use “*non-stretch*” venetian cord, not the normal stuff!” Sure, but the customer will still perceive this as “cheap cord” regardless of

---

your effort. Any cord you choose to use will never be perceived as high quality as wire.

Even if the picture is lightweight, and doesn't justify the "extra strength" of wire, remember it is not all about "function", it is more about "presentation". What looks better? What will give you customer more confidence? What will make your product look better from the average factory produced frame?

Some of you might be amazed to learn that venetian cord was actually made for venetian blinds, not picture framing. If it was actually made for framing, then it would be probably called "framing cord"?

If you are a mass frame manufacturer, use cord. If you are a custom framer, use high quality wire!

### **STAPLES VS HANGERS**

Use double re-enforced D-rings, not single D-rings or staples.

"But staples and cord are much quicker!", I hear you say. Yes, but if speed is so important to you, then forget offering custom framing, and just start selling ready-mades? Then you don't have to put hangers on anything?

The point trying to be made here is don't compromise essential quality, of the sake of a few extra seconds of "saved time". Remember, it's not all about "function", it is also about "presentation". Buy a cordless drill and use proper hanging fittings, love doing what you do, and don't whinge about the extra time it takes.

### **BUMP-ONS?**

Bump-ons are a small touch, to show the customer "you care" (... about their wall!). In relative terms, they are fairly costless and perform a couple of jobs.

Firstly, they protect the wall from being damaged by the sharp, pointy corner of the frame.

Secondly, they help create a comfortable space behind the frame to allow for air circulation around the framed package, which offers some conservation advantages. You'll never see a ready-made frame with bump-ons, so this is a great, cost effective way to create a "point of difference".

Also, if you are going to the "extravagant" expense of using a bump-on on the back of a frame, don't economise and use the horrible rubber ones (which stick to the paint on the wall!), splurge out a few more bucks and buy a roll of the nice "wall friendly" felt bump-ons instead.

### **FOMECOR VS MDF**

There are dozens of reasons why foamboard is better to use than MDF, and I won't bore the majority of readers by going into them here. Most ready-made frames use

---

MDF as a backing. Most custom frames use foamboard as a backing. Which category do you fall under?

If you are one of those framers who still insists on using 3mm MDF as a preferred backing for your custom framing, then my advice is when you go to sleep tonight, try to wake up tomorrow in the year 2006, rather than the year 1986...

### **FRAMING TAPE VS MASKING TAPE**

Sealing the edges of a frame should be done with a durable tape that has a long term adhesive. If you really want your customer to be unimpressed with your work, then try to use the cheapest standard masking tape you can find, because you know it will go brittle and dry out in a months time, and it's not as if you ever want that customer to come back to you again in the future ☺ !

### **BROWN PAPER BACKING?**

Most people think that brown paper backing on a frame is there for the sole reason of decoration, or just a "dust cover". These reasons are valid; however there is more to the humble "brown paper" than this alone. The use of brown paper backing can assist in creating a "microclimate" inside the frame, and to help buffer any sudden changes in climate at the surface of the artwork. The brown paper will slow the increase in relative humidity, and reduce the amount of moisture buildup inside the frame. The brown paper backing still allows the air in the frame to comfortably circulate in and out of the frame, thereby still helping the control of mould growth as well. The only thing going against brown paper backing, is that it is usually only available in one colour - brown?

### **QUALITY STICKER VS RUBBER STAMP**

Most framers put their business details on the back of their frames (unless it is a job they don't want anyone to know they did!). Doing this is a professional touch to the overall product. The quality custom framers who are proud of their business image will use a high quality, full colour label, sometimes with gold highlight! ("Gold" labels cost a lot more than normal labels to print, but no one doubts the fact they look better!!).

If you are just using a rubber stamp on the back of a frame to mark your details, it may be time to upgrade to something a bit more professional. Alternatively, if you just want your job to "look economy", then just keep using a rubber stamp.

### **WRAPPING THE ARTWORK**

Wrapping framed artwork in front of the customer is the final stage of selling "the experience" of custom framing. Your customer has just spent a "small fortune" on their new "treasured memory", so the least you can do is wrap it up for them to take home. If you want to give your customer the inconsiderate "discount shop" feel to their purchase, then just staple some cardboard corners on the frame (preferably one in each corner). However, if you want them to feel that you actually appreciate their business, then you could choose to wrap their "framed masterpiece" in bubble wrap, to protect it all over (not just the corners).

---

There are still some framers out there caught in a time-warp who choose to wrap framed artwork in brown kraft paper, which is definitely very "retro" ... (Remember when supermarkets used to pack your groceries in brown paper bags?) For those still lost in this time-warp; bubble-wrap is the "new age" brown paper... (Just like "plastic" bags, are the new "space-age" paper bags used by supermarkets now!)

### **BUT WHAT ABOUT USING CARDBOARD CORNERS?**

In my opinion, the only shops who use cardboard corners, are the ones that are ashamed to show the quality of their joins. All the frames in the mass-merchant discount shops have cardboard corners on them, so if you want your product to "look as cheap" as this, or if you are ashamed of the quality of your joins, then definitely buy yourself some cardboard corners today!

### **BUT WHAT ABOUT THE EXTRA COST IN ALL OF THESE IDEAS?**

As I was writing this article, I could literally "hear" some of you saying this statement, echoing in my empty head. Look, we are really only talking about an extra few cents per frame job, it is not a major "profit crippling" expense. I know that some of you might still object, wave your finger at me and say, "Yes Jared, but all these costs all add up". Yes, I guess they do. However these extra "little costs" are negligible when you step back and consider the big picture. At the end of the day, you need to ensure that your customer will "justify" the quality of your product as a higher standard than the discount framed prints or ready-made frame.

If you still don't see the value in offering quality components on the back of the frame, then at the very least bump your prices up by an extra buck or two per frame to cover the costs, as you will unlikely loose a customer over this. In summary, you simply cannot afford to compromise the perceived quality and reputation of your work, for the sake of an extra few cents.

More than ever, custom framers need to have a distinguishable "point of difference" from a cheap mass produced decorator print in a furniture shop. Ensure your framing job is different in every possible way to a ready made frame or a cheap framed print ... you want your customer to "see" the difference in quality.... otherwise they will still feel that the price they paid was too high?

In conclusion, I'd like to share with you one of my sayings –

*"If you go the "extra mile" for your customer...  
next time they need you, they will drive an "extra mile" to come back to you!"*

Jared Davis



*With over 15 years experience in the framing & graphics industry, Jared Davis has covered the wholesale, commercial and retail aspects of the business. His previous sales, marketing & training experience gives him an understanding of the changing opportunities for retail businesses, and he offers an up-to-date approach on new methods and techniques now required by today's business owners, to be able to successfully market, merchandise and sell their services to consumers. Jared is also a featured educator at major international industry tradeshows & conventions.*