

The Online Advantage

By Alexis Orlacchio

From websites to a social media presence, framers are discovering the many marketing opportunities the Internet has to offer

Are you looking for marketing strategies that you can use to entice new customers and keep old ones coming back? Technology is changing the way framing retailers market their businesses to both new and existing customers. From re-designing websites to creating a stronger social media presence, custom framing retailers are taking advantage of the many marketing opportunities the Internet has to offer

Take Cliff Wilson, owner of Framed in Tatnuck in Worcester, MA. Whenever he meets new customers, he always asks how they found out about his shop. Aside from his company sign, he says, “They always mention that they found us in a Google search. They come in because the reviews on our shop are positive.”

Today, many potential customers form their first impressions of a business before they even step in the door. “Customers go to a website as the first ‘default’ to check out businesses. They develop a strong impression about the company, which will likely dictate further action or not,” says Kent Unter-
mann, founder and owner of seven Pictures Plus stores in Hawaii. He believes frame shop owners run a risk of losing prospective clients if their company websites do not match the level of their brick and mortar stores. “The longer a business does not have an effective website, the more likely it is that they are not growing their customer base,” he says, adding that even his older customers are looking at things online.

So what makes a business’s website effective? Todd Dow, marketing manager at High Desert Frameworks in Bend, OR, says that an attention-grabbing website with easy navigation and informative content can connect a company with prospects and clients, ultimately leading

to more business. He says, “For the true custom framing shop, it is very important to portray a high level of expertise, show finished products, provide customer testimonials, and

highlight your design services and preservation skills.” Dow adds that the purpose of the company website is to build trust with your target audience, “it showcases your services and that you preform them well.”

Like High Desert Frameworks, the Framed in Tatnuck

website also features customer testimonials, which Wilson believes are crucial to bringing in new clients. He says, “You can say anything positive about your company on the website, but you also need to have customers talking about you and supporting those claims or else you won’t have credibility.” In addition to the testimonials section of his website, there is also a link to Yelp! reviews.

Pew Internet 2013 research statistics show that more than half of Smartphone users shop and make purchases



Cherry Creek Custom Framing manager Aaron Casey uses an iPad to scroll through examples of finished projects on their blog, which showcases their designers’ talents and is used to show customers new framing ideas. The iPad sits on a display for customers to browse examples at their leisure.

using their cellphones. Companies are increasingly using more mobile-friendly forms of their business websites. Wilson says, “‘Responsive’ is the term used in web development that means the website will show up correctly on whatever device it is on, whether on a smartphone, iPad, etc.” When non-mobile-friendly websites are opened on tablets or smartphones, they can appear distorted with text and links that are too tiny to read.

Dow says, “It’s a no brainer. We believe in having a content-efficient, responsive website that is friendly to most, if not all, mobile, tablet, and desktop browsers.”

It was this idea that Tam O’Neill, owner of Cherry Creek Custom Framing in Denver, CO, had in mind when she redesigned her website. “People, especially younger people, use their phones for everything. They may not take the time to research something at home on a computer; they do it on the go,” she says. O’Neill re-developed her website through WordPress, a popular online publishing platform that lets users create blogs and websites for free. She says, “A



“Social media has absolutely helped bring in more customers,” says Todd Dow, marketing manager at High Desert Frameworks in Bend, OR. Owner Myrna Dow works with a customer.

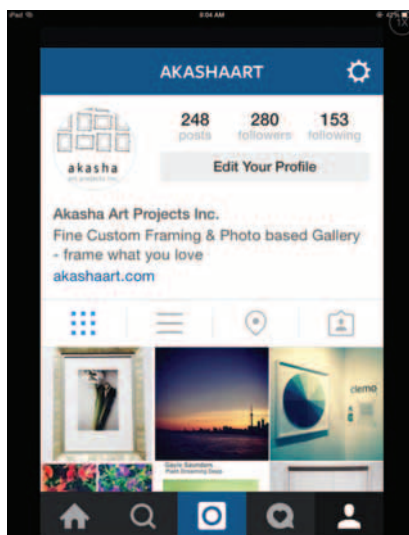
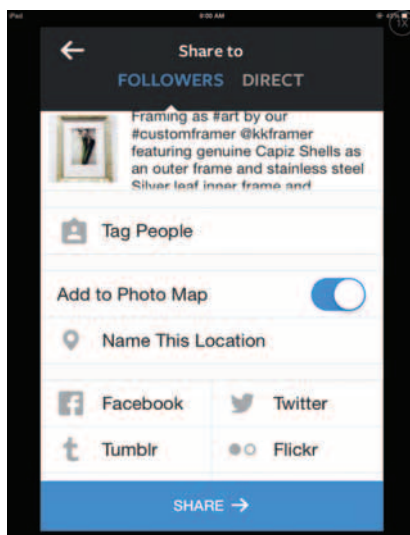


Cliff Wilson, owner of Framed in Tatnuck, Worcester, MA, says that new customers typically find positive reviews of his shop in a Google search which draws them in.

benefit to using WordPress is that it is automatically mobile-friendly. It’s also easy to post and edit yourself, so you don’t have to have an outside IT person.” O’Neill’s website connects to their Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest pages as well as Yelp! reviews. O’Neill mentioned that one customer originally parked his car to get a haircut, saw her company sign, and did an Internet search of the shop on his cellphone. Since the reviews were positive, he came in.

In addition to a company website, Dow says, “Social media has absolutely helped bring in more customers. We have utilized social media and a blog since 2002. With the addition of our digital printing services last year and our web marketing efforts, we have seen a younger crowd engage with our website and design studio.”

Sonja Scharf of Akasha Art Projects in Toronto, ON, is also a fan of using social media and the Internet to gain maximum exposure. “Very few people take the time to shop anymore. You need a strong online presence or you may not be found,” she says. As an avid user of Instagram, a



Sonja Scharf of Akasha Art Projects in Toronto uses the free photo sharing app Instagram to post images four to five times a day. “If you type #customframing where it says ‘Write a caption,’ anyone who searches ‘custom framing’ will find your post,” she says.

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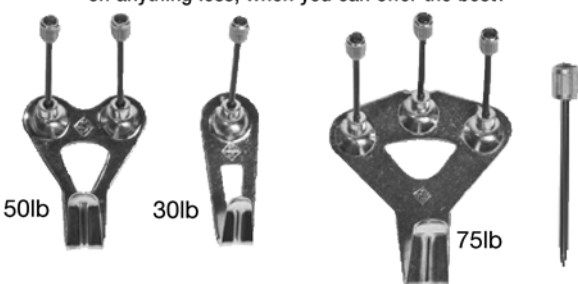
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free photo-sharing app that allows users to simultaneously post to Facebook and Twitter, she points out the importance of hashtags. "If you type #customframing where it says 'Write a caption,' anyone who searches 'custom framing' will find your post." Scharf puts new photos on social media up to four or five times a day. She says, "We believe in the power of visuals and try to post frequently. This has created a large number of followers, and many customers who come in mention that they saw our posts on Facebook." Her branding efforts on social media also resulted in Akasha Art Projects being named one of the city's top 10 framing firms on a major site about art, music, and culture in Toronto. "Since that rating appeared, our business has increased 30 to 40 percent," she says.

Today, social media allows business owners a new way to accomplish the same thing as direct mail and advertising but is quicker and more cost-effective. Sara Nachreiner of Mitrebox Framing in Minneapolis, MN, likes to stay consistent with her social media posts. She follows a common axiom that customers will need to be exposed to a company message a certain number of times before they actually come in to shop. She says, "It's important to post new pictures, frames of the week features, etc., to get your brand in front of people and generate excitement for your business." To help measure success, she uses Sprout Social, a social media management software, to schedule posts and analyze the demographics of responses. "Analytical tools like this are great because they let you see what posts your customers engage with the most, which gives you a better idea of what they would like to see more of," she says. Posts on design are among the most popular. "Any post puts our name in front of our audience, and customers always mention seeing the photos on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and our website."

Using these platforms can help you spread the word about your store instantaneously, while saving you money. Updating your website can bring in more clients who use the Internet to conduct research. Giving people a chance to rave about your expertise and great customer service on your Facebook page or your website testimonials is a virtual word-of-mouth marketing strategy that will highlight your staff and services. Social media and the Internet can help you draw more attention to your business and increase traffic into your store. ■

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Alexis Orlacchio is editorial assistant for Picture Framing Magazine.



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Frame Design

Annabelle Ruston

Anabelle Ruston, editor of *Art Business Today*, has published *Frame Design* through the UK's Fine Art Trade Guild. The 110-page volume is attractively illustrated with dozens of color photos and offers a thorough yet concise synopsis of major framing and design concepts. *Frame Design* touches on the most important things a framer needs to know in a pinch with down-to-earth language, making it easily digestible. The spiral bound is also designed to allow the book to be used as an everyday reference. It is filled with easy-to-follow instructional design tools and lots of practical ideas that can be valuable in creating designs that will please many customers.

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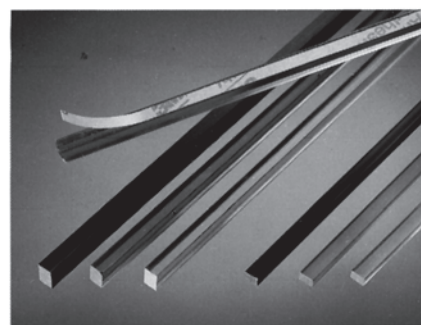
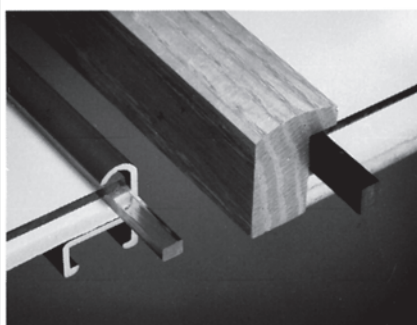
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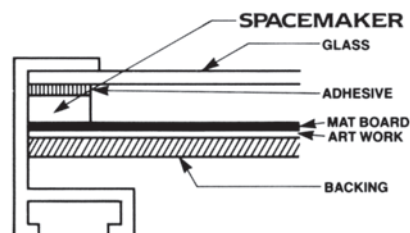
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