

# Capturing the Photography Market

By Greg Perkins, CPF

There have been numerous advancements in photographic technology in the past few years. As a result, everyone thinks they are a photographer. Indeed, many of them are actually quite good. Of course, there can be a big difference in results between a professional photographer with technical knowledge and an artistic eye versus you or I taking random photos. Even so, the reality is that you no longer need an expensive camera to take decent pictures. In fact, good photography is nearly always at your fingertips using phones, tablets, or other devices.

***Everyone is a photographer, not a framer—and that provides a lot of opportunities to cash in on photography's huge popularity***

In the April issue of *National Geographic*, a graphic showed the popularity of picture taking in America. In 2006, it was estimated Americans took 53 billion photos, making an average of 177 per person. By 2015 that number jumped to 105 billion, or 322 per person, with 37 percent of the photos taken with cell phones. In 2011, Facebook reported that 140 billion photos had been posted on its site. That is 10,000 times more than the number of photos in all the collections in the Library of Congress. At the same time, it has been estimated that there are 3.5 trillion photos in existence.

Not only do people enjoy taking photos, but they also enjoy sharing them. Instagram, as well as other apps, make it easy to let your family and friends see your life in pictures. With these apps and the various photo editing programs available, there is one large bunch of people devoting a



*A completely black and white frame design would be too strong for this all white décor. The silver frame tones it down to look its best.*

huge amount of time and energy to photography.

At this point, the surge in the popularity of photography hasn't really impacted custom framers much. But few framers focus their marketing efforts on this category. When you visit stores where readymade frames are sold, however, you will notice a shift in their offerings. There are still the standard rectangular format frames such as 5"x7" and 8"x10", but there are now many square frames on the shelves to accommodate digital photos, such as 12"x12".

What are you doing in your business to capture some of this photography craze? Today, there are online sites people can use to upload their own photos where they can be printed and framed. If you have in-house printing or photo restoration services, it is important to let the people in your market area know about them. If both existing and potential new customers know what you can do for them, and you make it easy, there are plenty of folks who prefer doing business locally who will make use of them.

So, where do you begin? First, figure out how to appeal to people's emotions and interests.

Frame some photos for display in your store. Not just the standard wedding and graduation photos but also some of artistic images and pictures an everyday person takes. Be sure to include the popular square format images seen frequently on Instagram and other sites. Just framing some photos isn't enough. Be sure to get them photographed for use in your marketing materials, both online and printed. It helps to know what people are taking photos of so you can understand how to best market your business to maximize your success. For example, the number one Instagram hashtag (label) is #love. The photos categorized using it are mostly of babies, spouses, or selfies with friends. Knowing this,

you might consider including some of these types of photos in what you frame.

When you review why people use online services to have their own photographs printed and framed online, four keys areas to note are price, ease, convenience, and less intimidation. It can be difficult for a frame shop with retail overhead to compete on price since the online services don't have storefront expenses. You can focus on ease and convenience by doing everything you can to streamline your business to receive these orders. Many people feel intimidated by frame shops because they do not understand what will take place or if they will be taken advantage of. You can help this issue by educating



*Create a more interesting design by exploring the various ways one image can be dissected into two or more pieces.*

people about the process, both for the customers who come in the store and through information you use to attract new business.

If you want to do business with the photography enthusiasts in your area, be sure your framing is attractive and satisfies their needs. Much of the framing offered by online services is quite basic, so it's important to offer that option, but you may also appeal to other customers with more interesting designs. Although the digital

photography trend is popular across the generations, older folks tend to take fewer photos than younger people do. When you are framing photos for your store displays and for use in your marketing materials, be aware of who you want to target. There isn't a right answer. It depends on things like your local demographics, your business image, and product selection.

Let's look at several framing options.

## Overall Neutrality

The mats used for photos are most often white and the frames are generally black. Part of this comes from professional photographers, who are told to use this color



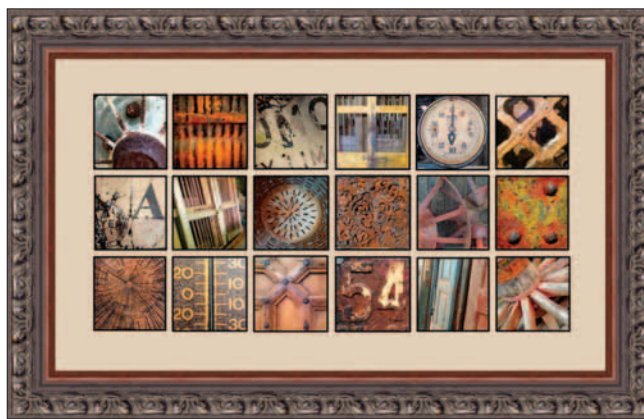
scheme for competitions and presentations. It is also sometimes a pricing issue, since the least expensive frames tend to be black.

It's important for framers to weigh and balance the popular looks people are buying with what works best with each photo. In this case, adding a silver frame around the black frame enhanced an otherwise black and white design. A black frame on its own would be overbearing for the photo with so little black in it and for the all-white décor. While it's not necessary for framing to match the décor, it is smart to consider things like contrast because you won't want it to end up too bold or too washed out for the room.

## Break it Up

You have likely seen large maps that have been cut into sections that are framed individually to hang as a grouping on the wall. The same concept can be used for photos. The image shown on page 31 was simply cut in half to become a diptych. Depending on the picture, you can divide it into as many pieces as you like. If you are working with a customer on a design, make sure the photo has no special monetary or sentimental value. As long as the photo is purely decorative, by all means suggest this concept. Your customer will get a design that is much more unique for the dollar, and you will increase your bottom line by selling more moulding.

This is the same image as the other daisy photo on page 30. If you offer printing and photo editing services at your shop, you can



*A display piece like this is a great way to show your customers what they can do with some of their favorite digital photos.*



*If you are not careful, groupings may outgrow the wall space allotted for them. You can use this technique with narrower than normal mat borders offset by spacers used to add depth and interest.*



*This Asian cabinet is a focal point in its room. In order to avoid competing with it a subtle black and gold color scheme was maintained*

make this type of change for your customers. The right half was simply altered to a sepia color with a single click. This idea applies to a single image cut apart, but this design was created by flipping the photo to create a mirror image. That just takes one more click using a photo editing program. It can't get much easier than that. It's a great service to offer when

your customers' images aren't the most flattering with the room where they want to use them. When you can take a picture they already like and offer to make it work better in their homes, they will love you.

## Instagram Favorites

The popularity of Instagram has resulted in millions of people storing and sharing their photos online. Many of these images are square. One idea is framing a collection of these images. In the example at the top of this page, the photos are all close-ups of various items, capturing their patterns and textures. It's also popular to mix and match photos, with the only unifying factor being that the person likes all of the pictures. Your customers may have such pictures of their kids, pets, or from a trip.

When framing groupings, it is easy to overfill the space if each piece is framed using your general proportions. This frame design intentionally makes use of narrower mat borders to reduce the overall size of each frame. Because narrow mat borders tend to look skimpy, you can overcome the problem by adding spacers between the two mats. This adds visual weight, so what

the mat lacks in width is made up for in depth.

Another idea for framing a collection of favorite images is to use a multiple opening mat to merge all the photos into a single frame. This is a great alternative for the person who has less space, a smaller budget, or a larger collection because it keeps the design more concise.

## Go Big!

As the resolution of digital photos has increased, the ability to print high-quality, large images has grown, too. When you combine this with the popularity of oversized art, the timing is right to promote framing large images. The photo in the image at the bottom of page 33 is 48" x 48". Photos are often matted, but you can also frame them without mats. When you don't use mats, you can make it up by stacking mouldings or adding a liner inside the frame. For this design, two frames were combined with a fillet.

## Not Just Black and White

Very few black-and-white photos are only black and white. In fact, many so-called black-and-white photos do not have true black or white in them. More often, these pictures are made up of a range of grays. The way the image comes from the camera is largely what dictates the color, but the paper also affects the color scheme. For the design at the top of this page, a light gray, medium gray, and dark gray mat combination and a dark silver frame relate to the softer contrast in the picture. Black and white mats and frames have their places, but you can fine-tune your frame designs with grays and silver.

## Warm It Up

You can add subtle color to warm up black-and-white photos. In the photo above, soft, earthy gray-brown colors were used instead of neutral white, black, or gray. Framers often get hung up on matching the colors in pictures, but you can coordinate with them or add a subtle indication of



*Many black and white photos will look better in various tones of gray and silver than stark black and white framing.*



*When black and white framing won't work well in your customer's room, you can sometimes add subtle colors without detracting from the photo.*

the colors that might be there if the image was in color.

## Review

The next time you are presented with a photo to frame, forget the same old white mat and black frame. Being a custom framer, you can do more to enhance the photos your customers bring to you. When a customer really wants a simple look or wants to keep the cost down, a basic white frame is an alternative that may still fulfill their request. Even though the white-on-white look—using mats and frames of the same color—has been popular for several years, it is still used less and remains fresher than black and white.

Maximize your profit potential for framing photography by displaying it and talking about it on your website, in social media posts, and for print ads among others. Also, plan a window display featuring photography or an in-store vignette. Within the photography category there are both professionals and amateurs. To get face time with the professionals, offer to speak at a local association or guild meeting.

If you have a large, up-to-date mailing list, send email invitations to an in-store seminar. At the seminar show the attendees ideas like the ones

covered in this article. Suggest they bring in their own pictures to get framing ideas and hand out a gift card to each attendee that they can apply to their custom framing project. One thing is sure: photography is not going away. It makes so much sense to cash in on this craze. **PFM**

*Interested in learning more about frame design? Greg will be leading several seminars at this year's National Conference.*

**Greg Perkins**, CPF, is in his 44th year in the framing industry. Starting out as a retailer, he worked at Larson-Juhl for 24 years and is now an industry consultant, focusing on frame design and retailing. In addition to teaching at The National Conference, Greg is also an author, contributing editor, industry educator, and artist. He can be contacted at [gregperkinsconsulting@outlook.com](mailto:gregperkinsconsulting@outlook.com) or 770-842-2028.

