

Sales Strategies



by Jared Davis,
MCPF, GCF

Selling Ready Made Frames

Say a person has a photo and decides that it needs a picture frame. What does that person think of first? Often, a ready-made frame might come to mind. This is especially true of someone who has never been in a custom frame shop. So, as a picture framer, do you offer ready-made frames, such as table-top frames, photo frames, or even artist-sized frames, that would appeal to these potential customers? If not, why? There is a huge market for ready-made frames, typically driven by craft shops and gift retailers. While not all custom framers embrace this product category, it could provide sales that you have overlooked or have had reservations about.

If ready-made frames are among the first things many people look for, why not carry some to get new customers started in framing?

If a ready-made frame is often the first thought of many prospective customers, then offering this product option is a logical enticement to stop in for a visit.

Offering an affordable alternative to custom

Either way, if you don't carry ready-mades, you could be missing out on a source of additional revenue.

Ready-made Versus Custom

When it comes to selling, most of the battle is providing customers a convincing reason to come into your store. So



Top Shot Photographics has positioned its ready-made frame display gondola close to the custom-framing area to increase awareness of custom-frame alternatives.

framing can encourage prospective consumers to feel comfortable visiting your store without feeling that they have to spend a lot of money. Once inside, customers can then be enticed into looking at the higher-value option of a custom frame—for this project or for something in the future. And in most cases, having a selection of ready-mades does not take sales away from custom framing.

Matt and Lisa Sexton of Top Shot Photographics in Goulburn, Australia, offer both custom and ready-made frames. They emphasize this point. “In the majority of cases where a customer walks in looking for a custom framing job, we end up providing that service. However, people who have never ordered custom framing before aren't aware of the associated costs of custom work. Having ready-made frames allows us to still make a sale and cater to all our clients' needs. We've also found that one of the advantages of having a wide-format printing service is that customers are able to choose a ready-made



Top Shot Photographics in Goulburn, Australia, successfully offers both custom-framing and a wide variety of ready-made frames.

frame and order a photo printed to suit rather than struggle to find a frame for a photo that has already been printed.”

Peter Abildgaard of Frame Up Quality Picture Framing in Mornington, Australia, displays a modest offering of ready-made photo frames. He says, “Ready-made frames have not detracted from our custom business whatsoever. In fact, it has nicely complemented our photo restoration and printing service, creating an affordable and instant option we can offer on the spot. We also offer a courtesy service to fit a photo into a ready-made frame for customers. This only takes a couple of minutes and builds loyalty for future business.”

A Market for Both

The reality is, there is a market for both custom and ready-made frames. Ready-made frames fulfil a different need for customers than custom frames. While cost is a factor, what is often more important is that ready-mades can be ideal for small photos, affordable gifts, and decorative home items.

Ready-made frames not only cater to buyers thinking, “Oh, I need a frame for that photo of Aunt Minnie,” but also to those who think, “Oh, what a gorgeous looking frame—I’ll have to find a picture for it!” Thus, ready-made frames can serve both a functional purpose, such as a diploma frame, or a designer accessory, such as a colorful decorator item. Impulse purchases like this are a great way to add to your sale to customers who come to pick up a custom frame but walk out with an additional purchase like an attractive ready-made that caught their eye.

Frame Styles

It is always sensible to cover the basics, so plain blacks and whites in simple profiles will always be popular, but variety is the spice of life. Like providing a selection of moulding samples, you can show a broad range of styles of ready-made frames—from traditional to modern to even novelty styles. They can also be affordable or high-value. Ready-mades can be suitable for photos, collages, and certificates in ready-to-hang or table-top versions. When displayed, ready-mades can both complement and enhance the overall consumer look and relevance of your store.

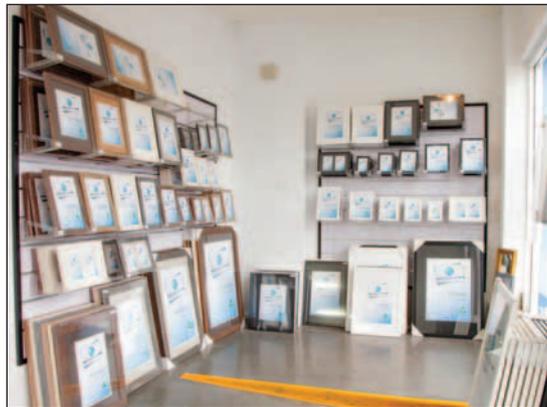
When it comes to sizes that sell, this can vary depending on your market, but standard photo

sizes are always common. Most manufacturers find the most popular sizes are 5"x7" and 10"x8" for photos and 11"x14" can be popular for certificates. Square sizes are also starting to grow in popularity due to the prevalence of photo apps such as Instagram.

Buy or Make Ready-mades

Some framers say, “I’ve got a load of offcuts that I’m going to chop down into ready-mades one day when I have a chance.” For many, that day never comes. When you consider the relatively low cost of quality ready-made frames, it’s hard to justify the return you would get on the time required to cut offcuts into ready-made frames when your time could be more valuably invested in your business in other ways.

If you do choose to make your own ready-mades, it’s important to make them to a standard that matches the expectations of other ready-made frames in the market,



Matt and Lisa Sexton from Top Shot Photographics used slatwall paneling for their ready-made frame display area, which provides the option of having a graduated display of different size frames.

including professional facing inserts, standbacks, and properly presented packaging.

Matt and Lisa from Top Shop Photographics say, “By manufacturing some of our own frames, we are able to include our own branded inserts and details into the frame. We also highlight the fact that these are ‘Australian Made’ on our inserts, which is a big advantage as many clients feel comfortable spending a little extra when they know they are getting a high quality, locally made product.”

In using offcuts to make your own frames, keep in mind it may not allow you to offer ongoing product consistency. Buying ready-made frames allows you to maintain an attractive and consistently stocked display, even during your busy periods.

Displaying and Merchandising

Ready-made frames always sell better when presented on a professional, dedicated display. You can use a shelf unit, a table top, a counter, or even a window. Avoid positioning them in a dark corner. Select a highly visible or high traffic area where they can become prominent, noticeable, and can lead to an impulse purchase. Lighting is also important in merchandising, so make sure you have sufficient lighting for your display.

Merchandised displays for ready-made frames should always look neat and logically organized, but not over-stocked. If a display is too full, customers may assume that no one else is buying them. Having a few items missing can visually convey the message that others have been buying. Comfortably space out your frames so your display doesn't look too cramped or too mass-merchandised. You can also make



Frame Up Quality Picture Framing in Mornington, Australia, has a basic display stand in the front of their stores, stocked with ready-made frames to cater to all customers.

your display attractive by using props such as plants, flowers, and other decorative items. You can even mix in custom-framed examples as well.

Offering a broad variety of different styles, sizes, and colors of photo frames will not only make your display look more attractive and eye-catching but will also be appealing for customers looking for a broader selection. A good mixture can also prevent your frames from looking mass-merchandised.

Some retailers remove outer packaging and then insert their own facing inserts to help remove this perception.

Many retailers have found that inserting real photos (such as family photos) into frames helps increase their chance of selling. It provides an easy way to visualize how the frame could look with their photos.

The Sextons at Top Shot Photographics settled on slatwall panels with custom-made gondolas from a shop-

fitter as the best option for their ready-made frame display area. This provided the opportunity to have a graduated display of different height frames with flexibility to change sizing. They also display decorative frames on gondolas with glass shelves with large drawers underneath for storage. This easily displays ornate and oddly shaped frames.

They say, “Positioning our ready-made frames close to our custom framing area

also increases our client awareness of the custom-made alternative to just buying a ready-made frame.”

Competing with Major Retailers

When it comes to price, Matt says, “Although we are obviously not able to compete with the price advantages of major retailers, the majority of our clients are willing



Jen and Rex Hutchison of Coastal Framing and Design in Tweed Heads, Australia, use slatwall paneling to create a professionally merchandized display area for their selection of ready-made frames. They buy from wholesalers rather than make their own.

to pay more for our products due to the higher quality of frames we offer. Customers also appreciate the service and advice from a professional framer even when they are selecting a ready-made frame.”

Abildgaard of Frame-Up Quality Picture Framing adds, “Our customers are not that price sensitive because ready-mades are not an expensive purchase. The convenience of having them immediately available also helps.”

Many major retailers usually only offer basic options in ready-made frames, such as black and white. This creates an opportunity for custom framers to offer alternative choices in furniture stains and decorative finishes, which often can't be found in department stores. It is often helpful to offer frames at a variety of different price points, covering both high value and affordable. Strategically, high value ready-mades could comfortably lead into the pricing realm of custom framing. You also need to have a price displayed clearly for ready-made frames, preferably with a price tag on every item. Customers can become frustrated if they have to ask for a price for this type of product.

Taking It Further

Once you start having success with ready-made frames,

you may find you can offer additional add-on components for these frames, such as pre-cut matboards or pre-sized pieces of premium, conservation, or anti-reflective glazing, which you could potentially source from off-cuts. Some framing businesses also offer in-store photo enlargement printing services and kiosks.

Conclusion

It's never a good idea to let business walk out your door, especially for a frame. Better to have a customer leave your shop with at least something in their hands. Today's consumers are looking for a broader range of choices. Offering ready-made frames could be the difference that helps your business become a complete one-stop frame shop, making it more appealing—right from the moment when they first think, 'I need a frame.' **PFM**

Jared Davis, has 25 years of industry experience and is the business development manager for Megawood Larson-Juhl in Australia as well as a consultant for Gunnar International. In addition to writing for PFM, Jared also travels extensively as an educator and speaker, teaching at many industry shows and seminars around the world including The National Conference. Jared also serves on the PFFA Board of Directors and is the author of the book "Getting the Most Value From Your CMC."

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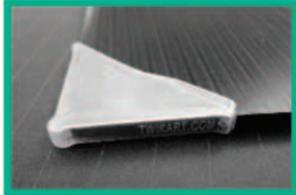
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