

Going the Extra Mile

How do you stand out from the rest and win repeat customers?

Let me start by asking two questions. Who won the men's 100m final at the last Olympics?

Who came in second?

It's sad to acknowledge, but history generally only remembers those who came in first. It may seem harsh, but in business, it's even harsher; there is no silver medal for second place. In business, you either win or you lose.

When it comes to training for a race, it's all about running those extra miles—they can make the difference between winning and losing on race day. Likewise, in business—unless you're lucky—only doing what you need to do won't win you that next job. Going that extra bit more to give yourself an edge is what will set you apart from your competition and win you consumer loyalty. What are you doing in your business right now to go the extra mile for your customers?

There is one simple guideline that can help you understand which extra mile you need to run: what matters most to your business is what matters most to your customer. With this in mind, let's break down some of the customer-centric areas that matter most



and share some ideas for going that extra mile—which can help give you the boost you need to win gold.

Exceeding your customers' expectations will help foster a long-standing relationship between them and you, their framer.

Presentation

You only get one chance to make a first impression. When a customer walks into your store for the first time, much of their silent judgment about your business is made within the first five seconds. This is largely based on what they see and how you present your store layout.

Think about what you can do to make your store rate highly within those first five seconds. Aim to inspire with beautifully framed examples, eye-catching displays, decorative props, and professional signage. This all needs careful curation, and remember, less is more. If you have too much going on to



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Quality

In the eyes of today's custom framing consumer, quality is a given. You're no longer going the extra mile by offering this. How does your product compare to mass-produced or imported products?

A good barometer is to look at your hanging hardware. Do you use cheap cord and staples for hanging the backs of your frames, or do you use high-quality hanging wire and metal fittings? If you're not already delivering a high-quality product,

then you're likely not going to win in the long run.

Service

Picture framing is a service industry. You don't just provide a finished product; you also provide an overall experience. The difference is made in how you make your customer feel. Considerate gestures such as carrying the customer's artwork to their car or even delivering an oversized framed item to their home add to your overall level of service.

Being able to meet or beat a given deadline when it matters—such as those rush-job, “his birthday is tomorrow” scenarios—also sets you apart from the rest. A successful business owner once told me, “Whenever you go the extra mile for your customer, they'll drive an extra mile to come back again!”

Competitive

Being competitive doesn't mean being the cheapest. It's easy to be pressured into reducing your price, but consider this: when a consumer is appreciating their framed memory on their wall for years to come, they don't remember the “great discount” they got from their framer. They remember their memory and, hopefully, the overall positive experience they had when they went through the process of buying it. You can be competitive in meaningful ways that don't revolve around price. For example, offering ready-made frames is one good idea to appeal to consumers of all budgets.

Consider alternative ways to add value without

Scott Dawson of Dawson's Framing on the Gold Coast, Australia, stands out from his competition by having an “unveiling” for his customers when they pick up their finished piece for the first time.

visually digest in five seconds, then it can lead to confusion. Successful businesses understand that good merchandising requires continual effort and is not something you can work on occasionally.

Comfort

How does your customer feel in your store? What can you do to help improve their comfort? Do you offer comfortable chairs or stools for customers to use while they are designing or waiting? Even a simple cushion on a chair can make a difference. Could you offer a complimentary bottle of water or even a coffee while they are waiting? For example, capsule/pod coffee machines are an inexpensive, quick, and convenient way of providing a coffee to help bring comfort to a consultation or a wait.

Consider the human senses. It's not just sight, but also sound and smell. What type of music can you play to make customers feel comfortable to want to linger longer in your store? Could you burn some essential oils to make a pleasing smell (and overpower the potential smells of sawdust and glue)?

Lighting is another commonly overlooked aspect of customer comfort. As humans get older, their eyesight becomes weaker. Therefore, department stores employ directional track lighting on their products to help them stand out with brightness and clarity. When it comes to lighting, consider dedicated directional lighting for your consulting area and your moulding sample display wall.



Anita McNab of Design Framing in Melbourne, Australia, adds a personal touch by gifting her customers a self-branded microfiber cloth with every frame sold in premium glass.

compromising price. For example, offer a \$30 gift voucher instead of a \$30 discount. Not only will this cost you less in lost profit, but it will also encourage an extra sale.

Exceeding Expectations

The best way to make a positive impression is to surprise a customer with something special that they may not have expected. There are plenty of opportunities for this in custom framing. One example is having a job finished sooner than expected. Another is simply providing some complimentary wall hooks to hang their item. You could choose to enhance a framing job by upgrading a single mat to a double mat when they may not expect it.

Liz Barker of Kenmore Gallery in Brisbane, Australia selectively offers customers a complimentary upgrade to anti-reflective glass over plain glass. This not only makes them feel great when they pick it up, but it also sets a higher standard for this level of glazing for future jobs as well.

Anita McNab of Design Framing in Melbourne, Australia, provides her customers with a complimentary, self-branded microfiber cloth with every frame sold in premium anti-reflective glass—which is both a handy cleaning solution and a great marketing tool.

Be Memorable

Being memorable is the magic X factor in business success. People remember great experiences more than great prices. Great experiences develop return customers, who want to tap into the inner child's voice that says, "do it again!"

What makes your business unique and special? This comes down to engaging the customer. Consider the ways you connect with your customer; every interaction you have with them, from initial greetings to the final "thank you for choosing us!" In an age of declining customer service in retail, a welcoming and sincere smile, comfortable eye contact, and respectful conversation is all it can take to help you stand out.

Personalize your customer's experience. Use their name where possible, and direct your conversation toward ways you can help them tap into their emotional motives for framing their piece. Find ways to relate to them, and show the best sides of your personality.

Scott Dawson of Dawson's Framing in Gold Coast, Australia provides his customers with a unique unveiling experience when they come to pick up their artwork. When possible, Scott prepares their finished framed piece in advance of their pickup and mounts it on a display easel in his showroom with a black satin cloth over it. When they arrive, he conducts an "official unveiling" for them; the result is always an "oh wow" response!

"It's something they'll remember about my business, and it's definitely better than just partially revealing their framed artwork wrapped in shrink wrap and cardboard corners," Dawson says.

Follow Up

Some framing businesses actively reach out to each of their customers a week or so after they've picked up their item to ensure they are delighted with their frame and service. This is usually by email or text. It's also a great idea at this time to request a positive five-star review on social media or Google (include a direct link). You could even offer an incentive to come back and frame something else again soon.

Conclusion

Coming in first place in business doesn't just come down to what you do; it's also how you do it. Going the extra mile is about staying hungry in business. Keep trying. Keep changing. Don't become complacent, and don't allow yourself to drop back in the race, and you will reach your goals. **PFM**