

Creating a Consulting Design Counter that Sells

Build customer loyalty by fostering a positive experience from A to Z.

If you think about it, the only place in a custom framing business that generates sales is the design counter. In fact, most other parts of your business cost money rather than make it. Your design counter is a vital aspect of your business, especially if you want to maximize the opportunity for every customer and consultation.

Times are changing. When it comes to buying, customer expectations are also changing. The dynamic on how you interact, engage, and sell to customers is continually evolving, so it's important to consider updating your methods to meet these changing needs and expectations.

Let's have a look at some updated and progressive ideas that help create a consulting design counter that sells.

Design Table Functionality

Your design counter serves a greater purpose than simply acting as a horizontal surface for use during a consultation. In the context of a customer experience, it's also the "stage." Your counter is where your customer will feel the emotion and delight of the design process. It's



also where their final spending decisions will be made.

When a customer walks into your store for the first time, they will see your counter and think, that's where it's going to happen; that's where their treasured memory will be transformed into a masterpiece. They will also observe your corner sample wall and wonder which one will be "the one" for their frame. How effectively you marry these two aspects of the customer experience can dramatically influence your customer's level of engagement.

Price Versus Pleasure

One trend in counter design I'm starting to see more of is the separation of the financial trans-

Is your counter working for you and your customer as it is? Could reimagining it improve the consultation experience?



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4 Corners Picture Framers in Canberra, Australia, has come up with a creative viewing solution; by positioning some angled mirrors directly above their design counter, customers can observe the artwork and layout in the mirrors' reflection, which also emulates a comfortable viewing distance.

action from the design experience via a hidden or detached payment counter. If your design counter is the stage, then your financial transaction area is the box office. When you go to a theater to see a show, the box office is never on the stage; and when you have a good time seeing a show, you're far less sensitive about the cost of the ticket.

Separating the financial transaction from the experience allows you to separate "the price" from "the pleasure." This also allows you to keep your design counter clear of clutter and operating with fewer distractions, especially the constant distraction of a cash drawer.

If you do have a separate payment counter, it is an ideal spot to arrange any impulse buys and gift items you carry, which can add value to your frame sales.

Table Orientation

Another growing trend in counter design is an island or open-sided table. Unlike the traditional counter style of "my side versus your side," an island design allows for a more open experience, where a design consultant can stand side by side with a client. This can help reduce any intimidating or opposing perceptions of buyer-versus-customer or expert-versus-rookie, so to speak. Standing side by side can help create a more collaborative and comfortable feeling and help build a more personal connection.

Many years ago, I was designing with a client on a typical my-side/your-side counter. At one point during the process, the customer asked me what I thought of a design option I had suggested for her landscape watercolor. I told

her my preference, and she looked puzzled, telling me, "I'm sorry, but I just don't quite believe you; you're looking at it upside down compared to me."

She had a point. How could she trust my advice or suggestions if she didn't feel that I was able to properly observe and appreciate the artwork in its correct orientation?

Open Access

Not only does an open counter-style table allow you to stand next to your customer, but it also potentially allows for more open access to your moulding corner sample display.

Some customers like to be engaged in the process, and this can come from being hands-on. Allowing customers to get close to, touch, and even remove corner samples from your wall helps encourage a more tactile experience for them. It can also help some clients feel less restricted and more in control, making the project feel more personalized.

Table Position

If a design table is close to your sample wall, positioning the table at an angle to your wall can create a less restrictive dynamic that helps eliminate any perception of my side/your side and instead visually invites customers to access any side of the table, including the sample walls.

Having casters on your counter's legs will help you easily reposition your table to suit different situations or simply to refresh your shop's look and feel.

Table Size

With the popularity of oversized art and wide format digital prints, it has become important to have a table that is large enough to feel spacious and comfortable to accom-



Aylesbury's Picture Framing in Perth, Western Australia, has a beautiful solid wood design counter that has an immediate "wow" factor and is set at a comfortably lower height for more convenient viewing.



Art & Frame Co in Adelaide, South Australia, had plan drawers integrated into their design counter for additional storage of samples and sales aids. Note the separate pricing and payment counter in the background as well.

modate larger artworks. You don't want the artwork to feel constrained or limited before you even start considering design options.

Table Height

Depending on the overall size of the artwork, people generally stand at least three feet away from a piece of art when viewing it on a wall. If you stand too close, it's harder to appreciate the overall balance and design of the subject matter.

With that in mind, consider your design counter—how high are your customer's eyes positioned from the art when it is on your counter? Does the height of your counter make it difficult or easy for your customer to observe the overall balance and proportion of the design?

For example, if you've ever had to consult with a larger artwork on the carpet, then your counter is too high. An intentionally lower counter height such as that of an office desk might facilitate a better, more natural viewing distance for your customer to be able to best appreciate the layout and design.



Bevel Edge Framing in Cairns, Australia, designed their showroom around the counter so that corner samples are accessible to the customer and the pricing and payment counter is separate from the design table. The design table is also at a lower height, which facilitates a more comfortable viewing distance. Also note the creative use of door snakes (draft stoppers) as paperweights.

Design Counter Lighting

Don't underestimate the value of good lighting. Keep in mind that a typical 50-year-old customer will generally see 25 percent less than a 20-year-old—so having dedicated lighting for your design counter can be worthwhile.

Having light flooding your design counter from directly above it reduces shadowing and best highlights the colors, features, and details of the design options you present. Good lighting can also help you clearly identify any slight imperfections and damage in the artwork, which you can then get the customer to acknowledge before the job is formally accepted.

Say Goodbye to Clutter

It's hard to make important decisions when you're distracted. Think about the decisions your customer has to make at your design counter; are there any items on your counter that can hinder this decision-making?

There is nothing better than a clean, clear table with no unwanted diversions. Consider positioning your mat-board corners on a separate caddy to provide a larger and less cluttered design area.

Plan drawers under a counter can provide a solution for additional samples, sales aids, and design essentials such as notepads and tape measures. Some businesses with plan drawers in their counter reserve the top drawer as a quick and convenient "mess drawer." This allows a consultant to promptly clear any excess samples and sales aids from a previous consultation when they are too busy handling back-to-back consultations to properly clean up in between.

Counter Seating

A stool positioned at your design counter conveys a subliminal message: relax and get comfortable. Even if they don't use it, conveying to your customer that you care about their comfort helps reduce pressure during decision-making.

Today's consumer is willing to pay more for an overall experience than they are for just a product. The ultimate goal in our business is to deliver such a pleasurable overall customer experience that they quickly decide they want to come back and do it again. You're selling more than just a picture frame—you're also selling the experience that goes with it. Make it memorable! **PFM**

Want to learn more about connecting with customers? Jared will lead several sales seminars at The National Conference in Las Vegas in January.