

Sales Strategies



by Jared Davis,
MCPF, GCF

Dealing with Indecision

Have you ever been frustrated by customers taking too long to go through the design process and make a decision? There's no doubt that customer indecision can be a major obstacle to finalizing a sale. So how long is too long at your front counter?

Some framing businesses find this situation challenging because time at the counter can become time lost from getting work done in the backroom. As a result, there can be a temptation to rush a design consultation without acknowledging the possible consequences this can have on your customer relationship and your sale potential.

It is important to remember that when customers feel rushed in the design process, they won't feel comfortable committing to a higher-value design choice. In some cases, they may not buy anything at all. Alternatively, you might be tempted to say to your customers, "Okay, why don't I let you play with this for a while and I'll be

back. Just give me a holler when you've decided." However, this can send a negative signal that the customer is not as important as your other work.

This dilemma is not uncommon, which is why larger custom framing operations separate the design staff from the production staff, given that each job has distinctly different pressures and expectations. However, staff members who have to manage both of these job roles really need to be



able to detach themselves from each job's opposing priorities, which can be hard.

The goal of every business is to maximize the sale value for each customer, so the time and effort invested at the front counter is "make or break" for sales. But the question is: does it take more or less time to achieve the best result? The root cause of a time-consuming consultation is usually customer indecision. So here are some approaches and strategies being used by framing businesses that have specific ways of dealing with customer indecision.

Managing Confidence

There are several areas where confidence needs to be managed in a consultation. First, if a design consultant reveals any lack of confidence or signs of doubt during the design process, then it can translate directly to the consumer, who may struggle to trust any options. As a consultant, it is vital to always remain confident in your design selections

Not sure how to handle customer indecision? Here are some great insights from framers.

and be prepared to explain why you're suggesting any options you present. Likewise, if customers are battling with confidence to make a decision, you may need to supply support and encouragement in different ways to avoid uncomfortable pressure or obvious hard-sell tactics.

David Schummy from Fix-a-Frame in Brisbane, Australia, uses a couple of strategies to help customers feel better about a choice. One way to add credibility to a particular design selection is to suggest, "Well, if I were going to frame this for myself, I'd definitely prefer this option."

Another tip Schummy suggests is that, when in doubt, most consumers feel more certain if they know they are following the crowd. So his alternative is to say, "Well, most people prefer this style." The key words to emphasize are "most people prefer."

Some customers suffer indecision when it comes to choosing matboard colors, especially when tones may have very subtle differences between options. Brooke Ovenden from Value Picture Framing in Brisbane, Australia, uses a Matboard Replacement Guarantee to help with these situations. If customers take home their work and are not happy with the matboard colors, Ovenden will swap it out for free. She found that when the store made a point of mentioning the Matboard Replacement Guarantee, customers felt more confident with the options suggested, and excess consulting time was significantly shortened.

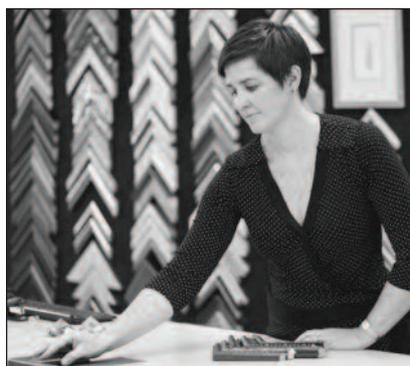
She adds, "We usually have fewer than 10 customers a year bring back their framing to change the matting. But, the time saved at the counter combined with the confidence this brings has helped us keep even the fussiest customers happy!"

Managing Price Shock

Some customers can be surprised when it comes to digesting the prices quoted for custom framing. A tactful approach when it comes to quoting prices for different design options



Kim Stephens from Clocktower Framers in Perth, Western Australia, has intentionally separated his beautiful, handcrafted timber design counter from the pricing counter to remove distraction from the design process. The lower-than-average design table also allows the customer a better perspective of the mat and moulding selections for the artwork.



Brooke Ovenden from Value Picture Framing in Brisbane, Australia, offers a Matboard Replacement Guarantee if customers are not happy with colors used when they take their work home. This guarantee helps provide extra confidence and security for the customer when choosing matboard colors.

is to start with the highest value option first and then work your way down to the most affordable. This will help ensure that you avoid surprising your customer more than once.

Stay with Customers

When customers take longer than you prefer, avoid the temptation to leave them by themselves. Stay with them. Leaving them alone can lead to further frustration and indecision. Be patient and remember that they don't do this every day like you do. From their point of view, you may be going a little too fast. Sometimes, people may only need a little extra guidance, assurance, and time to make their decisions.

Stay in Control

Although the customers always need to feel like they control the decisions, the consultant needs to control the process. Guide your customers by explaining each step of the process in advance without overwhelming them with too much information or too many choices. Simplify options to help maintain focus.

Manage Distractions

It's hard to bake a cake in a messy kitchen. It takes constant work to maintain a clean and clear consulting area. Try to eliminate any visual distractions. Also, try to consider some solutions for entertaining customer's children if required.

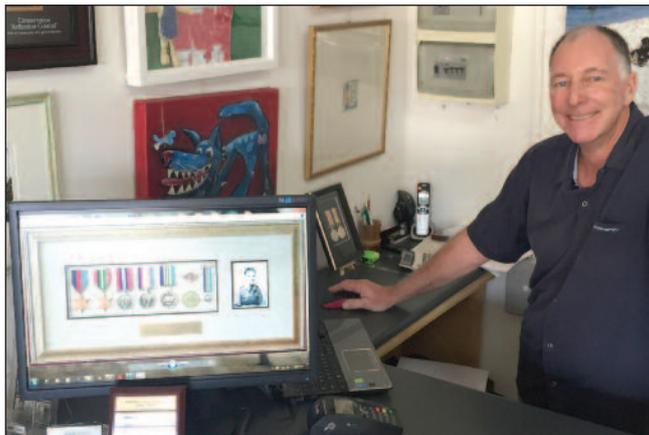
Provide Inspiration

Kim Stephens from Clocktower Framers in Perth, Western Australia, avoids customer indecision by starting his consultations with a browse through a digital library of photos he's taken from similar jobs. This provides a unique starting point for inspiration and ideas, and it cuts down the design process time.

Separating Design and Price

Stephens has also separated the design process from the pricing by physically distancing his design counter from his pricing computer. This isolates the design process (the fun part) from

the pricing (the business part). On his separate pricing counter, he has a second monitor connected to his laptop for customers to see how the price is generated in his point-of-sale software. This encourages the perception that everything is open and honest, building trust. It also makes it fast and clear to demonstrate how extra design options directly affect the final price, such as an upgrade of anti-reflective glazing or an extra matboard layer. He says this approach has not only made it easier to sell more high-value framing options, but it has also helped speed the decision-making process.



Kim Stephens peruses his digital library of categorized photos from previous jobs with customers for ideas before the design consultation begins.

Take an Interest

Customers read body language and can tell when you don't genuinely care.

Always take personal interest in every customer's project and story and try to find a way to relate to each customer on a personal level. If customers feel like you are genuinely interested in their project and needs, they will find it easier to trust you, which helps make your design suggestions more convincing and easier to sell.

Develop a Process

Stephanie Farkas from Tropical North Framing Gallery in Cairns, Australia, has developed a three-step process for design consultations, which has helped reduce customer indecision as well as decreased consultation time to an average of 20 minutes.

Ask Questions First — It's important to get to know your customers and understand what they want. This starts by asking questions. Not only will you get to know your customers, but you will also establish trust. You have to think about the questions you ask. Avoid asking confrontational questions like: "Okay, so what do you want?" The response could be fearful and conservative like: "Umm, maybe just something narrow and black?" Instead, ask more open, conversational questions such as, "So where did you get this piece?"; "Have you thought about where you might hang this?"; or even "Do you have a preferred



Stephanie Farkas from Tropical North Framing Gallery in Cairns, Australia, has developed the following three step process for design consultations: 1) Ask Question First; 2) Provide a Variety of Design Options; and 3) Educate the Customer.

style of decor you would like to match this with?"

Provide a Variety of Design Options — Farkas says, "All customers like to have a variety of choices so they feel in control, but they also don't expect to have to come up with every design idea by themselves. I see it as my job to provide a refined selection of designs, and the customers retain the control by choosing which options they like best. "When I get to the

point where a customer finally says, 'Wow, that looks great!' and a decision is almost made, I like to slow things down a bit by saying, 'Okay, great! Let's just quickly review these other options one more time, just to be sure the choice we make is definitely going to be right for you because I don't want you to have any regrets or second thoughts.' This extra step has helped save the day on many jobs from further changes, and it also helps build customers' trust and confidence in me even more."

Educate the Customer

— Farkas acknowledges that most customers don't mind paying a bit more as long as they understand why. It's always helpful to explain why your suggested choices may be more suitable. These reasons can either relate to a customer's initial questions or to promote specialized conservation materials such as UV glazing, which is a popular option for customers to pay a little extra for.

The Bottom Line

Life is full of choices, and it's fair to say some people take longer to make them than others. When it comes to customer indecision, a bit of patience can lead to profit. So, try looking at your design process to make things easier and more efficient. If done properly, the natural product will be what you are hoping for: time saved! **PFM**

Jared Davis, MCPF, GCF, has 24 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. Jared also serves on the PPFA Board of Directors and is the author of the book "Getting the Most Value From Your CMC."

