

Transforming Memories into MASTERPIECES

The Custom Imaging Revolution Could Mean Big Business For Custom Framers

BY JARED DAVIS, CPF, GCF

Sometimes, as custom framers, we forget that our service is a secondary one in the grand scheme of a customer's wall-decor selection.

That is, consumers don't invest in a custom frame unless they have something to put in it first, and these days, that something is much different than what it used to be.

More than a decade ago, the art print industry was thriving and generating a lot of framing business for custom picture framers. There was a constant stream of newly released images by a diverse group of artists—all driving a strong wall-decor market. Today, that market is only a small fraction of what it once was, especially for custom framers and art galleries.

So, where did all this business go? What has replaced this market, and what are people putting on their walls now? The answer: memories.

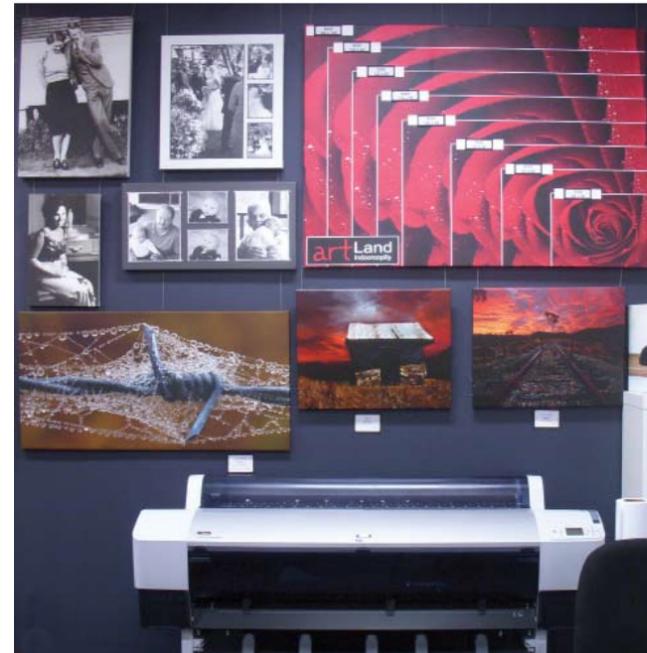
Art, of course, is still a primary product that generates custom framing work. But wide-format digital printing and photography are strongly growing primary products that also generate the need for more custom framing business.

In general, mainstream consumers no longer find generic framed prints as appealing as they once were, and few businesses can survive on selling this type of product alone, as they once did. With the digital revolution leading the way with digital cameras and photography, consumers are now self-proclaimed expert photographers, spending time and money creating their own artwork from their memories based on digital photographs. Whole industries have been created and propelled out of digital photography, including scrapbooking, photobooks and wide-format digital printing, or custom imaging.

So, we find that amongst other things, today's consumer wants to put his or her own memories on the wall, rather than someone else's vision or artistic interpretation. Apart from both personal and sporting memorabilia, memories also refer to a rapidly growing market in digital photography. Consumers today would rather hang their own photographs of the Grand Canyon than an artist's photograph or painting of it.

When it comes to luxury purchases, today's consumers strive—and potentially pay more—for owning something unique and individual, and nothing is more unique, individual and personal than their own memories, combined with their own unrecognized talent.

As custom framers, the more we can help ful-



fill the something-to-put-in-it requirement, the more potential custom framing work we create for ourselves. As business owners, it is always in our interest to offer and promote these primary opportunities as much as possible.

Don't Drive Business Away

How often do you hear customers ask: Do you print on canvas? Consumers are looking for this type of wall-decor in their homes now more than ever, and they naturally come to custom framers to provide it for them. This indicates a strong demand out there for this type of product.

But, how much of this business do you currently refer to other businesses—perhaps the photo shop down the road—simply because you don't offer this service?

Pushing this type of potentially profitable business away from your shop is detrimental, as you are not guaranteeing it will come back to you for subsequent framing or

HOW TO PROMOTE CUSTOM IMAGING

When it comes to selling custom imaging, you need to visually show your customers what you offer. The concept of digital printing is still new, and today's customers might not be able to visualize what you do. So, it is essential to display creative and popular design concepts and elements for inspiring your customers. Here are three ways:

1. DEMONSTRATE CONVERTING "THIS" INTO "THIS"

Display a standard 4" x 6" photo. Then, show the same image blown up into wide-format canvas and different sizes with different effects, such as black and white and polarized. Show different-sized images printed on different media, in different effects.

2. POST SIGNS IN YOUR STORE

To promote your custom imaging services, create a sign that reads, "We offer different ways to put YOUR memories on YOUR walls!"

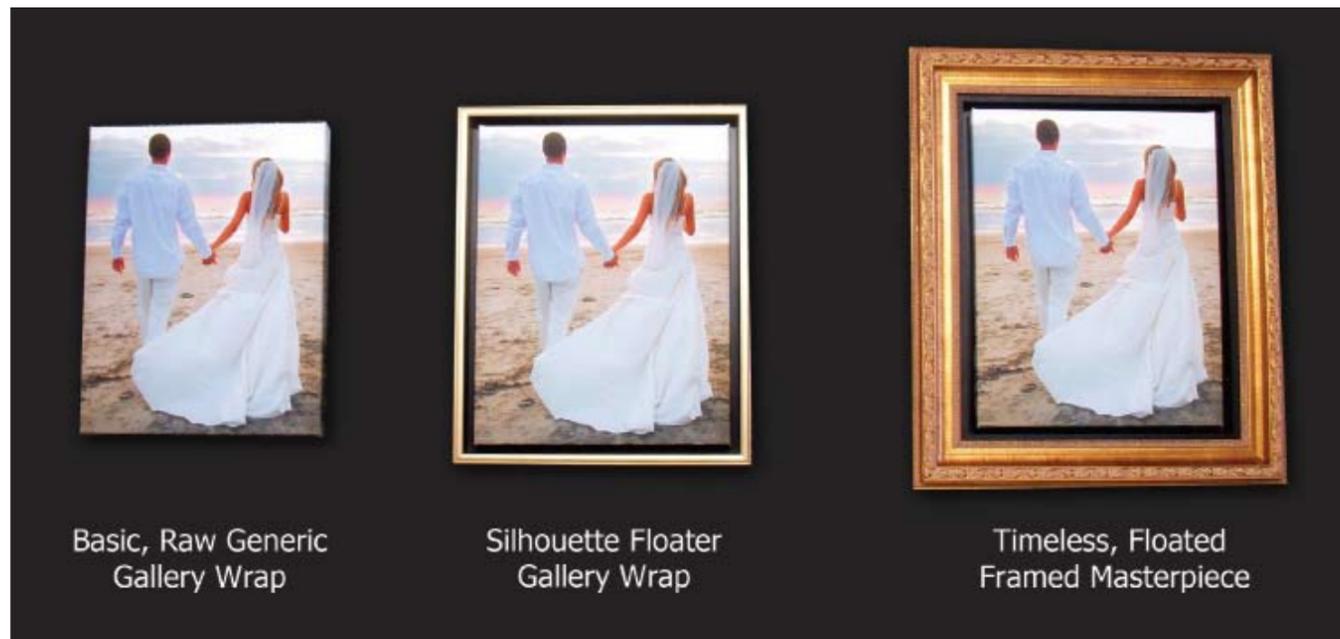
3. SHOW A VARIETY OF OPTIONS

Display different concepts, such as photographic collages or the ever-popular, wide landscape photos of common holiday destinations.

—Jared Davis, CPF, GCF



Custom Imaging



THE ESSENTIAL DISPLAY

The most essential display every frameshop needs is a “Good—Better—Best” display. This is especially critical for showcasing canvas-stretching options.

When customers enter your store and ask, “Do you stretch canvas?”, what is your response? Perhaps it’s “yes,” but both your and their expectations are nothing more than a generic gallery-wrap job. You could, however, potentially be getting more framing work from many of these requests.

Why not create a simple display of real examples that shows three different options for stretching canvas?

The display could consist of the same 11" x 14" image (the more emotional, the better) framed and presented different ways.

The powerful display pictured above works as an upselling tool for customers who already have generic gallery-wrapped canvases on their walls at home but are looking to uplift, change, enhance or update them a bit. And, customers really like the fact that they can bring their canvases in for an affordable upgrade to an improved, timeless style of presentation.

—Jared Davis, CPF, GCF

stretching.

If you are fearful of getting into digital printing, then don’t. But at least consider working out an arrangement with another business that offers this service, so you can outsource this work and not be in a position where you have to refer it elsewhere and lose the client.

The Benefits of a Wide-Format Digital Printer

A wide-format digital printer allows you to take any high-quality digital image or photograph and print a high-quality version onto a variety of different substrates and media, including canvas, photographic paper, super-high-gloss photo paper, fine-art watercolor paper and even matboard. Regarding size, you are only limited by the width of your printer, so if you only have a 16"-wide digital printer, you can still print a 16" x 60"-wide landscape photo onto canvas off a roll.

Many framers have traditionally thought that the main business potential in owning a wide-format digital printer lies in being able to offer and sell reproduction prints for artists; that’s certainly possible, but it really only represents a small percentage of where the true potential and profit lies in a wide-format digital printer. The real profit and potential is being able to offer wide-format custom printing for the average

domestic consumer’s memories and photos and allow them to convert these into personalized artworks, or, in other words, transform memories into masterpieces.

Wide-format digital printers are actually not that expensive to buy or lease considering what they can do and the level of technology they offer. And, the learning curve on how to operate them (with software like Adobe Photoshop) is not difficult for most framers with PC experience. With the abundance of free video tutorials available on YouTube, a person can become self-taught and proficient at offering specialized digital effects on photos, and even photographic restoration work, in weeks.

Digital Printing vs. Custom Imaging

“Digital printing” is a commonly used, technical, detached term describing what a wide-format printer can offer a consumer. However, the term we, as custom picture framers, should really use to describe wide-format digital printing is “custom imaging” because a wide-format printer offers just that—customized image creation. That’s any image, any size, any format

on any media—totally customized to suit your decorating requirements.

The term “custom imaging” also has a nice, complementary ring to it when used in conjunction with the term “custom framing.” (i.e., “We offer custom framing and custom imaging.”)

As long as consumers keep having memories, there will always be a need to preserve these treasured moments, and being able to convert them into artwork and wall decor is extremely desirable. Tap into the memories market as much as you can, and keep your business up-to-date with the future direction of our industry. Custom framers who are serious about long-term survival in our changing and competitive industry need to embrace the custom imaging revolution.

With 18 years of experience in the framing industry, Jared Davis, CPF, GCF, has covered the wholesale, commercial and retail aspects of the business. Davis is the author of “Getting the Most Value from your CMC” and an educator at DECOR Expo Atlanta. To contact Davis or to purchase his book, visit www.jared-davis.com.

13 BENEFITS OF OFFERING CUSTOM IMAGING

- 1 It is relatively inexpensive equipment to invest in. Or, at the very least, it can be outsourced.
- 2 It both complements and generates more custom framing.
- 3 It is appealing to today’s consumers as a highly desirable option of wall decor.
- 4 It appeals directly to the same demographic of consumer that also buys and appreciates custom framing.
- 5 It gives customers an extra reason to come into your store.
- 6 It attracts new clients that you wouldn’t have had before. (Remember the “Do you print on canvas?” question.)
- 7 It allows the possibility to offer corporate signage and display work.
- 8 It allows you to affordably create your own professional point-of-sale signage and promotional posters for your own store.
- 9 It allows you to offer limited-edition runs of printed artwork for artists.
- 10 It can possibly offer customized printing on matboard (depending on the model and brand of printer), which is ideal for specially framed corporate and sporting memorabilia jobs, where colorful logos, images and words are used on the mats.
- 11 If you don’t have the right color mat, it’s no problem. Just print the exact color you want.
- 12 It gives your business another source of profit and income.
- 13 It keeps your business more future-proof.

—Jared Davis, CPF, GCF

