

# Sales Strategies



by Jared Davis,  
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## *Selling Your Signature Specialty*

**C**ustom framers all sell picture frames, but what distinguishes your product from that of your competitors? The common response is a combination of quality, service, or price. But to really succeed in today's market, you may need more than that. Today's consumers see many retail businesses—including frame shops—and many of them suffer from mediocrity, offering the same products and concepts as everyone else. One of the best ways to avoid drowning in this ocean of conformity is to develop a “signature specialty” that helps highlight your products and services over others.

Consider the restaurant business. What makes one restaurant more outstanding than the others? Yes, quality, service, and value certainly come into play. But for some restaurants, there is something else that truly keeps customers coming back for more, and that is a popular signature dish. Almost all famous restaurants and chefs have a signature dish, a unique menu item that stands out as a crowd-pleasing favorite that keeps customers coming back again and again.

*Having a specialty that clients will remember can enhance your businesses and take it to new levels*

A custom framing business is not dissimilar to a restaurant in this regard. Does your business have the equivalent of a signature dish? Do you have a signature specialty that clients want and will remember you for? Here's a look at some framers who have established signature specialty concepts that have helped enhance their businesses and even taken them to new levels.



*This 8-ply mat design from Jodie Prymke of Jodie Prymke Fine Art Framing in Adelaide features a hand-gilded bevel with a metallic leaf ribbon and a strip of shellacked marbled paper. The decorative pen lines were created using a CMC.*

### **Gilded Matboard**

Award-winning picture framer Jodie Prymke of Jodie Prymke Fine Art Framing in Adelaide, Australia, believes it's important to have your own style that differentiates you from your competitors. One of the elements of her style is to use gold and silver metallic leaf on matboard, which she applies either directly to bevels using a quick-drying size adhesive or to premade, single-ply paper ribbons that can then be applied to matboard surfaces.

“Whether it's a simple metal leaf band or a hand-gilded bevel, a matboard can look so much more elegant with a highlight of shimmer,” Prymke says. “As a boutique gallery owner, I need to produce designs that my clients will feel are truly unique to their artwork. The possibilities of combining metal-leaf gilding with textured mats and marbled papers are endless, and that means I can offer customers something special that they love.”

In addition to framed examples on display in her store, Prymke frequently shows clients premade examples and photos of previous jobs to

demonstrate her metal leaf and pen line concepts during the consultation process. She says, “I always promote the idea that no two mat designs are the same, so my customers know that they’ll always get something special created for their art alone.”

## Stacked Moulding

Sami Sadek of Fast Frame in Melbourne, Australia, prefers to work with a specific combination of stacked mouldings, which his clients appreciate and come back for time and again. These mouldings have an identical timber stain, but Sadek combines different profiles that can be combined quite easily.

Sadek says, “My customers can see that a stacked shadowbox combination is a little different than the



*Sami Sadek of Fast Frame of Melbourne offers a popular shadowbox recipe combining two profiles of identical timber stain. Anti-reflective glazing is sandwiched between the two mouldings to create added distance from the matted artwork.*

usual frame design, and it complements the modern and timeless style of decor that clients in my market are looking for. Although it is a shadowbox style concept, this simple recipe of stacking specific moulding profiles has proven to be ideal for a wide

range of matted photos and art. It offers an extra element of depth for the viewer, and it is also preferable to use with anti-reflective glazing, which is sandwiched between the two profiles.”

When it comes to selling this concept, Sadek adds, “I show this idea to clients using framed samples in my showroom, and I also have some pre-assembled moulding corners to use as well. I don’t find it necessary to explain that it is actually two stacked frames as such, as I just price it as a concept in the overall frame price.”

## Traditional French Matting

Linda Wassell, MCPF, of Fine Art Services in Spring, TX, is well known for her talent with traditional French matting, the technique of using decorative ink lines, wash panels, and textures on matboard.

Wassell has been teaching this art to framers in hands-on classes for many years.

“French lines on matboard help direct the eye to fine details or even open up the image to create a larger perspective to the artwork,” Wassell says. “There are endless possibilities to incorporate French line components into a frame design. Not only are they ideal for delicate and subtle design applications such as wedding announcements, letters, and artwork with fine lines or small detail, but French lines can also be used in the same way as adding V-grooves (but with color) and to help tie together multiple openings.”

When it comes to selling French matting, Wassell says, “There are a few keys to selling French matting, no matter who the client is. First, you need to have some samples on the wall to enable your clients to see

exactly what you’re talking about.” She suggests using samples of old family photos, documents, diplomas, vintage memorabilia, and reproduc-



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tion engravings for French matting.

“By making shop samples, you also gain the practice you need to help perfect and refine your French matting techniques. It’s also a good idea to duplicate any patterns or designs you create as you go, so you can use these as corner samples at the design counter. Make sure you always take photos of all the French matting work that you do and keep them accessible to use as future examples.”

“Finally, remember to sell the idea of French matting. Every time a client comes in with a vintage piece of paper, immediately suggest this technique as appropriate to that period of time. It also helps to learn a bit about the origins and development of these techniques and share that with your clients so they’ll understand why this is the perfect design concept to make their piece of art look at home. French matting is a fabulous way to bring a unique and perfect harmony to a piece of art, and it develops cus-

tomers loyalty and trust so they want to return again with their next treasure!”

## Specialty Museum Frames

In the mid-80s, Fini Frames in Melbourne, Australia, developed a special back-loading frame system for galleries called the Fini Museum Frame. It met specific requirements of galleries and institutions for a framing system that was reinforced and reloadable, making it suitable for traveling exhibitions and loans.

Jason Pennings, co-owner of Fini Frames, says, “These frames offer a safe and reusable framing system for institutions such as national galleries, regional galleries, state libraries, and universities because it protects the artwork during transportation and can be reused for different exhibitions. We approach our frame making as if we’re making custom fine furniture. Every component has been carefully thought out, from the Tasmania blackwood timber we use to the custom-engineered hardware. It is all designed to allow sustained longevity and protection of the artwork and frame. It features corner strengtheners, corner and cross braces, and the internal aluminum frame. We think of it as a hard-shell suitcase for art, something we haven’t seen anywhere else in the world.”

Pennings adds, “Because our specialty market is now galleries and institutions, our reputation has gradually become more widespread. When one institution receives a loan from another using one of our frames, they become intrigued and want to find out more. We’ve also invested many years in traveling to different institutions, educating them about our system. We also gain exposure by

exhibiting our system at industry shows.”

## Custom Printed and Cut Mats

Nonda Bakouris of The Framing Company in Melbourne, Australia, has found a creative way to use the latest technology in digital printing and advanced CMC mat design to offer specialized framed concepts. Using his knowledge of Adobe Photoshop and wide format printing technology, Bakouris is able to print special designs



*This framed jersey from Nonda Bakouris of The Framing Company in Melbourne is highlighted by a digitally printed mat design and a creative aperture custom-cut by a CMC.*

directly onto matboard, which he then used to and cut custom-designed openings on his CMC.

Bakouris says, “Whenever I put these on display in our shop, not only does it create a “wow” factor, but customers also understand that this technique could also be applied to their personal memorabilia. This process is a little more involved than standard custom framing, so we charge accordingly for it—and our customers are happy to pay for it because the concept is so individual and customized. Even if you possess the technology, there are very few framers who have the special-

ized knowledge required to execute this type of concept. So it’s a strong point of difference for us, given that it’s not easy to copy.”

## Finding Your Own Signature Specialty

Everyone is different, so your signature specialty does not have to be a totally new concept you’ve invented; it only needs to be something that you’ve adopted and mastered. There are many specialty concepts that can complement and enhance your frame designs and maybe even help you develop a niche market. Some examples include:

- Decorative matting – gilded bevels, fabric wrapping, fillets, French matting, and custom mat carving.
- Stacked frame combinations and shadow box designs.
- Frame finishing such as gilding and antique frame restoration.
- Specialized conservation framing services for handling high-value artwork to museum standards.
- Specialty mounting such as specialized canvas stretching, mounting super-glossy photos or face-mounting photos onto acrylic.
- Digital services such as wide format printing, photo restoration and signage.

## Benefits of a Specialty

Developing your own signature specialty can offer many benefits beyond the standard quality, service, and value, such as:

- Establish a viable point of difference between you and your competitors.
- Help you develop your own style and reputation, which adds more value to your work and your brand.
- Generate an extra source of profit, where you could potentially charge

more for a specialized product or process.

- Generate more word-of-mouth goodwill, as customers who are delighted with something unique and different will be more inclined to tell their friends, enhancing both your reputation and new customer traffic.
- Give your existing customers another reason to keep coming back for more.
- Provide a little bit of expertise in something to give you more self-confidence and pride.
- Inspire you to develop a deeper passion for what you do.

## **Selling Your Specialty**

Once you develop and master your signature specialty, you will only become more successful when you promote it and sell it, and the most effective way to do this is to show it off. Start by creating examples of your work that you can display and use to show customers what you can do. Find ways to integrate your signature specialty into your in store displays to generate inspiration and interest. Take photos of all the special jobs you have created so you can show future customers, and upload them to your website and social media pages.

So, in the signature line of celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse, “Kick it up a notch and bam!” ■

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