

Bringing Designers and OEMs Together

By Myra Danon

Suzanne Gallagher, an Oregon interior designer who specializes in custom framed artwork for commercial clients, believes that interior designers and wholesale framers have a great opportunity to work together to provide art for commercial and residential projects. The reason that many interior designers don't include custom framing in their design projects, she says, is that they don't have a commercial framer who can supply them with the products.

Based on that notion, she presented a business plan to the president of a large OEM that would give a substantial discount to the design community and generate new business for the OEM. Gallagher acts as an outside representative to a commercial framer, marketing the framing resource to the interior design community.

The advantage of this arrangement to decorator/consultants, she says, is that they could have their wall art produced more economically, enabling them to earn commissions similar to selling furniture. The benefit for OEMs is that it offers a way to develop additional business, especially when decorators can pool their efforts when ordering work from OEMs.

She opens purchasing accounts with designers that allow them to purchase custom framing at the lowest price. This benefits the OEM framer because the company doesn't have to handle the accounts of

individual designers, which could entail recruiting, billing, training, and handholding. She creates volume orders by combining the framing needs of individual designers. Designers receive the volume discount regardless of quantity. There is also greater flexibility, as when Gallagher is called in to work with interior designers who prefer not to deal with OEM framers.

"Our collective volume with the OEM is significant, so we can command the deepest commercial discount," Gallagher explains. "I am treated as one customer. For that privilege, I am motivated to recruit designers and encourage them to sell art."

Gallagher starts by asking designers such questions as how they conduct their business, what they like most, if they offer art, if they have a framing resource, and—if not—would they like such a resource.

Gallagher offers monthly training sessions to designers that cover a variety of topics, including trends in framing design, product information, marketing, sales, artists, and a host of other pertinent information. "Recently I hosted a Trunk Show featuring the Winn Devon Fine Art Collection for designers and their clients," Gallagher says. "These events are part of the benefit for a designer to work with me."

Gallagher has a background in the fashion and textile industry as fashion coordinator for I. Magnin



Gallagher: Developing a mutually beneficial way for designers and OEM framers to work together.

in San Francisco and Saks Fifth Avenue in New York. This expertise helps her see framed art as part of the total design experience.

She knew, for example, that for a commercial client to truly express its company style and complement other aspects of its workplace, the selection and placement of framed art was essential. She says that for too long designers have overlooked the importance of wall art, concentrating instead on designing floor spaces without considering "furniture for the wall." This design need led to Gallagher launching her business as the "Wall Design Diva."

By using samples to market framed art to clients, she says, designers can add \$12,000 to \$50,000 a year more to their incomes by supplying commercial and residential art. Gallagher cites an example of a poster costing \$75 retail. The transfer to a canvas and brush strokes costs \$200. The cost for stretching the canvas runs about \$150,

and the molding costs \$900. When the completed project has the desired effect, the objective has been met. "Art is the frosting on the cake," she exclaims.

"Nobody in the design community is taking hold of framing and how to frame and design," she says. "The need is there to promote art in this way because people are going elsewhere." In developing her own design business, for example, Gallagher does "a one-on-one meeting with clients." To date, she has enlisted 40 designers as part of her program.

"The program is focused on the custom product, whether the client needs 1 or 50 pieces," says Gallagher. She tailors the framing selection to the budget that each designer has to work with. Each piece is custom-designed for its intended space. "We try to create a unique look from space to space while maintaining a consistent design focus."

The result of all this is that the designers and the supplier of the framed art have formed a happy and successful partnership.

For more information, visit www.walldesigndiva.com. ■

How does a designer find an OEM/contract framer to work with? One way is to contact PFM Production, which will provide a list based on a designer's geographic area, taken from the publication's subscriber list. Call 732-536-5160 x263 or e-mail wroman@hobbypub.com.

Myra Danon is a freelance writer based in Monroe, NJ. A former newspaper columnist and copy editor, Myra is currently assistant coordinator for the PFM Annual Directory and an assistant for the New Jersey Design Directory.

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