

Quick Tips

Easy ideas to improve production efficiency

Track Employee Work With Stamps

Production framers too often rely on employees' judgment instead of proactively holding them accountable. Employees, whether self-motivated to produce a quality product or in need an extra nudge, are more likely to put out a product meeting customers' satisfaction if they know the work can be traced back to them.

One cost-effective way to know who had a hand in working on a returned frame is to use a custom stamping system. Start with a stamp of three empty vertical boxes. Label the first box "Cut," the next one "Join," and the last one "Touch." Then get stamps made with individual numbers for each employee.

The first person to touch the moulding—in this case is the cutter—stamps the back of the moulding with the vertical stamp and then stamps in his individual number in the box labeled "Cut." The rest follow suit. Make sure each person knows not to move forward unless the previous box has been stamped. This will not only encourage employees to do their best work but will also make you aware of problems and training issues you need to address.

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Apply Your Own Adhesive

A lot of the production framers use foamboard that already has adhesive on it, but it's very easy and less expensive for a volume framer to purchase adhesive separate from the board.

Run an entire box of foamboard through a roller laminator at one time to apply adhesive, then put it back in the box until it's ready to go. You can mount the artwork to it later or cut the foamboard to size and then mount the artwork. Most production operations usually work on the same size at the same time, so using this approach is pretty automated.

The adhesive you purchase separately is also typically a much higher grade than what is on boards, so you're more likely to get 100 percent yield.

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Contributors to this column are industry members who have experience in production framing operations. If you have a tip of your own, please send it to Quick Tips, PFM Production, 207 Commercial Court, Morganville, NJ 07751.

Recycling Mat Drop-outs

What should you do with dropouts when you cut a mat—throw them away or recycle them for another order?

Say you need a 16"x20" mat. You cut that piece out of a 32"x40" full sheet and return the rest to stock. You may want to cut the remainder of the sheet as a quarter and a half a sheet to return to stock. This will help you keep track of partial sheets in inventory. It's also a good idea to print and attach barcode labels to the mat pieces you put back in stock in case a remnant doesn't make it to the proper bin.

Say your 16"x20" mat has 2" borders; your dropout will then be 12"x16". If a matboard sheet costs \$3.20, the dropout will be worth \$0.48. (If you don't use a lot of smaller size mats, this piece could be too small to recycle.) Let's also say an operator making \$10 an hour (including benefits) takes five minutes to pick up, label, and put the mat remnant back in stock. This costs you \$0.83. If an operator spends another two minutes looking through the mat bin later on to find a 12"x16" piece, that adds another \$0.33—or a total of \$1.16 in additional handling costs. The recycled remnant saves \$0.48 in materials, so the net cost of that recycled piece is \$0.68. This is \$0.12 less than cutting a new quarter sheet. On the other hand, you might lose those savings if you can't track random sizes in inventory easily. For example, at eight minutes of total recycling time instead of seven, you lose money.

The point is, if you do recycle dropouts, make sure to set some rules. Mat remnants need to be of a certain size before they are saved (quarter and half sheets work well, for example). Remnants also need to be properly labeled. Sizing can be done on a mat cutter or wall machine. Labeling can be done with a Sharpie, but a barcode works best. A barcode also lets you track a remnant in and out of inventory. The bottom line is, if you are organized well, then recycling can save you money. If you're not, then it probably doesn't make financial sense.

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