

Catalogs in the Digital Age

By Patrick Sarver

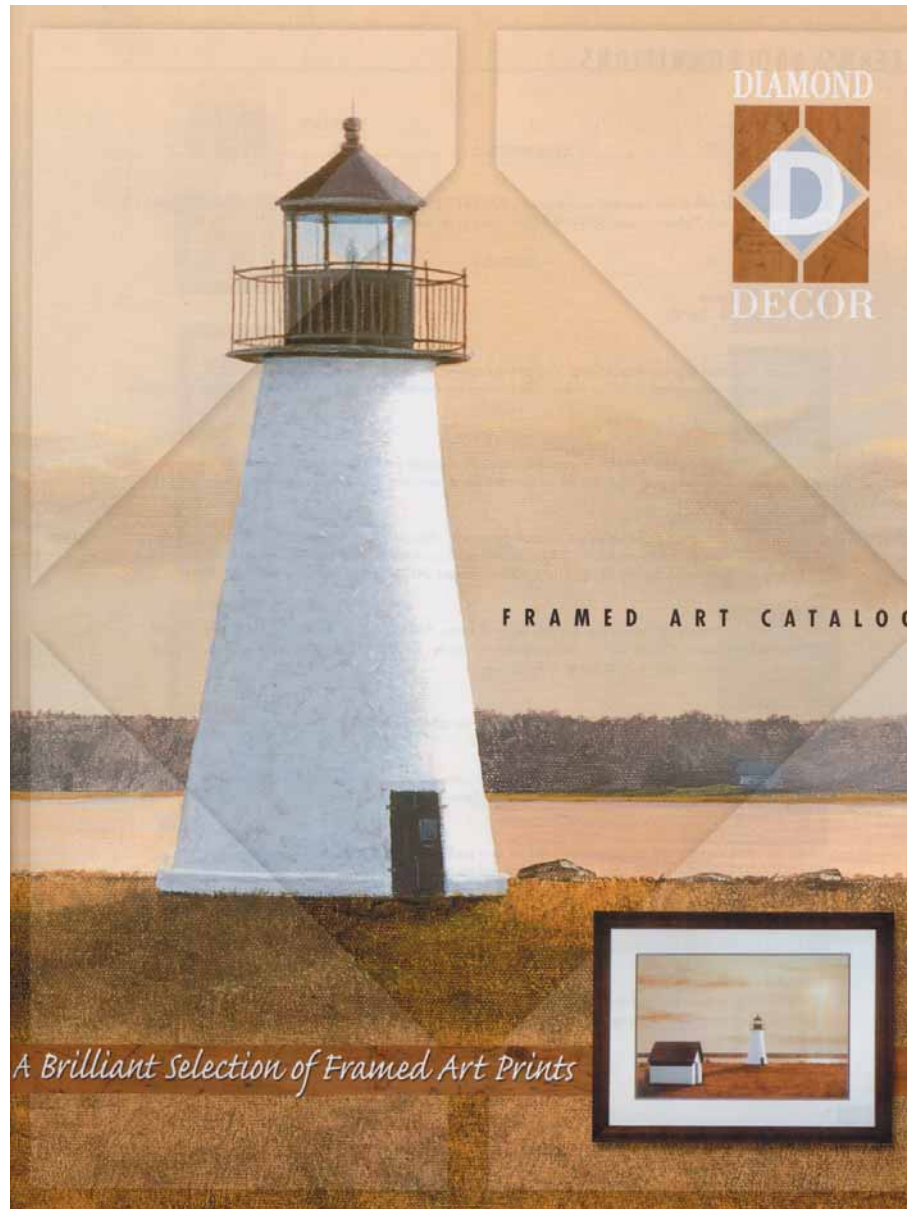
In days gone by, a catalog was pretty much the only way for people to view and order products. Today, with the Internet, CDs, and Power Point presentations, there are a lot of other options for presenting products to your clients. So are catalogs still a viable tool for wall art companies? Based on the response of production framers from various parts of the country, the answer is yes. What is increasingly happening, in fact, is that a catalog and website are commonly being used in concert with one another for showing and for ordering products.

Even in the Internet age, a catalog remains one of the best lead-ins to show clients new products and a way to buy merchandise. A good website is vital, but without a catalog how do you get your information and images in front of people so they'll want to visit your website? And while printing catalogs is not inexpensive, neither is setting up a good website.

Because of the great diversity within the production framing business, there's no standard way to promote products. The value of a catalog and other printed pieces to an individual company depends a lot on the specific product niche and clientele of that business.

Catalog Diversity

Businesses differ, and that is reflected in the range of catalogs and promotional materials used by production framing firms.



Diamond Decor's 70-page framed art catalog often serves as a starting point for customizing the items inside to suit the needs of individual clients.

In this day of CDs, websites, and e-mail, do production framers still find value in traditional printed materials like catalogs?

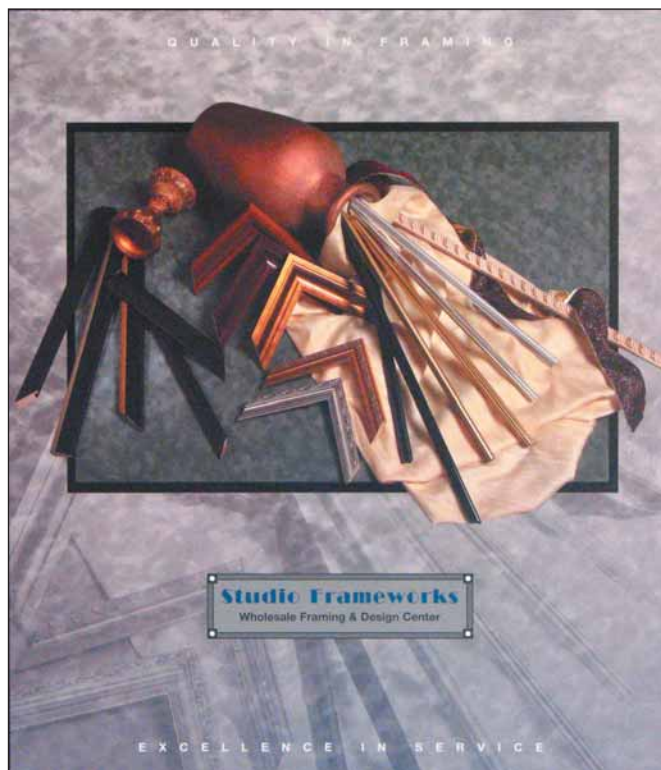
"I have one catalog now, and I'm going to print another one," says Ron Bolokofsky, president of Artmasters Collection in San Fernando, CA. "The first one's about 70 pages, and the new one will be about 150. They're all framed art. We usually print about 2,500. I also use brochures printed on 11"x17" sheets with multiple folds, so there are 16 panels."

On the other side of the coin are companies that print only smaller promotion pieces. "We have a few four-page flyers that we use to advertise products," says Tim Hannan, president of New England Picture in Manchester, NH. "We usually print from 200 to 1,000 at a time to promote our sports photography and our custom frames, such as our Tree Hugger frame, a composite made from 90 percent recycled materials."

More typical are production framing companies that have catalogs in-between:

- "We have a catalog of photos of framed artwork that runs about 70 pages," says Kevin Miller, vice president of operations at Diamond Decor in New Bedford, MA. "We print a couple thousand in color on 80 to 100 pound paper that is saddle stitched. We update this every year or two. We are also working on rep catalogs that will be updated on a weekly to monthly basis. We also do ring binder catalogs so we can add pages on an ongoing basis. Those are produced in-house on our high-end laser printer."
- "We have a couple of different catalogs," says Dave Cadish, president, Jenny Matt Editions in Las Vegas. "The main one is an eight-page color brochure that has about 20 pictures in it."
- "Our catalog is about 40 pages," says Eric Zacharias, president of Studio Frameworks in Crofton, MD. "I just had one run of 10,000. It's got a long shelf life."

Other companies find that their use of printed materials is changing along with their markets and their marketing strategies. "It's not the way it used to be," says Fred Carneau, owner of RNR Images in Mesa, AZ, which produces images of concert and racing photography. "Rather than putting together a particular catalog, everything I'm doing is customized. That means I'm working more with customized catalogs that I just print off the computer. It used to be that I could send out a standard catalog, but



Studio Frameworks' 40-page catalog is distributed to professional photographers and designers, with the goal of having those clients generate business by making it available to end users.

with the customized work I now do, I end up printing sheets with items that are similar to what a client wants and then we talk about it."

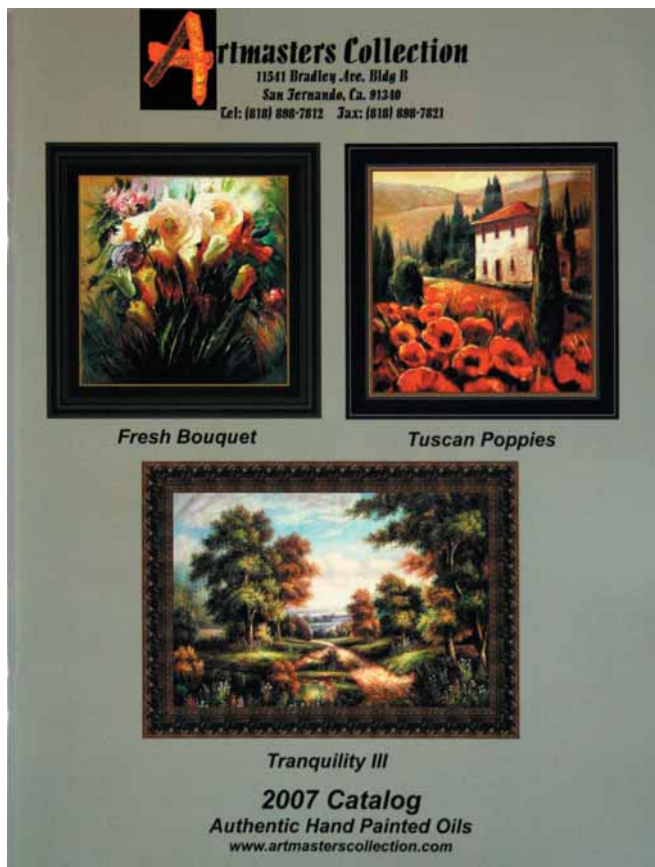
How Catalogs Are Used

There are also a variety of ways that catalogs are used in marketing. While they are primarily used as an ordering/reference tool for wholesale buyers, they can also help generate interest by end users.

"We build picture frames that open up on hinges," says Cadish. "They look like baby books that hang on the wall in a nursery. We do a new catalog about every six months that we can use for both wholesale and retail sales because they don't show prices. For example, we leave catalogs at hospitals and birthing centers. Everyone who comes through a facility gets one. And as we gear up our production to sell to big box stores, our catalogs will be an important part of our efforts to expand our sales."

Bolokofsky says he sends his wall art catalogs to all his current customers as well as to prospective ones. "We charge a fee that we rebate on their first order," he says. "The catalog is a starting point for a sales rep to follow up with. They're also used for direct ordering and as a reference throughout the year. Our goal is to also have our clients use the catalog on an ongoing basis to show our line to their customers."

"I use a catalog to go after a niche of the market that is half custom and half OEM," says Zacharias. "One of my segments is the professional photographer. I offer a lot of



Artmasters Collection charges a fee to cover the cost of its 70-page framed art catalog. The fee is rebated to clients on their first order.

framing packages for portrait sessions, wedding packages, and things like that. Cataloging those works well. I also give speeches to professional photography clubs and associations, and I always have catalogs available after I'm done. I also have a booth at photography trade shows, which is where I probably hand out more catalogs than any other place. I only do a little mailing of catalogs because they're kind of expensive. I want to qualify who gets them if I can.

"Most of the bulk runs I do are for designers doing hotels or corporate headquarters," he adds. "Because of that I have an in-house showroom set up specifically for designers. They tend to use the catalogs more as a reference for the types of frames I carry.

"Overall, I'd say my clients use my catalog during sales calls, for ordering, and as a reference all year long," Zacharias continues. "I designed it so that prices are not in the catalog itself, which allows both designers and photographers to leave the catalog out so their customers can browse through it. That actually helps create end sales while also helping guide designers and photographers in creating wall displays."

Branding With Catalog Design

Bolokofsky and Zacharias also use their catalog designs as a way to create a brand image. "I have a postcard that I send out frequently that basically uses the same layout as

my catalog," says Bolokofsky. "It's an identity thing. When the catalog changes, the flyers change along with it."

Zacharias also created an oversized postcard to tie in with the cover of his catalog. "I had 10,000 printed with blank backs so I could use some at a time with customized messages, such as announcing an upcoming open house or creating specific messages that I can pass out to groups when I have a speaking engagement," he says. "It's part of my branding."

Client Response

Catalogs are more than just sales tools nowadays; they're often looked upon as a marketing tool. And that means the response that a framing company's catalog gets isn't just measured by increased sales because it's out there helping to create a company image and even educate buyers.

"I'm really pleased with my catalog," says Zacharias. "I spent a lot of money having it designed to look really classy. It has helped me retain clients who are looking for nice framing, and I recouped all the costs within the first year. Especially for the professional photographer part of my business, a printed catalog is incredibly important. It also helps with designers by giving them ideas for framing they hadn't thought about—a different approach with double and triple fillets, multiple openings, or just unique frames that are really striking on certain types of images. So I've found that a catalog can actually be a good educational tool for designers."

"When my clients look at a catalog, they point out what they like and what changes they would like," says Miller. "Sometimes they request samples first. Or they might want to change the frame or matting. A chain of furniture stores, for example, may want a landscape print with more of a pecan-colored moulding than the brown mahogany we put on a piece to match their current line."

"The longer I'm in business and the more I have my materials out there, the more effective these sales tools are," says Bolokofsky. "They're doing the job I need them to do. People say how nice the catalog is, which is important because it helps create a good image of the company. We get orders from it, so it's done a good job. I think the next one will be better, because it will have an even better graphic appearance and product selection."

Catalogs vs. Electronic Media

Not all production framing companies feel catalogs are needed in today's electronic world. Often, that view arises from the specific nature of a company's products and market and makes sense in the context of its marketing philosophy.

"We don't have a printed catalog because everything we offer is online," says Carl Ertlinger, vice-president of operations at AGF, Inc., in Maryland Heights, MO. "Our whole focus is on delivering technology to retailers at an affordable cost, so we go with a more technological solution to promotion. We used to do ad flyers, but those

Catalog Printing: Some Basics

There are three main costs of printing a catalog: the paper, the printer, and the postage, says Pat Aho, manager of RR Donnelley Print Services Division, a large magazine and catalog printing company.

"If a framing or wall art company wants to promote their framed artwork and other products, typically it will use better paper," he says. Generally, a catalog needs to use heavier, whiter paper than a magazine to enhance the quality of the images.

Paper is specified by its weight per 500 sheets (25" x 38" for paper used for catalogs), which means that 500 sheets of a 70-pound paper weighs 70 pounds. Paper also comes in various grades or quality. A grade of #1 is the whitest and smoothest while a #5 is the grayest and roughest. A cover is usually heavier than the body of a publication or catalog. Coated stock has a thin coating of clay that gives it a shiny look and provides a better surface for printing photos and other graphics. The magazine you're holding, for example, is printed on 50-pound #4 coated paper and has a 100-pound #2 grade coated paper cover with an added UV coating to give it more gloss.

To print a beautiful catalog, says Aho, "you want to use at least a #4 or #3 paper and go to a 60- or 70-pound or even heavier stock. This improves the quality of the printing. It also increases your price. It all depends on how you visualize your catalog.

"When you print a quantity of, say, 2,000, there's not as much difference in cost when using a higher grade of paper because you're not using that much," he continues. "Most printing plants wouldn't run anything less than a 60-pound #3 and perhaps 100-pound or heavier #3 or #2 stock for the cover. That would make a nice looking catalog.

"Say you want to print 16 pages plus 4 pages for a heavier cover, for a total of 20 pages. You might run the inside on a 70- or 80-pound stock to give it a little bit of weight to make it feel more substantial. At 48 or 64 pages or more, you might want to print on slightly lighter paper, say a 60 or 70 pound paper. And at 64 pages you might decide to go from saddle stitch to perfect bound. [Saddle stitch is the term used for stapling in the middle, while a perfect bound publication is flat along the outside spine.] There are some other options available to add a coating (like a UV coating or a varnish) to give the piece a high-gloss sheen.

There are two main types of press, sheet-fed and web. A sheet-fed press prints on paper that has been cut and stacked in flat sheets, while a web press is one that uses paper that comes in large rolls. There is a point at around 4,000 to 6,000 copies when printing on a web press becomes more economical than on a sheet-fed press because of a web press's higher speed. A sheet-fed press does offer better quality because of its slower speed. It all depends on the stock and the number of pages you're printing. That's why it's very important to decide on what quantity you want to print, then look at whether it will be more economical to run on a

sheet-fed or web press.

"When you start off, your main costs are in digital file preparation, making the printing plates, doing page proofs, and getting the press set up to run your job," says Aho. "That's why the price between printing 2,000 and 5,000 copies won't be dramatically different."

Using that 16 pages with a 4-page cover as an example, let's say that the cost to print 20 pages on 70-pound stock is \$2,000. Print 3,000 would run \$2,500. For 4,000, it might be \$2,800 or \$2,900. In a similar way, when you go from 10,000 to 20,000 on a web press, the percentage increase in cost would be even less because of its speed.

"To get the most for your printing dollar, start by making sure that you supply your printer with quality, high-resolution PDF files to their specifications. [The most common PDF software is Adobe Acrobat.] While most creative people work in Quark XPress or InDesign, at this point we at Donnelley prefer print-ready PDF pages. Make sure you include any bleeds [inked areas that run off the edge of the paper] and create your PDFs correctly so you won't incur any unanticipated upfront costs. Look for a printer that will allow you to upload your files and proof them online. That eliminates having to send a CD to a printer and can save on proofing costs by eliminating costly color proofs. And perhaps look for a printer that offers 'soft' proofing at the press site on color-calibrated monitors, or use a printer that has a 'closed-loop color system' with cameras that read the color on press and lock it in. And definitely work with a designer who has experience with sending printable files to a printer. Or use a company that does custom publishing to help you with the product. Finally, try not to make any last minute corrections after you send a catalog to the printer. Otherwise, you'll get hit with correction charges.

"It's also important that whoever you select as a printer understands how to get the best economy out of your postage. If a catalog will be a standard-size piece, you want an 8"x10¹/₄" or 10⁷/₈" trim size. If you go larger than that, you're getting into a larger format using more paper. And the more paper and the heavier the paper you use, the more the postage will be. If it's a smaller piece of 16 pages or less, one good idea is to fold the piece in half and wafer-seal it so you can get letter rates. Another is to use a 'slim-jim' format, which is 6"x10⁷/₈". Even with more pages, you can wafer-seal and mail it at letter rates.

"The more you can reduce postage costs, the better. If you have a smaller page count or you're looking at a format like the slim-jim to get the letter rate, you could possibly cut your postage bill almost in half compared to mailing flat. Especially for promoting some specials, a flyer that could be folded down to qualify for letter mail is a good move."

Finally, get quotes from two to three printers and decide on the one that best fits your overall needs. And once you're satisfied with a printer's quality and price, stick with that company.

often get overlooked. And I think you get more bang for your buck with telemarketing.”

“General catalogs aren't really necessary now, because everything is specialized,” says Carneau. “A lot of clients they know what they want, they go to our website and see what we're doing. I use my website more as a catalog now because everybody has access. I don't sell to big box stores, and that's one of the reasons why my business has become so specialized. When we did catalogs, they were all right; they got the word out. We got sales, but it costs a lot of money to do it right. And we weren't dealing with a lot of clients.”

And then, some company owners feel they need to focus on creating an image that connects on a personal level with their clients, and the right catalog can help make that connection.

“I print catalogs because I think that customers and people in general like to touch paper more than the computer screen,” says Bolokofsky. “It's more personal. I don't produce my catalog on a CD, but most of the information is also on our website. A printed catalog and sell sheets are very important, because they put your name in front of your customers. ‘Out of sight, out of mind,’ as they say.”

Most production framers look at catalogs, websites, CDs, flyers, sales calls, and any other options as complementing each other in a well-rounded marketing and sales program. Catalogs haven't been replaced so much as added to by websites and the like.

“Catalogs are an important element of our sales program—next to a salesperson getting in front of a potential customer and/or producing actual finished samples for the big box stores,” says Miller. “You can't sell if a customer can't see what they want to buy. Along with a website, catalogs are vital.”

“If somebody's going to buy one of your pieces, they'll want to see a catalog with all of your pieces,” says Cadish. “A catalog gives everybody an opportunity to see all the different products you carry. They can also go to a website. Catalogs will be an important part of our sales program, and I would think they would be for anybody.”

As Hannan points out, “You can't

always hand people a business card with your website on it and ask them to take a look. On the other hand, we also send out our catalog digitally—not on CD but by e-mail. Or they can go to our website to see what we offer.”

Zacharias, who finds catalogs an essential part of his business, is also producing his catalog on a CD and incorporates much of it on his website. “The website is going to go into more depth beyond professional photographers and will deal with artists and designers,” he says. “I also do work for the Library of Congress and several branches of the Smithsonian, so there are more elaborate things I plan to do on the site. But this a visual industry, so you've still got to have catalogs that play to your strengths and show your quality and diversity.” ■

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