

## Partners in a Changing Market

By Owen Hickey

**A**s a publisher of open edition prints and someone in sales, on any given day I can spend time with an interior designer, a designer for a large contract picture framer, the owner of a retail framing gallery, or even the set designer for an upcoming film.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the business is why consumers buy wall décor and where they buy it. In the past 5 to 10 years, consumer buying trends have changed. All of us—art publisher, contract framer, frame manufacturer—have seen the impact of this and have responded in ways that reflect our businesses.

Like many of my associates in open edition art publishing, I often long for the “old days” when we introduced two new releases a year. These were in the fall to tie in with the Atlanta show, the High Point Fall Market, and the holiday season and in January to kick off the new year and accommodate the early spring trade shows and High Point Spring Market.

This tradition continues, but being successful in the wall art business today also means addressing the market needs of big box retailers. These clients have become increasingly important, especially when it comes to where consumers now shop for wall décor.

These retailers are also very trend driven. More often than not, they require proprietary product. Providing the right images at the right time to contract framers who serve these retailers has become ever more important for art publishers. We are constantly rethinking and retooling how we develop our product for this market as well as how often new product needs to be introduced.

This industry is more fashion- and trend-driven than ever and has become an integral part of the home furnishings industry. We strive to publish images that coordinate with the latest designs, styles, and colors of furniture and

*This is the first of a series of articles from leading art publishers featuring views and ideas affecting the wall art industry.*

home accessories. Two of the best places to see these trends are the High Point Furniture Market and new Las Vegas Market. Our artists are also an integral part of the creative process. All these things come together as our publishing directors research market trends and work with our framing customers to bring the right images to market.

Imagery is a key component in developing wall decor programs for retailers. Working closely with contract framers is an important part of this process. We provide samples of new releases and—of increasing importance—images slated for future release that can be produced exclusively for a production framer’s customers. We also emphasize that images in our current catalog can be resized to fit specific customer requests.

For an open edition art publisher, another key element is making efficient use of the paper we print on. Most standard size presses accommodate a sheet up to 28"x40", with a printable area of 27"x39". So when an image is selected for publication and sized, we have to determine if it should be printed two-up as a 19"x27" image or does it warrant a full-size treatment. Choosing the right size lets a publisher use paper efficiently to provide the pricing required for the market.

This aspect of the publishing business also offers benefits to contract framers.

For example, a 28"x40" sheet with a printable area of 27"x39" can be configured in several ways. You could fit five 11"x14" images on that sheet. Or 11 images at 8"x10". Another popular standard size is 16"x20", which would print two-up on the same sheet.

Another factor in pricing is the cost of paper. There are numerous weights and qualities of paper stock available at various price points. Using a more moderately priced paper stock is another way a framer can reduce the cost of the image. Quantity also affects price. A 500 print run is considerably more expensive per print than a run of 1,500 to 2,000. By working with a publisher with an eye to using paper size and stock most economically, there are opportunities to sharpen the price points.

Today, as our framing partners bring better product to market, they look to art publishers to help them provide the right image to complement that perfect frame—and to do it at the right price. Developing more creative partnerships between production framing and art publishing is one way we can all thrive together in this changing marketplace. ■



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