



By Owen Hickey

## Moving With the Market

Everyone in the wall décor business these days seems to be trying to do everything themselves. Publishers are cutting out the framers. Framers are cutting out the publishers. Artists are self publishing their images at home on their inkjet printers.

In this new world of wall art, are wholesale picture framers still looking to art publishers for inspiration, imagery, and product development? The answer, despite all the changes, is yes. And the publishers still depend on contract and volume framers to bring their imagery to the markets they service, whether that is corporate, hospitality, or retail clients.

What has changed is the way the business operates, from both the publisher's and the framing company's perspectives. For a publisher, it's no longer viable to print and publish extensive numbers of new releases two or three times a year. As always, not every image that goes to press will be a bestseller, and small margins and more competition mean that publishers need to be more selective than ever. Yet they continue to offer a wide range of imagery that they would like to bring to market. At the same time contract and wholesale framers know that their customers are always looking for what's new and want to be trend-current. And they also have less margin for error in choosing images.

As a result, despite the efforts to expand into other areas of the business, there continues to be an active partnership between contract framers and fine art publishers. Now, more than ever, in fact, they need each other.

How are some of the ways a contract framer can creatively use the art resources of a fine art publisher? A good starting point is to review a publisher's current catalogs, brochures, and websites for images. Developing a good working relationship with a publisher also opens up significant opportunities for image selection beyond a publisher's catalog items. Publishers are continually looking at new imagery, and much of the latest and freshest that is available often hasn't had time to be shown in catalogs.

Thanks to the today's technology of jpegs, emails, and digital proofs, presentations of these images can be made

easily and quickly. Images can be downloaded directly from websites. This allows framers to have access to the latest imagery, which can be used to show clients designs much faster than in the past.

For the corporate art and hospitality segments of the industry, the print-on-demand format is uniquely suitable in making "one-of" prints that can be tailored for specific design applications. There is also an element of exclusivity because an image can be sized and formatted for a particular project, which can be a strong selling point with many clients

These images can also be printed on a variety of substrates beyond the traditional paper and canvas, such as acrylics, aluminum, glass, and wood. While open edition prints and giclées remain the bread and butter for publishers, these creative art materials offer a wonderful alternative for clients interested in achieving a special look.

One often-overlooked area of opportunity for framers to work with publishers is designing and developing product for the High Point, Las Vegas World Market, and gift shows. (A number of contract framers even maintain their own showrooms at a number of these venues.) The buyers at these shows are varied. There are furniture stores, better priced gift shops, and interior designers. Each is looking for a specific product suited to their niche market. The number of new artwork available for production framers to choose from to meet these needs is significant, with publishers able to help them supply all of these shows with fresh, up-to-date product.

There are many ways in which the partnership between publishers and production framers remains a key element in the success of both types of companies. Rather than getting into new areas of business in hopes of reducing costs, publishers and production framers alike are more likely to find success when they work together. ■

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