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"Golden Profits"

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Whenever I think of gold I think of success. Gold nuggets unearthed by eager miners; 24k gold jewelry worn by everyone from a happy young bride to Fortune 500 CEO; the gold medal at the Olympics; and the symbolic gold coins of profit in a businessperson's bank account. Profits are the prize which all small businesses are after, and the proof of their successes.

OLD SCHOOL PROFITS

In order for there to be profits there needs to be an understanding of the big picture, the whole concept. According to my father, profits are the money left in the bank account after all the monthly bills are paid, the overhead in other words. The problem with being a second generation self employed small businessperson, is that I learned the basic concepts of: charging the customer for the items, paying out to make that business run, and then, only then, checking to see if there was any money left for a personal draw at the end of the month. I saw the family go through good months and bad, sometimes we had money to draw out and sometimes not.

Now, many years after my father's death, I have learned there is a better way to run a business, and that profits, as well as owner salary, are all part of the calculations of how to price a product or service in the first place. Seems my father never thought his labor was really worth anything. It was only what made him a craftsman and in turn earned him a living. Today we all realize that in pricing picture framing we need to take into account our income as in integral portion of business expenses, and plan on paying those expenses every month as you would rent or electricity.

I'm not writing about pricing in this column, that is truly not my specialty, but rather how to recognize available income by delving deeper into the world of mounting alone.

MOUNTING IS PART OF THE WHOLE PICTURE

When designing any custom framing project, whether a single custom project or large production, job the question of mounting the image must be resolved. Selling the concept of mounting should not be much of an option for the customer. Yes, we always need to discuss the conservation/preservation issues, but when the project is an inexpensive, open edition poster print the mounting options are much greater.

There are an assortment of products and methods for cold, hot, or conservation mounting, all of which may all be used to affix an image to a substrate. Regardless of technique, if it looks good the customer will remain happy, but if it bubbles or cockles, then your customer may never return. The customer has no way of knowing the ill fated mounting might be the result of the wrongly selected mounting technique rather than the skills and expertise of the frame shop being to blame, and quite honestly they don't care. In most cases they just wanted it flat.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MOUNTING TECHNIQUE

Knowing which mounting method is the correct one for any particular framing project is the framer's job. If a customer does not tell you that this poster is to be hung in the bathroom being subjected to extremes of heat and humidity, how would you know that dry mounting should be done rather than spray mounting? At the design counter, it is imperative to find out where is this to be hung as well as the more traditional facts concerning colors, lighting, and furniture styles.

After preservation mounting techniques have been set aside, and then the decision for which mounting technique to use should be left to the professional framer and not the customer. It is not that any mounting process is better than any other, it is more that one might be better suited for the long term health of a mounting based on its intended use. High humidity vs. dryness impacts board expansion and contraction which in turn reacts upon the item mounted. A resin coated (RC) photograph is relatively stable in that it won't expand and contract much with intermittent excesses of humidity and dryness, as in a heated bathroom. Where a mat board which has no coated surface will expand and contract a great deal when exposed to excesses of moisture as humidity.

The same photo being resin coated will not absorb adhesives for maximum bond. Now, if that RC photo is mounted to a mat board or other solid paper mount board, its bond will be challenged in normal expansion and contraction variations.

When placed in a bathroom these atmospheric variations can be setting the mounting up for failure when a method of bonding is selected that is weakened by high humidity and lack of absorption.

MOUNTING REPERCUSSIONS

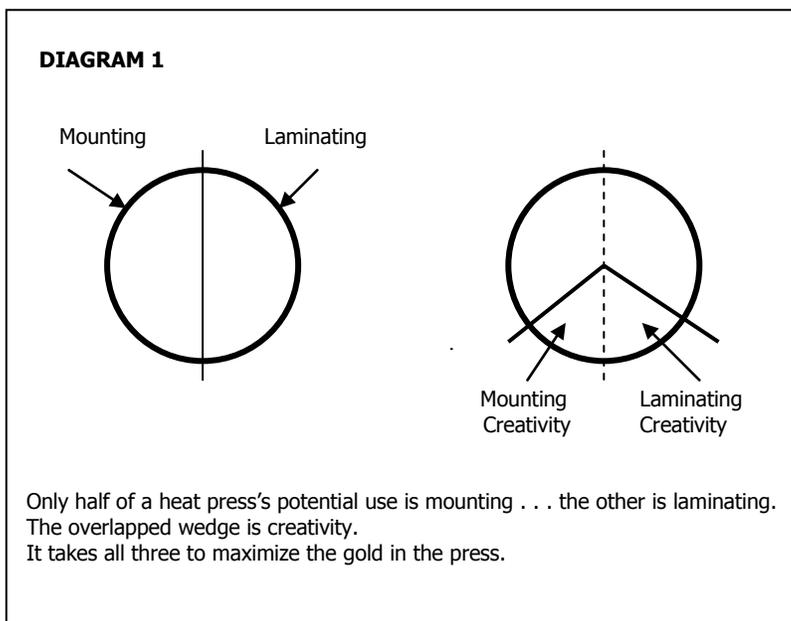
When any mounting fails it impacts profits, for because customer will no doubt return for it to be repaired. We all know that redo projects are a direct hit to profits because it is not the customer's fault if our choice of mounting method was wrong for the project presented, and as a result we are unable to charge for that repair. On the other hand, if the customer turned down your recommended mounting method, after you showed them samples of why mounting is highly suggested for that bathroom poster, and you warned them of the possible failures, well then it should be a charge to them to replace the mounting.

This may be often avoided by the small buckled 8x10" half mounted sampler kept under the design counter, or the half rippled mounted 24x36" matted poster hanging on the wall. These samples sell mounting without much effort. The customer sees what could happen when attempting to save money leaving the image unmounted. They should have been prepared ahead of time to pay for unfitting, mounting, and refitting at a later date if it deems necessary.

PROFITS FROM A MOUNTING PRESS

Unlike any other form of mounting when there is a dry mount press available in a custom frame shop there are numerous ways in which to increase profits. I've heard numerous framers say they bought existing shops or had the opportunity to purchase all the equipment from another framing business and were *stuck* with a dry mount press they have never used. It breaks my heart to hear a framer say that.

The profit potential of a hot vacuum or mechanical press may be doubled or tripled over other cold mounting techniques. *Mounting* is only half of the potential work any heat press can do, *laminating* is the other half, and both must be tapped into for total profit potential to be realized (**diagram 1**). If the targeted market is *mounting* and there is a press operator working the machine every minute of the day, every day while open for business, maximum profits are indeed being felt from mounting alone. Most framers, however, do not run their presses all day every day, but only when projects are due. The idea is to get the most from that mounting equipment.



EXPANDING INTO LAMINATING

The additional investment required to begin laminating with your existing mounting press and materials is minimal. Simply by adding a roll vinyl laminate, overlay foam (aka foam plastic), and perhaps an optional perforator (aka piercing tool), laminating may be offered. Laminating within a press uses vinyl films to heat-set a surface layer designed as a glass substitute. Encapsulation (or two-sided lamination) with polyester films is not recommended for application with this type of framing equipment, is was designed for use with roller laminators and high tack pressure-sensitive adhesives.

Introduction of laminating into frame shop services will require additional marketing to ensure growth and public awareness, otherwise noted as profits. Yellow pages advertising, mailers, and networking all provide good sources for telling the world of new framing services available. Through press releases, and promotionals, offering any new service falls into the same category as promotion of ant new piece of technological equipment like your new computerized mat cutter (See "CMC Series", PFM July 2001).

Potential sales for surface laminating will be found wherever glass may not be used. Any place dealing with children, such as day-care centers, preschools, nurseries and Pediatricians' offices would be perfect. The same is true with the elderly at nursing homes and hospitals. Detention facilities, jails, and institutions are all places where safety is an issue and may not wish glass present.

Engineering and architectural firms, city, state, and federal offices may need laminating services to prepare materials, charts, and designs for presentation to groups or clients. Real estate agencies obviously need maps for both pinning home locations and for drawing on with washable markers, think of the market potential there alone! Also consider sporting goods stores, hunting, fishing, hiking and camping information centers or recreational areas. The possibilities are endless.

DIGITAL IMAGE ALERT!

The one thing you must be careful of is using heat-set vinyl laminates with digital images. Since high heats are used to set the laminates the same warnings I issue for mounting digital images holds true for laminating them.

When digital manufacturers suggest that surface laminating is the way to frame their images they are referring to cold lamination methods and high tack pressure-sensitive mounting with roller laminators. These are the kind found in large reprographics firms, advertising agencies, and photo labs...not generally in custom frame shops.

REVELING IN CREATIVITY

Once mounting and laminating are both offered and the press is manned continually during business hours then full profit potential is there, but if still not utilized the entire time there is yet another profit making segment which still may remain untapped. This is the creative portion of heat presses where the most fun and greatest profits lie. Creative applications are any use of mounting and/or laminating materials in an innovative design using a heat press. In diagram two the mounting potential of a heat press is illustrated by a circle divided first in half then subdivided into thirds. This new segment overlaps into both mounting and laminating (diagram 2).

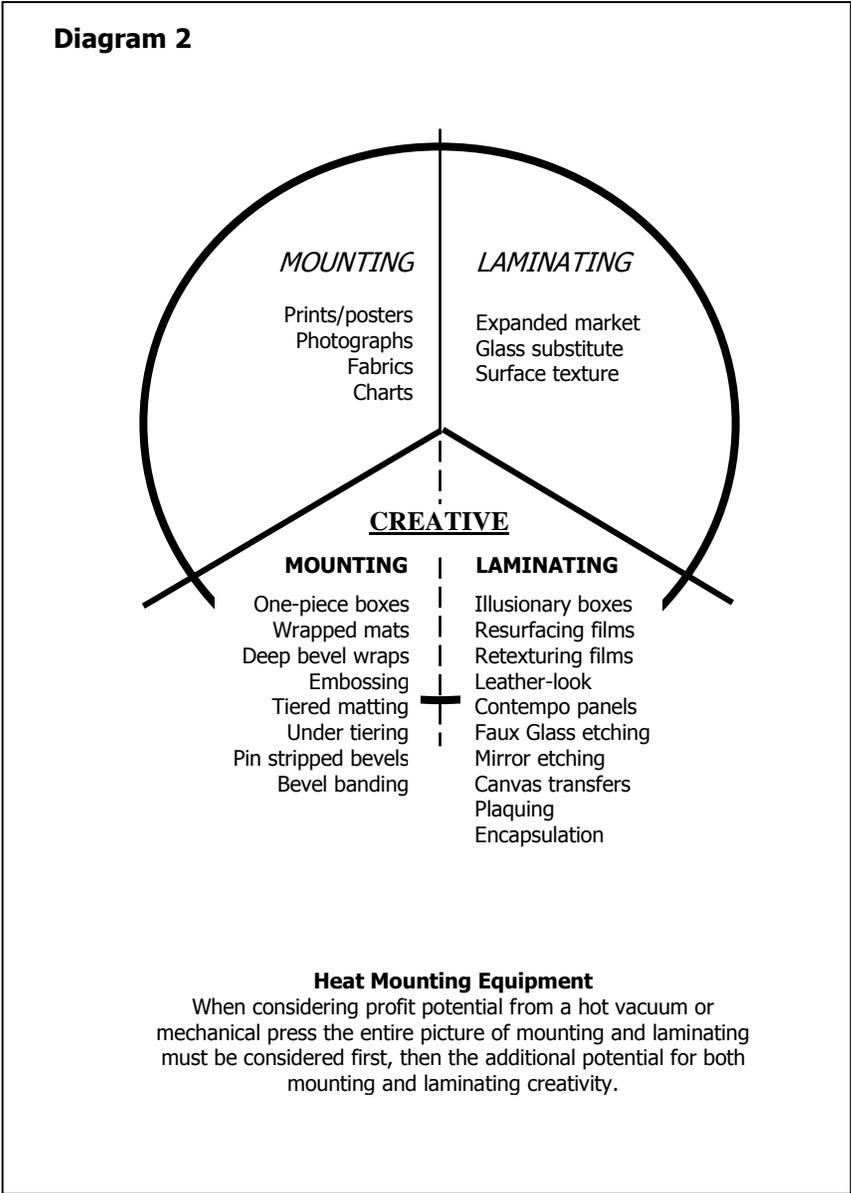
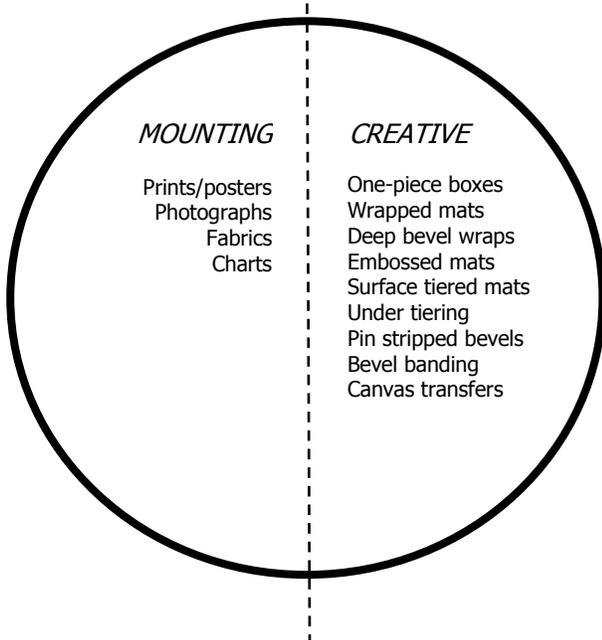


Diagram 3



Cold Mounting Equipment

When using a cold vacuum frame the creative applications for profits are limited to cold adhesives and mounting one layer at a time. No use of heat-set laminates may be used.

Tiered matting with colored core boards and art papers; one-piece shadow boxes; wrapped and embossed mats all fall into *mounting creativity*...while resurfacing, refinishing and retexturing films; leather-look; contempo panels; faux glass etching; mirror designing; embossing; and canvas transferring of both photos and prints overlap into *laminating creativity*.

Selling mounting and laminating creativity is also quite simple. Embossed mats, shadow boxes, and faux glass etching are all perfect examples of the ultimate in custom framing and design. And as I've mentioned in previous articles, always sell the \$50.00 difference in price between a 16-ply tiered mat design and a standard double mat. Creative applications do sell themselves, as long as they are shown on the walls and as corner samples. And many of the tiered layered mats may be cut using computerized mat cutters.

Mounting creativity is not limited to heat presses only, heat only limits used of heat-set over laminates. There are very many profit producing techniques such as wrapped mats, embossed mats, shadow boxes, even tiered mats that may be produced using cold mounting methods. The thing to remember is that time is money, and when cold mounting methods become too time intensive the profits go down. Yes, your labor is worth something **(diagram 3)**.

THE WHOLE PROFIT PICTURE

As long as any hot or cold press is used continually for mounting during the course of each business day it is being used 100%. Thus if priced appropriately for all materials and overhead, mounting alone is producing maximum profits. If heat equipment is used for both mounting and laminating all day it is also used to its maximum 100% profit potential. If however the cold vacuum frame, or hot mechanical press sits idle part of the day and no creative applications are employed, then perhaps only 1/2 to 1/3 of the total available profits are being recognized.

When considering heat press profits, if only taking mounting into consideration it could take twice as long to bring in \$1000.00 than if including laminating in the equation. Plus the whole picture cannot truly be viewed until the aspects of creativity profits are also added. The entire approach to successful profit dollars comes with press usage that includes *mounting*, *laminating* and *creative* applications. In turn the whole profit picture cannot be viewed with a cold vacuum frame if both *mounting* and *creativity* are not included.

Added profits come in many ways; selling up, selection of the correct mounting methods to suit the project, or using your mounting equipment in all ways possible to bring in those dollars. Profits aren't always a matter of thinking outside the box, but creative thinking may lead to creative designing which in turn may lead to those golden profits.

END

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Additional information on mounting basics is found in *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, Second Edition, 2002*, and *The Mounting And Laminating Handbook, Third Edition, 2008*.
Creative Mounting, Wrapping, And Laminating, 2000

will teach you everything you need to know about getting the most from your dry mount equipment

and materials as an innovative frame designer. All books are available from **Designs Ink Publishing** through this website.

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