



by Ken Baur

## On-Site Consultations

**T**he three most important services offered by independent framers today are delivery, installation, and on-site consultations. Performing these services is the best way to separate your business from big box competition. Of the three, on-site consultation (going to the home or office of your client to sell custom framing) is the most productive. Building an on-site consulting program not only helps you meet the needs of your busy clients, but it also opens the door for a surprising amount of additional opportunities.

A couple of years ago I recommended that framers charge for this service. Today, in more difficult times, however, our galleries promote it as a free service. Why? Because it gives us more chances to make sales, and our return on this service has also been outstanding. Not only are

average tickets higher on these projects, but we also sell more pieces per visit. In addition, more often than not, we get an opportunity to do additional framing. These jobs also commonly involve installation, which

adds even more revenue.

Once you recognize that this service can be a profitable one, how do you begin offering it? Like every program that impacts your business in a profitable manner, on-site consulting won't

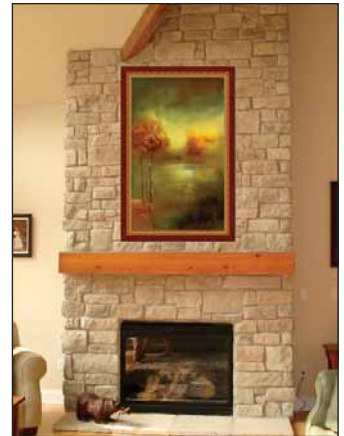
be effective unless you plan for it, create goals, train your staff, and establish an appropriate policy and procedures. Getting on-site opportunities isn't as difficult as it may seem. Using

gallery signage and promoting the service in your advertising are good ideas. But the most effective

method, however, is to listen for opportunities during a sale. When clients express hesitation in making a decision in areas like the size of a project or color selection for a certain wall, jump on the opening to offer a free visit as though it is something that is a standard procedure for helping clients make the correct decision.

It's also important to be flexible about your time. Busy clients may need evening appointments. If possible, create a form on your website that allows those interested in this service to request an appointment. Your new program will place demands on your schedule, but you will be rewarded for your efforts.

Before soliciting appointments, take the time to clearly define what services you will perform on your visits. Clients are not shy



*A client received a digital image of her fireplace with a proposed print and framing superimposed on a photo taken during an in-home consultation—something that couldn't have been done without a visit to the client's home.*

***Visiting clients in their homes and offices has become a vital part of service that opens up new opportunities for business***

about asking your opinion on everything imaginable concerning the decor of their homes, so be prepared to determine which areas you will provide consultation. Will you:

- Help them find the art they need?
- Offer opinions about wall color?
- Suggest furniture options and placement?
- Move and re-hang existing art and framing?
- Offer to install what you are selling?

Try only offering services you are qualified to advise on, and stick to your guns on this. Clients will pressure you to provide advice and service outside of your expertise, but this can backfire on you and cause problems. Making note of repeated requests may point you in the direction of obtaining qualification for additional services. For example, there are many web-based programs offering credentials for color consulting, staging, and interior design, which could be used to supplement a growing on-site program.

Limiting service to areas of your qualifications is important because you are going to build a reputation as an on-site expert in your market. If you open the door just once in an area you are untrained to service, you will ultimately undermine the reputation of expertise you are working to establish.

Another important consideration for your on-site service is the type of tools you will provide to clients to help them visualize your plan. Consider offering a written description that not only explains the concept but also shows what it will look like. This could be done by taking pictures of empty walls and superimposing art and frame combinations created by a virtual framing program and a software program like Publisher or Photoshop. Visuals like this help tremendously because they give clients the ability to visualize before they okay the project, therefore reducing the chances of miscommunication. You may also consider providing color sample swatch boards for large projects that must consider wall colors, furniture, and room decor textures. Blending the colors and textures to create an overall palette on a swatch board is a great way to demonstrate that your art and framing suggestions will harmonize with the room.

Clients may insist that their designer view your plan before it is implemented. If so, make sure you are the one doing the presentation so you can answer all the questions and concerns. This will give you a

chance to save the sale if the designer isn't on board. These situations really should be viewed as opportunities to show your ability and value to the designer's clients. Obviously, a designer isn't providing the service since the client had to consult with you in the first place. Be sure and follow up with the designer after the meeting to see if you can provide your services to them with other clients.

Finally, be observant for additional opportunities while in a client's home. Almost every home needs more art or reframing of older art. As you gain the trust of a client, you'll find an opportunity to suggest additional service for these areas. If the client says he or she would like to pursue it later, be sure to record that for future follow-up.

Being invited into a client's home to consult on art and framing opens up opportunities that never present themselves during gallery visits. Creating a professional program that meets and exceeds the needs of these clients goes a long way in providing more framing business and creating lasting relationships. Programs like on-site consulting that take you outside your showroom are important and necessary in today's world of custom framing. Building a program like this is a great start in changing the traditional business model of yesterday to help you begin meeting the challenges of a changing industry. ■

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**Ken Baur** is president of KB Consulting, which helps framing businesses adapt to the challenges of a changing market. Ken also owns Framing Concepts, a full-service, national award-winning framing company with three locations in northwestern Indiana. He can be contacted at [ken@framingbusinessconsulting.com](mailto:ken@framingbusinessconsulting.com).