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In Focus Vol. 4 No. 9

Compatibility Tool

Rebooting a High-End Framing Business

Shop By Brand

As the high-end framing business has matured, John and Valerie Becker of Red Wing Framing have diversified into fine-art printing, portrait photography, and art project management services.

Shop By Category

The prospects for business longevity can be improved by adhering to three basic principles: Remain true to your core values. Make quality products that people appreciate. Stay flexible enough to change with the times.

Digital Photography

John and Valerie Becker, of [Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing](#) in Red Wing, MN understand these principles, which helps explain why a company that originated as a high-end framing service also now provides photography, fine-art printing, and art-project management services to a diverse mix of commercial clients, photographers, artists, and consumers.



Using their HP Designjet Z6100 and a range of materials and expertise from LexJet, Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing produces a variety of graphics for the biggest employer in Red Wing, MN: The Red Wing Shoe Company. The company, which has been manufacturing high-quality boots and shoes in the US for more than a century, has stores all over the world and is opening a 20,000 sq. ft. flagship store and museum. One of the featured exhibits will be this 16-ft. high boot that shows the quality of the craftsmanship in Red Wing boots.

Large Format

Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing is part of a triad of companies that also includes [Red Wing Portrait Studio](#) and [Red Wing Digital Studio](#). What the three businesses have in common is a commitment to delivering great-looking visuals for personal, artistic, or commercial use.

LexJet Décor

One of their best-known clients is Red Wing's biggest employer: the Red Wing Shoe Company. Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing prints dozens of visuals for the shoe company's retail stores, including the firm's new 20,000 sq. ft. flagship store and museum.

Newsletters

John Becker, an avid photographer himself, admires the fact that the Red Wing Shoe Company sends photographers around the world, to shoot pictures of Red Wing's purpose-built boots being worn by workers on oil-drilling platform, construction sites for skyscrapers, logging camps, and electrical power plants.

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When the Red Wing Shoe Company wants to use these images in their stores, they count on Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing to recommend different options for graphics, and handle every phase of the project—including printing, mounting, framing, and installation.

"We position ourselves as a full-service imaging business," explains John Becker. "Ideally, we like to do projects end-to-end, but we don't have to. We can do any subset of a given project as well. We like to think of ourselves as consultants."

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When the Red Wing Shoe Company opened new stores serving the gas and oil industry in Abu-Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, John Becker of Red Wing Framing & Fine Art turned to LexJet for advice on the best materials for the job. The black-and-white graphics shown here were printed on Sunset Select Matte Canvas with HP Vivera pigment inks. The smaller images were printed on LexJet's 11 Mil Sunset Photo eSatin 300g paper and mounted on a 0.5-in board.

Serving All Types of Businesses and People: Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing initially branched out into the giclee-printing business. They continue to work with a number of artists. But in recent years, more and more of their work has come from small businesses seeking custom-art installations.

Customers usually have an objective in mind of what they want to accomplish with the images on their walls," says Becker. "We work with them to figure out what their pain points are and how can relieve them."



Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing used a semi-translucent polypropylene film from LexJet to print these images for the back entrance of a Red Wing Shoe Store in West Dundee, IL. As John Becker explains, "The back side of the store was used only for receiving, but it did have visibility from an adjacent parking lot. Originally the window was covered in craft paper. We replaced that with a powerful black-and-white photo of the boots being used." The translucent polypropylene means the images are visible 24 hours a day, thanks to the backlighting coming from the store which is illuminated at night.

They are also getting more business from walk-in customers, including some very talented photographers who want to have their best images enlarged, printed, and framed. "Being able to complete a project with high-end museum-level framing does make a difference."

John has noticed that people are slowly becoming aware of options for printing on materials other than photo paper. When he sees an opportunity to recommend something unconventional, he will do a trial print. At that point, he says "The finished product kind of sells itself."

For example, John believes backlits can be a very effective way to show off strong, vivid photographs. And he says a free-hanging fabric print can also be very eye-catching. "The ability to combine movement with imagery can be very powerful. Using air circulation with prints on [LexJet's Water Resistant Satin Cloth](#) can produce a very striking, wave-like effect."

He also isn't hesitant to try mounting various media types on top of all kinds of different substrates. It may not always be 100% successful, but "By virtue of trying something new, you might find a whole new untapped opportunity."

John Becker buys many of his materials from LexJet, noting that his relationship with LexJet has evolved over the years. "I use LexJet the way I hope a lot of my customers would use me. When I call my account specialist, Rob Finkel, I can tell him the requirements of the job and ask the tough questions, and he'll come up with the right solution for me. I need partners just like I hope my customers need partners."

Becker chooses to buy from LexJet because he understands that business is really driven by the ability to provide solutions to specific challenges: "I steer a lot of business toward LexJet because they've bailed me out in so many cases. LexJet is the first place I turn when I have a question related to digital printing."

Similarly, Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing is a loyal user of HP printers: "We've had three generations of HP printers now; our current one is the [HP DesignJet Z6100ps](#). It's just been a workhorse for us."

The Rewards of SEO Marketing: John Becker admits that marketing a company that offers such a wide range of services can be a challenge. But he devotes a lot of time to maintaining a strong presence online: "Obviously, we don't have the same business opportunities that we might have in a larger community, but the Internet has made it a smaller world. We do a lot to help customers find us."

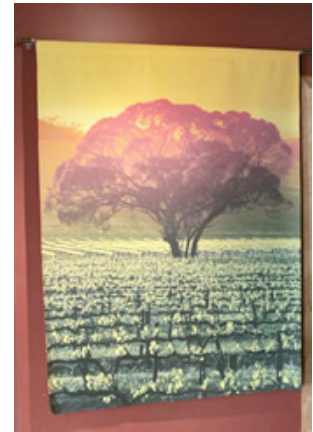
Becker's efforts to use search-engine-optimization (SEO) techniques that make Red Wing appear higher in the lists of search results have paid off by generating opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be obvious. For example, when the producers of the PBS do-it-yourself program *Home Time* were looking for a company to produce artwork to decorate a townhouse that was being remodeled on the show, they found Red Wing Framing through an online search. Becker says the shop produced 30 images for the home and gets an influx of new business each time the episode is rebroadcast in syndication.

Red Wing has also created exhibition prints for a retired TIME magazine photographer whose assistant found Red Wing Framing while doing a search on his iPhone during a road trip from Chicago to Minneapolis.

"We also do a fair amount of blogging and Facebook, and try to characterize ourselves a fun environment," says Becker. Red Wing Framing recently hosted a "mac-and-cheese smackdown" at their studios in which their fans, followers, and customers met to taste test various recipes. "That event had nothing to do with our business," says John. "But people left with a positive feeling of having been there."

"Despite all the technology that's out there, business still boils down to people doing business with other people," says John. "You have to enjoy the people you're working with."

Editor's Note: You can read more about projects Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing has produced for other restaurant and retail clients in a post on the [Studio LexJet blog](#) showing that [Business of All Sizes Can Afford Custom Wall Art](#).



For a local wine shop, John Becker suggested using fabric prints that would convey a gentle sense of movement and avoid the need for glass. This colorful art piece was printed on LexJet Water-Resistant Satin Cloth. The image was a photo that the client had taken during a trip to Napa Valley.