



THINKING OUTSIDE THE FRAME

American Frame has a history of innovating, and with Lenovo's help, they're continuing the tradition.



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 **AMERICAN FRAME**
Love your art. **Frame it right.**

American Frame's founder Ron Mickel understands the importance of adapting to change, evolving to thrive, and doing what you love.

It's his life story, and consequently the story of his Ohio-based company. In the early 1960's, Mickel decided that owning a paint and garden business suited him much better than working for "the man". He added picture frames to his store's inventory as a way to bump up the lackluster winter revenue stream. Boy, did it.

In 1967, Ron kicked his bread and butter, paint and wallpaper, to the curb. "I found myself doing more and more framing. And I was really good at framing and color coordination," explained Mickel. That revelation and the increased demand for Mickel's talent transformed the former paint and garden store into Ron Mickel Fine Custom Framing, and eventually The Ron Mickel Gallery, the first modern art gallery in Northwest Ohio.

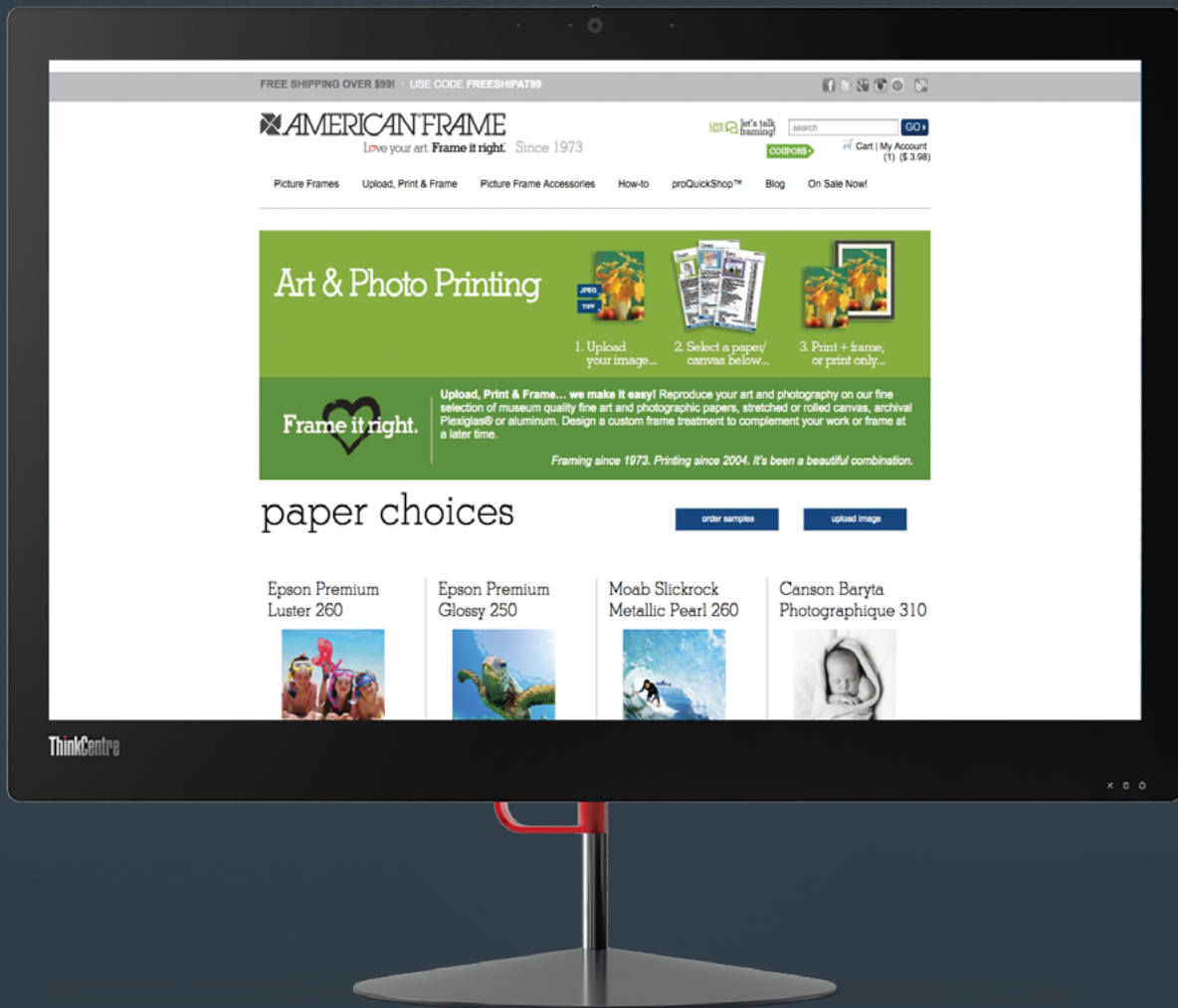


GOING POSTAL: MAIL ORDER MANIA

A few years later, his discovery of affordable metal framing again transformed his business. Instead of relying on walk-ins and word of mouth, he used marketing to spread the good word. The opportunity to expand his frame sales loomed large and the time to seize it was now. Mickel placed a small ad in the back of American Artist magazine hoping to do a little mail order business to supplement his shop, and kept doing what he loved, framing art and making customers happy.

Weeks later, a surprising phone call came from the local post office.

“Mr. Mickel, will you please come pick up your mail?,” heard the frame shop owner. Brimming with orders, Mickel’s post office box contained orders from all over the country. The entire Mickel clan banded together to fulfill orders, and the big picture began to come into focus: provide custom frames quickly and affordably.



NET WORKING INCREASES NET WORTH

Utilizing the latest in technology, the Mickel family put American Frame in a position to allow artists to frame happiness worldwide. In 1996, American Frame launched its first website, another pioneering move to serve customers with ease, convenience and quality. Today, most of American Frame's customers order online. The latest iteration of the site is a real difference maker, offering the ability to upload artwork and see exactly how it will appear in the frame and mat chosen.

"We allow working artists and photographers a means to custom frame their works easily and beautifully, elevating and preserving their work," explained Laura Jajko, Mickel's daughter and American Frame's President. "Our high quality, quick turnaround, and low prices make it possible for artists to make a living at what they love. In addition to framing, our large format fine art printing capabilities allow for the economical reproduction of original art and photography on many different substrates. Those who order prints can receive them ready to hang or drop-shipped to other locations.



INNOVATION AT THEIR CORE

Innovation has always been a part of American Frame's DNA. It's opened new doors. It's helped them diversify and grow. But most importantly, it's been the difference between a simple one-town hardware store, and an industry-leading global retailer. Staying true to its nature, American Frame continues to lean on new innovations to help further their success. And that's where Lenovo comes in.

The company's Maumee, Ohio showroom was expanded and updated in 2015, providing an inspirational playground for local customers. There, beautiful Ideacentre All-In-One touch screens allow customers to upload art so they can envision their own framed masterpieces. In conference rooms, ThinkCentre Small Form Factor desktops transform simple HD TV monitors into large screen PCs. And at checkout, those same flexible units help cashiers easily engaged with customers.

“We chose Lenovo to run our showroom because it just made more sense than Apple for us. We use Windows software for transaction processing and when we host events, moving our Lenovo computers is much simpler,” added Jajko. “Lenovo’s products’ long battery life means unplugging them to move to a new location in the showroom is no big deal, no matter how long it takes us to decide where they go.”

Yes, innovation is truly at the core of American Frame. It began with a small-space mail-order ad in the back of a magazine. And today, it involves working with beautiful device innovations that are truly redefining the way they engage their customers. Working with Lenovo is just another example of how American Frame works to stay on the cutting-edge. And they aren’t slowing down anytime soon.

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FRAMING THEIR FUTURE

After 44 years of evolving and innovating, American Frame knows sitting still is NOT an option. They continue to embrace the “what’s next” mentality by launching a massive content effort designed to inspire, educate, and encourage customers. Blogs, podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media outlets keep the company connected to its largely DIY customer base. Social media helps inspire potential customers by showcasing customers’ finished products. The company’s website, podcast, and social media channels serve to educate and inspire artists and DIYers to exercise creativity and inspire each other by sharing.

“Since 85% of our business is DIY, we don’t usually see our frames in action. Social media gives us a glimpse into the DIY revolution and how American Frame enables millennial décor. We get to see our mission come to fruition,” clarified Jajko. “Technology helps us keep frame and printing pricing down and stay competitive. Artists pay half of what they would elsewhere.”

But framing and custom printing aren't the only "goods" American Frame provides. The company also champions independent artists in their community by offering online educational content, allowing artists to display their works and lecture in the showroom, and act as a benefactor of nearby Bowling Green University's art program. In addition, American Frame also supports the Toledo Museum of Art and nearly 100 other organizations nationwide.

"We value our customers, and my father never shies away from taking risks that are potential rewards for our customers. We aren't afraid to make changes in processes, to embrace new technology. It's his goal to be an innovator in the industry and to do that in a way that's good for people," summarized Jajko. "Our love for each other as a family and for the industry we serve motivates us to keep looking for the next thing that will keep our business on the leading edge."

Can Lenovo's innovation and technology help your business find new growth opportunities? See how we can help make a difference by visiting our Small Business page.

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