

for

# MEMBERS Only

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**PPFA**<sup>TM</sup>  
Serving the art and framing professional  
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## Painless PR

*Hiring the right press agent can get your frame shop the publicity it deserves*



*H. Marion Framing, an institution in the Chicago suburb of Glenview, Ill., was founded by the late Hal Marion, father of the current*

*owner, Jan Marion (inset). What began as a high-end wall coverings and design consulting services business has evolved into a provider of custom, museum-quality picture framing and art consulting services.*

**W**hen Jan Marion, owner of H. Marion Framing Studio Inc. in Glenview, Ill., was preparing to host an exhibition of children's artwork at his gallery space last spring, he knew it was newsworthy enough to attract the attention of the general public and the local media. After all, it was an opportunity for the elementary school kids to show their pieces in a real gallery and for the community to throw its support behind the arts program.

A firm believer in the value of art education for all ages, Marion regularly hosts school programs in his frame shop. "Our belief is the more kids are exposed to art, the more they understand it," he says. "It's so important to foster art appreciation at an early age. And it's our way of giving back to the community."

Two years ago, Marion would have been less certain such an event would win media attention. Since 2001, when he took over operating the gallery and frame shop his father, the late **Hal Marion**, founded in 1973, Marion had been handling press relations by himself – compiling story ideas, writing releases, and contacting members of the media. He knew the basic techniques, but couldn't quite master the fine art of dealing with the press.

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The new member list is published separately on inserted pages.

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Like many custom framers and art dealers, he was too busy with the daily activities of operating his business to give the requisite attention to garnering the publicity his shop deserved. With growth came more responsibility, and more constraints on his time. Marion didn't want to miss any marketing opportunities, but neither could he neglect his core business.

"My biggest challenge was implementing a steady stream of quality programs," he says. "Filling client orders will often take precedence, and marketing the back seat. No matter how busy we become, I always strive to maintain a healthy marketing program."

Enter **Amy Falk**, a Marion framing client, who mentioned she owns **Falk Associates** in Lincolnwood, Ill., a full-service public relations and promotional marketing firm with 25 years experience. Retaining Falk as a consultant, Marion says, is one of the best business decisions he's ever made.

### Getting the word out

Falk agreed to work the art show with Marion to prove her value as a publicist. She took photos of the children at the event and submitted them, along with a

press release, to the local newspapers. The result was nearly two full pages of coverage in the *Northbrook Star* edition of the **Pioneer Press Newspapers**, a suburban Chicago newspaper chain.

It's likely the press attention stemmed from several factors: the status of H. Marion Framing in the community; the fact Marion is a member of several arts organizations, including the **Northbrook Arts Commission**; and the quality of the event itself. Nevertheless, Marion is convinced Falk deserves a lion's share of the credit.

"That was proof enough for me she knew the 'ropes,' had the contacts, and could deliver," says Marion. "I still feel like I drive most of the marketing, but having access to a PR firm of talented people makes more of my ideas a reality. It's a wonderful way for framers to broaden their capabilities – much like hiring an accountant or an attorney to help them run their businesses more efficiently."

When considering Falk for the job as his publicist, Marion made certain she had working relationships with the local, regional, and national press. Although it is important for him to reach people who are interested in art and framing for

their homes, he didn't want to limit his focus to traditional media. Instead, his publicist had to be someone who could suggest placements in publications that would also reach potential corporate clients.



*Photos like this one were taken by Marion's press agent at an exhibition of children's art last May. The resulting media coverage has helped solidify the standing of H. Marion Framing as a good neighbor in its community.*

That's because H. Marion Framing has carved a significant niche as a provider of limited edition, poster quality and fine art for healthcare providers, as well as law and accounting firms, in the Chicago metropolitan area. Its contract work comprises approximately 40 percent of Marion's business.

"Marketing to hospitals and medical centers is most definitely a growth sector for the design business," he says.

Like many high-profile businesses, H. Marion Framing relies heavily on publicity to promote its image and increase public awareness about its products and services. Of course, publicity is only one aspect of its marketing strategy.

### A slice of the marketing pie

Marion allocates about 10-15 percent of his gross sales each year toward a marketing budget that includes advertising and PR costs, website updates, postcard direct mail campaigns, gallery shows, and community projects.

While stories like the one about the children's art show certainly help the shop's image, Marion soon realized he needed something to help him reach the average consumer who understands very little about custom framing.

"Usually, when they bring a piece in to be framed, they have a dollar amount in mind," he says, "and if the framing charges exceed that amount, they don't understand why."

*This two-sided, four-color brochure is often the first impression consumers have of H. Marion Framing. It not only presents the company as a high-end framer, but serves to educate potential clients about the importance of custom framing. The brochure also won H. Marion Framing a Merit Award in the PMA/PPFA 2004-2005 Promotion Competition, Small Firms, Consumer Markets category.*



The answer was a marketing brochure, one that would both educate and inform, Marion could leave behind when meeting new clients.

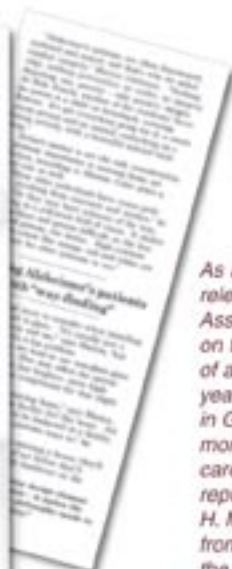
"Often in selling high-end framing, a certain amount of education is required," he says. "Not all customers understand the benefits of preservation framing, or the hours of study required of a custom framer. If we meet with some price resistance and the sale isn't made immediately, at least we can send the quote

see where the added value comes."

Once again, Marion turned to an outside agency to help him develop a professional-looking brochure that would impress people with the same level of quality and detail as his framing. The brochure is generic enough that it can also be inserted into the press kits Falk sends to potential corporate clients. To get even more "bang for the buck" from the brochure, some of the images and text were used to update the company website, [www.hmarionframing.com](http://www.hmarionframing.com).

While Marion understands not all aspects of his marketing plan will succeed, that doesn't deter him from exploring new avenues to get his message across. Take, for example, the time he tried on-screen advertising at a local movie theater. Although the amount of new business generated by the 13-second digital ad didn't justify the cost, Marion was still pleased with the professional image the ad left in the minds of the viewing public.

"We have always been perceived as a high-end alternative in the home furnishings marketplace," he says. "All my marketing efforts are aimed at maintaining and continuing to drive that same message." ♦



*As a result of a press release issued by Falk Associates, this article on the healing qualities of art was published last year in "Current Nursing in Geriatric Care," a bi-monthly trade journal for caregivers. In addition to reprinting information about H. Marion Framing Studio from the press release, the writer interviewed Jan Marion, owner of the shop, for the story.*