Executive Summary
In the fall of 2006, Stuart M. Altschuler, CPF®, GCF, of Prestige Framing Academy, LLC and PFA Consulting began recommending the roller laminator as the mounting device of choice for the small frame shop.
Over the past years we have recommended picture framing equipment for both photo finishers as well as custom framers as a part of our consulting operations. On an ongoing basis we evaluate different types of equipment, materials, and supplies to insure the competitive position of our client stores. Recently, we changed our position on the best alternative for mounting and laminating in the small shop picture framing environment.

Why investigate mounting alternatives?
From time to time a review should be undertaken to determine the validity of basic equipment necessities. Is the equipment that is presently used the most appropriate for the job? Are the industry-wide assumptions about certain machines still valid? What is the right direction for a new shop or department?

New Equipment advances
In the last number of years there have not been many advances in mounting equipment. Mechanical presses are still the workhorses of the framing industry. Vacuum presses still allow for multiple pieces to be processed simultaneously. And, roller laminators are scarce in picture framing.
While equipment pricing continues to be aggressive, there has been a rise in the price of the largest mechanical presses. There is much more activity in the adhesive and board marketplace. Many firms have created heat activated adhesive boards designed for different applications. These boards offer an ease of use for the operator at an additional expense. Yet, many are trading money for time. Still, these boards use heat, which can be problematic, as an activator.

Different type of mounting jobs
While the equipment available for mounting is little changed, the items being mounted have changed dramatically over the past years. More and more digital prints are presented for mounting to either the framer or photo processor. Framers, and to a lesser extent photo labs, have difficulty in determining substrate and method of print to facilitate an appropriate mounting choice. Regardless, heat is often an enemy.
As the number of consumers presenting digital images for mounting increases, the risk of damage due to inferior printing rises. Cold mounting processes reduce the risk of damage.

Types of mounting alternatives
For the framing industry mounting has largely been a choice of mechanical press versus vacuum. For the photo finishers, roll presses have been considered because of their ability to laminate and encapsulate as well. Cost has been a constraint in the purchase of any machine.

Mechanical
Mechanical presses are the stalwarts of mounting for picture framers. These presses have been around for decades. The must run at temperature (usually 160º minimum) to mount. The standard size for a professional shop is 26” x 33”. They are of a clamshell design, meaning that with three sides open, the largest piece that can be mounted is twice the width of the machine by whatever length.
Until recent price increases, these machines were considerably less than any other solution, and provided versatility.

Vacuum
There are two main advantages that a vacuum press has over a mechanical press. First, it can mount many pieces, each of a different thickness, simultaneously. If your business requires mounting lots of small pieces, this is sometimes your best bet. Since the vacuum is created around each piece individually, they can be of different size and thickness. More importantly, the vacuum press can be used to cold mount. An adhesive can be sprayed to the back of the item to be mounted, it can be
placed on the substrate, and the vacuum can literally suck it into place. Unfortunately, this type of machine has a very large footprint. It is also expensive.

**Roller Laminator**

Previously not considered to be appropriate for small custom picture framers, these machines have become more viable as the need for a cold mount, smaller footprint machine increases. Roller laminators are priced between the expensive vacuum presses and the lesser expensive mechanical presses. They have the ability to mount cold, warm, and hot. They laminate and encapsulate (optionally), and have the ability to handle graphics finishing as well. Roll machines are generally on a base with wheels and can be rolled out of the way when not in use creating a small footprint.

**Recommendations**

In the fall of 2006, Stuart M. Altschuler, CPF®, GCF, of Prestige Framing Academy, LLC and PFA Consulting began recommending the roller laminator as the mounting device of choice for the small frame shop. Since prices had risen on the mechanical press line that had previously been recommended, the roller laminator was now only slightly more costly. Its capacity (the most frequently recommended models are between 40” and 44”) was greater than the largest of the mechanical presses and it is capable of cold mounting. Throughput is much greater and cost of operation is therefore lower.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mechanical</th>
<th>Vacuum</th>
<th>Roller Laminator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Footprint</strong> (based on machine with approx 40” width)</td>
<td>39 x 37 x 12 20 in. high open</td>
<td>77 x 57 x 6.5</td>
<td>58 x 22 x 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>120 VAC, 12 Amp</td>
<td>230 VAC, 15 Amps</td>
<td>110 VAC, 16 Amps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperatures</strong></td>
<td>Warm, Hot</td>
<td>Cold, Warm, Hot</td>
<td>Cold, Warm, Hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max Substrate thickness</strong></td>
<td>Up to 1”</td>
<td>Up to 1”</td>
<td>Up to ½”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Functions</strong></td>
<td>Mounts, Laminates</td>
<td>Mounts, Laminates</td>
<td>Mounts, Laminates, Encapsulates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Throughput</strong></td>
<td>3’ per minute</td>
<td>1.2’ per minute</td>
<td>Up to 10’ per minute</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Street Price</strong></td>
<td>$3,500.</td>
<td>$6,250.</td>
<td>$5,250.</td>
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**Prestige Framing Academy, LLC** is a full service business consulting firm specializing in the picture framing industry. Major efforts include both new shop start-up as well as new departments within existing business, shop operations planning and implementation, systems work, and marketing. Prestige also works with industry vendors providing market strategy, new product development, and sales training. Consulting services are provided on a project basis, with pricing determined by assignment magnitude. The principal of Prestige Framing Academy, LLC is Stuart M. Altschuler, CPF, GCF a third generation framer.

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