

# Visual Merchandising And Window Displays



# **VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND WINDOW DISPLAYS**

The primary purpose of merchandising is the presentation of products in a way that causes them to be sold quickly, and at the highest possible retail margin. Merchandising also seduces and charms your customers into add-on sales. With careful consideration, retailers can relate directly to their customers and obtain customer loyalty through careful branding and attractive stores.

In order for a business to be successful it is important not to overlook the importance of good display. Customers are led by attractive eye catching displays and retailers have to create the right impression and stand out from their competitors. Visual merchandising maintains the stores image through effective graphic designs and attractive visual arts with the purpose to attract, engage and motivate the customer towards making a purchase. Here are some principles and tips that will help you have a better understanding of visual merchandising.

## **Merchandising**

Makes it easier for customers to shop.

Assists customers with the possibilities of coordinating and accessorising. Recommends, highlights and demonstrates particular products at strategic locations.

There are several techniques used to deliver great merchandising solutions:

- Creating themes/stories
- Co-ordination
- Blocking by style/type
- Using colour (complementary or contrasting)
- Symmetry and balance
- Repetition

# CREATING THEMES/STORIES

- Don't limit visual merchandising themes to Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn. Try to use at least six different themes in a year. Think about using special events such as Mothers Day, Valentines, back to school, festivals and local events.
- Think about how the merchandise 'sits together' does it tell a story? For example, if its kitchenware, have you broken it down into a theme? i.e home baking to include tins, bowls, aprons, utensils and any other related products. Can you maximise your 'add on selling'?
- Dare to be different. Unusual and big displays attract interest. People love novelty and something they haven't seen before. Look for inspiration from the Internet, films, books and most importantly other retailers. The best ideas may come from what they have tried and tested.



# COORDINATION

- Using colours that coordinate together is a visual merchandiser's way to entice customers to be more experimental. They will often use this matching technique to offer the customer quick and easy solutions to finding items that work well together. You can use this principle not only for fashion and home decoration but also for accessories etc.



- Pick samples of the products you want to use before you commit to moving everything around. This will allow you to see whether the items do actually co-ordinate.
- When using coordination, it is important to make sure it is clear to the customer what to put together. Avoid using too many colours and products. Ask yourself the question 'does it go together'?

# BLOCKING BY STYLE/TYPE

- There are instances when it is really effective to arrange your products by type only. It can have a huge impact visually if you take a section of a wall to just one product and make a feature of it.





# USING COLOUR (contrasting and complementary)

- People are always attracted to their favourite colour. It is effective to use colour as a theme for your merchandising and often can achieve good results. However by using accent colours you can often attract the eye to other products. Think of how bold bright colours lift dull ones. If your product range is neutral or you have a limited colour range, choose colours that harmonise well with each other and balance the display.



- If working with a large range of colours, blocking should be carried out light to dark and left to right to ensure balance is maintained. This is particularly useful when you have limited individual items that could otherwise look messy.

# SYMMETRY AND BALANCE

- Orderly, neat and tidy should be your overall effect. Don't clutter the customers perspective even if it is an eclectic and busy look that your trying to achieve. Customers don't want to waste time rummaging under mess!
- Balance things out. It doesn't need to be perfectly symmetrical, but it will help if you try to mirror the effect. Critique what you have put together, stand back and gauge your overall impression. Have you achieved a good balance?





# REPETITION

- Clarity helps a customer see the item they are looking for. Repetitions help a product stand out.
- Choose one feature item and repeat it in clean lines and grouped. This clean design approach will look striking and draw attention.
- Maintain balance by using repeats of odd numbers, use 3s and 5s as these are often more aesthetically pleasing to the eye. The pictures below give an idea of how to layout and mix your stock.
- Keeping items with coordinating colours, patterns, textures or functions together will help structure and balance your display.



Here are strong examples of blocking or grouping the same product.



This shows how to present a range of products that complement each other and coordinate.



- Depending on the style and size of your display, aim to have at least one main focal point that draws your customers in.
- Think of the items you are displaying and make sure they are a strong representation of your brand and the theme you wish to convey.
- Use props to add height and create a more imposing feel to your displays. Height will make your focal point stand out.
- Your customers want to see your best stock at eye-level. The best way to work with height is to balance it out by creating a pyramid or stepped display. It allows the eye to naturally travel down.



This photograph depicts the use of everyday props and how to work with the triangular formation. The use of the leaves hanging from the ceiling, allow the eye to travel down and fill the space in an uncluttered way. The lamps become the focal point and draw the viewer in.

# COMMON ERRORS

- Too much merchandise - shop looks cluttered and messy
- Too little merchandise - shop looks bare and uninviting
- Too many props - confusing to the customer what's for sale. Can look over complicated.
- Lack of attention to detail - looks unprofessional.
- Display changes too infrequently - regular customers will become bored, and slow moving stock will remain stagnant.
- Lack of underlying theme - if it looks weak and half-hearted your efforts are in vain. Customers need a strong message.
- Poor housekeeping standards - nobody wants to buy unloved goods from a dirty shop. Cleanliness reflects an impression on your customers. Always aim to have high standards.
- No display budget - even if its just having a basic display kit which allows you to suspend, hang, stick, staple items to display them to their best effect. Often the cheapest props are the most effective; washing lines and pegs are great for displaying clothes, fabrics etc. Experiment with everyday found objects.



# VISUAL MERCHANDISING BASICS

- Good store layouts
- Using the right merchandising style for the product type.
- Incorporating appropriate props and displays to support the product
- Adding the correct signage to communicate to the customer.
- Good lighting
- Add variation to your displays on frequent basis.

Good layouts refer to how customers are to navigate around the store. Take into consideration the placement of fixtures and displays. Think about the traffic flow and how you are able to make use of 'Hot-spots' (best selling areas). Make a floor layout and plan where you will position promotional, in-season, slow-moving stock.

Using the right display for the product type needs to relate to the merchandise. Customers are generally attracted to racks or bins to suggest items that are on offer or at a lower price. These should still be maintained with care and look attractive with a clear price. The advantage of these fixtures are they can be placed anywhere, even outside the facade or by the tills area as an impulse purchase.



Incorporating appropriate props and displays to support the product requires thought and a little bit of creativity. Consider how practical and possibly how functional the prop has to be. Is it going to be safe to display? Does it actually enhance the product? It is usual to use items as simple as tables, chairs and shelving units for display. However, be experimental; often the most inspiring

displays are ones which use everyday objects in an unusual way. Old suitcase, baskets, pallets can make interesting props. Be creative and always ask yourself, does it work?





Do not hide your price tag. If not the first, price is the second consideration of most customers after good quality. Put the price tag at a highly visible and expected position (commonly the upper right side). Always avoid covering important text and make sure pricing is not put on in a sloppy way.

Pricing needs to be clear and easily understood by the customer. If possible give clear descriptions, they should always be readable. Add further interest, by adding hanging price cards for special offers but avoid over doing this as it might look cluttered and lose interest. Avoid handwritten

signage for large signs unless you have been trained or have a particular talent for sign writing it can often look unprofessional.

Lighting should never be over looked, it is often the final finishing touch to any good display because it draws attention and highlights where our attention should be focused. Spot-lights are great for directing your eye onto price signs and other areas where that want to point the customer towards. Use lights to create atmosphere and add mood to your setting, just as you would at home. Be creative with coloured lighting to set a scene - this can be done with coloured bulbs or specialist lighting film paper.

Variation also helps to avoid boredom to your regular customers. You will want to create a fresh look or introduce new products and trends. Consider the fact that you may have customers who pop in on a regular basis, and you will want them to feel inspired and see new products are available. Vary the position, arrangement and style of your displays at least once a month. Some shoppers don't go through the whole store on each visit and turning over the merchandise exposes them to more as well as help to sell a slow moving product. If you are unable to tackle large areas, at least focus your attention on a 'hot spot' (best selling areas) - the area that can grab your customers attention. This could be naturally leading from the window display directly into the entrance of your store or perhaps high traffic areas around the tills, the ends of aisle or centrally positioned within the store.

Finally assess your overall impression, is the message clear to the customer?



Eye level is buy level, have you displayed your attention grabbers and best stock in the most desirable way and are they easily found? In addition to a good floor plan, the height of your displays and fixtures should be thought out.

Maintain a good appearance of shelves, showcases, racks and any other point of sale equipment, it enhances the overall impression of your store. Is the stock in the window easy for the customer to find? Is it clearly displayed? Is there any other way you can improve the shopping experience? Think about the ambiance of the store by adding dramatic lighting, aroma and music. Nowadays retailers are combining these with a cafe/bistro, or craft area.



# OUTSIDE/PAVEMENT MERCHANDISING

The facade of your shop is just as important as the way you merchandise the interior of your shop. Think about not only the signage and windows, but also can you entice the customers to buy before they enter the store.



Here is a good example of inventive facades that are eye catching with their use of signage. The picture of flowers, demonstrates how to use props on the pavement. The crates provide a framework and add height to the display.



Here are examples of where the shop spills out onto the pavement. Despite the amount of stock, it still remains orderly and does not detract from the window.



Here are some more inspirational ideas on how other businesses have embraced the outside space.



These images demonstrate that it is possible to deal with the outside space creatively.

# VISUAL TOOL KIT

- Staple gun
- Velcro
- Double-sided tape
- Blu-tack
- Pins
- Nylon string (fishing wire)
- Cable ties
- Wire
- Cup hooks or S hooks for hanging items
- Small hammer
- Masking tape
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Pliers
- Screwdriver
- Rubber bands
- Dust pan and brush
- Ladder

All items are sold in good hardware and DIY stores.



# WINDOWS

Your window display, if used effectively, can bring you new customers, create customer loyalty, enhance the image and brand of your business, promote certain product lines and above all be a major selling tool in increasing sales.

As discussed in visual merchandising, it is vital you understand the importance of your display and the message you are portraying to the customer.



- Theme/story
- Stock to promote
- Props/display budget
- Depth/height of window
- Promotions/advertising message
- Lighting
- Image



# WINDOWS

- Plan your scene/ setup. Make a small drawing if necessary to work out what you will need.
- Consider the proportions of the window and allow space around the sides. If you're working with height and hanging items, check if they will be seen at the right level.
- Work to a deadline, you need to plan to do your window at the best time for your business. Plan in advance for special events, so you are not too late to miss opportunities.
- If working with props, make sure they are going to fit and enhance your image. The first thing your customer should notice is the merchandise, not the props. Props can be classified as functional (mannequins, stands, panels, structures, boxes and display units). Shop around in secondhand stores for unusual props like suitcases, boxes and old furniture. Keep a look out for boot fairs and house clearance places that can offer many cheap alternatives.
- Change it regularly to promote new stock and keep customer interest alive.
- Lighting should have an impact and be used not only for general use. Spotlights highlight your products and prices. Lights bring your window to life, they are the finishing touch. They draw your customers in and add to the drama you have created.
- Find a system you can adapt for displaying your products. This may be either a series of shelves or boxes which you will be able to arrange in different formations to create new displays.

- Make it easy to clean. Consider your choice of flooring and wall covering from a practical point of view. Periodically you will need to clean the inside of your windows, so make sure you can do this with minimal disruption.
- Choose to display products that you know you will sell and that you have enough stock of to keep up with demand created from your window display.
- Use large graphics that will be seen clearly from the street when you are promoting a special offer or want to attract special attention. Get advice from a graphics company, it should always look professional.
- Consider the facade and external appearance of your store, is it conveying the right image?
- Establish a focal point on your window display for easy viewing. You may only have seconds to grab your customers attention, you need something to pull them in.
- Signage can be classified into corporate signage, information signage, category and location signage, directional signs and price tags, think about how yours need to look and do they work together to reinforce your brand identity. Brand identity is an extremely powerful tool and should never be underestimated.
- Your merchandise can be classified into best seller, impulse item, seasonal and trend items, advertised items, speciality goods, browse items, basic stocks and problem stocks. Among the classifications, the last is never a good idea to display in your window - it is far better to work with this item in store and rework this item with new stock.

# WINDOW INSPIRATION





# SUGGESTED STORES FOR INSPIRATION

## WINDOWS

Harvey Nichols  
Zara  
House of Fraser  
Ted Baker  
H&M  
American Apparel  
White Company  
Urban Outfitters

## MERCHANDISING

Reiss  
Zara  
Warehouse  
Oliver Bonas  
H&M  
Paper Scissors Stone  
Joules  
French Connection  
Urban Outfitters  
Hobbs  
Vinegar Hill

All of the above can be found in central Bristol and nationwide. It would be advisable to carry out your own competitive shop and keep up to date with trends on the high street. These examples are just a starting point where in most cases visual merchandisers are employed to keep up high standards.

Independent stores with the right idea include:

The Birdcage - 28 Clare Street, Bristol, BS1 1YE

Cox and Baloney - 182-184 Cheltenham Road, Bristol, BS6 5RB

Flo-Jo Boutique - 36b Gloucester Road, Bristol, BS7 8AR

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