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Visual Merchandising

How do you distinguish your store from the stores around you? How do you visualize your BRAND? People around or near you may be selling similar items—so how do you establish yourself as the store of choice? People must –first—SEE you as different and unique.

Shopfronts are important! They are what shoppers see first whether the store is on a busy street or enclosed in a mall or shopping center. Maybe you could paint your shopfront a new color? That might do it! But maybe the pink or purple or color you pick not only sends out bad vibes to the shoppers but makes you the most unpopular neighbor on the street. You might decide to use your signature or brand colors—or maybe make a statement .Maybe that will just make your neighbors more competitive.

What about your signage? Does it stand out? Can the shopper readily find you? What about lights? Great! Lighting can be a very effective technique but only if you can control the environment. Its effectiveness depends upon the store's location—the time of day—the weather. How about bringing your wares out onto the sidewalk or into the center's main aisle? I don't think so.

Did you say displays in the windows or up front in the vast entranceway? Now you've got it! Now you not only have a place for color and light and for signage, now you have an area that is yours where you can define yourself --express yourself--show what you sell--and say who you are selling to. We are not talking “visual merchandising”—we are talking about good old-fashioned DISPLAY: the presentation of the newest, most exciting products—your very best—shown in a new and unique manner with style, sophistication—humor-- whatever—whatever your store, your product line and you are all about.

A window display shows some choice items. It is not the storeroom up front. It is not where you put your overflow of stock. It is not a dumping ground. It is an oversized

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jewel-box where only your newest and best is on view. If you have an open-back window with a full view into the store, it would help if you blocked off part of that open view so that the shopper on the street can concentrate on your product display up front near the glass. You could drop a drape —put up a panel that might carry a graphic —a message—or maybe a seasonal setting)—you might unfold a screen or bank the background with plants. Blocking off the whole view allows the shopper to really see the merchandise while unobtrusively observing the store activity. By changing that panel—that drape or graphic or whatever-- you change the look of the window and create new interest for the new merchandise you are featuring. Be bright—creative—have fun—use your imagination.

Use materials and items that go with your theme and the merchandise. Oh! And—of course!—light up your window so that it does make a statement! The display window or up front presentation is where you make your opening statement. It is the overture to your production. It is where you make your “first impression”—and you know that first impressions do count!

Step inside! Your store has been finished with colors that allow the product offering to stand out and star and still there are focal areas where strong colors make statements—but they can be re-colored as the seasons change. And now we are back to display and merchandise presentation. Displays feature new products —or make them look new—and also explains them. Displays add spice, color and a sense of theater to the store. Display gives you the opportunity to cross-merchandise—bring products together from all over the store that go together—in the same space. It is a place to stimulate your shopper with bold new ways to mix and match your products. It is simple—but it does take time and effort. But—it is worth it. If you can't do it—bring in those that can.

For the visual merchandising in the store—the placement of the merchandise on the mid floor fixtures and along the walls—let the cross-over carry over . Cross Merchandising is not only a great way of creating eye-stopping displays, it means add-on sales. It helps the shopper visualize the potentials that she may have overlooked. It might suggest new color combinations—a fun and fancy way to mix patterns and designs--enliven something they own with something brand new—suggest different textures and different lifestyles. There—I've said the magic word—LIFESTYLE. Let your display themes reflect the various lifestyles of your

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demographic market. You know your customers. You know what they like and how they think—so help them by creating the lifestyle settings and environments they are entitled to.

So—from aisle displays—to hands-on, touch-me build up displays on the floor-- to the walls, shelves or cabinets filled with product—add color accents—add an occasional lifestyle prop or decorative —create interest and theater throughout the floor. That is how you make your store distinctive—unique—special and totally in your branded image.

Text: Martin M. Pegler, Redakteur der US-Zeitschrift „Retail Design International“

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