

Visual Merchandising Displays

HOW DO BUSINESS OWNERS attract potential customers? It takes a lot of thought and planning to prepare a store's exterior and interior displays. Numerous details must be considered. In addition, the products or services must be appealing for businesses to be successful.



Objective:



Explain visual merchandising displays.

Key Terms:



closed display
cohort marketing
elements of design
end display
fixtures
interior designers
island display
life stage marketing
mannequins

open display
physiographic marketing
planograms (POGs)
platform display
principles of design
racks
sales support areas
scale
selling areas

set designers
showcase
target customer
tier tables
visual merchandising
wall display
window dressers

Understanding Visual Merchandising

Many aspects are included in the elements of design. Visuals in a store are extremely important when trying to appeal to customers.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Color is visualized in many ways, so opportunities are endless in decorating.

Elements of Design

The **elements of design** are the language of design and the building blocks of visual images. They guide visual designs. The elements of design are color, line, shape, and texture.

Color

Color is hue, and the hue is varied by value (lightness or darkness). Color is visualized in many ways, such as the reflection of light off a surface and when it is absorbed by darkness. Color can be used to draw attention to a particular part of the display or to evoke an emotional response. Neutral colors are safe and cautious.

Line

Line is the continuous movement of a point along a surface or the way an edge is created when two shapes meet. Line is used to lead eyes up and down, from side to side, and around a display. Lines may be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Each type of line creates a different feeling. All three line types may be used in combination or are used to make curves. Horizontal lines tend to suggest rest. Vertical lines communicate loft or spirituality, and diagonal lines suggest movement.

Shape

Shape is a defined area or a geometric or organic form. In retailing, the shape may be the overall form or outline of a display: oval, rectangular, linear, etc. Shape is used to emphasize parts of the display, such as positive space and negative space.

Texture

Texture is the surface quality of a shape: rough, smooth, soft, hard, glossy, or dull. It is how a surface or material feels and looks. Texture is tactile.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Principles of design are guidelines that suggest ways for a designer to best arrange the elements of a visual display to connect all of the design elements to the overall design. The principles of design give an overall feeling to a design.

Balance

Balance is creating a visual equality or equilibrium among the parts of a display. The principle of balance equalizes the visual “weight” of all the elements of the display. Symmetrical balance (formal balance) is easiest to see when half of a design is exactly the same as the other half (a mirror image). Formal balance assumes that all items are of a similar size and visual weight. Humans are pleased (visually) by formal balance.

Symmetry

Symmetrical balance (formal balance) is easiest to see when half of a design is exactly the same as the other half. Formal balance assumes that all items are of a similar size and visual weight. Humans are pleased (visually) by formal balance. Symmetry creates a sense of dignity, tradition, and calm. Both halves of the display are equally attractive to the customer. To achieve formal balance, you can draw an imaginary line down the center of the display and place objects, weight for weight, on either side of the centerline.

Asymmetrical Balance

Asymmetrical balance (informal balance) is easiest to see when each half of a design is of equal weight but not a replica of the other half. Informal balance is created with an unequal number of elements and with varieties of color, placement, size, and shape of objects. Informal balance gives the designer more possibilities for arranging the display. An asymmetrical display often is more dynamic (with more tension, more movement, and more excitement), more subtle, and more imaginative than a perfectly symmetrical visual display. For instance, several small items can balance a large object. Also, several soft colors in a large space can be balanced by one bright color in a small space. Dark values (colors) appear heavier than light values. Dull textures appear heavier than smooth textures and could be placed closer to the center to balance the design. Radial balance designs radiate in the form of a swirl, spiral, or circle to create an almost symmetrical visual display.

Proportion

Proportion is the ratio of the parts to the whole display. It is the spatial portion of the display or how the size and **scale** (overall size) of all the display design parts relate to each other (e.g., distance, size, amount, degree, and parts).

Proportion is discussed in terms of a standard. For most displays, the human body is a universal standard of measurement and proportion. To impress the viewer, the design scale may dwarf the viewer. To make the viewer feel comfortable and friendly toward the store, scale should be more in line with typical household furnishings or mannequins of human scale. Mixing the elements of the display with large and small objects breaks the monotony of all large or all small objects. Adding an odd number of smaller, related items to large pieces can create more interest and balance. The ratio of merchandise to space is critical to a strong visual display. For instance, the ratio of props and cards must be in proportion to avoid the appearance that the props are more important than the merchandise.

Objects should not be too large, too small, too heavy, or too light in proportion to other items in the display. To achieve proportion in a display, a designer could use space divisions. A pyramid shape places merchandise in a precise order: short item, medium item, tallest item, another medium item, and another short item.

Step elevation (e.g., a staircase effect) is more informal than the pyramid and is most effective when an odd number of steps are used. Zigzag is a double reverse curve (an S curve) with equidistant spacing and is effective when small accessory steps are used. A ribbon or roll of paper often is used to create the zigzag line.

Emphasis

Emphasis is the focal point of the display and the spot from which all other eye movements flow. It is the place the designer intends for the viewer's eyes to focus. A designer typically develops emphasis with contrasting colors or textures. In a visual display, the merchandise is usually the focal point.

Emphasis is created through repetition and contrast as well as the use of the elements of design.

For example, a theme or mood (e.g., formalwear or sportswear) is achieved by creating a life-like situation in which the apparel is displayed. A theme could be displayed as a season, holiday, anniversary, graduation, prom, etc. An isolated item is emphasized when it is surrounded by blank space. Shiny surfaces reflect light as well as emphasize and enlarge objects. Dull surfaces absorb light and de-emphasize an area.

Color provides emphasis. For instance, an all-green display is hard to ignore. Unity is the achievement of repetition, rhythm, and pattern in a visual display; consistency; and a sense of harmony. Unity makes the viewer feel that the display has continuity and an ease of movement.



FIGURE 1. This is an example of a themed room—winter.

Repetition

Repetition is the recurrence of visual design elements (e.g., line, color, shape, texture, value, or image) to unify the display and to create some rhythm. Repetition can be exact duplication, a near duplication, or duplication with variety. Repetition should cause eyes to travel around the whole display and should provide some visual organization. Repetition creates emphasis by calling attention to the element through the number of times a color, shape, or texture is repeated. Grouping also creates repetition.

Rhythm

Rhythm is a pleasing arrangement that produces a feeling of continuity among the design. When the eye travels smoothly from one part to another, flow and movement (rhythm) are achieved. Rhythm is achieved through repetition, continuous line, progression, and radiation. Rhythm can be achieved with color gradations and a progression of sizes—from small to large or vice versa.

Radiation

Radiation is a type of rhythm achieved by the use of a circular arrangement that guides the eyes from a center point around the design. These displays are often dramatic.

Pattern

Pattern is showing a consistency of the design. English-speaking shoppers read from left to right, so a display should “read” from left to right. Pattern also is created through the use of light and dark via color or lighting features. Overlapping objects in a display prevents blank spaces. Pattern may be created with a fabric or color to unify the display, repetitious props, and/or flying (suspending) merchandise to create flow.

Harmony

Harmony is agreement in the feeling and the mood of the display: an umbrella element. It is achieved when the entire work has similar elements throughout, such as accessories tying an outfit together. Harmony is achieved through line, shape, size, texture, and a common idea. One key element of harmony is making the display realistic. For example, if a designer is displaying children’s furniture, the mannequins should be the correct size for the furniture. If a designer is creating a display of kitchen equipment, the counter height should be appropriate for the mannequins.

Structural harmony is important in that an electrical appliance would be out of place in a camping display. Decorative harmony is achieved by creating an atmosphere through the use of props, such as flowers and birds in a spring window or pumpkins and fall leaves in a Thanksgiving window.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

The elements and principles of design are the first step in creating successful visual merchandising displays. They are used in all of the visual design fields, including graphic design, industrial design, architecture, fine arts, and visual merchandising. In the specific instance of visual merchandising displays, knowledge of the elements and principles of design are especially important because the goal is to sell items to customers. Therefore, the merchandising displays need to attract customers to the store and to individual departments within the store. Customers often are attracted to the store based on the items the store is selling as well as their



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: 10 Great Coffee Shops

The following Web site shows 10 coffee shops that have successful designs. Coffee shops are extremely popular. Studies show that customers are extremely attracted to these 10 coffee shops. Look through the pictures and descriptions. After looking at them, choose five to focus on. Explain why you think the ones you selected are successful. Be specific. Go to the following link:

<http://www.dwell.com/food/slideshow/10-great-coffee-shops-design-fans#2>

presentation. Types of visual merchandising displays include window, showcase, tier table/rack, wall, open, closed, island (gondola), end (end cap), and platform.

CAREERS IN VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Window dressers are people who arrange displays of items for sale in store windows and within the store departments and common areas.

Interior designers are people who create functional and pleasing room arrangements and decorations while ensuring safety and enhancing the aesthetics of interior spaces. Skilled interior designers can boost sales and attract more clients. **Set designers** are people who plan and oversee the construction of the merchandise displays and the general interiors of the store.



FIGURE 2. This is an example of a window display.

MERCHANDISING STRATEGIES FOR VARIOUS TARGET MARKET GROUPS

Visual merchandising is a key part when marketing a service or product of a business. A customer must like what he or she sees in the store before considering a purchase. **Visual merchandising** is the act of physically displaying goods in the most attractive and appealing way possible. Components of visual merchandising are store image, storefront, store interior, store layout, and interior displays.

Purposes

The purposes of visual merchandising are eliciting immediate purchases by customers, pleasing the customers' senses as they move through the store, promoting the store image, educating consumers about new trends, informing consumers of sales and prices, improving business productivity, boosting sales per square foot, generating a faster turnover rate, decreasing markdown rates, and increasing the amount of the average transaction.

Target Customer

The **target customer** is the audience to whom the store wants to send the most appealing messages. That segment of the total customer pool is most likely to buy from the store. As

a result, the store actively directs its marketing efforts to the target customer and knows the target customer's wants, needs, and desires. Small targets (rather than “shotgun” marketing) are more likely to succeed. Traditional target marketing is based on common characteristics of the target customer, such as gender, age range, level of education, income level, geography, lifestyle (e.g., homeowner, apartment dweller, or college student), and hobbies and interests.

Cohort Marketing

Cohort marketing is a strategy aimed at people who had similar experiences during their formative years. Marketing experts have found that cohorts tend to behave differently than consumers from other cohorts. For example, people who came of age in the 1940s behave differently in the marketplace than those who grew up in the 1950s, even though they are close in age.

Life Stage Marketing

Life stage marketing is a strategy aimed at what people are doing at various stages of life (e.g., dating, getting married, having children, and retiring).

Physiographic Marketing

Physiographic marketing is a strategy aimed at people's physical conditions (e.g., poor vision, arthritis, menopause, and wheelchair-bound).

STORE LAYOUT

Store layout should be thought through thoroughly when designing a new business. It must have a good flow for customers. Also, the interior and exterior must be appealing. Customers will not enter the business if the exterior is not exciting. Once the customers enter the building, the interior must display the product properly.

Store Exterior

A marquee (exterior sign) is the store's “signature,” a sales tool, and the shopper's first impression. In about 10 seconds, the sign must attract the attention of potential customers and tell who the business is and what it sells. It should make a “statement” and often is used to promote a storewide event or sale. An entrance should be visually appealing and physically convenient. A door could be revolving, electric, or push/pull, depending on the needs of the target customer.



FIGURE 3. A marquee will often determine a shopper's first impression of the store.

The windows are the focus of an arcade-front store. The numerous windows allow potential customers to view the merchandise closely. Arcade windows are more relaxing to shoppers. Other windows include corner, enclosed (have a backdrop, so shoppers cannot see the store interior), open-back (allow shoppers to see into the store), angled, live or demo windows, parallel to the sidewalk, and circular types.

Banners and planters can be included in a store exterior. An awning may include the marquee and protects customers from the elements. It may be cantilevered out over the street or the walkway in front of the store. Lighting and security cameras are part of a store's exterior.

Selling Area

Selling areas are display areas for merchandise and are the store spaces in which customers interact with sales personnel. Selling areas represent 75 to 80 percent of the total floor space of the store and include departments, aisles, counters, fitting rooms, merchandise fixtures, displays, and interior decorating elements.

Sales Support Areas

Sales support areas are the store spaces devoted to customer service, merchandise receiving and distribution, management offices, and staff activities. Additional areas are elevators, restrooms, and gift wrapping.

Planograms (POGs)

Planograms (POGs), or schematics, are visual diagrams or drawings of a store's and/or a department's physical space arrangement and details of product placements. The plans are detailed and literally show where every product and item for sale should be placed: aisle, shelf, fixture, and customer service access. Planograms are often received before the merchandise is delivered to help the store organize its delivery and placement. Planograms are useful when a company or manufacturer supplies multiple stores and wants all displays to look the same.

Planograms are an important element of a store's visual merchandising. They may be images (pictures) and/or diagrams detailing the way a grouping of shoes, lawn chairs, or potato chips are to be displayed. Intactix and Spaceman are two types of planogram management software used by merchandisers. Planograms are rendered by hand and photocopied or sent via email to each store.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING DESIGN

A store is not successful selling products if the visual merchandising design is not top notch. The customers must love the products displayed in the store if they are to consider buying them. Visual displays include several physical items. Store owners need to consider what the products are before they decide what display they should use to feature them.

Displays

Display types are numerous. Factors that impact display choices may include cost, space, time, and number of employees.

Fixtures

Fixtures are shelves, tables, rods, counters, stands, easels, forms, and platforms on which merchandise is stocked and displayed for sale. As a rule of thumb, the minimum space between the aisles and fixtures should be at least 3 feet to provide adequate wheelchair accessibility.

Mannequins

Mannequins are lifelike forms of men, women, and children dressed with apparel items. Mannequins personalize a display and help customers visualize wearing the merchandise.

Showcase

A **showcase** is a cabinet in which merchandise may be viewed but not touched by customers. It is a closed display and may include more expensive items.

Tier Tables

Tier tables are flat surfaces with more than one shelf or level on which to display merchandise. They are typically used to display garments (e.g., jeans, T-shirts, shoes, and accessories).

Racks

Racks (rounders and the slanted greeting-card type) are fixtures that display a large amount of merchandise in a relatively small footprint.



FIGURE 4. Mannequins personalize a display and help customers visualize wearing the merchandise.



FIGURE 5. Racks are used to display a large amount of merchandise.

Wall Display

A **wall display** is a visual merchandising technique for distance viewing by customers from several areas of the store. Merchandise is usually displayed along interior walls.

Open Display

An **open display** is a fixture in which customers are able to see, touch, and handle the merchandise. Open racks and shelves provide easy access.

Closed Display

A **closed display** is a fixture in which customers are able to view the merchandise but are unable to touch or handle it. Closed displays most often are used to display expensive items (e.g., collectables and jewelry).

Island Display

An **island display** (gondola fixture) is a freestanding fixture that may be viewed from all sides. Despite the direction from which the customer approaches the display, there is a view of the merchandise.

End Display

An **end display** (end cap) is a fixture installed at one end of a merchandise island or aisle. This fixture allows more merchandise to be viewed. An end cap is commonly used to display sale items or special items the store wants to showcase.

Platform Display

A **platform display** is a built-up area (risers) for items that may have different sizes of racks and shelves. This type of display is used for items of various sizes on one rack.

Summary:



Principles of design are guidelines that suggest ways for a designer to best arrange the elements of a visual display to connect all of the design elements to the overall design. They include balance, proportion, emphasis, repetition, rhythm, and harmony.

Visual merchandising is the act of physically displaying goods in the most attractive and appealing way possible. Components of visual merchandising are store image, storefront, store interior, store layout, and interior displays.

The purposes of visual merchandising are eliciting immediate purchases by customers, pleasing the customers' senses as they move through the store, promoting the store image, educating consumers about new trends, informing consumers of sales and prices, improving business productivity, boosting sales per square foot, generat-

ing a faster turnover rate, decreasing markdown rates, and increasing the amount of the average transaction.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is the purpose of a mannequin?
2. What is the purpose of a planogram?
3. What is an example of a closed display?
4. Name two examples that can be part of the store's exterior.
5. What is an example of a traditional target market?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Visit five local businesses. First look at them from a car. Then look at them from a pedestrian's point of view. Take notes on the store's exterior. What is included? Is it appealing to potential customers? Why or why not? Share your findings with your class.

Web Links:



Design and Color

<http://www.johnlovett.com/test.htm>

Fixtures

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/fixtures.html>

Target Market

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/target-market>