

Inside knowledge

Your interior visual merchandising is a very important projection of your exciting and vibrant window displays. Sally Farmer explains how to create an effective selling environment that triggers within your customers a desire to spend.

Many principles of the general aspects of display that we have covered still apply, but it is in the interior that visual merchandising becomes the key descriptor, unlike window displays that are pavement theatre.

Visual merchandise is projected on entry to the shop and you need to direct the prospective customer's eyes and feet to a successful sale.

All display from the window through to the interior should play a major part in your merchandising.

The interior layout

I can only give general tips that will make you look at your interiors with a critical eye because the complexities of shopfitting cannot be discussed or advice given in an article.

Independent retailers cannot afford expensive refits which means that flexibility is a major design priority and considering that you have such a volume of small merchandise you will need professional on-site advice before a full shop fit and indeed several quotes!

The link

A customer has seen your special promotion in the window, enters your shop and turns which way? You need to monitor your customer flow: did they generally turn right, left or stop and look puzzled. Watch the customer flow and gauge reactions to your layout.

You should strategically display the merchandise that you are selling and make sure the new range of party merchandise is easily spotted. Let's start to organise your interior.

Basic demand

Tablecloths, napkins, balloons, cards, costumes, wrapping paper etc. Customers expect to find them in your shop or they will go elsewhere. Check your competitors. You will have fast sellers such as balloons but most of your demand merchandise will sell moderately well week on week.

Topical demand lines/convenience

A customer enters the shop to buy, say, Harry Potter tablecloths, cups, and the merchandise should have immediate impact. Not seek and find!

Impulse

The customer's eye sends a message to the brain and sees prepared party gift bags next to cups, filled with little Harry Potter gifts. A gift for the little angels to take home when

collected by parents – much more impressive and exciting than a bag of sweets. Result: impulse purchase of 20 party bags.

Check out your hot spot areas for impulse buying and be prepared to change the merchandise regularly to link with

your promotions. Over time this will establish you as a reliable specialist.

Interior visual merchandising is psychological persuasion at the point of purchase which

is designed to trigger a buying reaction from the customer. Also known as silent selling (see box).

Methods of internal promotion

Sales promotion known in the trade as "below the line" is different from advertising "above the line" in that it is designed to trigger a response from the customer NOW. It is short lived and may include the following:

- Events: Valentine's Day – Christmas – Halloween and any local events, possibly a carnival?
- Free gifts/enticement: free balloon with birthday card/tableware etc.
- Services: we deliver; we blow up your balloons; we hire out costumes...
- Leaflets at the point of purchase (the till): we do specialist parties – mail order etc. Chocolate willies for that little extra fun gift! Order on the net – view the costumes on our web page...
- Competitions: get people involved and encourage them to enter the shop.

Next time you walk into your shop you should consider the layout and the holistic environment and ask yourself a

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series of questions. The principles of good display and design still apply; use of balance, grouping of products, control of the eye by lines of sight etc. But consider also that all display from the window through to the interior should play a major part in your merchandising. Walk around the shop and consider how the overall presentation could be

improved and remember, attention to detail is good housekeeping.

It is also very important to involve your staff (if you have

any) and open their eyes to the importance of maintaining presentation.

Sally Farmer is the former vice-dean at the London Institute of Retail Studies at the London College of Printing, where she developed the largest Access to Design programme for visual merchandising.

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✓ Considerations

- Is it warm, but not too hot?
- Is it dramatic?
- Is it magnetic? (attracts and holds attention in the area you wish to control the customers' eyes)
- Is it persuasive?
- Is it well organised and neat?
- Could you find what you wanted if you were the customer?
- Has anyone dusted?

✓ Daily Checklist

- Look at your windows and interiors daily, do they look: Clean? Bright? Attractive? Informative?
- Are the light fittings clean?
- Is the floor clean and not a clutter of merchandise to trip up the customer?
- Is the door free of stickers/incorrect information?
- Is the light level fine – all lamps working?
- Are there dark areas in the shop?
- **WOULD YOU SHOP HERE?**
- Are all spots positioned correctly on the merchandise?

✓ The Shop Layout

The merchandise can be put into the following categories:

- Demand
- Convenience
- Impulse
- Specialist

✓ Silent Selling

The silent sale is concerned with:

- Presentation
- Product
- Persuasion
- People
- Purchase