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Accenting Accessories: How to Display Accessories to Increase Engagement and Sales

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We all know that successfully positioned, arranged, and displayed merchandise can capture attention, increase sales, and contribute to the overall appeal of your store. But oftentimes, this knowledge is not carried through to the accessories for sale in a shoe store.

Perhaps that's because accessories were initially brought on as an experiment, to see if customers would buy them. When customers did, a few more were added, then a few more – and then, almost before employees knew it, accessories were everywhere, yet sales weren't reflecting the increase in inventory. What happened? In most cases, there was no plan in place to actually create a visual experience with these accessories. But that doesn't have to be a problem. It can be remedied with a plan and a few simple steps.

Collect

Make it easy for your customers to see that you sell accessories. Don't spread them out so a few purses or scarves are here and there. Create a department that says you're serious about accessories. Group jewelry together in a showcase, create a wall of purses, place a colorful row of scarves on a curtain rod, and pull all your shoe care products into a corner or on a couple of adjacent fixtures. These

"collected accessories" will serve as focal points, so strategically locate them to draw shoppers throughout your store. Certainly you can still cross-promote and mingle some accessories into your shoe displays – but you'll be surprised how much more you will sell when you create mini-departments for these add-on accessories.

Arrange

When positioning merchandise on a fixture, it's important to maintain "critical mass" – where the amount of product you put on it appears well-balanced. Too little stock, and it looks like you're going out of business. Too much stock, and you'll end up with messy displays and customers thinking poorly of your merchandising abilities. Ultimately, your product should look abundant but not unruly. And keep in mind, we "read" fixtures like a book, left to right, top to bottom. Keeping fixtures well-stocked and looking good is a never-ending task, but well worth it in the long run.

Displays

Create displays with accessories *and* your main shoe lines to attract attention to both product lines. An effective display is simple, incorporates a theme, has good composition, and uses props. You can



Displays should show customers that a store is serious about accessories.



Plan a display to attract attention to both accessories and main shoe lines.

develop a cohesive theme by grouping merchandise according to style, color, or shape. Arrange items in groups of odd numbers, as this creates an aesthetic visual rhythm. By utilizing these elements and principles of design, you can compose a display that helps the viewer quickly make sense of the display. Position these displays not only in the accessories department, but throughout the store.

Embellish

In order to tell a compelling story with each of your displays, you'll need to incorporate more than just your product. Get creative with props – whether it's risers (in varying materials), table runners, 3-D art, or floral arrangements, make sure they support the display theme instead of distract from it. Think out of the box – perhaps some of your product lines can be turned into props. For instance, can rows of shoe horns be glued to a backdrop, or can shoelaces be turned into a piece of art? By innovatively embellishing your displays, you'll increase the chance that customers will engage with your products – pick things up, try them out or try them on – and subsequently increase the chance they will make a purchase.

Signs

Be creative with signage above your accessory departments. For instance, instead of "Purses," try "Carriers" or "Summer Satchels." Instead of "Shoe Care," try "First Aid for Shoes." When it comes to signage, fewer words are best, but clever is even better. All signs should communicate messages quickly and concisely. Your display signage should look similar to other signs throughout your store, to ensure that your brand's messaging is consistent.

Illuminate

Further enhance your accessories departments and displays by using lighting to make them stand out as focal points. To attract customers' attention, displays should be illuminated three times brighter than the surrounding ambient light.

Update

To keep shoppers engaged, especially returning customers, visuals need to be fresh. That means merchandise, fixtures, and displays should be changed regularly. This can be as simple as rearranging or regrouping merchandise, or more elaborate, such as updating fixtures with a new color or finish; it also means changing displays to reflect seasons, holidays, and special events. Remember, **your displays should tell stories**, and the stories will be particularly effective when they are relevant to your customers' lives. Is it back-to-school season? Valentine's Day? Prom? Cater to their needs and sales will benefit.

Numbers from independent shoe stores indicate that smart retailers see accessories as increasingly strong products: According to NSRA's *Business Performance Report*, non-footwear sales – accessories and footcare products combined – comprised roughly seven percent of business in 2005. By 2016, the percentage had risen to more than 16%.

Grouping merchandise into attention-getting mini-departments with products that are creatively arranged, and designing displays that are embellished with props, brightly illuminated, well-signed, and regularly updated, can make accessory sales more than worth the effort. Before you know it, you may have to do that store expansion after all. ■

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