



Lyn M. Falk

Store Layout: Start with the Basics

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One of the questions I'm asked most frequently is, "Where should I put my checkout counter?" While that's of vital interest to a store owner, it's only one of many things to keep in mind when laying out a store. Let's take a look at the basics.

Entrance Display

Don't overcrowd the front entrance area. There should be a **minimum** of eight feet of space between the door and the first fixture or display. That first few feet is considered the "transition zone" where customers take a few seconds to acclimate to the store's interior. It's an important area and shouldn't be filled with fixtures.

Focal Points

The first fixture or display should serve as an attention-getting focal point. What's a focal point? It's a well-defined visual statement that stands out from its surroundings and attracts attention. It stops the eyes, and often the feet. Strategically placing focal points in a store will **lead customers effortlessly** throughout the store. They should be placed every 15-20 feet, either on a zig-zag course, or along the right side of the store, creating a circle around the perimeter.

Focal points towards the back of the store should be elevated so they can be seen from the entrance. The back wall is also an area that, when merchandised or designed properly, can serve as a major focal point, drawing customers to the

back of the store.

Customer Service Counter

If the store is large enough to warrant a customer service counter, the counter should be placed in an area that is immediately visible to customers entering the store. The point to a service counter is to be accessible to everyone and to provide answers quickly.

Departments

Departments should be clearly identified with signage that is visible from the entrance. Customers should be able to quickly locate the area they want to shop.

Departments can be separated from one another via wider aisles, and in some cases different fixtures.

Aisles

All traffic aisles need to be 36 inches wide (minimum) to meet ADA

(Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements. For larger stores of more than 1,000 square feet, the main traffic aisle should be wider, 48 inches to 60 inches wide, so that it can accommodate two people passing, one of whom might be in a wheelchair or pushing a stroller. **No** distance between fixtures, furniture or displays should be less than 32 inches.

Destination, Frequently Purchased, and Impulse Items

Most retailers can divide their products into these three categories. The products that attract customers to the store are known as "destination" items and can consist of popular brand names, or specialty items that can't be purchased elsewhere. Customers will go out of their way to shop these items, so put these product lines towards the back of the store. Customers are willing to walk a ways to find them.



This illuminated back wall serves as a large focal point.

Frequently purchased items are just that – frequently purchased. Oftentimes, the consumer can purchase these items at a competitor’s shop – so having these products easily accessible and not too far from the entrance is the best way to turn this merchandise. Putting frequently purchased items in the back of the store or in hard-to-find places is a sure way to lose

sales on these product lines.

Impulse items are those products a customer will buy when she sees it, even though she didn’t come in specifically to buy that product. Impulse merchandise is often featured around the checkout counter – often to the detriment of the sale. Generally, the more impulse items on display, the fewer are sold. It’s the old

“less is more” philosophy at work. With too many products to interpret, the decision-making feature of our brain shuts down. Find other spots to merchandise impulse items. For instance, customers are more apt to notice a small display of water-repellent spray bottles by the seating area in the boot department, versus at the checkout counter where the bottles

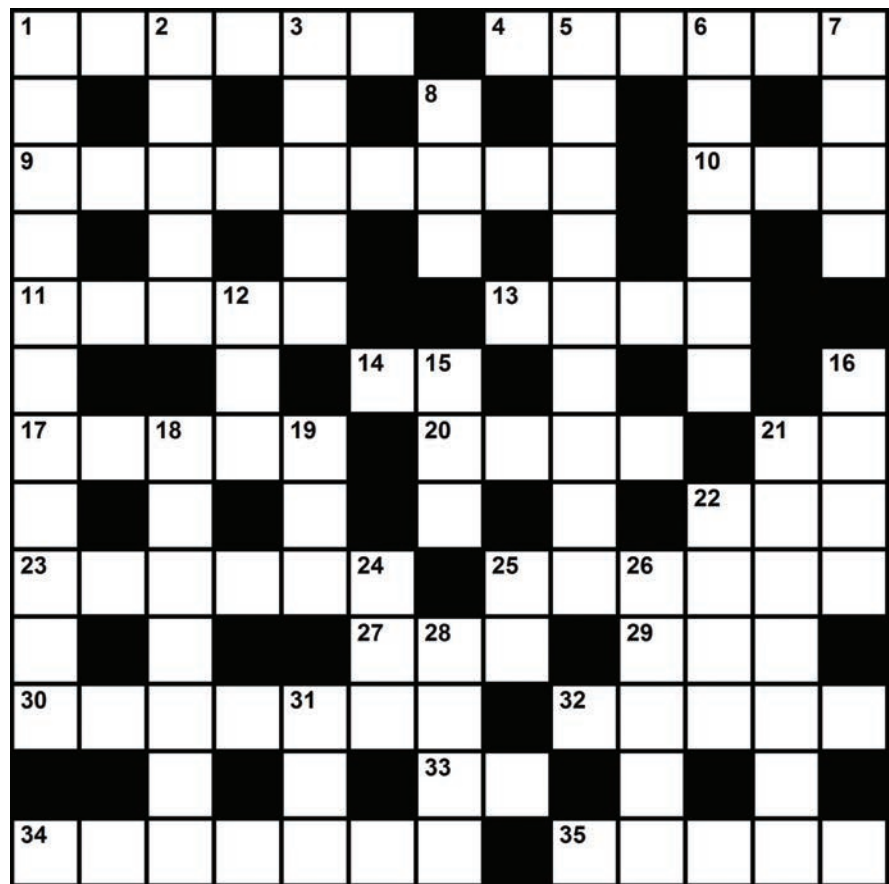
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Shoe Retailing Today’s Crossword Puzzle

Crossword writer Myles Mellor is one of the top crossword writers in the world, with more than 10,000 crosswords published worldwide in hundreds of magazines, newspapers and web outlets. He resides in California and can be reached via www.themecrosswords.com. Readers can also subscribe to his crosswords at www.ilovecrosswords.com.

Across

- 1 Kind of leather
- 4 One of the brand leaders in cowboy boots
- 9 Dream big but be ____!
- 10 Stylish, in the 60’s
- 11 "Just do it" shoes
- 13 America’s oldest footwear brand (goes with 20 across)
- 14 Unit of weight, for short
- 17 NSRA Chairman, Rick
- 20 See 13 across
- 21 Newport state
- 22 Edge
- 23 He might buy Muck’s or Cabela’s boots for turkey tracking
- 25 Showing polish and refinement
- 27 Light brown color
- 29 Brand dominating the boot market
- 30 First in a field
- 32 Category of boots with the highest margins in 2012
- 33 I love ___ new heels!
- 34 Factor in a store that can impact the customer experience
- 35 Assists a customer



Down

- 1 NSRA’s shipping provider
- 2 Show gratitude
- 3 Pedicure care focus
- 5 How often is NSRA’s Leadership Conference held? (3 words)
- 6 Created anew
- 7 Types of lighting that can reduce costs

- 8 "___ magic!"
- 12 Dusk
- 15 Shoe packaging item
- 16 Bright green color
- 18 Sellers
- 19 Never ___ to a customer
- 21 Records on a cash register (2 words)
- 22 All the ___, in the latest fashion

- 24 Route for short
- 25 All-nations org.
- 26 Bag and book hybrid
- 28 Boot for the military, ___ boot
- 31 Slippery long sea creature

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might be standing beside point-of-purchase display fixtures filled with shoelaces, sunglasses, and energy bars.

Dead or Slow Zones

Many retailers deal with a dead zone from time to time. They're often caused by putting taller fixtures in front of a department, or by under-illuminating an area. Tall fixtures can become a mental barrier, and dark areas are just not inviting. We're always attracted to the brighter spots in a room. Simply moving fixtures around, opening up a traffic aisle, and/or adding more light are generally inexpensive and effective fixes.

Research shows that most people move to the right when they enter a store. With this in mind, it can be difficult to get customers to shop the area to the left of the entrance, and this area can become a dead zone. Putting a destination department there, or a customer service/checkout counter, is a good way to get customers to this area.

Dressing Rooms

If you sell apparel with your shoes, then a dressing room is imperative. However, a five foot square (ADA accessible) dressing room takes up a lot of floor space in a small store. Putting one in the back of the store is OK, as long as it's not too far from the apparel department. The further away, the less likely it will be used – and if she can't try it on, chances are she won't buy it.

If you don't want to build a permanent dressing room, or just don't need a dressing room on the floor all the time, then create a portable one. Install a U-shaped drapery track off of a wall and keep the curtains pulled back against the wall until someone needs to use a dressing room – then simply pull the curtains out and around to make a square. Tall rolling racks with curtains can also work in a pinch. These quick-shift dressing room ideas have caught on in the retail world. They are inexpensive and provide flexibility on the floor.



A table-top display can make a good front-of-store focal point.

Store Focal Points: What They Are, What They Do

In a retail setting, key focal points include:

- table displays
- pedestal displays
- display vignettes
- architectural elements (water fountains, columns, doorways, etc)
- artwork (2-dimensional and 3-dimensional)
- mannequins
- signage
- brightly illuminated objects
- rotating (moving) displays.

Focal points are actually silent sales aides. They serve to:

- inform or tell a story
- break up large areas of merchandise into smaller, more "manageable" sections
- inspire customers to see or use a product in more than one way
- define a department
- celebrate a product line.

Effectively using focal points in a store is a way retailers can give customers a "new" experience each time they shop. The excitement of "new," combined with the same great service they have come to expect, will keep customers coming back.

Checkout Counter

So where **do** you put the checkout counter? It should be in a place where your staff can see the entrance and all areas of the store. A convex mirror may need to be installed to see around a blind corner, but it's important for staff to have a quick visual inventory of everyone in the store at all times. This doesn't mean the counter needs to be right next to the entrance, but certainly it should be within earshot of the entrance.

Finally, don't be afraid to change the layout of your store. In fact, changing some areas with the seasons, or when new product lines arrive, will help your customers stay engaged. A different layout can help them "discover" products that you've always carried. Layout changes can make a store feel fresh and vibrant, instead of "same old same old." So when you are rearranging your store, just keep the above points in mind. They will enable you to eliminate potential customer confusion, and keep the shopping experience effortless – and they may even add to your employees' enjoyment of their work, which always pays off in the long run. ■

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