



Designing attention-getting, impactful displays is a great way to showcase your creativity. It's also the best way to showcase your products and move merchandise. Even better, well-designed and interactive displays can increase sales up to 25% percent. Is your attention peaked yet?

Getting Down to the Basics: Merchandising

Many people think that the term "display" and "merchandising" are synonymous. They are, in fact, distinctions between the two techniques of which to take note.

Very simply, merchandising is "good housekeeping". It's the act of presenting your products on fixtures in an organized fashion - with a goal of helping customers quickly see and interpret the merchandise, and then be influenced to purchase something.

It is important to understand that in the United States, consumers tend to read merchandise from left to right and top to bottom. A well-merchandised fixture will have your customers' eyes roaming the entire fixture, not just the top shelf. A key to an attractively merchandised fixture is to group products according to size, style, color and type, and to fill the shelves. When shelves are left half-filled or even emptier, it conveys a message of poor maintenance to your customers. Additionally, it may suggest to customers you are going out of business - even if you are not. Shelves not fully merchandised also take away from your business image and reduces professional credibility. Yet overstocking products on a fixture isn't good, either. Products bulging off shelves and hooks will only end up on the floor and have customers thinking you don't know how to monitor your inventory - or your store. Even worse, customer may not be able to comfortably shop in this type of environment. Your goal should be to find the right "critical mass" for your store to help make consumers happy and your store look happy, as well.

Creating Focal Points: Displays

While the majority of your store will consist of merchandising, less space is dedicated to displays. This said, their purpose often weighs greater in total store layout and consumer impact.

Displays are well-coordinated focal points that are strategically placed throughout your store and should be changed regularly. Positioning your product purposefully throughout your store will encourage customer's steps to follow their eyes - bringing them further into the store and closer to your merchandise.

It is important to keep some "empty space" around the displays to ensure the focal points stand out from their surroundings. Thoughtfully placed focal points entice customers to shop your entire store without even thinking about it.

An effective display is simple, incorporates a theme (whether it's color, shape, style or a category of product), uses props and has good composition. Displays should attract and hold the attention of your customers for at least a few seconds. A display should stimulate interest and tell a story. And displays should create desire for the product. A well designed display will move the customer to action.

Display artists often create the unexpected, using principles of design such as "illumination" to provide interest and eye-appeal. Lifestyle displays can be very rewarding as they evoke emotional appeals that are often followed by a purchase. Another display rule of thumb is placing items in groups of odd numbers - three, five, seven or nine are great numbers to work with.

Providing information is often an important element of a display, so make sure signs communicate your message quickly. The fewer the words, the better. Avoid hand-made signs, unless your penmanship is excellent and you have a consistent style, and/or you are changing the sign daily as in a café or deli.

Finally, your display should reflect your product's price point. Keep the props and fixtures you use of a quality consistent with that of your product lines - never use cheap or obviously used, hand-me-down fixtures to display mid to upper-end items.

In a Dry Spell? Brainstorm With Your Buds!

A fun exercise you can do with your staff or friends is to pick 10 to 20 of your bestsellers and brainstorm all the reasons why these products appeal to your customers, then figure out how to use these ideas when merchandising your products. Get into your customers' minds - are they browsers? Are they tour participants who are rushed for time? Do they have small children with them when they shop? Once you have identified all the reasons these are great sellers, come up with display ideas that cater to the desires and needs of your customers while also supporting these great products.

Some people have the knack for merchandising and others don't. Some folks can be trained, and other folks... well... they should stay away from the display making end of the business! Practice will help those you can teach. And if you're still struggling to get a good display assembled, find an art or design student from a local college. They are often looking for work for their portfolio. Even high school students have proven their talents with window displays. In the end, your store - and your sales - will reap the rewards.



Lyn Falk, award-winning designer, author, and educational speaker, is founder of Retailworks, Inc., a boutique store design firm in Wisconsin, and "I LOVE That Display!", a visual merchandising & display studio. Falk has over 25 years of experience teaching retailers how to build beautiful, purposeful and productive spaces. Her clientele represents over 35 different retail industries, including hundreds of independent retailers. She is a long-time consultant and speaker for the National Main Street network, and grew up in an "Indie" family. Lyn is passionate about design and believes one should "never underestimate the power of a well-designed environment".