

LYN M. FALK ON STORE DESIGN

# CRITICAL MASS

To improve customer experience and increase sales, find the “sweet spot” between having too little product on your sales floor and too much.

**W**e’ve all been in stores where wall shelves and floor fixtures were only partially full. We’ve also been in businesses where products were packed onto shelves, literally falling off, and fixtures were so close together that shopping them knocked even more items onto the floor. Neither of these scenarios follows good retailing practices.

When a store is low on merchandise, customers may get frustrated and shop elsewhere. They may also ask: Why is this business unable to keep products in stock? Is cash flow an issue? Or is the store in trouble overall?

And when a store is over-stocked, customers may not be able to find the products they are looking for. Or when faced with too many options, their brain may be unable to make a decision. Both will have them cutting short their shopping trip.

So how do you determine where that “sweet spot” is? Or as we store merchandisers like to call it, “critical mass.”

## TOO LITTLE

Let’s start with the scenario of “not enough product on the floor.” Even retailers who excel at inventory management have had to deal with this over the past few years, thanks to strained supply

chains. With simple merchandising tips, though, you can create the appearance of fullness even when deliveries arrive with-out much of what you ordered.

**Remove and consolidate.** Don’t be afraid to take down shelves and roll fixtures off the floor. Combine product into fewer displays until you can fully stock your original setup.

**Face-forward product.** Even if you only have one row across and one row deep, it makes the shelf appear full. You can even place boxes behind the products as “generic fill” that will help give the impression that the shelf or fixture is full.

**Add props.** Bringing in display-only pieces such as dog or cat mannequins or statues can help fill empty spaces. Using larger items from well-stocked departments also works, such as adding toys to dog treat displays, as long as the products somewhat relate to each other.

## TOO MUCH

If you tend to have an overabundance of product lines on your sales floor, whether you overbuy or have a small store with little storage, or both, here are ways to get back to a visually manageable stock level.

**Keep it clear.** Make sure you have at least a 36-inch-wide aisle running through your store — 42 inches is opti-



The Public Pet in Honolulu, HI, excels at critical mass merchandising.



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mal for smaller stores, 48 inches for larger — from entrance to checkout. Keep the first 6 to 8 feet of the front entrance area empty, as this is the transition area where customers take a minute to look around and determine where they need to go for their desired products.

**Give them room.** Do not place an excessive amount of vendor fixtures — spinner racks, endcap add-ons, etc. — around permanent store fixtures. Do not overload shelves. There should be enough room for customers to grab a product without knocking others over.

**Departmentalize.** With the exception of holiday and other seasonal displays where you merchandise around a theme, keep product categories together: toys all on one fixture, leashes all on one wall, etc. Combining products that aren’t related can create visual chaos and impair the decision-making process.

**Don’t put it out.** If you ordered 26 of the same feather wand for cats to get a great price, put out six and keep the rest in storage until space frees up on the sales floor. You won’t want to be constantly tidying that many wands anyway.

With these tips, you can “critical mass” to watch your customers’ shopping experience improve and your sales rise.



## true tales IT’S NOT A BRAIN TUMOR

I once had an employee who abruptly needed time off for a surgery — she told us she had a brain tumor. She proceeded to send us photos of her recovering in bed with her dog, etc. for weeks ... only to find out she wanted vacation time, and instead of asking for time off, thought lying about a brain tumor was the best option. **Jennifer Frankavitz, Four Leggers Pet Supplies & Services, Beverly, MA**



## pet peeves

ANONYMOUS VENTINGS FROM PET BUSINESS OWNERS AND MANAGERS

## USE THOSE MUSCLES!

I know this is petty because we’re in a service industry, but one of the most annoying things to me is when a person comes in who has obviously either just left the gym or is going to the gym, is physically fit and capable of getting their own bag of food from the shelf, but stands in front of the counter and expects you to get it for them. I told you it was petty.