

Switch to Good Lighting

The right bulbs and fixtures will enhance your store and its merchandise.

by LYN M.
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A properly illuminated store can take a really good design and turn it into a really great design, while a well-designed store can turn mediocre under poor lighting. The right lighting makes your store layout easy to navigate, displays your products in their true colors and welcomes customers to explore every corner of the space.

Lighting is often one of the last items to be considered when designing a new space or retrofitting an existing one, and at the end the electrician may install readily available and inexpensive bulbs. Fortunately, solutions to poor lighting are also readily available. While the right fixtures will cost more, you're almost guaranteed to get your money back and then some with properly designed lighting.

Initially, lighting can appear to be complicated, but if you have the right professional on the job, the technical aspects can be narrowed down quickly. To properly illuminate a retail space, one has to understand watts (amount of power required to operate lamps—the industry's term for light bulbs—at full capacity), lumen

output (brightness), foot-candles (amount of light that falls on a given surface), voltage (120 standard or 12 for low voltage), photometrics (digital plan showing lamp foot-candles throughout the room), Kelvin temperatures (warm or cool looking) and color rendering indexes (how true product colors will look under the light). Then there are diffusers, luminaries, dimmers, photocells, ballasts and transformers to understand. With rapidly changing technology, it can be challenging to keep up with the latest versions of LEDs, much less updated lighting controls.

Before tackling the technical details, consider these five things when planning new lighting for your store.

NATURAL LIGHT

Nothing is better than natural light from windows and/or skylights to illuminate your store. However, it's rarely available throughout the entire interior and is helpful only when the sun is up. If you are lucky enough to have natural light, you also know how sun can wreak havoc on merchandise in windows that face south, east or west.

If this is the case, exterior awnings, gray film applied to the glass or interior shades can help with this extreme sun issue.

GENERAL LIGHTING = MOOD/AMBIENCE

Define the mood you want to create in your store. Because fabrics and yarn are often selected based on pattern and color, a light with a high color rendering index (CRI), such as equal to or greater than 85, is important. Also, the space should be bright enough so one can easily read signs and price tags, but not so bright that it feels like you're in a medical clinic.

The best Kelvin temperature is 3500, and the light should deliver a consistent level of foot-candles, somewhere between 35 and 40, across the selling floor. (A good electrician or designer should have a foot-candle meter to read the amount of light in a room.) Lumen output is critical to get the amount of light you need on the selling floor. Also, make sure light fixtures are mounted at a height that delivers the right amount of light to the selling floor. Mounting height and lumen output are key factors to consider together.

Finally, LEDs are great lamps to use in your ceiling fixtures and are generally chosen in either a tube form or screw-in bases for pendant fixtures.

ACCENT LIGHTING

Focal points, product displays, artwork and specialty signage should receive three times more illumination than the ambient light. If your selling floor has a general illumination of 35 foot-candles, then the piece being accented should be about 100 foot-candles. If you're trying to highlight a wide space, such as a wall display, then be sure to specify a flood lamp to get the most spread of light. A spotlight is preferred if you're just highlighting a smaller quilt or piece of art. Finally, remember to get a lamp that is 3500K and has a CRI ≥ 85 .

DECORATIVE LIGHTING

Decorative light fixtures, such as chandeliers, floor lamps, table lamps, wall sconces, strings of Edison bulbs, etc., are fun to have, just don't use them as major sources of illumination. They are simply for establishing visual décor or perhaps defining an intimate seating area. Mixing light sources avoids visual monotony. Stores that simply have recessed LED fixtures can make for a boring environment. Be sure the style of the decorative fixtures works with your brand, and the bulbs are within 3000K and 3500K.



TOP Azure, an apparel boutique in DePere, Wisconsin, draws attention to a cozy seating area with decorative lighting. **ABOVE** Outpost Natural Foods in Bay View keeps things bright and highlights signage with track lighting. **LEFT** Milk Merchant in Wausau supplemented recessed ceiling lights with copper pendants to focus attention toward the counter.

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FORTUNATELY, SOLUTIONS TO POOR LIGHTING ARE READILY AVAILABLE. WHILE THE RIGHT FIXTURES WILL COST MORE, YOU'RE ALMOST GUARANTEED TO GET YOUR MONEY BACK AND THEN SOME WITH PROPERLY DESIGNED LIGHTING.

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Finding the Right LED

LEDs have come a long way in the past decade and now fit well into most retail environments. However, the wrong bulbs often get purchased and installed, especially when it comes to the screw-in lamps for track lighting.

Many think the box that reads, “LED–Daylight,” and has a price point under \$5 is the perfect solution. It’s not. Kelvin temperature should be 3500, lumen output at least 1000 (higher if your track is mounted more than 9’ off the selling floor), and CRI \geq 85.

These bulbs are not often available at your local home improvement store, but can be purchased through an electrician or designer. Depending on size, they can run between \$16 and \$22 per lamp, but will last 50,000 hours (about 12 hours a day for 12 years).

For more information on good lighting specifications for your store, contact Lyn Falk at lfalk@retailworksinc.com.



FIXTURE SELECTION

When selecting light fixtures—the shades that surround the bulbs—think about where you need light in the space. Fixtures can provide direct downlight, indirect light (the light shoots upward and reflects off the surface of the fixture before heading to the room for a softer light), a combination of downlight and indirect light, or in the case of pendant lights, the light can be emitted through parts or all of the shade. Make sure the fixtures are in a style that reflects your brand. Selecting the fixtures is often the easy part; specifying the bulb that goes in the fixtures that can get tricky as not all fixtures support the kinds of bulbs needed in a retail environment.

If you’re a lighting novice or simply don’t have time to learn the basics, hire an experienced designer to study your space and provide specifications for new lighting. Some states and communities will audit and swap your lighting with energy-efficient versions, which can be an excellent, cost-efficient way to get your lighting upgraded. Keep in mind that this service is most interested in the energy-saving aspect of your lights, not in creating the desired ambience for your shop.

Don’t underestimate the power of lighting. You’ll be grateful you did when you see the results of good lighting specifications.



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