

# LIGHTING MAXIMIZING MERCHANDISING



Selling today involves creating a retail environment that causes the customer to take pause and evokes the desire to buy something. Here are some tips for becoming a retail selling machine. BY MARK OKUN

**T**he saying goes “Retail Is Detail” — and the attention you pay to merchandising your store makes that statement ring true. Today’s digitally dexterous consumer demands that showrooms differentiate themselves not only from the direct competition (i.e. home centers), but also compete with the virtual advertising from Internet retailers. There are a few ways that brick-and-mortar showrooms can stand out. First of all, they must capitalize on providing an experience that can’t be duplicated in a home center or by the Web-based reseller.

Maximizing every aspect of the in-store experience permits this type of merchandising to make a

real impact on your dollars-per-square-foot sales. Incorporating all your saleable products in attractive displays will engage customers and help them envision owning and decorating with those items in their homes.

Believe it or not, your merchandising mission starts when the customer drives into the parking lot. This is the point where subconscious impressions are formed about the company. What does the outside of the store look like? While this seems pretty basic, it bears repeating; the parking lot and the grounds must be clean, with all trash picked up and disposal containers available. If there is room for landscaping, have working landscape lighting products on display and demonstrating the effects that can be achieved — and be certain to illuminate it at night.

By taking control of the initial customer impression as soon as possible, you are affecting the customer positively and having them anticipate what’s next. Curb appeal can make or break a good first impression.

When walking in the front door, the client is at a transition point. The subconscious effects of the parking lot are engrained in their minds. What does the customer experience the moment they walk into the store?

The customer experience starts in the parking lot, and so does the visual merchandising.

The sensory story begins now and it is incumbent on the store to excite their guests while putting the customer at ease.

We have five senses, and store owners should attempt to appeal to each of those in a congruent way that supports the overall shopping experience.

## SHOULD THERE BE MUSIC?

There should never be a question of whether to play music or not. Music can be a unifying theme played in the entire showroom, or the music can be programmed to complement the defined space it is in.

Elegant formal crystal settings can be displayed with the delicate sounds of a great symphony, while the smooth sounds of a favorite crooner can be offered up in a more metropolitan display.

Music plays such a significant role in the customer experience that some retailers have specific music playing based on where you are in the store and what display you’re looking at.

The music choices you make should be an audio reflection of the mood you wish to create. Tip: The proper volume is important in setting the mood of a store.

## MAKING SCENTS

The olfactory sense is such an important trigger in recall and creating a lasting impression in a client’s mind, yet is often not incorporated into the merchandising plan. In fact, there are companies that *only* focus on scenting the retail environment. If you want to break through all the clatter of audio and video stimuli the customer experiences, scenting can be a way to do that.

The scent of fruits like apple, plum, or peach are uplifting and can reduce anxiety. Its calming effect would be well-positioned where the customer enters the store.

Some retailers brew fresh coffee and bake cookies not only to offer a snack to their customers, but to create the familiar fragrance of home. However, a word of caution on using fragrance; it should be a delicate scent that is not overpowering. Introducing multiple scents — even when they

are faint — can become overpowering, like playing two songs over the top of each other.

According to the *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, “Customers have better assessments, felt greater pleasure and stimulation, expressed intention to revisit the store, and spent more in a scented environment than in an unscented one.”

## EXPERIENCE THE THEME

When customers enter your store, is there space for them to adjust to coming in, like a decompression zone? They need a moment to adjust to the new environment.

American shoppers have a tendency to turn right when entering a store. Humans have been so affected by the way we drive that we apply those same “rules of the road” to the way we shop. In fact, 90 percent of customers will make that right turn and the wall they see first is called the “Power Wall.” This is, in my opinion, the most influential merchandising position that customers see. It is the display that makes the most impact on them.

Here are some thoughts to consider when setting up “Power Walls.” Keep the space fresh by changing the displays monthly and by keeping the area surrounding it “style consistent” with the theme. That means the accent pieces and the style of the lighting must flow smoothly. This is a great place to feature your newest items and also those high-style accent pieces that provide the best margin. These displays must show off the most attractive products that you have. You can also get a little edgy; this is great place to “test” out new product offerings. “Power Walls” are useful for highlighting the shopping experience while creating intrigue. The goal is to convey that this is the place they want to shop.







**DIGITAL MERCHANDISING**

The Internet of Things (IoT) has moved the idea of merchandising from a product-centric display into a customer-centric experience. Customers want to see and experience lighting and home fashion on their terms. Having a thought-out visual merchandising strategy can supercharge this experience. The use of smaller, less-cluttered displays allows a store to be bolder in its choices. A benefit of the Internet is that you can have video monitors with a display and use them to expand the merchandising by showing additional items from the collection that are not there.

Planning the route through a store is like creating a storyboard of excitement and engagement. To do it right, you must consider the floor, walls, and ceiling like you would a blank canvas. Plan what customers will see when they enter. Will the display be inspirational or cutting edge? Maybe the display replicates a setting in a home.

Walkways and aisles must be wide enough that two people have ample space to pass and avoid what founder of Envirosell (a market research and consulting company) Paco Underhill calls the “butt brush effect.” Underhill’s research discovered that customers will avoid looking at merchandise if there is not enough personal space available to them.

One merchandising area to pay attention to is the undercabinet lighting display. Lighting showrooms often have kitchen cabinets and a marble counter to display the effects. Whenever possible, display both a dark and light countertop so that the client sees how the correct color temperature will impact each color choice.

While setting up kitchen vignettes is not new, how about creating a space that replicates a bedroom or home office? Create lifestyle displays that accent the lamps and lighting fixtures in each. Make sure each characteristic of the display is congruent and shares aspects of the style, color, or design story.

**DO A DOUBLE CHECK**

Stand in the decompression zone – that space just inside the door – and look forward, then right, and then left. Each direction is a possible pathway for customers to take based on the intent of their visit. What does each of those pathways look like? How does it flow? What is the first focal point?

Focal points purposefully lead somewhere. Whatever path the customers choose, provide them with an experiential journey. When an aisle

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ends, create a visual draw toward the space with a display that is inviting. This is done with the use of shape, color, and light. Do this with each focal point.

Perhaps your decompression space has a reception desk to provide immediate assistance. If so, that becomes your point of the first in-store impression. Make sure this space is a welcoming, professional atmosphere that puts the customer at ease while communicating “we are here to help.”

**TAKE A BREAK**

Create visual breaks on walls and in aisles. For example, on a continuous wall of mirrors, interrupt the flow with bold or distinctive artwork or signage as it transitions into another style or finish.

Incorporate signage in the middle of aisles as break points. Every characteristic of printed material – from signs to business cards, price tags, and invoices – should flow with your color scheme, font, and logo.

**DON'T FORGET HOUSEKEEPING**

Another reminder from retail 101: keep the store spotless, both inside and out. Visible clutter must be avoided at all costs – from wall displays to ceiling grids and countertops to accessory displays. Clutter is distracting to the client and sends the wrong message about your company.

**SALES COUNTER MERCHANDISING**

Impulse buying is a common characteristic of today’s consumer, and it is especially true of customers who are having fun in the store and enjoying their experience. When merchandised correctly, your sales counter area can increase your profits and average sale. Focus on categories that your customer will respond to. The products you select can be varied; in some stores it may be jewelry, while others may sell paint or flashlights, but make certain that these items take a premium position.

**RE-MERCHANDISE OFTEN**

Customers who return to your store like to see new and fresh looks. While everything can’t be moved all the time, little changes every 7 to 10 days will keep the store fresh. When customers come in repeatedly over the duration of a project, they notice what’s happening in the store. A piece that may have been around for some time often gets new interest when moved to a new location.

Merchandising your store with these ideas can create fun and excitement! ❖



Mark Okun is Business Contributor to enLIGHTenment Magazine and President of Mark Okun Consulting & Performance Group. He has more than 30 years of hands-on retail experience training and coaching sales associates in the lighting and furniture industries. [Mark@bravo-businessmedia.com](mailto:Mark@bravo-businessmedia.com)



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