

CUSTOMERS WANTS AND DESIRES

AND 15 VISUAL MERCHANDISING TACTICS YOU CAN DEPLOY TO EXCEED THEM — PART 2

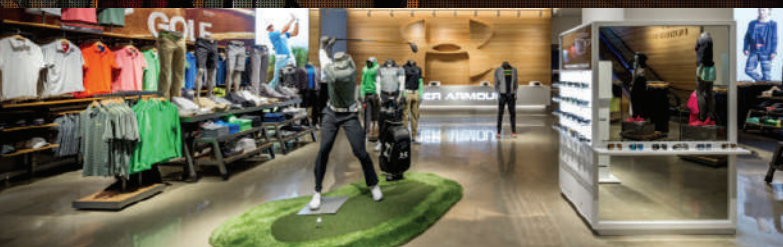
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EXCITING THE DEMANDING CUSTOMER

In Part 1 of our article on 15 visual merchandising tactics we can use to excite the customer, we talked about the three elements **that contribute to the perfect retail environment and shopping experience: WINDOWS, INTERIORS, and MAINTENANCE.**

We highlighted the importance of windows, if your store has them, and how you can create high impact displays to catch the customer's eye. We then shared 7 tips to create interiors that would make it exciting, comfortable and convenient for the customer to shop and profitable for you to sell to them. By displaying your product in the right way and in the right places in your store, you can experience greater sales. The thinking goes: 'If they see it, they will buy it.'

Here we have 8 more tips to share.



8 Use fixtures to sell merchandise

Fixtures are only there to hold and present merchandise and should not be the central focus of the store. **Good fixtures should be almost invisible to make the product really stand out.** At the same time, they communicate image and need to reflect the store's unique identity. Some stores have become very creative and imaginative and have developed **graphical systems that incorporate product within the display fixture** for high impact product presentations and to create drama.

Avoid fixtures over 5 feet in height (except on walls!). They represent a barrier and prevent the customer and you from having a clear view of the entire store and product displays. They can also encourage shoplifting if they are too high.

9 Use focal points, hot spots, layout structure/flow, directions, signage, logical adjacencies to guide and tempt the customer

Once in the store, the customer needs to be guided through your product assortment. The creation of focal points, the proper placement of fixtures, the use of signage and logical product adjacencies, all help to orient the customer and make sure they are exposed to as many areas as possible and every product on display. To achieve this very important goal, it is key that we understand how people move and shop in a store.

People slow down when they see reflective surfaces. People face and walk forward. Men move down aisles faster than women. Right after entering a store, most people look and walk toward the right.

Knowing this, the first thing you need to do is create a **layout structure and a path for the customer to shop effectively, efficiently, comfortably and to make sure that they are exposed to your best merchandise.**

Start with the entrance which must be uncluttered. Paco Underhill, author of *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* calls this area the 'decompression zone'. He defines it as the area 1.5 to 4 meters beyond the lease line (your entrance). When customers enter a store, they are decompressing from the outside to the inside environment and they are unable to see or notice any product that is in the decompression zone. That is why he recommends not to put any products in this area that you are trying to sell, as the customer would likely not even see them.

Then, you look at your store's **layout hot spots. They are the most valuable areas where customers are naturally drawn to.** This is again where you are going **to display your best/highest margin/most profitable products.** They are:

VALUABLE AREAS

- **The right side of the store. This is where more than 80% of customers will look and turn right upon entering a store** (unless you are in the UK or other left side driving country!).
- **Entrance area: after the decompression zone comes the transition zone, about 4 to 7 meters beyond the lease line - it extends in a semicircle about 7 meters into the store. This is called the 'prime real estate area' because almost 100% of customers are exposed to it.** (Note: if your store is very small almost all of it will qualify as 'prime real estate' area.)
- **Cash wrap or checkout area.** This is where you hope every customer will stop and is your last chance to make sure your customer has the total solution. **Showcase accessories, maintenance products, and impulse items for a complete solution. (Think tees, balls, range finders, etc.)**
- **Focal points. Often at the end of an aisle. Make sure you feature desirable items with a strong graphic, a display, or lighting to help direct the customer's eye. Use these areas to make an eye-catching merchandise statement.**

continued 

- **Power/feature walls: tell a single, eye-catching story.** A customer should understand what a wall is saying in about two seconds. Wall displays therefore should be visually easy to understand and not contain too many different colors or uniquely shaped items. It could be a **commodity or item selling story where you display merchandise that is very similar in one place (e.g., one style of golf shoes in two colors repeated throughout), or a price story where you group similar or identically priced products together (e.g., shirts under \$100), or a color story where you use product to make a color statement, develop color blocks by pulling together a display with a single dominant color.**

Use signing and graphics to promote your store brand and communicate with the customer. Signs help your customer find what they need and help them learn about your products and promotions. Of all the visual elements in a store, graphics and the use of words create a dialogue between your store and the customer. Through good signage the customer learns what you are about and what's unique about your store and your products.

When selecting signs and graphics for your store, it is important you **achieve a proper balance of aesthetics, functionality and accessibility.** **Aesthetics** means that **they must enhance and reinforce your store**

brand image or promotional message. **Functionality** refers to **how well they perform every time and over time.** **Remember, you are in retail to provide a unique experience for your customer, and details truly matter.** Having a worn or outdated sign is not a small detail at all!



Accessibility means your signs **must be 'user-friendly', sell benefits, be placed in sturdy sign holders, have uniform sizes (no more than 4 different sizes), and must be simple and easy to understand.**

And finally, **never use handwritten signs.** Unless you want your customer to think you are not serious about your store, handwritten signs make you look like you are 'playing store'.

10 Create comfortable spaces to shop

This has been Apple's mantra since the beginning. Their message is loud and clear: **you are here to stay!** Because they know research has proven again and again that the longer the customer stays, the more they buy! So, they allow you to bring your personal things (bags, briefcases) as the tables are large enough for you to put your stuff on them if

you wish. As well, the aisles are wide enough to avoid feeling crowded – have a **1 meter minimum aisle width and 1.5 meter if you can**, to avoid what Paco Underhill calls **‘butt brush’** which is when someone passes in the aisle behind you when you are looking at a display and has to brush you to pass.

11 Display product for maximum impact AND to generate sales

A beautifully designed store is of no use if the store’s product is not displayed to stand out and to tempt the customer.... remember, product comes first!

Start by departmentalizing your inventory. This means you will need to **put all the same products in one area to make it easier and more logical for the customer to find what they want.**

Then, you create visually appealing displays and displays that sell. A key component of the buying appeal of a product display or, in other words, a display that encourages the customer



to buy, is for the customer to be able to interact with the product. From the simple **‘no product under glass’** cardinal rule at Apple where every customer is **encouraged to sample the gadgetry** and ‘fall in love’ with it (with the

exception of the Apple watches that are under glass due to the high risk of theft), to more advanced forms of interactivity such through the

use of **virtual walls, simulator rooms, etc. In-store demonstrations, classes, events and similar** are also part of the effort to promote the customer’s engagement with the product. We all know that a golfer has to be able to try a putter if they have any chance of buying it.

Buying appeal is also about making sure the products you want to sell the most – your highest margin products – are displayed where the customer naturally sees them first and can reach them more easily: place the best **at eye level and place lower margin products at waist to knee level** (make the customer ‘work’ to find them). Place the higher margin products – your higher price clubs, for example – on the left because people **read from left to right** and you want customers to see the best first. Display product on tables **in odd numbers and with the right adjacencies so customers are encouraged to select related items close by (think of balls displayed near clubs and gloves right on top of the clubs.** This helps the customer become educated on what goes with what for the perfect experience.)

Price in ‘packages’. Think like a customer: what would you shop for that relates to each item?

MAINTENANCE

Maintenance is about making sure that the store always looks great.

12 Change your store frequently

Unfortunately, **customers habituate to a store.** Customers often are in your store weekly

if not more frequently and they think they have seen everything that you carry, but they really haven't. Changing items helps break through this 'habituation' or feeling of nothing new to see. **Therefore, move things as often as possible - change your 'front and forward' weekly and sometimes daily. Change the area around your POS every day.** Think about it: would you continue going back to a store that always looked the same? Most likely, not! Customers are always looking for something new, different all the time. When was the last time you moved something to a different rack and a customer asked if you just received it!

13 Always keep your store neat and clean

Part of always looking great is also having a neat and clean store all the time. This is rule #1. Dust every shelf every day. Clean floors, doors, mirrors, glass tops, products, props etc. constantly. Keep all products in perfect order and organized. We only have one chance to make a first impression; customers judge a store in the first 20 seconds. So, what is that first 20 seconds like in your store?

14 Photograph your store, freeze it in time

Take at least 36 photos of your store from the front to panorama shots just inside the front

door; a series of 360 degrees from the middle and another set of panorama from the back; and then, (and, this step is critical) print the pictures out on 3 x 5 paper - do not view them on an iPad!. Now, look at your pictures and critique everything: exterior, entrance, interior, displays, signs, missing merchandise, essentially the good you see, the bad you see and the truly ugly. Then, improve the good, fix the bad, eliminate the ugly and repeat this exercise every 6 months. You have no idea what you can see in a two-dimensional picture versus the three-dimensional view you have by standing in your store.

15 Be more than just a store

Retail environments should incorporate also activism, art, music, culture, green, and lots more: for example, a fish tank, an atrium with a dancing fountain and solar windmill at Abt Electronics really captivates customers. What can you do to be more than 'just a pro shop'?

If you implement all these fifteen ideas right and also remember that shopping is an **emotional experience and temptation** is what matters most while **keeping it simple** for the crazy-busy customer of today and tomorrow, you can be assured that your customer will keep coming back!

Good luck getting the right retail environment!

FOUNDER & PRESIDENT



MANAGING PARTNER & SENIOR CONSULTANT



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