

VISUAL MERCHANDISING

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Visual merchandising is effective presentation of products that impacts customers purchase. It is providing right product to right customer at right time. It is defined as “the presentation of a store/brand and its merchandise to the customer through the teamwork of the store’s advertising, display, special events, fashion coordination, and merchandising departments in order to sell the goods and services offered by store”. This means everything that customer sees, exterior or interior, creates a positive impact on customer.

Retailers are gradually realizing that only selling the product is not important, but customers’ satisfaction and convenience is also important for shopping. Stimulus in retailing includes space related, product related and people related aspects. These stimuli are mostly collected through eyes. Hence, it is inexpensive way of marketing.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VM:

Visual merchandising includes both store exterior and interior. The store exterior includes window display, façade and retail premises. Window display is a medium which creates first impression in customer’s mind to enter the store. Physical attractiveness of the store impresses customers highly for store selection. In the same way exterior of the store instigates customers to enter the store. The store interior includes orienting factors signage ; Layout, fixturing, merchandise, presentation techniques, props and spatial factors and ambient conditions.

Consumer expectation regarding in-store design have increased and there is also a heightened desire for shopping excitement, which can in part be delivered through innovative design of the physical environment Visual merchandising is, concerned with both how the product/brand is visually communicated to the customer and also whether this message is aptly decoded.

Visual merchandising includes various aspects of consumer such as sensory pleasure, affective pleasure and cognitive pleasure. Consumers under stress will make planned or nondiscretionary purchase and won’t spend as much time or money on unplanned/impulse purchases.

Customers account both monetary and non-monetary costs of the merchandise. Recreational i.e. non-monetary are vital for shopping .The longer a shopper remains in store more he or she will buy. And the amount of time the shopper will spend in the store depends on how comfortable or enjoyable the experience is. So the visual stimulus and ambience must be soothing and effective so customer remains in store for longer time. Along with the merchandise, it triggered affective reaction among shoppers which creates store patronage intentions. It is evident from the above research studies, that in-store environment is critical component of store choice and sales behavior.

Visual merchandising contributes to a brand's personality and the characteristics associated with the brand. The design of the store should reflect this as part of their retail brand strategy. This includes the in-store environment and brand communications used such as signage and images displayed in-store. These visual elements all play a part in building a retail brand and therefore they help a brand differentiate itself from its competitors, create brand loyalty, and allows for a brand to place premium pricing on their products.

STORE LAYOUT

- The most common forms of store layouts include grid layout, racetrack layout and free form layout. Choosing a store layout depends on the type of store and the nature of the product sold. A grid layout is generally organized in a rectangular shape, which allows customers to shop quickly and maximize shop floor space, ideal for a supermarket or hardware store. A racetrack layout ensures that the consumer only follows one path when browsing the store. This is beneficial in the sense that the consumer will come into contact with every product on the shelf.

➤ **ATMOSPHERICS**

The atmospherics also have a large influence on the store environment. Atmospherics should all coordinate with each other to create a consistent ambience and positively influence the consumer's shopping experience and buying decision-making process. Visuals such as light and display are not always enough to enhance the overall ambience of the store, and retain customer attention; therefore, other elements such as music and scents can be used.

➤ **MUSIC**

The music played within a store can promote a brand's image, and can also aid consumers into making purchase decisions. Music that suits the style of the store and the target audience is an important factor to consider. Music with a slow tempo can cause the consumer to relax; therefore, they spend more time in the store. This leads to more contact with merchandise and increased purchasing. Having music, which is popular within the target market, can also encourage consumers to linger in the store longer.

➤ **SCENT**

Having a unique scent in a store can differentiate the brand from others. When customers smell that scent outside of the store, this will trigger their senses and remind them of that brand and its products. Scents can also trigger emotional responses for example,

- Lavender, basil, cinnamon orange– relaxing, soothing, calming, and reduces anxiety
- Peppermint, thyme, rosemary, grapefruit, eucalyptus – enterprising, stimulating, increases arousal and productivity
- Ginger, chocolate, cardamom, liquorice – romance
- Vanilla – comforting and calming
- Black pepper – sexually stimulating

Distributing scents throughout the store such as vanilla, lavender, thyme, rosemary, grapefruit, and eucalyptus can be advantageous for the retailer. These scents calm, soothe, and comfort, therefore, stimulating the consumer to loiter in the store, leading to increased merchandise awareness and increased impulse purchasing.

➤ **MANNEQUINS**

They are a tool used to show consumers what their products look like on a person. The mannequins will commonly be styled to match trends as well display the latest products available

➤ **LIGHT**

Light can be used in many ways in retail stores, from highlighting an object or area of a store to simply illuminate the entire store. Bright light can create a sense of honesty, positivity, and can promote impulse purchasing. Lighting can also be used to highlight the store layout and urge customers to flow through the store, exposing them to more merchandise.

➤ **WINDOW DISPLAY**

The first piece of visual merchandising customers encounter with a brand is the window display. Window displays are used as an initial attraction to bring customers into a store and are also used as a marketing tool to communicate the brand's image to the consumers as well as to distinguish itself from its competitors. The importance of the window display is that it is a touch point consumers have with the brand. Overall, stores who had a window display had a positive increase in sales compared to those who did not.

➤ **COLORS**

The use of color can create atmosphere, grab the attention of by-passers, and attract them to the store. Different colors can trigger different emotional responses. Using colors that associate with a certain product or brand representation is also a useful technique when planning window displays. For example, using neutral colors such as green and brown when promoting environmentally friendly products is favorable, as they give off an earthy, relaxing effect; therefore, the consumer perceives those products as environmentally friendly.

➤ GRAPHICS, PHOTOGRAPHY AND SIGNAGES

The use of graphics and photography in window displays is an effective way of communicating information to the consumer. The most common form of communication in window displays is through text and signage, especially when advertising a sale or a special. This technique is commonly directed towards price driven customers who are constantly on the look out for bargains. Colorful, bold text and graphics are used to grasp the attention of these consumers. Signage should communicate a short, clear message, which is consistent with the brand's marketing communications model. Visually, signage should be appealing to the eye and easy to read. One effective way of using signage in windows is using a self-adhesive vinyl cutout to the window; small signs in the window can also be used to communicate the price of a good or the discount. Photography can be used in a window display to enhance the theme of window or reinforce the brand's advertising campaigns.

➤ SEASONAL DISPLAYS

Adjusting window displays based on seasonal events, calendar dates, and consumerism-based holidays such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Father's Day can be a useful approach to encourage consumer purchasing. Choosing products that suit the season to display in the window can remind consumers to purchase gifts and provide gift ideas for the particular holiday

➤ FASHION TRENDS

Window displays can be used to set trends; therefore, window display designers must always be one step ahead of trends and predict future fashion movements. The merchandise must be able to direct these trends to the target audience, and be able to communicate them in a way so the audience is able to understand. Clothing must be styled on mannequins appropriately with popular clothing to draw consumer attention to the store.

CONCLUSION: Visual merchandising is a crucial retail strategy that maximises the aesthetics of a product with the intent to increase and maximise sales. A visual merchandiser plays a critical role in the look, feel and culture of a brand using design elements. Using location based analytics, retailers can also measure the impact on store performance every time they change their window or promotional displays - analysing their impact on customer draw rates, conversion rates and average transaction rates.



Image source: Self clicked

