

DRIVING RETAIL SUCCESS

Visual Merchandising Should be a Feast for the Eye!

PEARL izumi

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RMSA
Retail Solutions

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New merchandise is rolling in, but before opening those boxes consider this:

1. THINK "FIRST IMPRESSION"

First impressions are everything. Before customers walk in they've scanned your window displays, so put some thought into how they look. An unchanged window sends the wrong message, so create 12 scenes. Grab your calendar and coordinate them with your advertising schedule, local events and various holidays. For example: Winter—Get a mannequin, dress it in winter gear, use craft paper and cut out a few snowflakes. Hang them from the ceiling with transparent line, stick in a bike and presto—a winter window.

2. THINK "VISUAL"

How do customers "see" apparel when they walk in? Is it on the wall, on floor racks or hanging in the back room? Walls are a primary focal point; floor fixtures are secondary. Create an impact with walls first—a visual feast for the eye. Do it with mannequins. Create two sections, one for men the other for women. If you only have 8 feet, split it up. Then support what's on the wall with floor fixtures. Make it clear, though, which is which, particularly for shorts. There's nothing more embarrassing than a guy grabbing some women's shorts and squeezing into them.

3. THINK "ATMOSPHERE"

Can customers wander through the apparel section? Are the chrome racks too high? Lower them. Make the section less claustrophobic. Sight lines and lower fixtures are more inviting. Give customers points to focus on, not gobs of clutter. Create one or two displays with foliage and mannequins.

Music is a bottom line decision. Background music should be just that—soothing and in the background. Still, a silent shop can be deadly. Don't let music, or the lack of it, run customers out the door. Pick the middle ground.

Give your store the "sniff" test. Is it musty? Does it smell like grease? Stale pizza? A locker room? If an undefined odor lingers in the air, strategically place some air fresheners.

GET IT UP AND ON DISPLAY NOW

1. Use hangers with size rings. Be consistent when hanging shorts; hang them the same way. Hang bibs upside down so customers can tell.
2. Put shorts on a wall using the "good, better, best" rule. "Good" goes on a hang rail; "better" hangs above it; and "best" goes on a face-out so customers can see the silhouette and the panels.
3. Color is critical. Cut your wall and fixtures into color ways. Not everything needs to be on a wall, as long as what's on the wall tells a story.
4. Stick to the color wheel (ROYGBV—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet—and display them in order.
5. Move displays around every week. Keep them flowing. Don't leave them unchanged for weeks.

Quick 'N' Easy

- Spiff up the entryway. Dump old posters. Vacuum dead bugs and cobwebs from window displays.
- Study sales reports and identify slow movers, then adjust your next order.
- Stick orphans on a sale rack; donate them if they are two years old.

Get Ready

- Take digital photos of your store and study them. Get feedback to improve the store's look.
- Update benefits and features signs for new products. Time is tight when the season breaks.
- Hangers and size rings. Check your supplies.

What's Next?

- Inventory analysis—qualitative and quantitative.
- Floor plans.
- Out of the box and on to the wall.

DEALER SPOTLIGHT



Kevin Chudy of Bike N Hike, Portland, OR.

Merchandising for success is more than visual

Kevin Chudy of Bike N Hike on store atmospherics.

Here is what you can do today:

Merchandising is what customers see, smell, feel and hear (*atmospherics*). Our store's merchandising starts outside where customers "find us" when walking, driving or riding by. The decision to checkout Bike N' Hike happens outside with a clean, well-lit, appealing entry.

Once inside, customers want to see our product (*visual*) so we avoid fixtures that clash. All interior

signage should match or blend. Keep a clutter-free store and eliminate visual pollution that draws the eye away from what we sell.

Customers also need room to browse (*feel*) without feeling crowded or so they can stand back to look at and compare products. We also make it easy for parents to push a stroller through our clothing department without feeling pinched.

Smell can be a turn-off for some, especially rubber tire smell. We use an aroma service an outdoor cedar scent. The best scent is one that customers only slightly perceive; that creates an emotional sense of comfort and well being.

I've visited many stores that sound like a classic rock radio station (*hear*). Do customer tastes align with the mechanic who controls the sound system? Is the music for mechanics or to enhance a great experience for your customers? We've installed professional sound systems with flat screen TVs to boost the in-store experience.

After doing all of these changes we could then tackle an expansion. Two years ago we expanded and remodeled our flagship Portland, Oregon, store. The newly added 2,000 square feet put the focus on "women-specific" products and since then we've seen monthly sales of bikes, apparel and accessories exceed sales to men.



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