

MODEL SUCCESS

AS THE PERFECT FORM, MANNEQUINS CAN BRING TO LIFE A STORE WINDOW, AND IS THE PERFECT CANVAS TO PORTRAY ALL THE INTANGIBLES OF A BRAND - IMAGE, STYLE AND LIFESTYLE DESIRES.

It may seem like a lifeless model, but the in-store mannequin is anything but a critical aspect of the fashion retailer's visual merchandising (VM) toolbox, the mannequin can create more interest and drama than a typical clothing rack to bring any store or display to life.

Mannequins are not just fancy clothes hangers. There is a subtle art and

science to the setting up of mannequins and mannequin displays for them to be dynamic and successful, says VM expert Jose Maria Bustos.

Outshining example

No one exemplifies this more than United States-based Patina V. Since it was started in 1987, Patina V has built up a reputation for its beautiful mannequins, which

co-founder George Martin calls the "ultimate silent salesperson".

Each Patina V series is a work of art designed with a definitive look and flair that communicates a specific style and persona. From realistic mannequins that evoke classic glamour or contemporary style to abstract ones that convey whimsy, movement and drama, Patina V collections are inspired by a diverse range of subjects.

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"Like in any other design field, inspiration is always the elusive search," Martin tells INSPIRE, "In my particular field, fashion plays a very important part, and with that I mean not only the clothing, but all that it reflects; color, texture, trends, body image, and lifestyle." Each collection is envisioned as a total concept, including the setting of the models and the image they convey and emotions they evoke.

Patina V launched three recent mannequin collections; Flash is a realistic series for the young contemporary fashion market while the abstract E-Motion mimics the dynamism and drama of dance moves. Building on a line called Image, Patina V launched Image Flow, to expand the popular series of abstract featureless models with delicate hands and varied poses. Patina V mannequins are so exquisitely and realistically crafted that they are even becoming collector's items.

Perfection personified

With its perfect form and poise, the fashion mannequin is the idealised version of the perfect human body. High fashion stores constantly update in-store mannequins as these are an essential branding tool, explains Bustos. "Mannequin collections are launched several times a year and ... (stores) buy new mannequin collections each year in order to be seen as the fashion leader reflecting the trends on the Paris runways," he says.

Like a modern day Madam Tussards, Patina V crafts some of its mannequins based on actual runway superstars to reflect the latest on societal ideas of beauty, immortalising these beautiful faces and bodies.

And as a "mirror that does not talk back", Martin explains that a well

executed mannequin display creates a design and lifestyle statement that interprets a store's image and communicates this to each target market.

Bustos elaborates, "When a young and trendy girl walks into a hip junior department where the mannequins have youthful looking hair styles, the latest make-up for teenage fashion, as well as perhaps a tattoo and pierced body parts, the association is instant and it interprets the fashion in a way no other mannequin group could."

Mannequin Basics

When it comes to choosing the right mannequins for your store, there are several elements to consider: budget, staffing, store image, impact, space, and of course function. The first step, identify the target customer.

Retailers must be very clear on this. "Each new mannequin collection is usually designed with a specific range of fashion or lifestyle in mind," says Bustos, "The groupings, poses, hairstyles and make up are all targeted towards a specific customer lifestyle, so it becomes essential that retailers be clear about who their target customers are and buy mannequins that reflect that customer profile."

Another key consideration is the type of mannequin for your budget. Abstract mannequins tend to be moderately priced and can be used with a wider range



This page: Mannequins based on actual runway superstars. Opposite page: E-Motion mimics the dynamism and drama of dance moves.

displays



Image Flow is a popular series of abstract featureless models with delicate hands and varied poses.

of products. Realistic mannequins are a bit more expensive and require constant updating of hair and make up," says Bustos. After all, as the icons of the fashion forward, mannequins must never look dated.

Expanded polystyrene models are indestructible, cheap and light and are not realistic looking. Those made from urethane are pricier, but very durable, light, and offer good realism. There are also headless body forms and wall-mounted ones.

Keep in mind that cheap mannequins don't drape fabric well or create a compelling and attractive image compared to high-end models. Retailers in much of Asia often reuse the same faceless, hairless, glossy white abstract mannequins season after season, notes Bustos, due to cost concerns

and a under-appreciation of the value of mannequins. "There is a place for abstract mannequins and Patina V creates some of the most wonderful abstract collections," says Bustos, "However, one must know where, how and when to use them."

A company such as Patina V usually assists retailers to pick suitable mannequins for a brand or style. Patina V also adds value with Patina V Arts, a division that creates props and support elements to help add to mannequin displays.

If retailers are not yet convinced of the value of mannequins, Norman Glazer, the other co-founder of Patina V has some evocative advice, "(The mannequin) stirs the desire in the customer to think, 'I could look like that.' It is the replication of what the perfect woman or man is for the times." ◆irp

Choice models

Jose Maria Bustos gives some model advice on buying mannequins:

- Buy mannequins with wigs only if you update them regularly, otherwise stick to mannequins with sculpted hair
- Mannequins should never be displayed barefoot, but note that shoes are easily damaged and require updating. Consider mannequins with sculpted shoes
- Check the location of support pole on mannequins to ensure it does not hinder clothes wearing
- Always order additional mannequin body paint to cover scratches
- For multiple stores, consider buying new mannequins for your 'A' stores and rotate last year's collection to other stores for a cost-effective way to keep displays fresh
- Find the right height element for seated mannequins or it will tilt
- Mannequins come designed to go together to create rhythm and interesting juxtapositions, so ask the manufacturer on how best to group them
- Mannequins always look best presented in odd numbers



Jose Maria Bustos is a retail consultant with VMA Pte Ltd, a Singapore-based retail visual merchandising provider and consultancy. He has worked with department and specialty stores in the USA as well as clients in Asia and the Pacific Rim, including Tangs, Robinsons, Courts and Tiffany & Co in Singapore, ShopperStop department store in India, Tarra Disc and Rimo Department Stores in Indonesia and Landmark and Ayala Group in Philippines. He also conducts training and workshops for retail organisations and contributes to retail trade magazines.