



Store-design and merchandise presentation at the Singapore-based Ong Chong Jewellers' show-room

The Target Customer is the Jewel in Your Crown



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Over the years I have worked with a number of medium and high-end retail jewellers and the key concerns from a visual merchandising and design perspective are always similar. The following is my take on key issues for the Asian marketplace.

Let's begin with the most important consideration – your target customer. It is vital for any retailer to be clear as to who their target customer is and develop their retail strategy with that target customer in mind. All activities such as brand development, store

design, merchandise presentation, visual merchandising, advertising and, most importantly, product design should be geared towards attracting that target customer.

Once we are clear as to what section of the marketplace we are targeting, a step-by-step analysis of how well all the above elements fit into our target customer's lifestyle is essential.

BRANDING: For many family-owned Asian retailers, 'the brand' may have been in existence for generations. There is often a

reluctance to mess with the family logo or brand identity that their forefathers created. However, what has worked in the 60's, 70's or even the 80's with regard to design ideas as they relate to branding won't always cut it in today's style-savvy marketplace.

Just as jewellery design must change in order to stay relevant and current, so must branding strategies. Often, a good brand consultant can help you identify those elements of the brand which are worth saving (a logo, for example) as well as those which could use a total revamp or perhaps just a slight modification to make them more relevant in today's marketplace.

With the Singapore-based jewellery brand known as 'The Jewelry Box' I was asked to try and keep its unique Indian characteristics while contemporizing the brand and making it relevant to Singapore's younger generation. We achieved this by using a handwritten script for the brand name to give it a warmer, friendlier feel and creating a unique colour bar for the brand's application on packaging, advertising and other elements of the marketing mix. The result was a fresh and exciting departure from its previous look.

STORE DESIGN: Once the brand direction is clear the next important point is to ensure your store design reflects the same positioning as your branding strategy; in fact store design is a part of your branding strategy! Your marketing may bring customers to your doorstep, but whether or not they step inside will have a lot to do with how well your

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product, branding and store design work in unison to transmit your company's values. A lavish and luxurious high-end jeweller whose product offering might include large ornate items might very well prefer a store design with lots of mirrors and gold detailing that attract a flamboyant and Hollywood type client who is willing to spend on such lavish designs and be able to carry them off within their wardrobe, while a lower key yet elegant store design, as is often found at Tiffany's, with its dark wood detailing and subtle and subdued luxury, sends a message of quiet restraint which is usually more attractive to the business executive type.

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“Over the past decade, Tiffany's has embarked on a store update of their design in order to stay current and attract new, younger customers while still appealing to its old-world money customer base. The materials picked for its new store fit-out and décor were all chosen to reflect that old Madison Avenue, old-money feel in a new and contemporary way.”

and attract new, younger customers while still appealing to its old-world money customer base. The materials picked for its new store fit-out and décor were all chosen to reflect that old Madison Avenue, old-money feel in a new and contemporary way. Its merchandise presentation is also very much in alignment with its values – hence the clean, simple in-case displays where the product is king. Products are sparsely placed and neatly arranged on cream, salmon and gray silk and linen pads that help to segment the different collections from one another in the store.

The only in-case prop used at Tiffany's are the well coordinated presentation trays with the linen- and silk-covered pads. The tops of the counters are left clear except for the occasional top of counter case. This sophisticated approach to merchandising is appealing to its target customers and is noticeably different from other brands that use a wide array of in-case presentation materials.

Around the world Tiffany's is known for its whimsical and often theatrical miniature shadow box (small window) displays. This Tiffany's tradition was started in the 1960's by Tiffany's then VM designer Gene Moore and carries on until today. I have had the pleasure of creating a few of these miniature concepts myself and the key to their success is the design and construction of the window itself.

Designed with a proscenium, which helps to focus your attention on the scene in the window, Tiffany's is the only jewellery brand I know that wisely invests in technically superb theatrical lighting which comes with floodlights, spotlights, baffle shades as well as glass coloured gels which can withstand the high temperatures these lamps generate. This special equipment is placed at the sides and the top and sometimes underneath the window platform to create that unique Tiffany's effect. The other distinguishing element is the internal construction of the window which allows multiple lighting techniques, heat ventilation, easy access and change

of backdrops and props, all to give the viewer that special Tiffany's window experience!

Nearer to home, Singapore-based Ong Chong jewellers is a perfect example of an old established jewellery business that was being outpaced by younger, trendier brands that were quickly expanding in Singapore and moving into its core businesses of gold and traditional Chinese offerings. Ong Chong desperately needed to recreate itself.

In order to stay competitive it rebranded itself with a new identity created by A.S. Loukin (brand consultants), a new store design by Ed Poole and Associates (a leading Singapore-based design firm) and project coordination of both the brand and store design, as well as the merchandise presentation, by VMA Pte Ltd.

Before the makeover, Ong Chong's merchandise presentation consisted of showcasing all rings together in a large assortment, all chains together (by different thicknesses), all gold bracelets together and on and on...in a traditional manner used by many old-time Chinese jewelers, with all cases lined with bright-red satin.

This recent recreation of the branding, store design, merchandise presentation and visual merchandising speaks volumes about Ong Chong's desire to be current and relevant in today's hip market place, while still living up to its traditional values of great customer service, quality products, unique designs and value. Now it's also providing a better shopping experience and better merchandise presentation where items are easily identifiable and sensibly presented by style, collection or material.

There are lessons there for any retailer.

The author is a leading authority on visual merchandising. He has lived for many years in Singapore, where he runs his own consultancy, VMA Pte Ltd. Jose Maria Bustos is presently Creative Director of VMA Pte Ltd, a Visual Merchandising consultancy with expertise in design and VM training based in Singapore (www.visualmerchandisingasia.com). He is one of the 2008 winners of the Institute of Store Planners/VMSD 1st Place Award for 'Specialty Department Store Design'. He also has an MFA (San Francisco Art Institute) and BFA (SFAI) as well as being a Rockefeller Fellow (museum studies and education). Jose Maria has worked within the Visual Merchandising Industry for over thirty five years having worked for companies like I. Magnin & Co., Saks Fifth Avenue, Marshall Field's & Co., Dayton's & Hudson's department stores and C.K. Tangs. He has written articles for Retail Asia Publishing and for Retail Biz, published by the Times of India and recently several articles for InSpire Retail, Capitalands in house magazine.