

displays



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WITH DESIGNERS INTRODUCING NEW TRENDS EVERY SEASON, FASHION RETAILERS SHOULD CONSTANTLY REFRESH THEIR VISUAL DISPLAYS AND INTRODUCE CREATIVE IDEAS, SAYS RETAIL CONSULTANT JOSE MARIA BUSTOS.

MAKING SMALL THINGS MATTER

pens, jewellery, knick-knacks and all the pretty things that comprise home décor — small items like these often cause display headaches. However, retailers can show them off in a coherent, attractive way with a bit of effort and skill, leading to more customers and better sales.

Display basics

According to international Visual Merchandising (VM) consultant Jose Maria Bustos, there are two key components to VM: Window display and in-store display. Overall, store design is the most important aspect of VM, so foresight and planning are essential.

“Think about what you are selling before designing your store rather than designing the store and trying to fit in the

Opposite page: Creating a focused window draws customers into the store, while customisable shelves allow the displays to be varied. Space need not be a constraint; thoughtful arrangement of ribbons and craft materials can engage shoppers with the display of colours.

This page: Stunning colour separation on a wall makes it a focal point and draws customers deeper into the store.



product,” he stresses. It is also worth ensuring that fixtures, like shelves, are customisable so that they can be rearranged to refresh the display from time to time.

For window displays, consider: “Do you want it to be open so that customers can look inside the store? Or do you want it to be closed so customers can focus on the window presentation?”

Ideally, if you are showing small items, you need a small window and if larger items, a big window. When displaying small items in a large window, mask the window, cut out shapes at eye level and use “risers” to elevate products to showcase them.

“In this way, you can create pretty vignettes (decorative designs) that customers can focus on,” says Bustos. An example would be the simple but whimsical motifs used by L’Occitane that often involve dainty displays of flowers, leaves and fruit consistent with the brand’s organic themes.

Make it beautiful

A common mistake is to use window displays to sell all your goods, cluttering the display, Bustos adds. “Windows are not meant to sell. They are the first point of interaction with the community and should speak to the bigger issues.”

The objective of the window is to get customers into the store; it is the work of in-store staff to sell, he says, adding: “Windows should be beautiful.” It is not necessary to display products in window to hard-sell them; be creative instead.

For example, hardware stores in Asia tend to be very practical in nature, but home and hardware stores can take a different approach, says Bustos, “for example, suspending a grid of light bulbs of different shapes and colours hanging at different heights in the window at eye level, to create a multicoloured, multifaceted display.”

A leader in window dressing is renowned American jeweller Tiffany & Co. which has a long history of beautiful window displays, he adds. The most memorable were the work of the great window-dresser Gene Moore, who, in his almost 45-year career with Tiffany, created about 5,000 window displays.

Create drama

Being the first point of communication with potential customers, window displays should appeal to the senses and human emotion. “Create drama. Employ stories, create a stage and use theatrical lighting,” Bustos recommends.



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This page: Smart organisation pays. It showcases items and helps customers find purchases.

Opposite page: Drama can be simple and engaging; it should appeal to the senses and relate to the merchandise or brand.

The vibrant colours and staging of Anna Sui Cosmetics is one example where lighting and props are used to create depth and stories.

Drama can be also simple. When Moore was commissioned to design the first Tiffany window displays, he started the signature “closed” look that has been the hallmark of all the stores since then.

One memorable Moore display was of a series of hollowed out white eggshells strung up at different heights, the delicate shells illuminated with blue light. In the centre of this “stage” was a single sapphire ring. By turning a simple, everyday object like an egg into a piece of art, Moore managed to create the drama, whimsy and allure.

“Your windows should be talking points,” emphasises Bustos. “They should get people talking such that they say to others: You must visit this store.”

Primary colours

The effectiveness of colour cannot be underestimated. Decide on a “colour story” to enhance the look of the store, both

inside and out. “It can be monochromatic or multi-toned,” says Bustos. Accessories shops like Diva, Aldo Accessories and the like tend to use this tip to great effect.

In a closed window display, one can also do a different colour for each window cut-out to showcase products in a very attractive way, such as an all-red window display or a minimalist look. A good example is Singapore paper retailer, Prints. Internationally, Swedish paper and paper accessories store Ordning & Reda is renowned for its bold colour displays.

In the news

“Windows are a reflection of what’s going on in the wider society, so use global and current affairs to draw attention to your windows and make them relevant to your shoppers,” encourages Bustos.

“When Singapore won the team table-tennis silver medal at the Olympics, it would have been a marvellous opportunity to create a window display around table-tennis, regardless of the products on show. It is an easy way to engage shoppers, and the components are not expensive.”



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.



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8 basic steps to consider in VM

- Select a merchandise category
- Decide on your colour story
- Create a theme
- Select appropriate and related props to suit the theme
- Select the right mannequins
- Select accessories to complement the theme
- Sketch proposed window display
- Budget for and plan an annual window schedule, allocating resources for each quarter of the year

Bakery chain BreadTalk, for instance, not only initiates in-store promotions and decor, it even creates signature breads that make the most of events like store inaugurations and the recent Formula One Grand Prix Race in Singapore.

Neat freak

In-store, clever organisation not only helps customers find purchases, it also showcases items to facilitate sales. The rule of thumb is to think about the end-use of a product and group together all the items with similar use.

“Within this category, I would separate them according to material, followed by the different styles of the product. Then break it down further by colour,” Bustos advises. Doing this will make your shelf presentation more attractive and consistent. Doing colour separation on a wall particularly will make it a focal point and draw customers deeper into the store.

Basic organisation tips: Always stack small items at the top, medium sizes at eye level and large items at the bottom. When organising on a wall shelf, the general rule is to arrange small to large items from top to bottom and left to right.

Furniture and lifestyle store Barang Barang plays well with themes, colours and sizes. In some cases, breaking the neatness rule may work — such as vintage stores where

clutter is charming and encourages customers to browse and discover — but only if it’s in line with the values and image of the company.

Target well

In-store displays and merchandise must speak to their target audience, and it helps to think creatively about who the market audience is. It is also important to keep in mind that while aiming to attract the market, the market too is evolving. Singapore shoe retailer, DMK, which recently contemporised its stores, has employed VM to evolve with the times.

This sensitivity to and awareness of the audience is something that helps the creative targeting of new markets. Hardware stores are one group of retailers that often miss out on attracting women customers, Bustos observes. “More women now are independent homeowners and they have a very different sensibility about decorating than men.”

Restoration Hardware store in the United States, for example, targets women strongly with prettily packaged toolboxes, tools and gardening tools in matching colours. “It’s like a fashion boutique, but they sell paints and rubber gloves,” says Bustos. “It makes the store unique.” ◆irp