

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.

FASHION FORWARD

Why is VM especially important for fashion retailers?

Because of the quarterly and seasonal factors related to fashion retail and its additional themes of cruise wear, colour trends, silhouettes, ethnic themes, etc, all of which need to be projected in a strong, comprehensive manner and on a timely basis, the fashion retailer needs to sell through before the next season and therefore, displays must look fresh, new and different every few months.

Where does a fashion retailer start when it comes to planning the VM for his store?

Truth be known, most creative people get their inspiration by looking at what their competitors are

doing and then improving on it. To quote my friend Jay Parry: "Creation isn't making something out of nothing. Instead it's organising existing elements into new and different wholes".

One great creative tool I recommend to my clients is called the Seven Simple Steps of SCAMPER, which is used by professionals in our industry to help them re-interpret ideas they find interesting. SCAMPER stands for: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Minify, Magnify, Put to other uses, Eliminate, Reverse or Rearrange.

What are some of the most important tools a retailer can use to create displays with impact?

A strong and well executed wall presentation is not



Opposite page: High ceilings allow for staggered floor heights and strong lighting effects.

This page: Visual Merchandising can brighten up a department with interesting carpet patterns and fixture designs like these 'Chutes and Ladder' fixtures in the children's department.

only an attention-getter, it also makes for a pleasant and easy shopping experience, and is one of the strongest statements a retailer can make about the brand and the company's values.

Some key points to consider for a store wall presentation are: folded versus hanging, faced-out versus shoulder hang, signage, forms, colours, lighting, etc. I personally like it when wall presentations are mixed for interest, and floor fixtures are varied in height to create visual rhythm.

Many retailers design their store walls with horizontal hang bars, which do give them more hanging capacity, but it's a nightmare for the shopper. Face-outs on the other hand, allow you to highlight the detailing of the merchandise and create strong colour presentations on walls that will draw customers into your store.

I'm also a strong believer in providing product information. But this needs to be planned into your wall presentation in order to strengthen it and not detract from it – what size, what colour, what information, which placement and how it will be attached. Suppose we need to add graphics to the wall, what size, what format?

Then comes the lighting: is it distanced far enough from the wall to give it a strong wash of light in order to 'pop' the whole wall presentation. Are there a few spot lights for

highlighting the graphics? All of this must be anticipated prior to setting up the wall display, otherwise it's extremely difficult to achieve.

Should retailers focus their energies on creating special themes for key occasions (eg. Christmas) or should they update the display themes on a more frequent basis?

Fashion retail stores should consider changing their windows weekly. If that is not possible, then twice a month, but absolutely not less than that.

Shop windows are a barometer of seasonal and social events. A shop's windows establishes the time of year and, very likely, a timely contemporary event. It might be a film release; it might combine seasonal points of the year such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter or Mother's Day. At other times, propping might be based on colour schemes, materials or cultural themes. The possibilities for innovative ideas around such themes are endless.

What are some interesting and out-of-the-box ways to showcase merchandise?

An example which comes to mind is a window I saw at Barneys New York where they used wooden ladders to display men's dress shirts which were hung on the ladder rungs. Around the ladder, they also hung bare light bulbs that were lit from industrial wire.

Another window at Saks Fifth Avenue had wooden beams criss-crossing the window at different angles. One each of the different shoe styles were placed along the top of the beams. Both displays were extremely simple but were very well lit using theatrical lighting and colour gels which created a dramatic impact.

Cost is always a concern, especially for smaller retailers. What are some ways they can produce stunning VM displays without busting their budgets?

In fashion retail, 'less is more' unless you are a seasoned designer with a budget. Try to keep your window design simple and showcase the merchandise. Choose a theme

"IN FASHION RETAIL, 'LESS IS MORE' UNLESS YOU ARE A SEASONED DESIGNER WITH A BUDGET."



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Visual Merchandisers can play a key role in creating excitement in flooring, ceilings, lightings and much more.



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such as sports, and carry that same theme through all your windows. For example, one window might have a tennis theme; and another window might have a golf theme. Always ensure the props do not overwhelm the merchandise.

Do you need a large investment to create an effective display?

With many regional retailers enlarging their footprint by entering markets like China and India, local retailers will need to step up to the plate with regards to VM spending or be eaten up by the western firms.

Fashion retailers should try to budget for window presentations, with a slightly heavier expenditure for December. Even if it's a small budget, once they are clear as to what they have to work with, they will be able to adapt their creativity accordingly. Also, window designs should be planned at least two weeks in advance of the installation date to allow proper preparation time and follow through.

Which fashion retailers, in your opinion, have succeeded in creating VM displays with impact?

Luxury retailer Gucci changes their windows regularly and all stores globally have the same window design. Their displays are successful because they are simple and easy to install, while still being attention-getting and creative.

Zara is good example of a mass merchandiser who does a wonderful job of keeping the stores looking fresh and the windows looking very dramatic. They do have a corporate VM team to develop their concepts and these concepts are sent via detailed guidelines to all stores for implementation.

Tangs is my local favourite. They have a generous annual VM budget, as well as an outstanding VM team that just focuses on VM. They are also skilled in computer graphics. Tangs works closely with a tight group of outside contractors who are well versed in window display. Their strength is in their ability to manipulate the mediums they use such as digital printing and stickers. They creatively use these elements in new and innovative ways in order to achieve unique effects. ♦FP