

**THE
ADVANCED
OFFICE
ASSISTANT**

MERCHANDISING

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Retail is a competitive business. Do not fool yourself - even if your product is completely unique, you still have competition. There is always another store down the street - or in the next mall - that is aiming for your customers' wallet. Customers have a limited amount of disposable income, but their choices of where to spend it are infinite!

WHAT IS MERCHANDISING?

Merchandising is the “silent sales person” in every retail outlet. It strives to enhance, promote and peak interest in products without saying a word. It also tells customers more about the business – your level of professionalism, the ranges that you carry in stock and how “friendly” your business is.

Here are some helpful hints to help you create displays that will get the customers' attention:

1. Create a focal point

An overwhelming display or a boring one can both have the same problem - a lack of focal point.

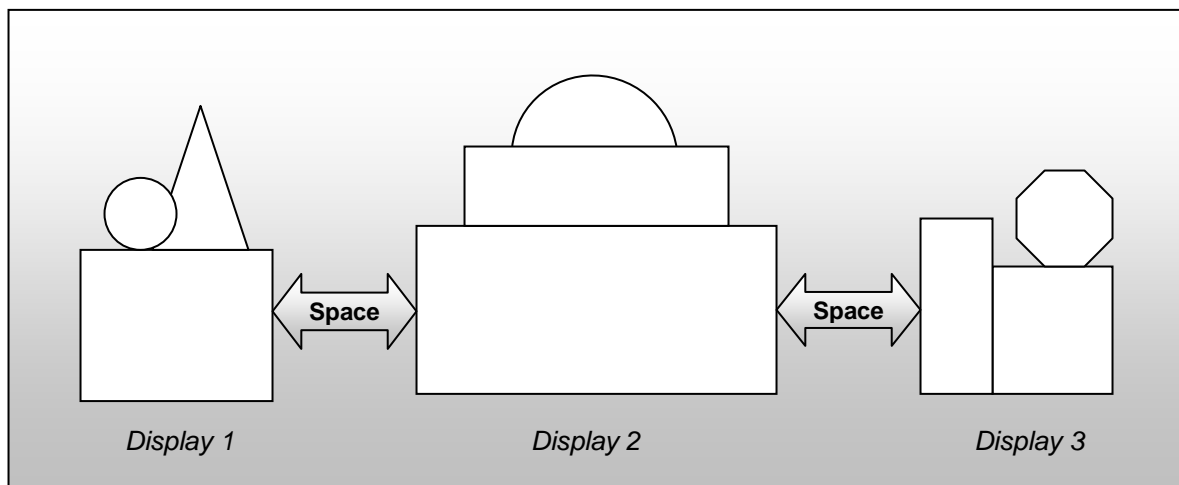
- Where do you want your viewer to look?
- Is there one main feature you want them to notice?
- Where will the eye travel through the display? Don't leave this to chance. Plan what the customer should do when they see the display. Perhaps a new product is the main focal point, with complimentary items placed in close proximity to encourage multiple sales.
- Many window and table displays are too low. The focal point should be at eye level to most viewers. Visitors will not make an effort to get a good look at your display, they will simply walk by without noticing.

2. Use line and shape to plan your design

Do not just put your products together willy-nilly. Draw a quick layout to help you visualize the plan for your design.

- Will your layout be horizontal or vertical?
- Will the products be arranged in straight or curved lines, in a pyramid or circular shape?
- Will the design combine a variety of elements, or just one?

To experiment with this, draw a rectangle that is roughly the same shape as your display space. Sketch geometric shapes such as squares, rectangles, circles, semi-circles and triangles in various combinations to get a sense of an appealing layout. For instance, a large triangle could represent an arrangement of goods. A long vertical rectangle to the left of the triangle would represent signage placement.



Basic Merchandising principles in the retail industry

3. Create balance

Strong displays have visual balance. Dark colours appear heavier than light ones. Large objects appear heavier than small ones. This seems straightforward, but you need to think about this as you plan your display. Generally larger, darker items should be placed near the bottom of a display, with lighter items at the top to avoid appearing top heavy. Placing too many items or heavy looking items on

one side appears unbalanced. A grouping of many items on one side of the display can be balanced by one heavy item in just the right place on the other side. Think of weights on an old fashioned scale to get an idea of how this works.

Does balance matter? We all respond emotionally to visual stimuli. Creating a display is about creating a mood and a desire within the consumer. A lack of balance creates an impression of instability and anxiousness. The consumer is not even aware of the feeling; he or she simply searches out an environment or merchandise presentation that gives them a positive feeling and creates an appealing mood.

Avoid a cluttered effect. General rule of thumb is one display grouping per 1.5 square meters. Always keep in mind to keep a space between each display to compartmentalize your products.

4. Keep it simple

Do not try to do too much. The goal is to attract attention to the product and to make it easy for the customer to find what they are looking for. Keep your groupings logical by grouping similar products together, with complimentary products nearby. (I.e.: Spectacles and Sunglasses with cords and cases nearby or Contact lens accessories with contact lens solutions nearby.)

5. Use proper lighting

Lighting is overlooked far too often. When budgeting for store fixtures and merchandising, display lighting is not an 'extra'. Lighting your displays properly can make the difference between a display that makes people yawn, or makes them stop and look.

Displays should not be lit directly from the top as you will get unattractive shadows. Lights should be slightly off to the side, and to the front of the display. They should enhance the 3-dimensional quality of the product. Preferably the

display should be lit from more than one angle. Lighting should be adjusted every time you change your display.

If you do not have adjustable lights in your key display areas and windows, get some as soon as possible. A good lighting store will have some for a reasonable cost and can give you advice on installing and using them.

6. Look at the display from all angles

After you have completed your display, step back and look at it. Very few people will see if they are standing directly in front of it. Approach your display from all possible angles and view it as a customer would.

- Is your focal point still placed appropriately?
- Do you need to angle the display to the customer's viewpoint?
- Is the signage visible and readable?
- Does the arrangement still appear balanced?

Observe the direction from which most customers approach the display. Make sure that the best view of the display is the one that most of the customers will see.

7. Frame display units

This is a much-debated topic in the Optometric Industry. Some feel they should merchandise by colour while others feel it should be by style or even price. Some say it should be merchandised by gender.

There are no specific rules for Optometric merchandising only. All the retail rules apply to our industry. How does it affect us?

The first deciding factor is merchandising space. If your practice only allows for 3 frame display units, it is not possible to categorize too much. If on the other hand you have ten, categorizing your frames will work well in the practice.

Whether you have three or ten cabinets, follow these guidelines:

- All frames must be tagged. Always ensure that price tags are clean and fresh and on the same side of the frame. Tags must never obstruct the sales process.
- If your display cabinets allow it, categorize your frames by supplier (one supplier per gondola only). In this supplier display, keep gent's frames, ladies frames, unisex frames and children's frames separate and arrange them by colour – darkest colours on the bottom and lighter colours on top.
- If cabinets are not merchandised by supplier, first categorize it by style and then by colour.
- To merchandise sunglasses, use one of the following rules: If your stock is merchandised by supplier, arrange one row of sunglasses on the left. Use the rest of the cabinet for prescription frames. Alternatively, if your frames are not merchandised by supplier, display all the sunglasses in one section. The “first by style and then by colour” rule applies.
- If you are merchandising by supplier, always ensure that you have sufficient stock of both prescription frames and sunglasses to keep the cabinet full and to keep a few frames for back-up to fill the gaps. (Representatives should manage their stock on your shelf to ensure that you are always carrying the latest models and that “dead” stock is replaced.)

8. Display stands

These stands are generally used to display cords and chains, spectacle cases, lubricants and solutions, etc. Whatever it is you are displaying, ensure that the correct message is conveyed.

- Gondolas should always be clean and free of dust – even if your neighbour is breaking down the building!
- All items must be clearly priced.
- Merchandise contact lens solutions by supplier – Cleaning solutions and wetting solutions next to one another.

- When merchandising cords and chains, merchandise it by colour. This makes it easy for the customer to select. Leather with leather, chains with chains, beads with beads, etc.
- Merchandise Spectacle cases first by style and then by colour.

MERCHANDISING STRATEGY TIPS

Impulse buying

Never miss an opportunity to tempt the customer into buying something they did not plan for. The influence of in-store stimuli such as displays, shelf positioning, packaging and of course price, is important in the purchasing decision. Items such as sunglasses, ready readers, cords, chains, spectacle cases and contact lens accessories which are often bought on impulse should be strategically positioned to secure the best impact.

Hot spots

A “Hot spot” is a prominent or highly visible area which promotes rapid sales of stock. These spots are often used only for discounted and slow-moving stock but can be used in many different ways. In stead of highlighting the discounted price of a sale item, highlight the benefits and features of quality high-end products. Use it on gondola ends, in aisles, waiting areas and till points.

Cost-effective ways to keep Merchandising fresh:

- **Upgrade lighting** whenever you can. Retail store windows especially need to be well lit. There are some great little halogen spotlights out there that are inexpensive and easy to install. They are terrific for highlighting display areas. Just make sure they are installed safely and the cords are unobtrusive.
- **An inexpensive can of paint** can be used to paint your fixtures to match, or touch up chips and keep things looking new.

- **Fabric and paper** are two valuable display helpers. Use them under or behind a display to provide a backdrop, use a scarf to add colour and movement to a static arrangement. To avoid a busy look, stick to a few colours and textures that complement your store design and merchandise.
- Attend a seminar or spend a couple of hours with a retail consultant to learn some display and merchandising techniques. Get a free initial consultation.
- **Pretend you are a customer** and take a look at your storefront. Try to see the store as the customer would see it. What do you notice? Are you struggling to get customers to come into your store?
- Sit down and make a list of **adjectives which describes the image you want to achieve** for your store. Before you make merchandising plans, check your list to stay focused. A great idea in another store won't necessarily fit your image.

HOUSEKEEPING AND MAINTENANCE

An important aspect to always remember is that your customers must feel absolutely comfortable in their shopping environment or in this case – your practice. Just as you will (hopefully) not invite guests to your home when it is messy, do not expect your customers to feel welcome in your practice if it reflects untidiness and neglect.

Because you are in the practice every day of the week, it is easy to overlook the general appearance and maintenance. Do not fall into this trap! Your customers will notice it and draw their own conclusions about the kind of business you run.

Remember – the appearance of the practice reflects your professional image!

Always focus on the following:

- **Windows** – should always be kept clean and free of dust and stains
- **Entrance doors** – same as above. *Only* have trading hours and emergency contact numbers on your doors.
- **Interior walls** – A fresh coat of paint works wonders. Keep walls clean and free of stains. Look out for surface cracks and peeling paint.
- **Ceilings** – Keep your ceilings well maintained. Watch out for black stains around air vents which appear over time.
- **General wiring** – Keep wiring out of sight. Not only is it unsightly but it can pose danger.
- **Point of sale (POS) on counters** – A customer should NEVER have to see the junk kept behind service counters. Keep your point of sale material immaculate at all times! Don't clutter it with too much merchandise – only place it when the POS allows for it.
- **Merchandise** – All merchandise must be current, clean and free of dust – even if it is on sale! If a price tag is stained from dusting or cleaning, reprint it!
- **Fixtures and fittings** – These must be kept free of dust and clean at all times. Ensure that marks from cellotape and prestic are removed.
- **In-store and window displays** – Displays must be checked daily or even twice daily. (Dispenser must ensure to replace a frame when removing another after a sale.) Replace posters if they are torn or look old.
- **Empty spaces** – Never run out of your best sellers and never leave gaps on display stands. Should this happen for a reason outside of your control, manage the empty space by re-arranging stock or setting up a temporary merchandising area in its place.
- **Staff** – The appearance of your staff goes a long way in adding to your the overall image of your practice. Uniformed staff wearing name tags always reflects a professional image.

Keep a housekeeping checklist that includes the above points and use it regularly to ensure that all areas of your merchandising add value to your practice.