

VISUAL MERCHANDISING WINDOW DISPLAY

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Abstract: *Window display plays a major part in the selling strategies; it does not only include the simple display of goods, nowadays it is a form of art, also having the purpose of sustaining the brand image. This article wants to reveal the tools that are essential in creating a fabulous window display. Being a window designer is not an easy job, you have to always think ahead trends, to have a sense of colour, to know how to use light to attract customers in the store after only one glance at the window. The big store window displays are theatre scenes: with expensive backgrounds, special effects and high fashion mannequins. The final role of the displays is to convince customers to enter the store and trigger the purchasing act which is the final goal of the retail activity.*

Key words: *visual merchandising, brand image, designer, window display, customers' behaviour*

1. Introduction

Retailers are facing an unpredictable environment that offers a various number of threats, but also great opportunities for development. An important part of the promotional strategy which retailers use nowadays is window display. This is a display of goods in a window designed to attract customers, but now it becomes crucial for big retailers to use windows not only to present their products, as windows “are created to enthuse and challenge the consumer and ultimately entice them into the store”. [3]

Visual merchandising is defined as the “activity which coordinates effective merchandise selection with effective merchandising display”. [4]

The purpose of visual merchandising is to attract, engage and give the proper

motivation to the customer, having sales as the final result.

The history of visual merchandising started with Marshall Field&Co, in the 19th century, when the line of business changed from wholesale to retail. He started to use store windows to display the goods attractively.

Window displays serve not only the purpose of conveying the type and positioning of merchandise to customers, but they can also be used to promote the strategies and images of the corporation itself. The store environment can affect the different types and levels of consumer behaviour (Kotler, 1973)

In the 21st century, window display is art. It represents an attractive way to communicate with customers and to distinguish oneself from competitors, an important marketing tool that has been

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neglected within the literature, but plays a major part in the development of a business. The major benefits brought by this tool are: the process of communicating a definite brand image; creating a brand image by integrating it into the brand strategy; shaping the image between the market competitors; usage of modern and innovative technology; presenting a special event for the retailer, the customer or the environment.

Window display actually represents a visual merchandiser's tool that has always had to be eye-catching, having the role of attracting the customers and produce sales. But nowadays it represents the brand image, having the role to promote trends in fashion and the final purpose to drive sales.

If consumers have positive and favourable attitudes towards products, they will act accordingly, by purchasing the products when the need occurs and providing positive image forward. The main objective of any marketing communication tool is to provide the most important information to the target audience in the sense of encouraging a positive response, materialized in buying the company's products. Any marketing communication activity has to accomplish AIDA, that means to get customer's Attention, to keep their Interest, to generate Desire and to make them take Action.

The most important functions of the window displays are: to attract attention, to create interest, to invite customers in the store and finally to generate sales. On the average, a person has 11 seconds to analyse a window display, not a lot of time to convince the customer to buy something, but enough to create curiosity.

2. The power of colour

"A successful window display includes an imaginative colour scheme that will complement the product, help enforce a brand or simply be used to support a

window theme. Either way, the visual merchandiser never underestimates the power of colour, the aid the creativity." [3]

It is well known that each colour has a distinctive effect on consumers. A perfect window will have to take into consideration how to use colour wisely. If you have a store for kids for example, you have to use bright colours. When you want a dramatic effect, you have to use dark colours. You have to keep in mind that bright colours give you space, while dark colours shrink your space.

Using colours internationally can be tricky, because the meaning of one colour in one country can have a total different meaning in another; let us take white, for example: it can mean dead in many Muslim countries (the mourning colour) and purity in other countries. If you speak about the opposite colour, black, this can mean Lenten season in Latin America, and the same story is with purple. Red means good look for many oriental cultures and for others it is the symbol of vitality, danger, love or aggression. Red is often used for the Christmas windows, or for sales; it attracts shoppers and it intensifies the shopping appetite. Pale green is a signature of Prada's windows, but it is also frequently used in hospitals because of its calming nature; this colour can also mean death in some Muslim countries.

It is said that French-Canadians respond more to warm colours (red, yellow), while for attracting Anglo Canadians you have to use cool colours (green, blue, white).

The combination of mannequin, lighting and background in a window display and a store highlight can further intensify the decision process where the former affects the affective pleasure of consumers and helps them determine the suitability of a store's retail identity to personal preference; it also intensifies the sensational feeling of consumers and encourages the tendency to try on or purchase, a fact which directly relates to the pre-purchase stage.

Emotional Response to Colour

Table 1

Color	Emotional Response
Blue	A cool color (makes room seem cooler). Calms and relaxes excited people. Makes time seem to pass quickly. Tends to stimulate thought processes and encourage conversation.
Green	Easy on the eyes. A cool color. Restful and tranquil. Stimulates conversations. Makes time seem to pass quickly.
Red	Excites and stimulates. Induces aggression. Makes time seem to pass more slowly.
Yellow	A cheerful color. Creates a feeling of warmth and happiness. Draws attention. Boosts morale.
Orange	Friendly, warm and vibrant. Exhilarating.
Violet and Purple	A cool color. Tends to lend elegance and sophistication. Royal.
Brown	Relaxing and warm.
Gray	Depressing. Cool.

Source: <http://www.ricksegel.com/blog/bid/78878/Recommended-Article-Visual-Merchandising-Tips-and-Techniques-of-Visual-Merchandising>

There were some window designers that tried to use monochromatic schemes. It is a recipe that creates impact on consumers, and attracts attention on a product or an important element in the window. Usually window displays follow the trends and only seldom create new ones.

There is no doubt that colour is the most powerful tool in window design, it creates the background and a window professionally designed transmits the right energy to the customer.

3. Graphics in window display

The invention of the adhesive vinyl lettering in the 1980's was an important step for window design, because since then retailers have used this concept and applied sticky colourful lettering to their displays. But this practice started earlier, with all the signs being handmade.

The usage of graphics and of photography has proven to be an efficient tool to communicate with the client. The most frequently used situation for the signage is for the sales period, when the window displays announce and compete in sales. Frequently during sales periods, retailers announce big sales in the window display, creating the effect that everything in the store is on sale, even if this is not true. Another usage of graphics is for creating a story, by giving short directions and communicating directly with the customer.

Photography is used to transpose the client into another world. This is a recent tool, not as old as graphics, but it has a significant importance in the marketing communication tools.

It is common that during sales, retailers cover their windows with big graphic meshes or undress all mannequins. This is a

strong message that only confident brand owners can send. There is a middle way to do that developed by Harvey Nichols: he covered the window display with sale inscription, but also made room for the products.

4. The influence of technology

Retailers are always searching new ways of attracting customers, and technology plays a major part for this objective. A very important part in the technological process is played by lighting.

The first use of window lighting was made by Harry Gordon Selfridge who introduced gas lamps to his London store in 1909, so that his customers could see the window display and the products even at night.

A product can be very easily highlighted with a proper source of light, with the right colour light and at the right intensity.

The lighting process is usually overlooked in window design, because of the high costs and the level of knowledge required in this process. But when it is used well, it can emphasize the right product, it can create the right mood for customers and for the window scene.

Many stores are now using computer software that adjusts the brightness or even the colour of the window lightning depending on the outside light level, if it is day or night, creating a window that always stands out irrespective of the time of the day. It takes into consideration that during the day, the window needs more light, because it competes with the sun light.

Robert Stadler, one of Dior's designers, was able to make products appear and disappear from the window displays while the customer's reflection did the identical thing, by using a sophisticated lighting program.

Besides lighting, a pretty used concept is movement, so the visual merchandiser will try to attract customers by replacing the

static scenes with dynamic figures or objects. Take for example the Selfridges window from 2009, where the designers used flying mannequins, spinning umbrellas.

A special window was created by the photographer Helmut Newton, in which customers were given the opportunity to take a picture of them. It was a great idea that gathered a lot of viewers and became a model of technological innovations in window displays.

5. Window display as a story teller

Globalization determined the movement of the globe population from one country to another, from one city to another. The migration trends are now towards the big cities, where everything has a different shape. The big companies invest a lot of money in their visual merchandising, and they create a real show in their window displays. That means big budgets and great ideas, planned ahead. But the final result is a piece of art, a story directed by big retailers.

The main purpose of a dramatic window is to shock consumers, to start rumours, to ask questions or to create other strong reactions. The window display designed by Viktor&Rolf at Selfridges, London is well known, as they have installed a window display upside down.

For big stores, one window designed as a theatre stage is not enough, and they usually create some continuous stories in different windows. That means that consumers perceive a real story, and realize the real talent of true designers, who bringing the real stage in window displays stores. But these are not the only two reasons, as a continuous scene in several windows also engages the customer into the story, and buys time to convince the customer to enter in the store and make an acquisition.

There are cases when the theatrical display does not include any products. They are

only conceived to tell a story and demonstrate customers and competitors how proficient the brand is.

6. Seasonal displays

Throughout the year visual merchandisers have many opportunities to find new and interesting themes for store customers, the traditional celebration of the religious events being the perfect opportunity for buying a gift or something nice for friends or family.

It is said that retailers make good profits from holidays and they try to promote the existing ones, Christmas for example, and to invent new ones, like Mother's Day, Father's day and so on.

Christmas is by far the most important and abundant in customers, it is the moment when sales are on the pick, and for that window designers prepare fabulous displays. The process of planning this type of window can start many months in advance.

Department stores usually use Christmas window display to promote family and its values. It is very common to present children with a large wish list.

But there are of course, exceptions. Selfridges London made a series of window displays, in one of them Santa Clause shopping in a supermarket and gathering oversized groceries. This was followed by the second display with Santa breakdances amongst a collection of empty glasses.

It is possible for some big retailers to try to draw attention on some social themes. Barneys' used a Christmas window display to send an ecological message.

Breaking the Christmas window display tradition is a tool that draws a lot of attention.

Special window displays are not only made for Christmas, there are also other special holidays like Valentine's Day or Halloween, or special events like the

Olympic Games, Wimbledon, and Football Cups and so on.

7. Fashion trends in window display

The main role of a window designer is to transpose fashion trends into an impact window design; this has to be adapted to the present trends of their own segment of customers.

Usually, window displays are seen to be trend setters, so window designers have to take care to respect the trends and furthermore to predict the future ones.

A window display from Selfridges London recreated the catwalk show from the Alexander McQueen's 2008 Autumn/Winter in the main window. This kind of collaboration gives a clear advantage, because it allows the brand's image to be represented as the designer intended.

The most simple and efficient way to attract customers into a store is to use must-have season clothes on the mannequins.

Zara simply presents their products inspired from Gucci or Prada, but with a very different price tag. This retailer is famous for its monochromatic displays, which are big hits in Europe.

The most expensive window displays are put in scene by luxury fashion houses, even though, in the past, they relied only on high couture products.

Retailers use a brand dedicated window to attract attention on a certain brand, but also mix brand windows, to create universal trends.

A special design by Vivienne Westwood was made for Selfridges. She presented a dress into a bubble, and the accessories in smaller bubbles. With this image she gave the products special meanings: delicate, unique and special.

"There is no doubt that following fashion trends is important for a visual merchandiser specializing in fashion, but trends are vital in other areas of retail too. A

home, food or cosmetic visual merchandiser will also need to be aware of movements within their industry. It is no longer just about shape, style and size of the product, but about who is wearing, eating or talking about it. A successful visual merchandiser gathers the trends from their customers and competitors, as well as obvious catwalk shows.[3, pg.170]

8. What's happening now in Romania

After focusing on how window displays in big cities are, we have to look at what happens with our domestic window displays. Big companies certainly keep a line for window displays, so they send the same message through their displays.

There are few retailers that hire window designers to conceive artistic window displays. But the budgets are limited, so we can hardly find real pieces of art in the displays.

Most retailers try to highlight the products from the window displays, to create an attractive window starting from a product and seldom from an idea of design.

Gradually, big retailers have entered on the Romanian market, they brought with them not only the business, but also the new ideas and trends in the window display area. That forced the market to develop and local retailers to compete for their market share by using different tools, like window displays.

9. Conclusions

Consumer expectation on window design have increased, this means that the public are now more educated always seeking something new and exciting. Offering these things involves knowing your audience, their expectations and their desires.

An important and low cost marketing tool is represented by the window display. It has the role to present products, the brand and to transform passers-by into customers. It is not very easy to build an eye-catching

window; you have to create a theme for the window, to adapt the lighting, to decide what colour you have to use for your display. For that you have to consider the products that the store sells, the products you want to use for the artistic display, the customers you want to attract, the brand image and the brand history and finally the message you want to transmit.

Nowadays a successful retailer understands that his role is not only to sell. He also has duties such as to inform, to research, to teach and to communicate with his market.

The combination of mannequin, lighting and background in a window display and a store highlight can further intensify the decision process, the former affecting the affective pleasure of consumers and helping them determine the suitability of a store's retail identity to personal preference, while the latter intensifies consumers' sensational feeling and encourages the tendency to try on or purchase, which directly relates to the pre-purchase stage.

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