



Visual Merchandising and its Impact on Customer Buying Decisions

KEYWORDS

visual merchandiser, visual merchandising, Visual Merchandising Techniques, impulse buying.

S. Soundharya

Research Scholar, Mother Teresa Womens University,
Kodaikanal

S.Sathyan

Sales Team Leader, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt
Limited, Tirupur

ABSTRACT A successful retailing business requires that a good image to be created in the customer's mind that permeates all product and service offerings. Visual merchandising is a new skill which is growing popular nowadays. Visual Merchandising is defined as the presentation of any and all merchandise at its best: colour coordinated (synchronized colours), accessorized (related products/props) and self explanatory (descriptive/illustrative). One of the final stages in the process of setting up of retail store is Visual Merchandising which customers would find attractive and appealing. Visual merchandising not only presents merchandise in an attractive manner to give visual treat to customers but also encourages impulse buying by customer. Visual merchandising techniques are used by retailers to convert ordinary visitors to customers. This study gives deep insight about the emerging skill visual merchandising, technique it uses and its role in customer buying decisions and impulse purchase.

1. INTRODUCTION

Visual merchandising is a skill which is growing popular nowadays with the entry of large giants and due to emergence of many super markets, malls, super stores and exclusive showrooms. In a fast growing market where e-marketing captures majority of the market share, it is necessary for all retail outlets to employ some technique which pulls customers to their store. Visual merchandising is one such technique which makes customer to spend some valuable time and feel good about the place where they are buying goods. The main objective of visual merchandising is to attract customer and to sell the products. Buttle alluded visual merchandising to as the 'Silent Salesman'. McGoldrick suggests that visual merchandising is: 'one of the visible, systematic, logical and intelligent ways of putting stock on the floor'. Visual Merchandising is offered to the customer from exterior of the store to interior of the store. Visual merchandising is a tool to increase sales and influences customer decision to buy the products. 80% of impressions are created by sight. Impulse buying takes place only through sudden look of the tempting products. Visual merchandiser takes great care to make both exterior and interior of the store to look attractive. Visual merchandiser creates a visual merchandising plan and continuously changes it according to current trend to attract the customer.

2. NEED FOR VISUAL MERCHANDISING

In the current arena, even the middle class family who gets average income want to purchase in a place which has good ambience, lighting and having proper display. Starting from vegetable store to jewellery, people look for visual treat. Visual merchandising creates pleasure to the customers who is shopping by stimulating all five senses through good aroma, attractive display, light music, touch and good taste.

3. TECHNIQUES USED IN VISUAL MERCHANDISING

3.1. MAKE MERCHANDISE THE FOCAL POINT

The main aim of display is to showcase the products in a neat and attractive manner to the customers within the given area. Merchandise should be the focal point to customer. Customer should not be distracted by too many

displays. Closely related products are kept nearby to attract customer's attraction. In case of fashion merchandise retailers should change the display frequently according to current trend. Staple merchandise is those products which are always in demand. Staple merchandise should always occupy a space in display.

3.2. DISPLAY CALENDAR

A good display calendar is the result of planning, coordination and cooperation. To plan good displays, it is important to have a display calendar. This would include all marketing events, festivals etc. As well the launch dates for specific merchandise, such as the spring-summer collection, special kids wear collection etc.

3.3. WINDOW DISPLAY

Customer gives only few seconds to window display. **Window display helps the retailer to establish and maintain an image. An effective and attractive window display arouses the curiosity of customer. A store can have series of windows if they want to display more items.**

3.4. COLOURS AND TEXTURES

Colour is one of the most important tools in the Visual Merchandising. Colour increases the brand recognition up to 80 percent. Colour has an impact on human psyche and it has ability to affect our mood. Primary colours like yellow, blue, red are always attractive. Colours are mostly associated with occasions and emotions. Colour has the ability to attract more customers into the store. Attractive and elegant colour in the display items turn walkers to stoppers and significantly convert them into shoppers. Texture can be rough, smooth, sleek, durable, permanent, thick, thin, earthy, natural, wholesome, sandy, soft, hard, coarse, fine, regular or irregular.

3.5. EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

A store's exterior look is often referred to as the architecture. The exterior store design includes various factors like parking, inviting entrance, location of the store, frontage and exterior of the building, window display, store name and display space. These elements give a good first im-

pression to the consumer. An effective store front also influences customer's mood. A cluttered, dirty store front will prevent customers from entering the store. Store's exterior has impact on image of the store so retailers today are working hard to create a good architecture.

3.6. STORE NAME

An efficient store name sets the pitch and provides the store identification by conjuring up an image in the customer's mind. An effective name is consistent with both the product mix and the store atmosphere.

3.7. STYLING

Styling merchandise refers to unique way of displaying products in a way that the USP of each product is not only brought to fore but is also enhanced. Good styling can act as a shopping guide and helps customers save time and effort while selecting and matching coordinates.

3.8. SALES TRACKING

Visual Merchandising is all about showing off the merchandise in a store. These are visual concepts at their very best, aimed at making a sale. It is, therefore important to know how effectively VM is being used and the scope for improvement therein.

3.9. HANDLING THE MANNEQUIN

A mannequin may well be the most valuable asset in the store. A 'silent salesperson', it speaks the clearest fashion message on behalf of the store. A mannequin will stand tirelessly for hours and days, in the same place, in the same position with the same attitude, always smiling, fresh and pleasant. It does not gain or lose weight or inches; it does not ask for time off or extra pay for any increase in cost of living.

3.10. LIGHTING A MANNEQUIN

In Store Mannequins should be lit with an intensity that is there to five times greater than the ambient lighting in the store. This can be done using incandescent flood-lights and spot-lights. The mannequins face should be lit from, most desirably, three angles-or at least two angles to avoid shadow.

3.11. LIGHTING AND MUSIC

Proper lighting is one of the most important considerations in retail outlet. Lighting is used to direct customer attention to display. More light should be used for dark colours and less light for light colours. Today lighting has become a display medium. Customers' are generally attracted by the brightest item or area. Lighting is used to capture the customer mood. Soft and light music soothes customers mind and helps them to make good decision. Most of the gift shops and fast food restaurants play latest and mild music to attract the customers.

3.12. DISPLAY THEMES

Display theme is necessary for display. A theme is a display of sale items of analogous categories e.g. a display of cosmetics. Theme is necessary for all retail displays. A good theme should capture peoples imagination and they can be cool, warm, romantic or wild. A good theme will entice the customer with a good shopping mood. Good imagination and good creativity is necessary to create a good theme. A theme for Christmas occasion is group of angel mannequins with white dresses. A bridal theme in India can be many colourful sarees , lehenga particularly in maroon, red and dark pink which is preferred by brides. Related themes are used o increase impulse buying

3.13. PROPS AND FIXTURES:

A prop is an object added to support the theme of the product. Props are very important part of the display and are used to tell story of the product. There are certain props which are used only for displays such as Floor coverings, wall colourings, backgrounds, mannequins, screens and steps. These are functional props which are used to physically support the merchandise. Mirrors, flowers sea-shells, surfboards are called decorative props which is used to establish the mood or an attractive setting for the merchandise on display. A prop will highlight the most wanted merchandise and will add visual treat to the customers. Fixtures are used for storing and displaying merchandise. They may be floor fixtures or wall fixtures and are manufactured by various materials like wood, glass, steel and synthetic.

3.14. BANNERS

Banner is an inexpensive way of promotion. Banner is easy and quick to install. Images, slogans can be added to banners to make the appearance of banner more interesting. Banners should be changed frequently and can be reused. When banners are changed frequently consumers will think stirring changes are taking place inside the store.

3.16. SIGNS AND GRAPHICS

Signs and graphics should be provided inside the store. Enough directional signs should be provided inside the store and local language should be included in the sign and signage system. Signage should be informative and clear. Most giant retailers employ signage which includes, prize, size and department location. These are also known as visual indications that direct the customers to have a look at entire store which often results in impulse buying. Light-directed signage should be included in front of the store to attract people during the night and old signage should be changed frequently.

3.17. END CAPS

End caps are display for the product at the end of the store. The products placed on the end caps easily grab customer attention and sell at faster rate. A common end-cap technique is cross-merchandising, where interrelated items are grouped together to encourage additional sales. An example of this would be when a departmental store displays pen and ink together.

4. VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND IMPULSE PURCHASE

Impulse purchase constitutes about 15% of the store and has the highest rate of sale. Visual merchandising helps to showcase the product by using end cap technique or by placing them near the counters for higher visibility or by cross merchandising to increase the sale of the products. Candies in a super market and hair accessories in a fashion store are impulse purchase items and are kept near cash counters and entrances/ exits. The locations of various goods are chosen carefully to ensure that the customer is exposed to the entire store, thus increasing the possibility of purchase. Talking about space management and optimization in a retail store, Ajay Mehra, Coo of Times retail (Planet M) says" Space management does not end with just optimization, but has a much larger opportunity for merchandise promotion and display which could not only bring profit for a retail organization but entertain and delight customers too"

5. VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND CUSTOMER BUYING DECISIONS

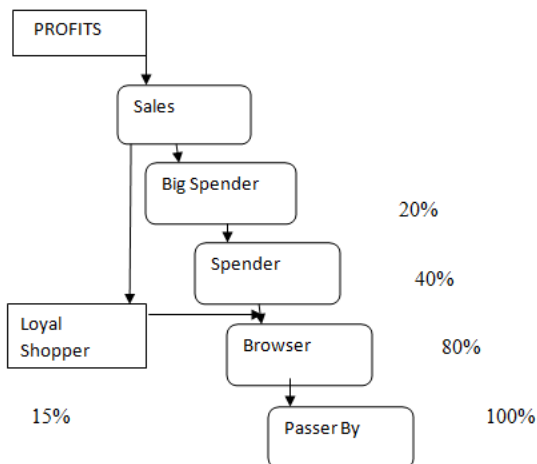
The atmosphere of the shopping environment can influ-

ence customer attitudes and their perceptions in relation to the overall quality of the store in terms of the uniqueness of the product, service levels (Baker, Grewal and Parasraman, 1994), the purchase price (Areni and Kim, 1993) and purchase volume (Milliman, 1982). A thematic environment has become necessary as people look into much more than purchasing things at the store or even at the restaurant. One hour at the place should not be spent simply looking at walls or eating food" opines Manoj Mittal of Khana unlimited. India has many such theme restaurants and even tier 2 cities are concentrating on theme based model for their stores and restaurants. Mercuries is a restaurant in New Delhi that started in the early years of 21st century and has solar system as theme. In Coimbatore Rayappas is the hotel which has rain forest as its theme. The purpose to set a theme is to create an exciting environment for the customers and to improve the customer buying decision. According to customer stickiness progression model loyal shoppers will become spenders who contribute more to the profit of the organization. Visual merchandising has a great role by converting passerby to spenders and ultimately converting them to loyal customers.

6. CONCLUSION

In this modern world visual merchandising is a valuable tool for retailers to increase sales. Visual merchandising helps retailers to understand the brand, their customers, their product range and how to segment it and present it to the best advantage to drive sales from the customers. Visual merchandising is the coordination of all types of physical elements in a place of business that are used to project the right image to its customers. Visual merchandising not only encourages purchasing but also makes the customer feel good about where he or she is doing business. Visual merchandising also creates good vision about organization. A good image surely sets a business apart from competition. In customer driven marketing it is very imperative to increase sales through some innovative sales promotion technique. Visual merchandising serves this purpose. Visual merchandising uses the phrase First impression is the best impression. Repeated visits by customers happen only when their first purchase is a memorable one. Visual merchandising is a communication tool which converts shoppers into customers and generates impulse sales.

Fig 1: Customer Stickiness Progression Model



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