

SECTION 3: Planning the Retail Merchandise Presentation

Part 1: 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation

Visual merchandisers utilize the same tools, the art elements and design principles, in order to establish the store ambience or atmosphere and environment, merchandise the store and/or department, and create displays. The art elements include color, texture, proportion, line, and shape, while the design principles include composition, balance, repetition, rhythm, and dominance.

Regardless if the art elements and design principles are utilized in creating store design, merchandise presentations, or displays, they must be used harmoniously and presented at the sophistication level which relates to the target consumer. When the six basic principles of display are discussed, these elements and principles will be discussed in-depth in **Section 4: *Investigating Design Principles and Art Elements to Communicate Store Image and Build Profitable Retail Sales***. In this section, however, they will be discussed in general as they relate to merchandise presentation.

In **Section 2: *Part 6: Plan the Merchandise Presentation***, a variety of techniques for creating merchandise presentations was discussed. As explained, often the retailer simultaneously uses more than one technique in the same store. A major technique proven to impact the retailer's bottom line is the 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation. This technique is usually combined with other techniques in order to build a unified, harmonious merchandise presentation.

However, store layout and placement of departments within the store should be addressed before discussing the 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation. Two common store layouts are the maze and grid methods. There are others, such as the racetrack or wagon wheel layouts, which the student might wish to investigate. In the *maze layout*, fixtures are placed without a set pattern or set of aisles. Rather they are positioned in a free flow pattern that gently guides the customer's traffic path.

Even though specific aisles are not created in this layout, all fixtures should be set in the same directional position and/or at the same angle so as not to confuse the consumer. In other words, the layout logically leads the customer through the store or department so that all three areas of a 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation is viewed by the consumer. Additionally, it should be noted that approximately 80% of the consumers who enter a store or department, by instinct, will walk to the right!

The maze method is the most interesting and exciting store or department layout. However, some consumers who are shopping in a limited time span do not want to be bothered with browsing the entire merchandise mix and wish to hurry through the traffic paths and go directly to a specific item or product classification.

The second layout that is commonly used is the *grid layout* where fixtures are placed uniformly in relation to the floor area or in squares similar to a checkerboard. This layout creates a grid-like pattern which forms aisles for the customer. Frequently with this method there is a main aisle that runs throughout the department with secondary aisles to the right and left of the main aisle. All fixtures must be positioned at the same angle and in the same direction. Different store types tend to utilize various varieties of fixture configurations to create the grid pattern.

For example, specialty stores often use feature or stacking tables at the front of the store or on the aisle of the department. On these tables, visual merchandisers usually layout a product classification in colors available. Then, they position a draper or costumer with hanger on the top level of the table in order to display the particular featured product classification with other coordinating items. The mass merchant many times uses a larger fixture placed on the aisle of the department in order to present the variety of selection of a specific product classification.

In department stores and shop concepts, T-stands and 2-Way fixtures, featuring the most exclusive merchandise in the department, are positioned on the aisle. In the core or “Bread-and-Butter” area, round fixturing, 4-Ways, and capacity fixtures are utilized. On the top or “Vista Walls”, faceouts, waterfalls and hanging bars are used to divide the expanse of the space. All of these areas with the appropriate fixturing will be addressed in-depth in the discussion of the 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation.



Regardless the type of store or department layout, the merchandise organization and presentation within the store or department is most important for promoting multiple sales and impulse buys. In fact, the visual presentation should increase sales volume and bolster the retailer's bottom line. As previously stated, the 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation within the store or department is one of the most effective methods for creating a productive and pleasant shopping environment for the customer.

The 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation is based on relating the store design and visual merchandise presentation to the lifestyle of the consumer. Additionally, it facilitates the ease of selection, makes it easy and convenient for the customer to shop, encourages multiple and add-on sales, and ultimately increases sales volume and hopefully less markdowns and an increased profit margin. The *3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation* is a merchandising technique utilized by retailers to organize and present all of the store's or departments' product classifications on the three levels of the line of sight from the customer's perspective when entering the store or department.

With this method the retailer logically arranges the store so that the customer is unconsciously directed from the front to the back of the store. Additionally, it entices the consumer to "stop, look, touch, and try" merchandise throughout the store. The three areas of the 3 x 3 Merchandise Presentation are a) windows-on-the-aisle (i.e., the entrance and aisle or front one-third of the store or department), b) the core (i.e., floor) or "Bread-and-Butter" area, (i.e., the center of the store or department), and c) the top walls or vista walls (i.e., back and side walls of store or department). In each of these areas of the department, the customer should find information about the product offered by the retailer, a nice selection or variety of merchandise, and displays that educate and become "silent sellers" for the retailer.