

SECTION 3: Planning the Retail Merchandise Presentation

Part 2: Merchandise Presentation by Color

Color is the single most important element in both merchandise presentation and display. In fact, color is the first element in any visual presentation that attracts attention. Color may create or become 80 % of the merchandise/display presentation. However, color is a personal, individual, private experience that is influenced by culture, regional and global locations, and environmental background. For example, in the United States the traditional attire of the bride is a white wedding dress, while in other countries red is the color of choice. For funerals, black is the color frequently worn to symbolize sadness and death in western countries; but white is the color of death in China, and purple is the color that designates death in Brazil.

Furthermore, there is a physiological and psychological impact of color that affects the viewer's perception of the visual presentation. Consumers react instinctively to color. Based on the consumers' previous experiences with color, their backgrounds, and the region in which they reside, consumers immediately "read" or translate the meaning implied by a color. Thus, color creates a mood and binds the overall theme and merchandise classifications in the merchandise presentation. Color motivates the consumer to buy!

Additionally, color is symbolic for seasons, holidays, events, and occasions. For example, black and orange denotes Halloween; red and green automatically announces the Christmas season; and red, white, and blue signals the Fourth of July. On the other hand, in a retail store, red signs signify "sale" or clearance merchandise.

Concisely, customers are drawn to merchandise through effective color coordination. Remember, color sets a mood and ties the merchandise presentation to the retailer's merchandise mix and product categories. *Color is the single most important selling element of the merchandise presentation!*

And, as previously discussed, all merchandise presentations utilize color in order to organize product classifications and to create a logical arrangement for ease of customer selection. Merchandise presentations begin with color (i.e., light to dark), proceed to the arrangement of product classifications (i.e., left to right), and culminate with sizing (i.e., small to large) within each color of each product classification. Additionally, the same strong statement of a harmonious color scheme (e.g., two colors and a neutral) should begin at the entrance or windows-on-the-aisle section of the store or department, continue throughout the store and culminate with the top or vista walls.

For additional information on color, the color terminology, color schemes, color coordination, and the psychology and symbolism of color will be discussed in-depth in **Section 4: Investigating Design Principles and Art Elements to Communicate Store Image and Build Profitable Retail Sales.**

Merchandise Presentation by Color: Light to Dark and Neutral to Warm to Cool

To colorize the merchandise assortment, *within each product classification arrange styles from light to dark.* A hue or pure color is noted as being *chromatic* or highly colored. All colors have *value* or a degree of lightness or darkness that is evident in the color. With regard to light and dark colors, if white is added to a basic or pure color the results are a *tint* of that color or a *pastel*. If black or grey is added to a

basic or pure color the ending color is a *shade*. Also, the *intensity* or the brightness or dullness of a color must be considered when arranging merchandise presentations and creating displays.

Colorize merchandise in a sequence of neutral to warm to cool colors. Neutral colors include white, black, grey, brown, and beige. These colors are frequently used in store design and décor and especially for background colors for a display. These colors act as a foil or background for the merchandise and do not compete with the colors in the merchandise or display. For arranging the merchandise presentation, an example of positioning tints and shades of white to brown utilize the following sequence:

- white → winter white
- cream → beige → light browns
- medium browns → dark browns

Neutral colors that are warm include winter white, beige, and brown; neutral colors that are cool colors include black, white, and grey. Warm colors advance and are aggressive and exciting. On the negative side, these colors, in some tints and shades, may be agitating or irritating to some consumers. *Warm colors* include red, pink, yellow, orange, peach, brown, and rust. Some tints and shades of purple may also be classified as warm. An example of colorizing warm colors may be viewed below.

- light yellow → marigold
- peach → orange → rust
- pink → red → burgundy
- lavender → purple

Cool colors recede and are calming and relaxing. Colors classified as *cool* include blue, green, blue-green and sometimes violet, depending on how much of another color is mixed with the purple. Cool colors may be arranged accordingly:

- sky blue → medium blue → navy
- light green → medium green → dark green → olive green
- gray
- black

As has been discussed previously, when arranging the merchandise presentation, always consider the psychology and symbolism of color as well as the personal color preferences of a culture and geographic region. Remember, color creates a mood and is the binding factor that relates the merchandise and display theme to the presentation. *Color is the single most important selling element of the merchandise presentation.*

Merchandise Presentation by Product Classifications

The merchandise presentation is organized from colorizing all product classifications and then proceeding to the organization and arrangement of those classifications. Separate product classifications by type, end-use, occasion for wearing, or lifestyle of the consumer. Additionally, separate within each product classification the fabrication types (e.g., cotton, silk, polyester), as well as solid colors from patterns composed of the identical colors. In other words, do not mix cotton and cotton blend long sleeve woven shirts with silk blouses and cotton knit tee shirts. Separate the shirts from the blouses and the blouses from the tee shirts.

Patterns are frequently arranged to break the monotony of several solid colors on the same fixture or within a wall space. Based on colorization of the pattern, position color-patterned product classifications that match the identical solid colors of the same product classification between those different solid colors. Arrange patterns from geometric to floral to stripes to plaids between those solid colors.

Also, arrange each product classification by sleeve and hem lengths. For example, do not mix long and short sleeve cotton shirts together in one wall section. Rather, separate the long sleeves from the short sleeves and arrange those items by color, fabrication, and occasion for wearing. Likewise, separate shorts, skirts, and pants on the same fixture. Begin with the shorts and arrange those together and then position the skirts and pants. Within those classifications, also separate the different length of shorts, the different lengths of skirts and different length of pants.

For example, if the retailer has both dressy crop pants and trousers in stock, the crop pants should be separated from the trousers and both of those should be colorized within product classifications and then sized from left to right, small to large on the fixture or in the wall section.

Merchandise Presentation by Sizing

The merchandise presentation culminates with sizing within each color of each product classification. Size from left to right of the wall section and fixture and from small to large within the product classification. If the product is on a wall waterfall, the smallest size should be positioned on the lowest level of the waterfall, with the largest size being positioned at the top of that fixture. If a product classification is housed in a cube or bin, the smallest size should be on the top of the stack of the merchandise while the largest size is located at the bottom of that stack.

In summary, these guidelines are used frequently in retail stores. Therefore, the consumer has been trained subconsciously to locate the correct size with merchandise arranged utilizing the above guidelines. However, not all retailers employ these guidelines for organizing and arranging their store's merchandise presentation, yet these retailers are very successful. For example, for many years, JC Penney has used a different presentation for colorizing its product assortments, yet sells reams of merchandise every season. The model that Penney's utilizes has been very lucrative for the Penney stores. Thus the JC Penney consumer is accustomed to and expects that particular organization and arrangement of product.