

Part 3: 3-2 Physical Elements for Building Store Image

The consumer's first introduction to a retail store is the *center's marquee* and/or the retailer's *signage*.

The signage is oftentimes on the marquee and also on the storefront. The signage should automatically identify the personality of the store and provide information about products, services, and interior store environment. Signage sets the mood and is the first indicator or cue to assist in establishing an image for the retailer. The lettering of the signage is most important. The letter type, style, color and materials from which the sign is made are all significant elements that help to tell a story.

The size and scale of the sign in relation to the front of the store and the exterior of the building and/or marquee must be aesthetically pleasing and appropriate for both the shopping center and the retailer. The lighting of the sign is also critical. A partially lit sign, a sign that is difficult to see or read at night, or an unlit sign "calls out" to the customers as quickly as a beautifully designed sign that supports the retailer's image. Remember, the sign is the retailer's first introduction to the customer and is the retailer's signature to that particular geographic area.

Any *additional outside signage*, such as banners and awnings, also reflects upon the image of a retailer. Banners and awnings should relate the exterior to the interior of the store and should be compatible in size, scale, type, and color of the store materials and/or the store wide promotion that the retailer is staging. Awnings should be both functional and decorative. While adding color and eye-appeal to the storefront, many times awnings are utilized by the retailer to introduce a store-wide event, institutional theme and/or new product offering. Of course, the logo and graphics on banners and awnings should denote the personality and image of the retailer.

Banners should be attention-getting, colorful, and informative. Since they are usually an inexpensive form of marketing, the retailer should change them often and coordinate them with the color scheme of the special store event being staged at the time or with the color scheme of the store décor. The length of time a specific banner graces the storefront, as well as the interval of time it remains hanging during the selling season, should be monitored by the retailer. Repeat customers become bored quickly and wish to see new, exciting visuals when visiting their favorite retailer.

The next element that the retailer must consider when developing an exciting and attractive store environment in order to attract the target consumer is the *store exterior* and the *store entrance*. Not only the building material type (e.g., brick, stucco, wood) and colors but also the condition of the exterior "paint a picture" about the retailer and help to set an image cue. Cracking, peeling or fading paint or stained and soiled storefronts speak loudly to the consumer.

However, at times, the retailer cannot control this particular cue. In most shopping complexes the center owners maintain certain building requirements and/or regional or local governments regulate certain aspects of the building codes. Additionally, store-planning trends affect building material selection, color schemes utilized, and architectural designs rendered.

The store exterior and entrance should tie the store to the community or the center in which it is located. In other words, the storefront and entrance should be complemented by the landscaping and retail center's outside surroundings. The storefront and entrance sets the mood and atmosphere not only for the store image but also for the merchandise presentation. The entrance must make a customer feel welcome and invite the consumer into the store.



Oftentimes the store entrance emulates the local architecture of the region and helps to establish the color scheme and ambience of the store. The entrance into the store should appeal to four of the five senses. *Visually* the lighting should be well planned and attention-getting or dramatic at the entrance of the store. Furthermore, the color scheme and inside building materials should be a backdrop for creating a colorful, motivating merchandise presentation. The visual merchandiser must create merchandise presentations and displays at the front of the store that compel consumers “to stop, shop, and spend”!

The *audio* or type of music also helps to set the mood and atmosphere of the store. The selection of music, its volume, and the vibe that it creates should appeal to the target consumer and reinforce the store image. Likewise, the subtle smell or *aroma* in the air of the store should entice the customer to remain in the store for a length of time and should be related to the region in order to evoke a positive mood or state. The olfactory sense can bring back memories from the past and lift the spirit of the

consumer. For example, aromas in bakeries, movie theaters, or stores with special potpourri create an emotional connection with the consumer and usually increase sales.

Females are usually more sensitive to odors than males. Also, ethnicity, as well as aromas and odors in geographical regions, impact the spending preferences of some consumers. Various aromas stimulate purchasing behavior while others tend to be associated with relaxation. On the other hand, some smells or odors have a negative impact on the consumer. Each retailer must experiment with, evaluate, and then select the aroma that is the best “fit” to create store image, influence the target consumer to purchase, and to imitate the smells of a particular geographical region of the country.

The surface treatment, feel, touch, “hand”, or *texture* of the building materials and fabrications used in wall coverings, fixturing, and furniture, plus the types of merchandise displayed at the front of the store are attention-getting and may create excitement in the merchandise presentation. From the store entrance and front displays to all other areas within the store, the visual merchandiser must emphasize the effects of the senses on the consumers’ behavior and spending patterns in order to create a store environment that will attract the target consumer and impact the sales volume of the retailer.

