

## **SECTION: 4: Investigating Design Principles and Art Elements to Communicate Store Image and Build Profitable Retail Sales**

### **Part 1: Examine the Six Basic Principles of Display**

#### **Part 1: 1-2 Select Merchandise Thoughtfully**

When building the actual display, the first step the visual merchandiser takes is that of analyzing and selecting the merchandise to be displayed. It is of utmost importance that display personnel recognize that the merchandise to be displayed is the focus of the artistic endeavor, and that all other elements needed to build the display play a supporting role to the merchandise itself.

Many times creative visual personnel become so intrigued in a store/special event theme or are so enthralled over the supporting components of the display that the merchandise itself becomes secondary. As an employee of the Visual Merchandising Division, the displayer must always keep in mind the objectives for designing the display and the expected effect of the artistic creation on the store's bottom line.

When selecting the merchandise, the visual merchandiser must be sure that there is back-up stock to support the display and that the display is positioned near the merchandise being displayed. Also, the product classifications should be in the same sizes with the same trend theme; and, styles, fabrications, and colors should be compatible in order to support the trend being featured. By rule of thumb, color schemes frequently are composed of two colors and a neutral.

Additionally, visual merchandising personnel must keep abreast of the latest fashion trends, new market developments, and new merchandise and accessory trends. One of the major responsibilities of the visual merchandiser is to interpret run-way or high fashion trends in order to reflect the store's fashion image and attract the target consumer into the store. Most visual merchandisers develop a keen curiosity for tracking mega trends and specific seasonal fashion trends.

There are numerous sources from which the merchandiser may research these trends. For all segments of the industry, there are many online trend sources as well as print sources. For example, *Women's Wear Daily (WWD)* is considered a major source for the women's and menswear fashion segments of the industry, *Earnshaw's* is the source for children's wear and *Furniture Today* is a major source for the furniture industry. Moreover, the visual merchandiser will definitely want to read the trade journal pertaining to his field or *Visual Merchandising Store Design (VMSD)*.

Furthermore, visual merchandisers may visit the market during fashion market weeks in such locations as Paris, Milan, or London. In the United States, they will definitely want to visit New York City and/or Los Angeles during fashion week, as well as attend MAGIC in Las Vegas. Based on store size and budget, the visual merchandiser may also attend regional markets such as Dallas, Chicago, and Atlanta. At all of these markets the merchandiser may view fashion shows, visit showrooms to view lines along with the buyer or merchandise manager, or attend seminars sponsored by the particular market.

Usually during market trips, both the retail buyer and visual merchandiser visit large retail stores in order to view the latest trends in merchandise presentation and display. Other sources that the displayer may view trends include Broadway plays, current movies, and award shows.

Besides the merchandise itself, the visual merchandiser must consider all material elements of a display when selecting the merchandise. Those *elements of display* include props, background, and display materials.



*Props* should develop a relationship between the merchandise and space around it. The selection of the prop type depends upon the store and fashion image, the store's target consumer, the type and price of merchandise being displayed, the theme of the display, and the season of the year. Also, props may denote a current event in the region or community. However, these props should be recognized and understood by at least 90 % of the store's target consumers.

There are three types of props: decorative, functional, and structural. *Decorative props* establish the mood or set the tone for the display, while *functional props*, such as mannequins and forms, actually "wear" or hold the merchandise. Architectural components of a store become *structural props* when included as an integral part of the display. Dividers, ramps, stairs, frames, columns, posts, etc., are natural displayers and become excellent props when they support the merchandise and theme in the display. However, all of these materials must be compatible with the merchandise itself.

Moreover, *props* should tell a story about the merchandise, be compatible with the merchandise concept, add visual excitement to the display, and serve as a resting place for the viewer's eye. They also may create a bridge between the display elements, achieve rhythm and flow within the display, reinforce the theme of the display, and must relate to the display in proportion, size, and color. (All of the art elements and design principles previously listed are discussed in this *Part 1*, in segments 1-3 to 1-4.)

In summary, props play an integral part of the display composition. From the visual depiction, the target consumer should understand the merchandise concept, train the "fashion eye", and relate the merchandise presentation to her/his lifestyle. Therefore, props should be carefully selected and should add an extra aesthetic as well as functional dimension not only to the display design but also to the merchandise being presented.

*The background* and the *perimeters of the display* are defined when the location is chosen for the display. The floor and ceiling as well as the back and side walls of an area must be analyzed and incorporated into the display in order to create an effective presentation. There is both positive and negative space to be considered. The *positive* form is the merchandise itself; thus, the background becomes the *negative* space. If there is a large amount of negative space, the positive object will stand out. If the displayer uses negative space in the same shape as the positive object or the merchandise itself, the space will frame the basic outline of the positive element and appear as a shadow or replica of the positive forms.

Two rules of thumb for utilizing positive and negative space effectively in a display are as follows:

- Do not use equal amounts of positive and negative space as the area becomes boring.
- Use a large amount of negative space to act as an equalizer for a strong positive element. For example, very bright or large items call for a greater amount of negative space in order to create balance in the display.

Additionally, the color, texture, and types of all the materials of which all display components are composed become symbolic and impart a "silent message" in the display. Therefore, all elements in the display, from the merchandise to the props to the background materials, must be carefully planned and selected to support the display concept and "tell the story" intended by the visual merchandiser