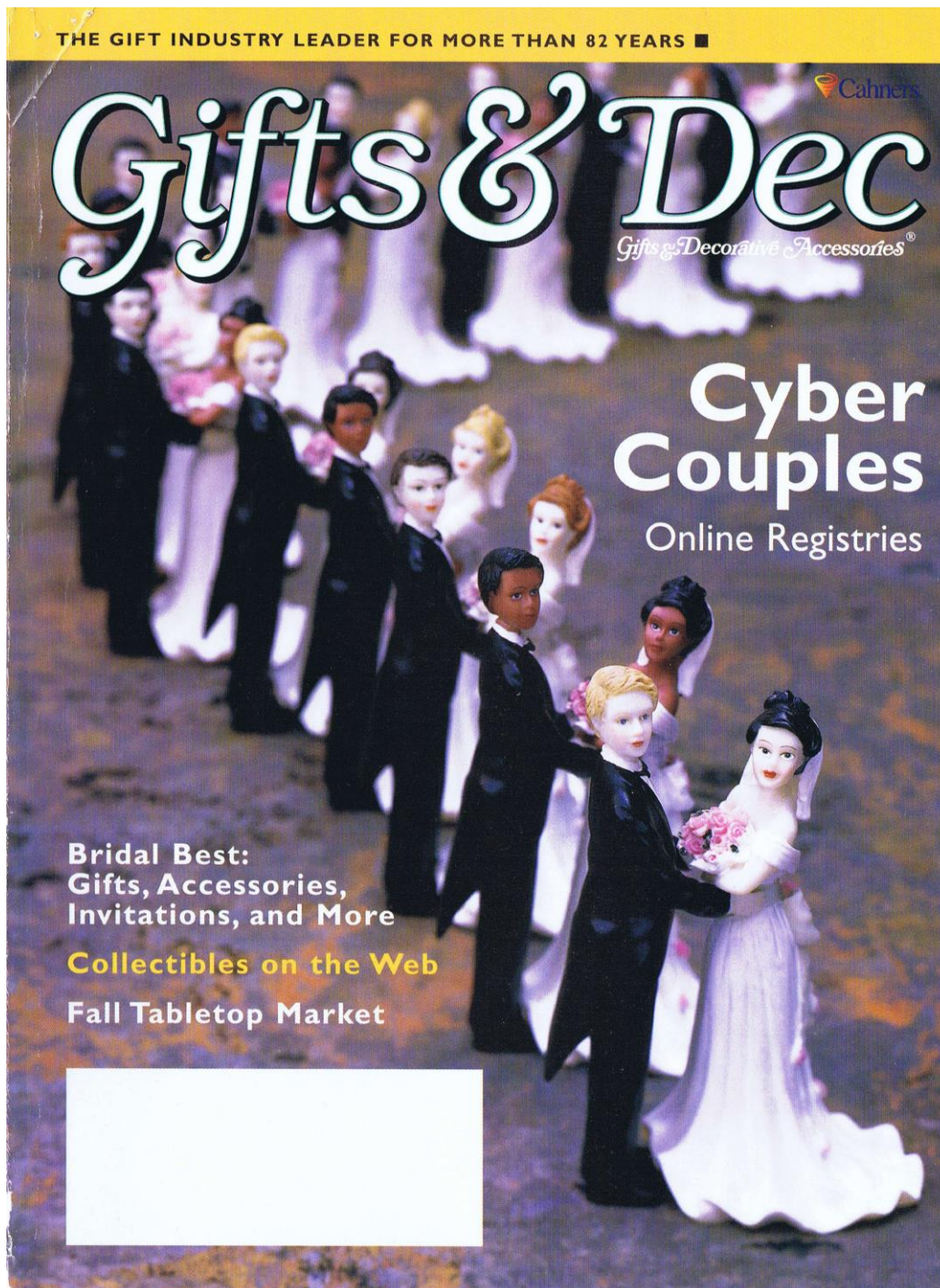


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# High Tech and High Touch

**G**uess what? The future is now. During the last decade, industry prophets predicted that “high tech” would eventually create a demand for “high touch.” Today, technology has enhanced retailers’ visual merchandising and display capabilities, allowing them to give customers that high touch.

## VENDOR MERCHANDISING SERVICES

Manufacturers are increasingly offering merchandising products and services to retailers, including new store setups, the building of displays, store set revisions, demos, fixtures, and merchandisers. Their goal in providing these extras is to help retailers sell their products. Manufacturers know that when they give you good point-of-purchase materials, they save you time, energy, and money, and make their product

look great in the process. It’s a win-win situation for everyone, including the consumer, who is better able to make the connection between national brand advertising and your in-store display.

New technologies in printing, die-cutting, punching, folding, stapling, and gluing are making it possible for manufacturers to provide a wider

range of display materials, including fixtures, gift bags, and tissues, as well as posters, banners, and other promotional materials. If you use these useful freebies correctly and in a timely fashion, the manufacturers will keep them coming.

## THE COMPUTER REVOLUTION

Thanks to the user-friendly programs that are available today, retailers who invest a little time in learning basic computer graphics skills can create their own posters, flyers, and signage. No longer dependent on a printing company, retailers can move independently and quickly (e.g., creating attractive signs to place directly in displays or to show off in

decorative frames).

Computer graphics programs also make keeping in touch with customers easier and more fun. Newsletters, invitations to special events, and announcements of new product introductions are all at the fingertips of the 21st century retailer. If you suddenly need copies of a particular flyer, you can press the print button and go wait on the next customer while the computer and printer do their work.

With the aid of your trusty computer, you can also build a better customer database. Once all the data is entered, it’s a simple matter to add or delete names, keep track of customers, and send out mass mailings.

In short, technology now allows you to maintain a strong visual image for your store and to promote it far and wide in your community.

## BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG SALES

Remember that light is life. My single greatest complaint about most product displays is the poor quality of the lighting. I’m not saying that you have to tear out rows of fluorescent tubing. But feature displays need

focused spotlights in order to enhance details, textures, and colors. The warmth of real light lends objects a sense of life. The optimal lighting condition for a display is a combination of indoor light and daylight, supplemented in key areas with spotlights. Window displays need a lot of light during the day to combat the black-glass effect, while at night a single spotlight can show off an amazing amount of product features.

A word of caution about spotlights: Don’t use too many, as they can create heat, glare, and deep shadows (which are just as bad as leaving your store too dark).

## NEW AGE PROPS

The 21st century retailer can create dramatic and attention-grabbing staging, thanks to a range of wonderful new props made of state-of-the-art materials. I just ordered a 61-inch white Styrofoam Eiffel Tower for the grand unveiling of the Lancôme cosmetic line in a client’s drugstore. I could just as well have used Grecian Styrofoam columns with matching urns filled with artificial ferns and trailing greenery. Set pieces designed for theater productions and photography shoots are also available to the retailer. They range from greenery and flowers to faux stone and marble. If you sell picnic baskets, you might want to purchase deli props for displays. Artificial fruits, berries, and vegetables can enhance tableware or table linen displays.

Technology is producing more of what we want and need, at better prices and in more colors, textures, and sizes. Wire-edged ribbon used to be very expensive and difficult to get. Foamcore board used to only be available in 4x8-foot sheets. Now I can make use of the smaller

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20x30-inch colored versions that have become available at most office supply stores. With the help of a linoleum knife, a yardstick, and T-pins, I can fashion backdrops, miniature folding screens, risers, steps, boxes, signs, and cut-out shapes. Foamcore is a high tech wonder material for the display

artist, and sources for it are no longer a secret.

## THE CREATIVE TOUCH

Unfortunately, ready-made props aren't always available, and that's when your creativity comes into play. Of course, a display project must be quick, easy, and inexpensive for it to appeal to most retailers. Recently, I

was using a giant Easter Bunny from Russ Berrie in a display and I needed a giant carrot to use as a prop. Using chicken wire and fabric remnants, I was able to make the carrot in less than 15 minutes. A retailer who attended one of my seminars told me a few months later that she had taken the idea and made not only chicken-wire carrots, but peppers and bananas, too! Another retailer made huge pears and apples using gold lamé fabric. As you can see, one simple idea can spark a lot of genius when applied creatively.

(original ads replaced by illustrations appropriate for topic)



WINDOW DISPLAY IN AIRPORT for High End Fragrance Promotion



All the good elements of VMP and display are operating in this window display.

1. The back drop with a retro image of a train station porter is printed with high tech graphics equipment.

It sets the theme, adds dimension, and takes the viewer right into the stage.

2. The POP, provided by the supplier are the posters and the boxes that all help to point to the tiny product, which is the perfume bottle itself!

3. The 'low tech' arrangement and the addition of the pink balloons add a contrast of softness while contributing to the image of the product. The Pink is feminine and the balloons suggest a party, and celebration.

4. The lighting is sufficient to make everything visible from a distance, and is almost 'romantic' as the light would be from candles or a crystal chandelier. There is no glare in a shopper's eye.

5. Closer inspection reveals the details of the actual product, the fragrance packaging on risers.

NOTE: the 3D affect of sticking the POP boxes to the backdrop over the image of luggage!

This gives a level of 'reality' to the staged 'props' and draws more attention to this display.



**The optimal lighting condition for a display is a combination of indoor light and daylight, supplemented in key areas with spotlights.**

Remember, whether it's high tech or low tech, a prop must do the following three things:

1. It must take its cue from the product's shape, size, color, style, and packaging.

2. It must point to the product in order to establish an instant connection. A prop should amuse, not confuse the viewer.

3. It must be useful as well as ornamental. In other words, it must be flexible and portable, so that it can be easily moved, stored, and refurbished as product lines and seasons change. ■

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