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SHOW ON,



BY LINDA MCKENDRY,
VMPC

show off!

Trade fairs are one of the best places to get display ideas. Are you making the “merchandising most” of your show visits?

You can count on a lot of “showing off” when the fall gift trade shows are on. Shows are the *best* places to get great merchandising and display ideas. Behind the scenes, exhibitors are doing everything in their power to influence you, the buyer, with all the latest tricks of the trade in visual merchandising presentation. Many of them rebuild, refurbish, or reinvent their images to get the competitive edge because all the other exhibitors are competing for your attention. The astute retailer, aware and observant can learn much.

You can take note of the placement of products, the lighting and backdrops. Pay particular attention to whatever stops you in your tracks and grabs you off the aisle and into a booth where you didn't plan on shopping. Try to identify what caught your eye, slowed you down, and drew you in. Did you see it from a distance and kept your eye on it as you walked closer, almost oblivious to the exhibits you were passing to get there? Did something stop you or slow you down as you were almost past it? Was it a color? A texture? A scent? A sound? Was it something that moved, sparkled, or changed appearance?

The trade shows are the perfect place to put your shopping focus to the test and know that if it caught your eye when you were destination-driven to one of your favorite suppliers, then you can probably use the same effect to stop shoppers in their tracks back home. But taking home the ideas and making them work is another matter. Here are some ideas to help make it happen.

Bring Your Shop Along

1. Do you have a floor plan? Measure your shop and all its fixtures, aisles, windows, doorways, and important architectural features. Draw these on grid paper with a 1/4" equals one foot scale and tape enough sheets

together to accommodate the size of your shop or showroom. If you can get your hands on a professionally-drawn plan from when your location was built or last renovated, you will probably only have to make a few adjustments in placing your walls and entrances the way they are currently. Little “x’s” on the walls or pillars can identify where electrical outlets are and very light dotted lines can indicate the light fixtures. This is the layout of your shop. This bird’s-eye view will help you in rearranging departments, fixtures or traffic patterns to accommodate an appropriate area for a completely new product line you want to consider.

Having a scaled layout is particularly advantageous in communicating to your colleagues what you have in mind. This diagram becomes something you can whip out of your carryall when you meet them for a break at the show to pour over product possibilities and ideas. This is one of the best ways to minimize any communication breakdowns and avoid problems when merchandise arrives and there is suddenly a conflict about where it is going to go.

2. Feature Display Venues: Mark in feature display areas, such as windows, front of aisles, end of aisles, high wall spaces and tops of tall fixtures. This will help you identify the amount of space available for those cross-merchandised displays or promotional areas so you can take advantage of special offers from suppliers. This is often shown on your plan as a large circle in the middle of the crossroads of a wide aisle where a round table can be placed. If you are partnering with vendors whose advice and judgment you value, you can then show them the plan and get them involved in making your plans work with greater sales and profits. Everyone benefits when there's sell-through and every effort should be made to see that happen.

3. Photos: Take your shop to the show with

photos of your shop's interior (colors, furnishings and fixtures) and exterior. Photos help to give an elevation view of the placement of walls, doorways, ceiling height, lighting, etc. They also illustrate the colors, finishes, and textures of floors, walls, fixtures, and how your current products' displays will have to fit in with things that are new. Many times when I've completed a display seminar at a show, retailers who have attended the show will line up to ask questions about their particular challenges. If they have photos, they have far less explaining to do and I can come up with answers immediately, which is how your suppliers will be able to advise you.

Prepare the Place

When you get back to your shop/showroom begin to make room for the items that will be arriving. Move the fixtures around. Dust and vacuum while you're at it. Take this time to regroup items into cross-merchandised displays in which to place items that haven't sold in the summer season. Remember to display before you discount! The process of making room for the new products coming in doesn't mean that you discard the “old.” You'd be surprised at the increase in interest, energy and sales that can be created by giving old items new venues. Just moving fixtures around or clearing off shelves to make room for new products coming will get your regular shoppers excited in anticipation of what you are about to show them. There's an atmosphere of expectancy created as you make changes in the appearance of your shop/showroom, which has maybe been taken for granted by you, your staff and your customers. By having a plan in place that everyone can relate to and see on paper the extra work involved and the temporary upset of having some things displaced won't dampen the enthusiasm of your employees or shift sales to another store.

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After the fall shows is the time to gear up for the holiday season when so many retailers do well. If you want to be really dramatic, this is the perfect time to paint walls, shampoo carpets or refinish floors, and add in a few extra spot light fixtures. If you are afraid that too many changes, especially in your more popular departments, are going to annoy and frustrate your regular customers, then just make the cosmetic changes and leave the departments where they are. I guarantee that if you shop the show looking for all the great new, wonderful, and creative inexpensive display ideas you will be motivated and inspired to go back to your store and do your own makeover.

The best ideas, the best use of space, and the best variety of visual presentations are all waiting for you at every trade show. My only word of caution is to remember that where they are showing you a single sample item from which to take an order, you will probably end up with depth and back-up stock. So make a mental note of where the items they aren't showing you will go in your merchandising scheme of things. Make a pact with yourself this show season to go prepared to venture into the realm of reinventing your business and giving it a facelift for your buying public. Never let your customers take you for granted or forget that you have taken the time to go to the shows and find the best buys and treasures for them. When the shows are over, it's time for you to show off! □

To book your services call 905-813-8725 or write to VMPC, Visual Merchandising Presentations Ltd., 6309 Donway Drive, Mississauga, Ontario, L5V 1J6.

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Shop the Shows for more than products! Look at what gets your attention. Study colors, patterns, and style of booths and what the vendors are doing to impact you!



Accent Lighting



Did a product line catch your eye and you realize it's the focused lighting? Is that something you can look at doing in your store or for a feature window display?

(original ads replaced by illustrations suitable for topic)



Products POP! in front of the right color backdrop and accents draw drama and attention to neutral colored items.



Trade shows are the best place to examine and find out what background colors make the products POP! Combined with the right fixture style and lighting and it's all an exciting experience for the shoppers.



If it got your attention, then it's worth trying in your own store back home.

Fixture Finishes



When considering taking on a line of products, look at how they are being displayed at the show.

Check out the color, pattern, and style of fixtures and furnishings, containers, cubes and risers.



Find out if any of what is displayed at the show is available for purchase, or FREE with a generous opening order. This makes your merchandising quicker and easier and is sure to contribute to the success of sales!



Entertainment

What entertainment is offered at the show that you find amusing, stimulating, or exciting? Does it bring any to mind you can use in your store from your community?