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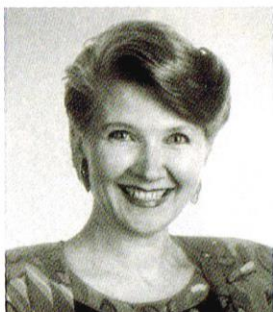
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Making a scene

TO BE SEEN



BY LINDA MCKENDRY,
VMP

READER QUESTION: Help! I want to do something to draw more attention to my shop, its image, products and services, from outside. What can I do to make my business more appealing and attractive from the street?

LINDA'S ANSWER: Six years ago, when my husband and I first moved to Toronto, I traveled many different routes to the downtown area before I discovered which one was the fastest. One day, I noticed a street on my map that led directly off the highway into the downtown core. I decided to take it. As the traffic slowed to a crawl my annoyance level rose. Ahead of me several cars were stopping traffic, signaling their "reservation" for a coveted parking spot being vacated by a shopper. My attention was drawn to the wide sidewalks and the colorful variety of products spilling out from each store. Out in front of shops shaded by bright awnings were furnishings, clothing racks, garden accessories and a multitude of people milling about. I suddenly found myself browsing from the car and making a note of the street name at

The funny thing was that the day she and I went to find the spot everything had been taken inside, the sidewalks were deserted and, for me, the area's original appeal was gone. The magic had left and so had my expectations of sharing a wonderful shopping day with my friend. We were disappointed. I felt that I had let her down. We drove around until we came to another shopping district that had interesting looking stores and stopped there to browse.

In visual merchandising, I have a saying, "Goods to be sold, must first be seen." The sooner something is seen the better. What kind of "scene" are you creating for passers-by? Is it an instant invitation to explore other offerings inside? Here are a few ideas to get you thinking about what you can do.

bine that concept with good contrast in color, pattern, textures and shapes, you will make an even greater impact. Try one of these:

Arches & Awnings. Archways funnel traffic into the front entrance of your shop. Arbor-shaped archways can be made of wood, fiberglass, wrought iron, twisted grapevines or aged shutters topped by an arched roof. Add color and contrast with tulle, ribbon, rayon or artificial flowers that reflect the type of market you are targeting and the price point of your products. Or weave some artificial ivy in and out of the spaces and add white twinkle lights for a touch of romance especially for people driving by on summer evenings.

Don't forget the opportunity for aroma appeal: Scented sachet bags tied up into a



Well-known, Toronto-based, display expert Francois always wows customers with his entrances. Here he uses branches from a downed tree to frame the doorway to his store. In addition, window boxes always overflow with flowers and large showcase windows are changed often to keep customers intrigued.

Francois will be opening a new Toronto store in October. Watch for a profile in a future issue.

the next intersection so I could find my way back to that delightful spot for a leisurely shopping trip with a girlfriend who was also new to Ontario.

GRAND ENTRANCES

You've heard me say that "bigger is better" when it comes to attracting the most attention from the greatest distance. If you com-

trellis or tucked into branches will send out the delicate fragrance of honeysuckle, roses, gardenias.... The slightest breeze will carry the scent and draw attention like a woman's

signature cologne.

Is security a problem? Gusts of wind? Even metal edge or concrete frames around a commercial door can have small holes drilled in them to fit eye-screws for securing a trellis or archway in place to prevent it from blowing over or "walking" away in the midnight hours. If your doorway is high, consider having your archway fitted with locking casters so it can be wheeled in after shop hours. The use of concrete blocks with large hooks imbedded in them on each side of your entrance can also anchor front entrance decorations and the guide wires to these anchors can be camouflaged with greenery, vines, or maybe even flags if that suits the image of your place and product.

Awnings have more trendy twists than ever. Shapes to suit your fancy matched with your corporate colors and imprinted with your shop name or logo are available in an ever-increasing array of materials. Awnings have the benefit of giving shade to your windows which in turn protects your product presentations, minimizes the black glass effect for better daytime viewing into your store, and invites customers to stop on hot days.

Pots & Planters. Large potted trees placed in oversized urns will create an arched effect when branches are pruned to meet each other over the doorway. Topiary shrubs, shaped into a variety of figures and designs can carry your store's signature, logo or image out onto the street in a unique and elegant way. This is especially true if you want a very structured and formal look. Don't be shy about "decorating" trees with ornaments such as fruits, flowers, birds, garden accessories, or items from your shop that will hang from the branches. Anything that is rounded, trailing, or arched has the effect of softening the severe, angular lines of most commercial entrances and immediately projects a more homey, inviting and informal presence.

Window boxes blooming with bright summer annuals will draw attention to your window displays. When greenery is trailing down onto the sidewalk and along the perimeter of your store, attention is taken away from the hot, dry, dusty concrete. The bits of debris, dead leaves and candy wrappers aren't as obvious when the wind blows them amongst the shadows and textures of plants. Do they have to be live? No. There are beautiful, realistic silk plants on the market that look very natural, even up close. However, it is important to glue them into their containers and don't forget to take them down when their natural growing season is over.

Products & Props. I have sat across the

street and watched people as they are drawn to the abundance and intrigue of products being displayed outside. I have seen people who are chatting with each other or walking with a purposeful gait to a determined destination, slow down, pause, and stop to look at things displayed outside shops. The most amazing thing is that if the products are in a line that lead to the entrance of the shop, and better yet, flow through the open door and into the shop, the people are inside before they know it. I've come up with the rule that if you're going to put product outside then your front door must be propped open. You may have to put up with some dust blowing in, but if paying customers come in with it, you have nothing to lose. Shoplifting outside? It happens. Plan to purchase those products that are a minimum loss to you in the event of theft or that are more difficult to remove because of their weight and size. One merchant recently told me that in his opinion the cost to control theft was more than the cost of the odd item that went missing. Remember, people are drawn to abundance, so don't put out a huge table on the sidewalk for only a few items.

I have a client who asked me to help her find a new location. The shop of her dreams was set back from the neighboring stores and she was concerned about good visibility especially for her regular clientele who would be looking for her new location. Right next door was a trendy home accessory gift shop. I noticed that they had a lot of items like grapevines, rusty iron garden ornaments, clay ovens and assorted lawn decor arranged along the outside of their shop ending at the property line of my client's prospective shop. I immediately advised her to make friends with these neighbors and offer them several more feet of sidewalk right around their store and a little into her space. I told her that this was already attracting the attention of drivers and pedestrians and their eyes would just follow the products around the corner and directly into her shop. That's a win-win situation for both parties. Her product is a limited garment line of which there isn't enough to show a rack full of pieces outside. But, we did invest in a small garment fixture, shaped like a "body," that holds two or three outfits and to which balloons can be tied to attract attention on sale days. If you can't put the actual products outside for practical reasons consider oversized replicas or props.

Props are used to great effect at St. Jacob's, a small-town heritage shopping district near Toronto. You can sit on the bales of hay or old-fashioned benches outside the shops and have your picture taken with the life-size country "characters." Two flowers shops in Missis-

sauga, both in old houses set way back from the main street, have life-size stuffed gorillas that sit out on benches, rain or shine, to advertise the shops. Sometimes they are surrounded with buckets of fresh flowers and other times they are just wearing oversized straw hats banded with faded silk flowers. They always catch my attention. And if anyone asks me if there's a flower shop in Streetsville, I just tell them to look for the gorillas outside. No building number to watch for.

Remember the old carved, wooden cigar store Indian? They are now reproduced because all the originals have been snapped up by collectors and are very hard to find. If you can't place a three-dimensional figure or oversized product outside your shop, consider a two-dimensional flat figure cut out of plywood and painted. How many times have you noticed the storks stuck in a residential lawn to announce the arrival of a baby? Or pink flamingos? You've seen the limit, when a piece of cake or a pie is protruding out of the pastry shop and the front end of a car looks like it's crashing through the brick.

Paint 'n Splatters. A company in the US that specializes in manufacturing a line of plates recently had its five top-selling designs reproduced by artists on plywood and attached the eight foot diameter "plates" to the outside of its otherwise very square and very plain building. Truckers and tourists are stopping to ask if they can have their pictures taken in front of the building. Now that's promotion!

Murals on the outsides of buildings are becoming more and more popular and trendy. From bold colored avant-garde graphics to delicate pastel vines and berries trailing all over brick or stucco walls, these murals contribute to a unique and special look. Being perfectly realistic isn't the point compared to creating an atmosphere and making a strong statement. Every community has professional and budding artists just waiting for an opportunity to turn your shop into a work of art. The grocery store I shop at has hired a window painter who paints comic book scenes and stories to fill up all that empty blank space from the ceiling to floor, wall-to-wall glass. Right now there is a saga about chocolate chip cookies. My favorite scene is the one with volcanoes spewing chocolate chips into the air. It's an eye-catcher.

For an immediate increase in summer sales and tourist traffic, it's time to create a "scene"...to be seen.

For book Linda's services call 905-813-8725 or write to Visual Merchandising Presentation Consulting Ltd., 600 Highway Drive, Mississauga, Ontario. L5V 1J6. www.todaysdisplays.com □