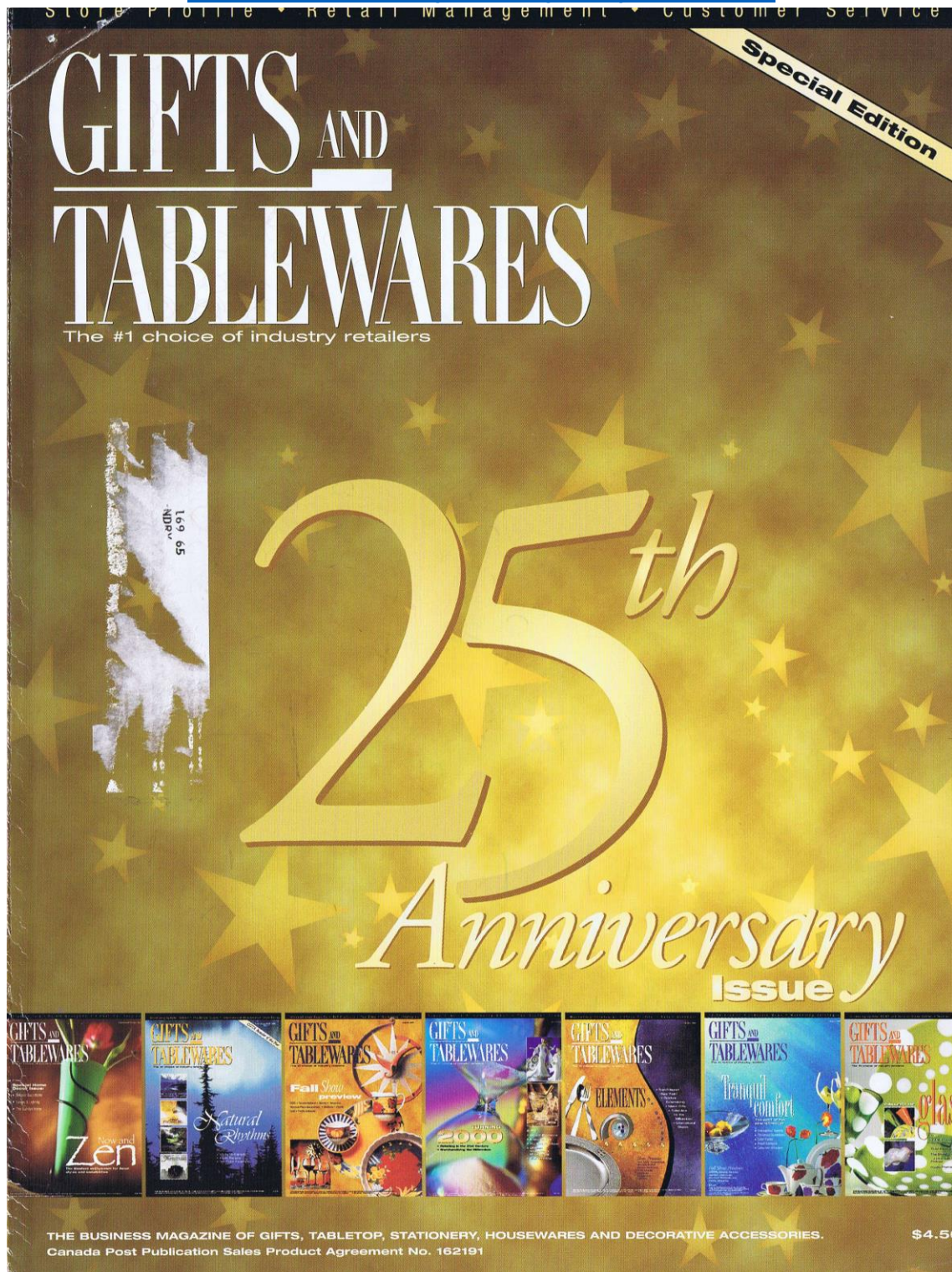


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Tried, tested and true



BY LINDA MCKENDRY,
VMPC

READER QUESTION: I want to give my shop a brand new look that will attract more attention to my regular lines but I don't want to do major renovations or incur a lot of expense. Help!

Linda's Reply: "In with the new and out with the old" is *not* the visual display way of the new millennium. Instead, retailers looking for ways to update their stores should adopt the old bride's adage, "Something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue." Look around your shop for these four elements.

Something Old

Old things have special significance either in their appearance or in their function. Even if your fixtures are old, if they are working and displaying your products in a beneficial way, keep them. However, you might consider moving them to different spots in your shop. You'd be amazed at the number of times that I have been able to create new traffic patterns and aisles—to get shoppers stopping and retailers feeling like they are working in a fresh environment—simply by moving fixtures.

Maybe old fixtures, walls, doors, trim, signs, or hard surface floors just need a fresh coat of paint or some faux-finish to give them a facelift. Use a color and finish that will impact your products the most—usually a contrasting one.

I recently worked in a shop where I created a whole new look by separating glass cubes into tall columns and standing them on laminated bases in wide aisles. This effectively turned them into glass, island showcases that brought the products to a much better eye level and made the bottom cubes more accessible as well as keeping them away from dust and people's feet. If you build higher instead of wider, you will show more product in less floor space. You will also make your store roomier, visually and physically, thus making it more inviting and better able to accommodate customers in wheelchairs and those with strollers and backpacks.

Someone else's old, could be your new for a fraction of the cost of customizing. Search used fixtures warehouses for counters, fixtures, nesting tables and shelf units. Even slat wall and bins of appropriate fittings are available. Make minor adjustments, such as drilling holes in surfaces through which to run posts or wires for computer terminal or light fixture power sources, in order to fit them into your space. In one shop we added a top to a counter that already had built-up sides. It provided a higher counter for customers to be served at and a handy but out of sight place for service clutter. The dusty rose laminate was covered with a new textured stone finish for a natural, high-touch look.

Something New

If you bring in a whole new product line, display it front and center and promote it with good signing and focused lighting. The "in your face" approach works. I'm all for having tables with floor-length drop cloths positioned at the entrance of a shop or in the middle of an aisle. If a customer can't avoid seeing an item, they'll definitely know that you have it. (A client of mine refers to this as "guerrilla marketing.") But make sure you don't clutter the aisles, creating a hazard for pedestrians. Another up side: You can buy tablecloths in a range of colors and designs; they're cheaper than new fixtures and are a quick way to get a whole new look.

Put new bulbs into your existing light fixtures. If that doesn't brighten up your whole shop then get new lighting. Whether built-in or portable, light will immediately show off products that have been sitting in the dark for far too long. Items that have been around for awhile might also benefit from a little polishing and being put back on the shelf at their regular prices. You may have to change your attitude about old stock; instead of hiding it

after numerous price reductions, showcase it. Remember, to every new customer it's a brand new item. The successful retailers I work with tell me that they are always finding new spots for things that aren't moving. It amazes them when a regular customer will come in and say, "When did you get this in?" Instead of replying, "Oh, that's been here for ages!", try saying, "I just put that there yesterday!"

If you really want a new look, go for hand-painted walls, particularly in spaces where you can't feature product. Try something neat on the door to your storeroom or on an expanse of wall high above your fixtures. Often local artists are happy to create something for a reduced fee and the opportunity to have their work somewhere they can send people to see it. Provide the artist with an image, even if it's from a child's coloring book, so that he or she can create something that reflects your store's ambience and the features of its product lines. A shop I worked in recently had an artist paint a big tree in a corner where the door to the building's heater was. They then transformed the space, which was located near the store's children's department, into a play area for kids. Everyone loves it and the heater vents are completely camouflaged. In addition, some of you might have big blank walls on the outside of your building—perfect canvases for budding artists.

The newest "new look" opportunity resides in your web site. The new visual merchandising is a down-loaded digital photo of your store, its products and friendly salespeople. Your local tourism board and chamber of commerce are just waiting for you to attach your site to theirs; people interested in visiting your area will be encouraged to shop in your store and vice-versa. A web site also provides a medium in which you can adver-

tise and promote to your heart's content. And its potential as a mail-order vehicle gives you another chance to turn items that need a face in a brand new market.

Something Borrowed

First, you want to borrow ideas from other shops, catalogs, magazines and web sites. If you see a display that catches your eye, stop and analyze it. Is it the way the products are arranged? Is it their colors, patterns or styles? Is it the lighting? Is it the props? Is something moving, reflecting or glittering? Is it a lot of little items that are massed or a single large item that's overwhelming because of its size? Is your eye riveted to a certain venue because a backdrop is stopping it from being distracted by lots of other products or fixtures just behind it?

I tell people to borrow props so they can reduce their investment in items that they won't be selling. Many photography shops and theaters have props they only use seasonally or occasionally, and party rental shops are often pleased to have their services promoted through a silent salesman sign in front of a borrowed prop such as a wedding arch or lattice screen. Travel agents will gladly lend you used posters to create "slice of

life" backdrops for products that would be used at the destination shown, or are imported from a particular place. You "borrow" the prop in exchange for additional exposure to the business supplying it. This cross-merchandising between merchants—the formula for community marketing—reflects a positive business image to local shoppers and tourists.

Something Blue

Blue, the hue at the top of all the millennial color trend charts, should serve as a reminder to always know the trends and to have at least one spot in your shop to showcase "what's in" and "what's new." This is the best way to target trend-forward shoppers. However, it doesn't mean you should shift your entire mix to accommodate the latest fad. You can assign a fixture or a location in your shop to merchandise—and market test—a few trendy items. Readers of this column know my rule about grouping and spacing, a display technique that allows you to present an entire line or a single object that may not be a natural fit with your established product lines. If you give these products a place of their own, separated by space or the boundaries of a fixture or backdrop, you can

offer a greater variety of goods without confusing your customers.

Good visual merchandising principles and techniques haven't changed at all over the years. People are still drawn to abundance. They are still more likely to buy products that are within comfortable reach. Shoppers will stop to look at windows where there is something light, bright and white close to the front. They are still drawn to well-lit objects. Everyone will look at something that's moving or glittering when it comes into their line of vision. We will continue to seek places to shop that give us service, convenience, and a variety of product choices. But visual merchandising—VMP—is what we see. And to be sold, goods must first be seen. The rules have been tried, tested, and found true. Every anniversary of every shop that's doing well is an example of successfully combining the old (keeping what's working) with the new (trying fresh approaches), borrowing ideas and props and keeping up with the times.

For Linda's services call 905-813-8725 or write to VMP Consulting, 6309 Doon Ave., Mississauga, Ontario, L5V 1J6. www.todaydisplays.com

(original ads replaced with illustrations for topic.)



What's "NEW" is the EXTREMES of "hand done" and "hand held" to stay alive in your community!



Your store goes into the virtual world of every shopper who has access to the internet.

Hire local artists and add a touch of whimsy or 'reality' to walls: inside and out! Paint can hide, expose, and even trick the eye by adding dimension that isn't really there. A children's play corner is worth giving up the space when it keeps the caregivers shopping! Large outdoor murals enhance the entire community with history, or just visual interest.

This is an opportunity to keep a fresh face to your customers and prospects. A photo of your store, featured products, or special staff accomplishments, keep your customers in touch.