

Visual merchandising in retail stores- its time for christmas and New Year celebration

■ RAMANDEEP SODHI AND RITA KANT

Received: 18.02.2013; Revised: 30.05.2013; Accepted: 04.06.2013

See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to :

RAMANDEEP SODHI

Department of Fashion
Technology, Punjab University,
CHANDIGARH (U.T.) INDIA
Email: raman_rapy@yahoo.co.in

■ **ABSTRACT :** The study aims to find out how and to what extent retail apparel outlets incorporate visual merchandising during Christmas and New Year. The survey method was followed to conduct the study and data were collected through Interview schedule and convenient sampling. Goa was selected as locale of the study. The major findings showed that almost all the stores employed visual merchandisers who used their creativity to enhance the aesthetic appeal of window displays, store designs, walkways and in-store displays by increasing sales and capitalizing on human tendency to window shops. It is also understood that displays are frequently changed to promote new product launches and reflect festive or season themes such as Christmas, New Year, Spring or Summer. All the stores allocate specific budget for their window displays, lighting fixtures, signage and graphics. The output of the study unfolds that merchandiser's main focus on festive season is to maximize sale and revenue by using a different point of sale merchandising products such as mannequins, holiday and event displays, sale signs, display boards, props, balls and baubles, different fixtures, window themes, colorizing, lighting, music, room sprays, Santa in stores etc. to convert potential customers into real customers.

■ **KEY WORDS :** Visual merchandising (V.M.), Window displays, Lighting, Store design

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER :** Sodhi, Ramadeep and Kant, Rita (2013). Visual merchandising in retail stores- its time for christmas and New Year celebration. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 8 (1): 226-231.

During the early 18th century, when the contemporary methods of visual merchandising began to evolve, store owners and managers cared little for the appearance of their stores and the presentation of merchandise. In the late 18th century, merchandise was staged in interesting and unique arrangements to attract consumers. There were many people whose initiatives and brilliant ideas helped to set eye catching windows. Credit goes to American retailer, Gordon Selfridges, who brought the concept of visual merchandising in Department Stores. He was the first to promote Christmas sales with the phrase 'Shopping days, until Christmas. He understood better than anyone the power of a good and exciting display. Simple, creative and innovative displays are more attractive to customers and to do this good merchandising presentation skills are required. Selfridge revolutionized the concept of visual merchandising in many ways. When in July 1909, Louis Bleriot crash landed his air plane across English Channel; Selfridge displayed the same

landing of plane in his windows. People gathered in queues to see his artistic skill. The period of 1920s saw a revolution in terms of art, fashion and designs. Paris was the one to take the lead in creating marvelous window displays. Theme displays reached the masses. Stores and designers started advocating their ideas through displays. Fashion designers started working on the design concept of the windows. Many artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauscheberg started their career as Window dressers in 1950s. Stores started adopting different techniques to make the most of their windows. With time the design aesthetics used in widow displays moved indoors and became part of the overall interior store design. Traditional windows have been replaced with wide open entry ways through which shoppers can view a larger portion of main selling area. Visual merchandising ranges from window/exterior displays to interior displays including form displays and floor/wall merchandising as well as promotion signage. It also broadly includes advertising and

brand/store logo. Today the visual merchandisers create window displays that can be easily set in place in all the front windows of the stores associated with the retail chain throughout the country. Merchandise display can also be an important aid in helping consumers to make purchase decision. Window display is an important promotional issue. Along with the window displays, the interior displays are updated or replaced with entirely new display depending upon the demand of season or occasion. With the emphasis on the whole store rather than the windows, display people have become visual merchandisers, who specialize in entire store's visual appearance.

A visual merchandiser is a professional involved in the combination of skills, including creativity, dedication to design, stay within budgets and sense of promoting activity of goods in retail outlets. He or she implements the merchandising technique effectively using the design of an environment via visual communications from lighting, colours, music and scent stimulating customers' perceptual and emotional response and ultimately affect their purchase behaviour. Elements such as temperature, lightning and music can profoundly affect how people feel, think about a particular store establishment and exist below the level of customer's immediate awareness. These comprise visual, aural and olfactory dimensions. The Atmospheric dimensions colour, lighting levels, appearance of objects (size and shape), volume, pitch tempo and style of sounds; nature and intensity of scent play an important role in affecting the mood of a customer in the store. In addition to being the centre figure in planning window and interior presentations, visual merchandisers have assumed numerous other responsibilities, such as store design, layout, fixture design and selection, graphic development and procurement, signage direction and lighting usage. A good store design helps to improve efficiency and encourages people to browse and look into every corner rather than just standing in the store. If consumers can easily satisfy their goals, the feeling of pleasurable shopping, experience will be enhanced.

The lavish windows of the downtown flagship stores create a great deal of excitement especially at Christmas and New Year time, stores like Levis, Nike, Tommyhilfiger, Bata impress critics and customers with their imaginative window displays (Fig. A).

Each year the presentations seem more and more elaborate especially on Christmas and New Year. A major outlay of money is spent during this period. Santa's picture made with cotton and red colors, bells, stars, flowers, all add a feeling of realism and life to the decoration. Using fabric to cover walls, columns and different cribs featuring statues of mother Mary and Jesus are shown to give the store a special look.

The study endeavors to find out the different types of windows, merchandising tools, props and displays employed by these stores during Christmas and New Year and outlay of money allocated during this period on displays in Goa.



Fig. A: Window displays during festive season

RESEARCH METHODS

Survey method was adopted to carry out the present study and to collect required information. Questionnaire method, interview schedule and convenient sampling were the tools used. The sample size consisted of 50 visual merchandisers.

The researchers included a questionnaire for the visual merchandisers. Questions were asked related to personal profile of the visual merchandiser, including his name, educational status, professional qualification and number of persons working in a visual merchandising team, types of displays, materials, tools and techniques employed for maintaining store ambiance, budget allotted for V.M. Pre-testing was followed and questions were reframed for added clarity, some questions were added to collect more useful information and those which were irrelevant to the study were deleted.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The budget allotted to visual merchandisers is presented in Table 1. The result showed that the maximum outlay of money was spent on windows and props (38 %), moreover the expenditure on signs and graphics (28 %) and lightning fixtures (25 %) was almost equal. Just about (8%) of stores gave importance to display fixtures. The figures showed that visual merchandising is a recognized technique of selling now-a-days. Stores allocate a good percentage to visual displays.

Table 1 : Budget allotted to visual merchandisers during Christmas and New Year

Budget allotted to visual merchandisers	Percentage of respondents
Display fixtures	8
Lighting fixtures	25
Signs and graphics	28
Windows and props	38

Table 2 represents the types of displays employed throughout the year. All the stores surveyed employed open, window and interior display method of visual merchandising. 84 per cent made use of theme displays, reasonably project display and lifestyle displays were employed by 64 per cent and 44 per cent of stores, respectively. However, isolated displays were employed by only 36 per cent of stores. The figures showed that visual merchandising ranged from window/exterior displays to interior displays including form displays and floor/wall merchandising.

Type of displays	Percentage stores
Open display	100
Theme display	84
Life style display	44
Project display	64
Window display	100
Interior display	100
Isolated display	36

Table 3 shows types of windows employed by stores during festive season. Window display is an important promotional tool used by all retail stores. Closed windows (38%) were employed by maximum number of stores during festive season as the theme can be presented without disturbing the whole store. Open windows and partial open windows were employed by approximately one-fourth of stores. Whereas, only Island windows and shadow box were employed by 12 per cent and 6 per cent of stores, respectively.

Type of Window displays	Percentage stores
Closed back window	38
Open back window	22
Island window	12
Partial open window	22
Shadow box	6

Table 4 shows that all the stores use colorizing, balls and baubles, Christmas tree and bells. 92 per cent of stores uses pictures of Santa. Garlands, bows/ ribbons and Christmas lights were employed by 84 per cent of stores. The tradition of having cribs (76%) at store fronts showed statues of Jesus Christ mother Mary and father John. Candlesticks, candelabras and snowman were used by approximately 20 per cent of stores.

Type of displays	Percentage in 2005
Colorizing	100
Balls and baubles	100
Garlands, bows and ribbons	84
Snowman	22
Christmas lights	84
Pictures of Santa / bells	92
Christmas tree	100
Candelabras and candlesticks	20
Crib	76

Conclusion :

The results of the study revealed that visual merchandisers are professionals who are expert in the process of creating and staging displays in retail stores, conventions, fashion shows and other public events. Spring season display is welcomed with fresh flowers in the stores. Valentine day celebrations are accompanied by red balloons in the stores. Diwali display involves stores decorated with candles, beautiful posters of crackers. Christmas celebrations are enlightened with Santa’s pictures (Fig.1) decorated with balls and baubles, bells, lights, Christmas



Fig. 1: Santa’s picture along with merchandise display



Fig. 2: Balls, baubles and Christmas tree

tree (Fig. 2), Cribs (Fig. 3) featuring statues of mother Mary and Jesus Christ. Theme displays (Fig. 4) are carried throughout the stores along with interior (Fig. 5) and open displays (Fig. 6) on all occasions.



Fig. 3: Crib featuring birth of Jesus Christ



Fig. 4: Theme displays during Christmas



Fig. 5: Interior displays



Fig. 6: Open displays

The interiors range from natural settings using stone and woods to elegant environment with atriums, majestic staircase, marble flooring to other touches of grandeur. (Hasty and Reardon 1997) The satisfaction of shopper needs via interior and exterior design elements that produces an operationally efficient store, the desired store image and a central location that effectively displays merchandise. Project display (Fig. 7) brings all the products together in one store helping shoppers to make their experience a pleasurable and interesting. Tommy Hilfiger exhibits full ranges of men's and women's in their stores along with accessories such as bags, belts, shoes, watches etc. Lifestyle displays (Fig. 8) featuring television monitors to show vendor collections along with videos, music, sound and other electronic formats are used to capture shopper's attention. Isolated displays (Fig. 9) require lot of expensive props, large preparation, so are mainly employed during Christmas season in Goa. A maximum amount is allocated on windows and props, lighting fixtures, signage and graphics due to festive season and least amount of money is spent on display fixtures.



Fig. 7: Project displays



Fig. 8: Lifestyle displays



Fig. 9: Isolated display



Fig. 10 : Closed back windows

The output of the study unfolds that space that was once allocated to store windows has been minimized and replaced with more selling floor space. The role of windows has been diversified, Closed back windows (Fig. 10) are

used to present a theme and are generally employed during festive season, Open back window (Fig. 11) and partial open widows (Fig. 12) are maximum in demand as it introduces the customer to new, exciting and creative merchandise, presenting the viewers an entire view of the store. Shadow boxes (Fig. 13) are used for smaller items such as folded shirts with ties and sweaters; accessories such as jewellery, handbags and so on. Island widows (Fig. 14) are least in demand as it has glass on all the four walls and lighting is a problem in these windows. The list of materials and props used by stores on occasions like Christmas and New Year are endless. More and more retailers are using things found in nature such as trees, branches, rock, nests, bells and so on. Of course, at Christmas and New Year time, animated displays and glittery props like lights, fabrics, balls and baubles are of paramount importance. Statues of mother Mary and Jesus featuring a story along with straw, wood and antiques used extensively.



Fig. 11 : Open back window



Fig. 12: Partial open window



Fig. 13 : Shadow box



Fig. 14 : Island window

Visual impression is considered very important in attracting shopper and any investment in creative display pays off in the end- of- the-year bottom line. A good fashion store, as one that maximizes the fashion consumer's exposure to fashion merchandise and invites consumers' consideration of

fashion items by displaying merchandise in their path and field of vision(Underhill, 1999). The world of display has expanded from a concentration on eye catching widows to a concept of storewide visual merchandising that include not only window and interior displays but how to present any and all merchandise for consumer inspection and create exciting environment with signage, graphics, display fixtures and props.

Authors' affiliations:

RITA KANT, Department of Fashion Technology, Punjab University, CHANDIGARH (U.T.) INDIA Email: kaushikrita@rocketmail.com

■ REFERENCES

- Calasibetta, C.M.** (1998). *Fairchild Dictionary of fashion*, Fairchild Books Publications, pp. 158-159.
- Castantino, M.** (1998). *Fashion marketing and PR*. BT Batsford Ltd., pp. 57-58.
- Frings, G.S.** (1996). *Fashion from concept to consumer*. New Jersey Publication, pp. 35 8-362.
- Goworek, H.** (2002). *Fashion buying*. Blackwell Science Publication, p.107.
- Hines, T., Moore, C. and Bruce, M.** (2002). *Fashion marketing*. Butterworth-Heinemann, pp- 102, 108 -112, 115, 123-125,129,131.
- Jarnow, J.A., Guerreiro, M. and Judelle, B.** (1987). *Inside the fashion business*. Macmillan Publishing company, pp. 396.
- Jones, S.J.** (2002). *Fashion design*. Laurence King Publication, pp. 50-53.
- Lee, S.** (2005). *Fashioning the future*, Thames & Hudson, pp. 27-28.
- MCGoldrick, P.** (2002). *Retail marketing*. McGraw-Hill publication, pp. 148-158.
- Moore, C., Bruce, M. and Grete, M.** (2004). *International retail marketing*, pp. 78-80.
- Sidney, P., Arthur, A.W. and Nathan, A.** (1988). *Fashion buying and merchandising*. Fairchild Publications, pp. 42, 380.

★★★★★ of Excellence ★★★★★