



**Retailing's Biggest Challenge:  
Integrating Advertising, Marketing and Merchandising In The Showroom  
By: Michael Boswell**

Integrating marketing, merchandising and lifestyle concepts into a cohesive showroom presentation is one of the most important actions retailers need to take. All too often these important aspects of retailing are lost in sea of product. Unfortunately, many retailers have the 'if you build it, they will come' mind set. Simply placing lots of product in front of consumers does not guarantee sales.

***"The sale is dependent on the customer's positive perception of your store."***

The sales (and marketing and merchandising) process starts before the consumer ever enters your store. Every retailer needs to establish a quality advertising program, whether print, broadcast, or other medium, that establishes what makes his or her store unique. Why should a consumer visit your store instead of your competition? The main question a consumer asks when responding to an ad is "What's in it for me? If that message is not conveyed in *your* advertising, the store that *does* convey it will get the customer.

Once the advertising has attracted the consumer to your store, it is important to reinforce the message that got their attention initially. The presentation of 'ad pull through' confirms that the promotion that inspired the consumer to visit your store *is* available and at the price advertised. There are many ways to present 'ad pull through', based upon the layout of the showroom floor, as well what product(s) / service(s) you are touting.

One of the most common problems with showrooms is that it is real easy for them to become a hodgepodge of various merchandising materials that were never intended to work together. The result: clutter. You wouldn't mix contemporary, traditional and avant-garde furniture in your living room- don't do it in your showroom. That is, however, the impression a consumer has upon entering a showroom with merchandising in disarray. Not only is it visually upsetting, but it does not convey the professional image you need to present.

***"Your visual merchandising must simultaneously satisfy the logical and emotional buying habits of the consumer."***

Retailers need to create a merchandising program that satisfies the logical and emotional aspects of the purchasing process. Both goals can be achieved through proper lifestyle and product imaging. Reinforce to your customers that the purchase they are considering is one that will not only improve their lifestyle, but is a quality value as well. Very few customers wake up and say 'Gosh, I've got to buy this product **TODAY!**' A retailer, however, must create that type of emotional enthusiasm and urgency, while simultaneously appealing to the logical aspect of the purchase process. In most cases, people buy furniture because they have to, not because they want to. What they have is worn out, so they're going to want a product that is durable. This can be conveyed through features and benefits presentation, whether by brand or item.

Most consumers' knowledge of products is limited to name recognition. They are familiar with Brand A, so it must be better than Brand H- or is it? Brand H may have similar features and benefits but at a price point more in line with the customers needs. Verbally informing them of the similarities is easily misconstrued as nothing more than a sales pitch. By having a display that

shows why Brand H is a quality product, the customer can see that what they are being told is true. The more product information a consumer can see, in a clear, concise way, the more their fears are put to rest and the easier the sales process becomes.

***“Your visual merchandising has to reflect not only the material goods purchased, but also their social aspirations.”***

To maintain your program's credibility with your customers, it is important that the lifestyle imaging match their demographics. If your customers see people who look like them, with furniture in houses that look better than their own, it will establish the perception that your furniture will make their homes just as nice as those pictured in the merchandising. Not only does this reinforce that

***“Providing value- real and perceived- is the key to successful retailing today.”***

The bottom line is that retailers need to make sure that their merchandising presentation is integrated with their marketing and advertising programs. All of these, along with lifestyle merchandising, need to be integrated to create a cohesive presentation that will satisfy both the emotional and logical aspects of the purchase process. The result will be a much more impressive looking showroom that will help increase sales.

Michael Boswell founded Boswell & Associates in 2006 and has created many Point Of Purchase programs for retail. Signs & Displays Direct, a subsidiary of Boswell & Associates, offers a complete line of visual merchandising displays including banners, light boxes, window and floor graphics, wall murals, catalog stands, kiosks, lightwalls and other display products. Boswell & Associates creates cohesive implementation of all these concepts into the retail setting for manufacturers, distributors and retailers.

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