

NURSERY PAPERS

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The art of strategic merchandising

Pile it high and watch it fly? Not always. Strategic merchandising involves far more than meets the eye – a well merchandised store engages shoppers and all their senses. More often than not, customers will walk out of a well merchandised store with cartloads of items they hadn't originally intended to buy.

This Nursery Paper is written by renowned retailing expert, trainer and speaker Debra Templar, and examines the art of strategic merchandising. Covering store layout and presentation, the sensory retail experience and visual merchandising, this paper offers practical tips and hints for creating a uniquely successful shopping experience in your retail nursery or garden centre.



The art of strategic merchandising

Have you ever gone into a store to buy a single item and left with a cartload of things you hadn't intended to buy? Congratulations! You have fallen victim to some other retailers' merchandising strategy. When a store or nursery is merchandised well this becomes a common occurrence.

Visual merchandise is projected upon entry to the nursery and you need to direct the prospective customer's eyes and feet to a successful sale.

Let's look at what you can do to maximise the customer experience in your store, and therefore the sales success.

Organising your store

The link

A customer has seen your special promotion in the window, enters your nursery and turns... which way? You need to monitor your customer flow - do they generally turn right, left or stop and look puzzled? Watch the customer flow and gauge reactions to your layout.

You should strategically display the merchandise that you are selling and make sure the new range of merchandise is easily spotted. Let's start by organising your interior.

Basic demand

Customers expect to find the basics in your nursery or they will go elsewhere- check your competitors. You will have fast-sellers but most of your demand merchandise will sell moderately well week on week.

Topical demand lines/convenience

A customer enters the nursery to buy something- for example, water wise products. The merchandise should have immediate impact – it's not 'Hide and Seek'!



Strategic merchandising directs the prospective customer's eyes and feet to a successful sale.

Impulse

Check out your hot spot areas for impulse buying and be prepared to change merchandise regularly to link with your promotions. Over time this will establish you as a reliable specialist.

Next time you walk into your nursery you should consider the layout and holistic environment. The principles of good display and design should apply: use of balance, grouping of products, control of the eye by lines of sight, etc. But also consider that all display from the window through to the interior should play a major part in your merchandising. Walk around the nursery and consider how the overall presentation could be improved and remember, attention to detail is good housekeeping.

It is also very important to involve your staff and open their eyes to the importance of maintaining presentations.

The principles of good display and design should apply when organising your store, for example, use of balance, grouping of products and control of the eye by lines of sight.



Making your product the star

How do you make your product the star? It's easy when your merchandising involves each of your customer's five senses.

Sound: audio architecture

If your nursery is quiet then you may be missing out on sales. The music you play in your nursery does more than entertain shoppers – it provides a background that entices them to stay longer and buy more. I like music that gives shoppers a psychological lift. Your aim is for your shoppers, young or old, to smile. Another plus; the right music can make your staff more efficient, so if they're dragging at the end of the day, crank up the tunes.

You might want to consider categorising your playlist. Examples of categories could be 'energy' (when you need to crank it up and get customers and staff moving!), 'cruisy', 'rain music' (when you want it to rain), music that appeals to Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, etc. Ensure you give someone responsibility for the music on a daily/weekly basis.

Here's a tip: let your staff have a turn choosing some of the music. Just make sure that every lyric is given the third degree before you put it on your playlist.

Taste: the flavour of success

If you sell food, this is a no brainer. But even if you don't, it's not a problem if you make food part of your nursery experience. Place cold drinks near the front door to welcome shoppers on hot days. Do the same thing in winter, replacing the cold drinks with hot coffee or hot chocolate. Offer free bottles of water customised with your store's own label. Host a wine tasting. Partner with a local restaurant for an in-store event. The ideas are endless. Just remember that when customers try, they usually buy, so while their mouths are full, stick a cool product in their hands.

Smell: aromatherapy and aromacology

Remember that old retail adage: 'If it smells, it sells'? Turns out it's true! Researchers have found that a pleasant smelling environment has a positive effect on shopping behaviour. We all respond to good scents, maybe because they have the power to evoke memory. We've all had a whiff of something familiar and been instantly transported to another place in time. That's what makes aromatherapy so popular.

Now we have aromacology – the science of scents and their effect on our minds and moods. Grapefruit, for example, will give shoppers more energy, vanilla will calm them when the store is hectic, pine will inspire positive feelings and cinnamon is said to attract money. So put out the potpourri and let the scent permeate the air. Better yet, purchase scent diffusers and place them throughout the store.

Touch: please play with the merchandise

Some stores set up such intricate displays that shoppers are afraid to touch them. Even worse are the salespeople who follow shoppers around the store 'fixing' product displays that customers have had the audacity to touch. Give me a break – shoppers are supposed to mess up the store!

So if you're a perfectionist, you need to resist when it comes to your displays. You've got a choice:
 PERFECT + NOT TOUCHED = NO SALE or
 NOT QUITE PERFECT + TOUCHED = \$\$\$.

Make sure that your displays are set to invite customers to play. Instead of an intricate display, ensure they're touchable. Choose an 'Item of the Day' that your salespeople carry with them as they work. Encourage them to show the item to customers, inviting them to take a look or try it out. Make a visit to your store a fun and interactive experience, not just a place to buy stuff.



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Sight: trolleys

What makes a savvy garden centre retailer forget about the importance of colour, convenience and signage when it comes to trolleys? Here's a tip: customers overlook the colour of wire. They don't see it. It blends into nothingness. So if your trolleys are "hiding" then how do you expect customers to find them?

Good customer service is to have a minimum of one, preferably more, trolley bays dotted throughout the garden centre with a sign stating something like: "Customer trolleys – Please take one". It also makes sense to paint your trolleys. Why? So they don't look like wire and customers can see them and feel confident using them. Pick colours that work for your nursery but don't have them so well blended into the greenery that they can't be seen!

Here are some tips on the care of trolleys:

- Ensure trolleys are kept clean. Clean them at the end of the day before storing them in a secure location overnight.
- Keep trolleys well maintained. This involves daily checking.
- Ensure you have a tool kit, oil and spray paint available for maintaining the trolleys.
- Ensure trolleys are in a safe location and retrieved regularly from parking lots

Visual Merchandising

Much of what happens on your sales floor is visual – all that wonderful merchandise is eye candy to a shopper. You can place product on your shelves and hope it sells, or you can use visual merchandising techniques to make sure it does.

Make a vertical move

Say you have a new product and are about to set up an end feature display. There are two ways you can merchandise this product on the shelves, horizontally or vertically.

If you choose a horizontal presentation, placing just one product per shelf, then you limit the amount of items a shopper is likely to see as they scan a shelf. If they only glance at the second shelf, they will only see that particular product. That's why a vertical presentation is the better bet.

Any time you display product in a vertical slice, you expose your shoppers to a greater variety of the assortment at any eye level. We're naturally inclined to read from left to right, so vertical merchandising encourages shoppers to see your entire selection of merchandise, regardless of which shelf they choose to gaze upon.



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Small left, large right

Say you sell Product X in two sizes. A popular trick of the trade involves displaying the small size of a product on the left, and the larger size on the right. This technique works because most customers are right-handed, and will unconsciously reach for the item closest to their right hands, rather than reaching across their body or shopping cart. Walk your aisles – you'll find endless opportunities for this trick in your nursery.

Find the hot spot

Every single section of every single fixture has a 'hot spot' – the part of the fixture that sells the best. Most shoppers tend to stop and look at the centre of a product category or display, so the hot spot silently points out and sells important merchandise. You can locate the hot spot on any fixture by simply drawing an imaginary cross through its centre.

Another merchandising tip: since most customers will reach for product with their right hand, the position just to the right of the centre of the cross is an equally hot display area. This technique is called 'hot spot and one to the right'. It's the perfect place to display items you don't want shoppers to miss.



The 'hot spot' is the part of the fixture that sells the best. You can locate the hot spot on any fixture by simply drawing an imaginary cross through its centre.

Throw 'em a curve

Any time you display product on a slanted shelf, you increase what's known as the shopper's 'strike zone'. It's called visual curve merchandising and it increases the amount of product a shopper sees in just one glance because they look up and down a display, as well as forward.

You may well have product gathering dust on flat shelves. Try a new slant. Call your favourite fixture company and invest in inexpensive plastic fencing that will hold the product in place when you slant your shelves. Once you try this technique you will be amazed at the difference it makes in presentation and sales.

The bottom line

Pile it high and watch it fly? Not in your store and not always! Instead, choose to engage shoppers and all their senses. Create an in-store experience that's uniquely your own.

Acknowledgements

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