

retail design

As retailers strive to find new and exciting ways to promote and sell their products in an aggressive global marketplace, designers are challenged to understand consumer behaviour as well as the changing building technologies.

The cultural and social issues of the shopper impact on how products are branded and presented to buyers. The way we dress or the way we furnish our homes, the food we eat, books we read or music we listen to, right down to the cars we drive and phones we use - all point to the people we are, as far as social status is concerned.

People are basically curious and want to be stimulated by new ideas, inventions, fashion and food, and interactive retailing includes in-store multi-media presentations to support the sales process.



Swatch captures the shopper's attention by providing seats for them to sit on while they inspect watches on display.

It is easier to try the timepieces on their wrist while seated and they are more likely to purchase when comfortably sitting.

The five senses - sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell - are stimulated with integrated retailing by the using eye-catching displays, music/entertainment, food sampling, tactile surfaces and air fragrances. Shopping has become a very sociable activity and is sometimes referred to as "retail therapy" by addictive shoppers.

While shopping is necessary for survival, it is the coming together of people at the farmers markets or shopping mall that entices families out of their homes at the weekends to buy essential commodities and be tempted by luxurious items to make us 'feel good'.



This produce is very attractively displayed. The store is called Lets Eat.

The store also supply ready meals made from these fresh and tasty ingredients.

Shopping may be part of a family outing for entertainment at the mall, or a chance to meet friends for a coffee within a store. Or it may simply be an information-gathering exercise to research products and prices before a purchase.

What shoppers remember about their experience is important - why do they keep going back to a particular retailer or shopping centre, or why do they reject a store or mall in favour of another?

The robot and colourful interiors makes this store appealing to kids.



Relationship building is one of the key objectives between the retailer and the customer, and strategic design from the shop front to the point of sale is vital to reinforce the values of the brand and company.

The skills of the retail designer need to activate a consumer's natural instinct to consider a product or service, and then facilitate its purchase or use, so that the consumer feels 'comfortable with their purchase'.

Retail environments must be efficient in terms of space, flexibility and cost. Design is the management of people and space in a constantly changing retail market, which is driven by a number of external factors, even the weather!

Consumers demand natural and organic products, and want to know more about their manufacture and origin.



Shops are constantly seeking new customers as well as trying to retain and strengthen relationships and loyalty with existing customers.

Consumers are time-starved and have less disposable income today so they are looking for value in their investments as well as the best reward schemes for buying from a particular store or website. And if a discount or free delivery is not offered they will often insist that it becomes part of the purchase agreement.

Supermarkets today may encompass chemist, bank, petrol, dry-cleaning services, books/newspapers, clothing/shoes, toys, and small appliances - a one-stop-shop.

Online supermarket shopping saves the customer time.



Clients look for reward schemes and discounts.

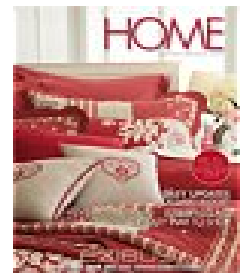


Society no longer accepts "growing old gracefully" and people are healthier and fitter, and they want to look and feel young for longer. Young consumers shop around for value, credit and loyalty schemes. School children are far more brand conscious.

The company behind the 'store front' or 'website' must not lose sight of their customer's needs and wants. It is a balance between making it a sociable experience with the speed and convenience of technology.

Trading hours have changed drastically to meet consumer demand - supermarkets are open from before breakfast until after dinner, some 24 hours a day. And of course internet purchases can be made any time of the day or night, every day of the week.

Catalogues and mailers encourage telephone and online orders with courier delivery right to your front door. Digital television will become the vehicle for internet shopping in future and there are already home-shopping channels operating 24/7.



The interiors and layout of stores has also changed in recent years. Retail outlets are opening within or beside airports, hospitals, hotels and churches.



And cafes are operating within book stores, fashion boutiques, beauty salons and sports stores. And every shopping mall has an extensive food hall within it, and some department stores have an entire floor dedicated to bars and restaurants.

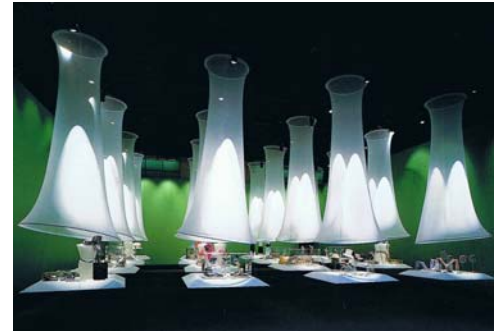
Homeware and hardware stores contain information kiosks and self directed check-outs, while family restaurants incorporate playgrounds and entertainment for children.

Entertainment includes fashion shows within clothing stores, food demonstrations within supermarkets and theatre sports within shopping centres. It is all about having fun.

Interactive shelves 'talk to the customer' when pressed, and sound effects are activated by pads on the floor when walking around the store. Fragrances are released from products when touched. There are entire video walls with moving images, or music to relax or stimulate the shopper.

Interactive shopping is a sensory experience to direct customers around the space, present products and information at various points, and trigger their mood and impulses to make a purchase.

Gauze tubes direct the light down onto the products in this jewellery store which give a dramatic effect.

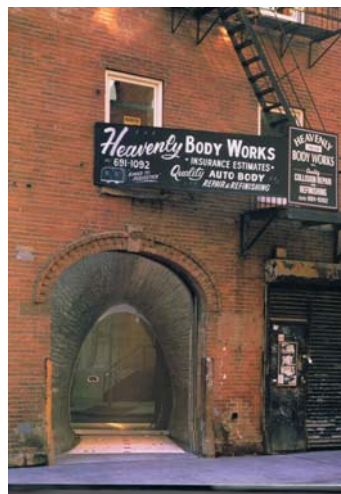


shop front

First impressions are critical - the shop front and façade communicates the brand while window displays present products to entice the customer into the store. For small objects such as jewellery or cosmetics the window display should be at eye level, while larger objects such as furniture require space in proportion to the end use for maximum impact e.g. room setting.

Signage usually shows the logo and typeface to communicate the identity of the store. Illuminated signs have great impact day and night. Awnings and canopies are used to protect pedestrians from inclement weather and reduce the sun from damaging perishable goods. They can be made from canvas, metal or sandblasted glass and often incorporate signage and logo as well.

The entrance should be easy to find, welcoming and seductive to invite the customer into the store. Two very different facades - the more traditional brick building and a glitzy glass shop front to the right.





floors

The floor is a good way of defining space - the transition from outdoors to indoors, the circulation around the store, public and private spaces. Floors can be neutral or bright and colourful in design, and should be slip resistant and safe.

Materials should be durable and easy to maintain, and protected by a good quality entrance mat to remove dirt and grit from shoes. Carpet, often used in department stores, is soft underfoot for both staff and shoppers, and reasonably cost effective. It also absorbs sound, and carpet tiles offer flexibility to repair damaged areas.

Timber, cork, vinyl, terrazzo, polished concrete, terracotta or ceramic tiles are all popular, sometimes used in conjunction with carpet or sisal. Tiles can be cold and noisy. There are also resin and stone conglomerate tiles, floor grade laminates and industrial rubber, even glass tiles, used in retail flooring.

All interior surfaces should comply with fire and safety regulations and materials should be researched and checked with regulatory bodies to ensure standards are met.

walls and ceilings

The walls are used to conceal, support, divide and focus attention within the space. Materials are varied, paint commonly used to create planes of colour for a sculptural or decorative effect. Colour can add drama or support brand identity, it can heighten space or conceal it, add warmth to make a space look cool'.

Ceilings sometimes conceal the air conditioning, security, fire alarms, electrical cables, etc. between floors of multi story buildings, commonly called suspended ceilings. The surface finish is usually a mineral fibre tile sometimes with open grid sections. Some open-ceiling designs expose all the services and they become a feature of the store interior giving a high-tech effect.

Ceilings should not overwhelm the other interior elements or the products on display, an uncluttered ceiling will draw the eye down to the products on display.



This is a minimal approach to displaying art.

Simple timber floors and white painted walls and ceilings.

The product dominates, not the décor.

lighting

Lighting can be used to create atmosphere, focus attention and influence moods - it should create excitement and anticipation. But as the lighting is usually on all the time it is important to consider cost of energy consumption as well as the installation and maintenance of light fittings and bulb replacement.

Technically there are lots of options for creative lighting effects using coloured lights for signage and display, as well as strobes and fibre optics. For overall lighting usually a combination of metal halide or halogen and tungsten light sources are specified. Fluorescent lamps are economical and give good colour rendition, halogen lamps also provide good colour rendition and are available in miniature sizes.

The ceiling lights here mirror the walkway below to move the shoppers to the rear of the store.

Backlit images show the menswear on each side of the walkway.



Ambient lighting is used along walkways and circulation routes as well as service areas such as escalators. Accent lighting is used in product display areas to create atmosphere and make the merchandise look appealing.

Light fittings include downlights, uplighters, spot lights, ceiling mounted fittings and recessed fittings. Light beams can be controlled from small and intense pin-spots to highlight jewellery for instance to a wider and softer beam for larger display or objects.



A theatrical effect can be achieved by adding coloured filters and moving parts to the light beams.

Each recessed wall display of jewellery is washed with a different coloured light in this store.

services

As for any commercial building, there are always lots of services to accommodate in addition to lighting. There is the air conditioning and heating, telecommunications and cabling for computer terminals and point of sale equipment such as scanners and eftpos. Security systems such as burglar alarms, in store camera surveillance, smoke detectors and fire sprinklers, electrical cabling and sound systems.

Cabling and ducting is usually concealed within the suspended ceiling space or sometimes a cavity is created under an access flooring system. Cables may also be ducted along skirting boards and incorporated within cabinetry.



shop fittings and merchandising

A modular system is flexible and cost effective to present products in different ways as required during the seasons and/or promotions. Fashion stores require “invisible” equipment so it doesn’t overshadow the garments themselves. Shopfitting specialists work to create standardised equipment which can be customised to suit various retailers. Hardware stores require strong shelving for heavy objects, whereas pharmacies have lots of small lightweight items to display.

Display systems may be wall-mounted around perimeter of the store, or floor mounted within the space. Mid floor units allow customers to walk ‘amongst’ the products, which often encourages sales. Customised shelving units and cubicles may also be mobile so they can be moved within the space as required.

Visual merchandising is taking the product and using advertising and packaging to present it to consumers in the most eye-catching way to encourage interest. Having the right product in the right place at the right time!

Technology helps merchandisers to promote products with audio, visual and interactive media that bring vivid images to life within the store.



circulation patterns

This should aid customers through the retail experience. Visibility and access are important as people like to know where they are going and not feel trapped. Good signage is reassuring and landmarks can create points of reference. Circulation in larger stores needs to be clear, especially with escalators, stairs or lifts.

Walkways help to penetrate the full depth of larger spaces but should not appear never-ending. Departments and product areas should be close to the walkways, and dead-ends should be avoided. Product areas should entice, not overwhelm customers. Avoid bottlenecks around service/cashier desks, fitting rooms or emergency access areas. Points of relaxation should be included so shoppers can rest when needed.

Rectangle type floor plans such as those used in supermarkets or warehouse retailing make efficient use of space but can be inflexible because of the grid-like system. Free flow circulation is varied in spacious areas to allow departments to become islands without barriers, and therefore inviting.

A well planned store should create three fundamental spaces -

- a) Luxury items or treats need to be well positioned to stimulate impulse purchases
- b) Convenience goods such as bread and milk are often at rear of store to bring people in past luxury items
- c) Location and juxtaposition of considered goods (furniture, appliances, jewellery) are critical since most shoppers have limited time to research before buying.



service areas

Promotional areas may be in the form of in-store mini exhibition or demonstration areas, and these are continually changing depending on the products being promoted. The site of these should be planned for a location that is visible to most customers, such as by an entrance or at the base of escalators (but do not create an obstruction).

Stockrooms and deliveries are another practical consideration. Shopping malls are usually planned to give access at the rear of buildings/shops to allow stock to come into the stores unseen.

Safety and access, means of escape, staff rooms, fitting rooms, public and staff toilets all need to be considered when planning stores. Planning for people with special needs should be part of a retailer's philosophy.

personalisation and after sales service

Today's consumers are more complex and define themselves by interests and activities as well as social status. They demand the customising of products on offer - including different colours and/or sizes.

They are asking for purity in product, wanting to know the origin of their selection, especially in foodstuffs or products that come in contact with the body such as cosmetics or healthcare items.



Drivers wish to customise their motor vehicles by selecting the exterior colour, the interior trim colour/pattern and the seat upholstery - not just accepting what is on offer at the car sales showroom.



Advances in fabric production techniques means that modern clothes can be works of art in themselves, personalised to the consumer's specifications.

websites

Having a website to support a retail store so people can research products and prices before they go shopping is fast becoming a crucial requirement for any company. And some companies are swapping expensive retail premises for warehouses and only selling through a website, offering delivery to home or business, which eliminates the need to go shopping at all.

Some products such as books or CD's lend themselves to web-based shopping as shoppers can listen to music online, or read supporting information about the book, before they buy. But one of the best parts is being able to sort and categorise the item quickly, rather than flicking through shelves of items in store trying to locate the one you desire.

The most critical facet of website design is dictated purely by information and speed of use, it needs to be expandable, intelligent and provide an easy way for customers to make a product selection and payment.

compiled by

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