



JUDY BELL  
KATE TERNUS

FIFTH EDITION

# silent selling

Best Practices and Effective  
Strategies in Visual Merchandising

BLOOMSBURY



**look**

**compare**

**innovate**

# silent**selling**

FIFTH EDITION

best practices and effective strategies  
in visual merchandising

judy bell / kate ternus

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## preface

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**Do you like to shop?** Do you look forward to the *début* of the latest fashions at your favorite apparel store? Do you enjoy seasonal changes in the displays of fresh produce in the supermarket? If shopping is one of your favorite forms of recreation; if you have a good eye

for style, composition, and color; and if the idea of creating an attractive shopping environment for others appeals to you, you might find a satisfying career in the field of visual merchandising. *Silent Selling: Best Practices and Effective Strategies in Visual Merchandising* presents the industry at its finest and provides a practical view of the activities that go into creating store environments that sell. This book serves as an introduction for aspiring visual merchandisers and a handy reference for current practitioners. This is a complete learning resource for instructors teaching Fashion Design, Fashion Merchandising, or Visual Merchandising students in Visual Merchandising and Store Planning and Window Display courses that focus on how to create visual displays and present merchandise effectively.

### Organization

*Silent Selling's* organization consists of six parts divided into fifteen chapters. **Part One: Preparation for Visual Creativity** introduces the field with a unique opening chapter about thinking outside the box, a theme that is carried throughout the book. This chapter focuses on the creative and artistic mindset of visual merchandisers. The second chapter discusses the practical application of the visual merchandiser's creative talent in the retail setting. Chapter 3 shows how design elements and principles are put to work to produce effective visual presentations.

**Part Two: Practices and Strategies for the Selling Floor** focuses on the presentation of fashion goods, with attention to the basics of floor layout and fixtures in Chapter 4, wall setups in Chapter 5, and apparel and accessory coordination in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 discusses the presentation of home fashions.

**Part Three: Communicating Retail Atmospherics** shows how signage (Chapter 8) and lighting (Chapter 9) support the presentation of fashion merchandise and communication of the retailer's message.

In **Part Four: Visual Practices for Nontraditional Venues**, the practices discussed in earlier chapters are applied to grocery and food service stores in Chapter 10 and to other retail outlets, including online retailers, in Chapter 11.

Three chapters comprise **Part Five: Tools and Techniques for Merchandise Display**. Chapter 12 features the Window Show, an on-location exhibition organized under the auspices of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, to demonstrate the magic of display windows. Basic techniques underlying the magic are fully explained. Chapter 13 provides instructions for dressing mannequins complete with step-by-step illustrations, and offers advice on using mannequins together with display fixtures to present fashion merchandise to its best advantage. In Chapter 14, the threads of earlier discussions are woven together in a description of the organization and management of the visual merchandising function. **Part Six: Career Strategies** concludes the text with advice on building a career in visual merchandising. Leading practitioners share their success stories in their own words.

Parts 1 through 5 conclude with installments of the applied Capstone Creative Project.

### Features to Enhance Learning

Throughout each chapter, special features reinforce the content of the text. The emphasis is always on practical advice from the real-world experience of industry professionals, advice that readers can apply in their own

careers. Brief quotations from authoritative sources open each chapter and appear periodically in the text. Technical terms of the trade are highlighted in boldface in the text and defined in the margin at their first mention. Succinct tips and observations in **Retail Realities sidebars** point out practical concerns that affect visual merchandisers on a daily basis. Within the text, boxes call attention to safety concerns related to the verbal instructions and practical explanations. This edition features over 250 full-color photographs of cutting-edge displays from stores around the world to demonstrate how creative visual merchandisers use outside-the-box thinking in their interpretations of standard strategies and practices. Detailed illustrations offer a journeyman's guide of the best how-to techniques for everything from outfitting store fixtures with apparel, home, and grocery products, to building in-store and window displays, to dressing mannequins and positioning and lighting them properly.

A series of end-of-chapter features offer further opportunity to relate the text to real-world experience. The first are **Review Questions** that will allow the reader to examine and go over what they should have learned in each chapter. Next, is **Shoptalk**, a statement in which a visual merchandising expert shares his or her observations about the aspect of the field discussed in the chapter. The three types of assignments that follow provide hands-on experience. In the **Outside-the-Box Challenge** section, the challenge is to generate ideas for creative, attention-getting presentations by following author Judy Bell's look-compare-innovate process.

This assignment is followed by **Critical Thinking** activities and a **Case Study**. Both are written to improve analytical thinking as it relates to the world of visual merchandising. Visual merchandisers must "think on their feet" and be strategic when developing their aesthetically successful, retail-business-enhancing designs. These two sections will

allow the reader to understand the varieties of tasks that many visual merchandisers must do in order to incorporate the world of retail operations into visual merchandising for successful silent selling.

In the Directory of Visual Merchandising Professionals on page 415, leaders in the field offer words of advice and inspiration. A comprehensive glossary and a list of references and resources are also provided.

## New to this Edition

This fifth edition has been extensively revised with the following new features and content to enrich the readers' learning experience:

- A new **Design Gallery** feature opens every chapter with full color photographs that reflect the theme of the material to come. Later in the chapter, the photo is reintroduced with a description about the retailer, including origin of the business, mission, and interesting and unusual highlights. A careful look at each image follows with a discussion of the elements and principles of design demonstrated therein, to help students learn to analyze what goes into creating outstanding window and interior presentations.
- Over fifty new color photographs have been introduced to the text from around the globe. Many of the images represent new and innovative concepts that won gold and silver trophies in the Shop! 2016 Design Award event. Others come from the vast library of WindowsWear, an international subscription service that photographs the best windows in retail. Global retailers from Beverly Hills, Boston, Dublin, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, Milan, New York, and more bring the retail design theories in the text to life. Students are asked to examine every aspect of the retail store environment in these prototypes, including fixtures,

signs, and merchandise presentation. By using Judy Bell's look–compare–innovate process, they can evaluate what works best and determine where opportunities lie. When they take on their new roles in the workplace, they will have already laid the groundwork for developing visual merchandising strategies that are effective, differentiated, and brand-right.

- New sections on digital tools introduce some of the most widely used resources in the retail industry today. Students will learn about Mockshop and CAD programs in Chapter 5, as related to fashion apparel wall setups. Chapter 10: Grocery and Food Service Stores introduces a Virtual Reality (VR) system by Kantar. In Chapter 12, The Magic of the Display Window features WindowsWear PRO and explains how the resource is used in the industry.
- Chapter 9: Lighting has been revamped with the assistance of Brad Stewart, an executive vice president from Hera, a highly respected retail display lighting resource, including updates to the technical aspects of the chapter and real-world advice in a new Shoptalk feature.
- Inspirational quotes have been updated to include some of the most creative thinkers of the day, like Lena Dunham and Seth Godin, along with words of wisdom from past leaders like Steve Jobs and Harry Selfridge.
- Searchable resources in every chapter have been updated. In a field that demands constant change, the text offers new places to go and new things to discover beyond the covers of this book.
- The **Capstone Creative Project** inspires learners to apply their best ideas from each chapter's reading and activities to a hypothetical store design. The resulting project could become a practical portfolio piece, could take the place of a comprehensive final examination, or both. Capstone assignments follow the end of Parts 1 through 5 and task learners to synthesize the information from each multi-chapter part to an application in the hypothetical store they have chosen to design.

## Student Resources

### Silent Selling STUDIO™

- Study smarter with self-quizzes featuring scored results and personalized study tips
- Review concepts with flashcards of terms and definitions
- Enhance your strategic visual merchandising skills by doing exercises that incorporate WGSN and/or your institution's fashion and interior forecasting services.

Fairchild Books offers STUDIO access free with new book purchases (ISBN 9781501315565). STUDIO access is also sold separately through Bloomsbury Fashion Central ([www.BloomsburyFashionCentral.com](http://www.BloomsburyFashionCentral.com)).

## Instructor Resources

- Instructor's Guide, including sample syllabi for both semester and term colleges and universities; Test Bank of multiple-choice, essay, and fill-in-the blank questions for each chapter that can be used interchangeably and assembled into your own personalized exams; suggested answers to Review Questions, Outside-The-Box Challenges, Critical Thinking, and Case Studies.
- PowerPoint presentations include images from the book and provide a framework for lecture and discussion
- BFC First Day of Class—Learning with STUDIO PowerPoint presentation
- BFC First Day of Class—Learning with STUDIO Student Registration Flyer (PDF)

All Instructor Resources, digital exam copies and student resources may be accessed via [www.BloomsburyFashionCentral.com](http://www.BloomsburyFashionCentral.com).

## acknowledgments

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**This textbook is for anyone** who would like to learn how to think and act creatively. It is filled with letters, quotations, and photographs of people who are active in the industry today. You may read that some of them are former visual merchandisers—that doesn't mean they're

retired; it means that they've taken the next steps in their visual careers to be artistic consultants and freelance project developers. They continue to bring all the excitement they can to a variety of interesting visual projects. These people are passionate about their work; they offer their best ideas on building careers to those who are entering the profession. They are individuals who are eager to give back to the industry by joining industry associations, participating on boards, speaking at seminars, planning scholarship fundraising events, and judging student design competitions. These people enjoy all that their career has to offer in this unusual, exciting, creative industry. They are eager for you to join them, and that is why they have helped us to create this text.

We would like to express our thanks to the following individuals who made outstanding contributions to this textbook: Karen Doodeman, director of programming and events, Karen Benning, director of communications and editorial, and Todd Dittman, chief operating officer, all at Shop! Association, for access to the award-winning photographs from the 2016 Shop! Design Awards event; Brad Stewart, executive vice president at Hera, for his expertise and input to our chapter on lighting; Jon Harari, chief executive officer at WindowsWear for his assistance with images; Joseph H. Hancock, II, Professor, Design & Merchandising, Drexel University, for his enthusiastic approach and expertise in reviewing and updating exercises, capstone project, instructor's guide and test bank, and STUDIO resources for this edition; and all of the retailers,

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### From Judy Bell:

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### From Kate Ternus:

I thank my lucky stars for students—from the very first one to my final semester's batch! Retirement doesn't mean that I don't think of you with every word I write. You taught me a lot! Thanks, still, to my dearest family who kept everything working while I was either on hold or online. Thanks to my mother, Dorothy Kuesel, for the floral designs—still creating color books for my "kids." To Tom "Full Speed Ahead!" Beebe and Steve "Image is Everything!" Platkin, my East Coast links to a rich tradition that we've shared with deep affection, a thousand thanks (five hundred each).

### From the Publisher:

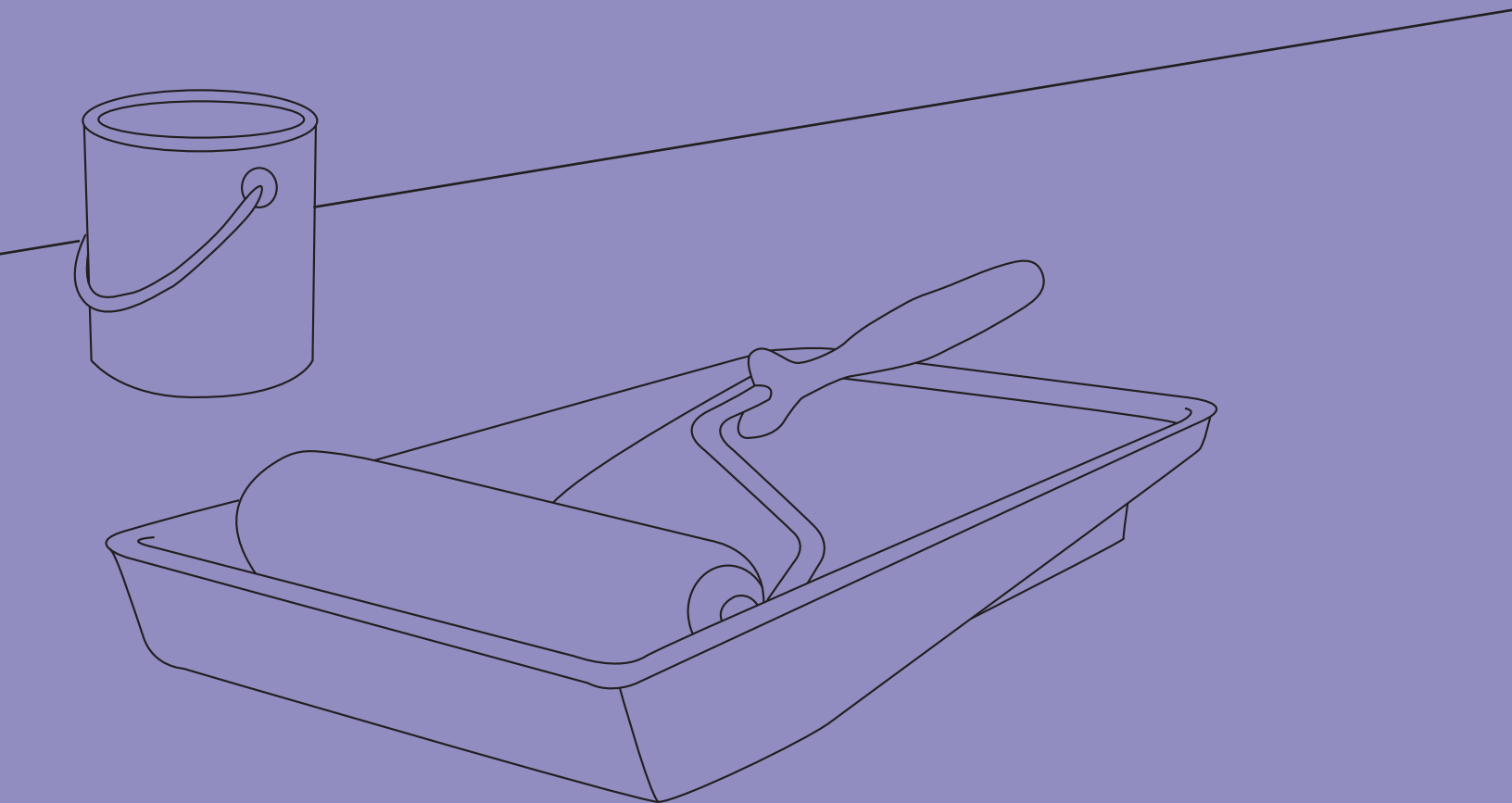
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*This book is dedicated to Andrew Markopoulos, former senior vice president of visual merchandising and store design at Dayton Hudson, who moved visual merchandising from the display window to the boardroom, establishing it as a valued profession and an integral part of the magic and delight of the retail store environment.*

*Every year in his honor an individual in the store design industry is recognized for their outstanding achievements and contributions in the visual merchandising and store design industry. They join the ranks of former recipients in The Markopoulos Circle and together they continue Andy's legacy of mentoring the next generation of retail talent.*

At Andy's funeral (1999) the priest told what might be a familiar story about a man passing away and when he gets to heaven, St. Peter is showing him around God's mansion. He noticed another man running around, moving art and putting everything in its place. The man on the tour asks St. Peter, "Is that God?" St. Peter replies, "No, that is Andrew Markopoulos."

*The Markopoulos Circle, Jenny S. Rebholz,  
design:retail, April/May 2016*



## **Part One   PREPARATION FOR VISUAL CREATIVITY**







YOUR LUCKY DAY

FORTUNE

WEALTH

LOVE

FAME

POWER

HAPPINESS

CRYSTAL BALL



# 1

## Creative Thinking: Getting Outside the Box

### It Begins with Creativity

Visual merchandising is a creative occupation. Success in this field depends on a person's ability to infuse creativity into every part of the job. The discussion of creative thinking that launches this text should set a mood that encourages you to explore and internalize the creative retailing methods and strategies introduced in each chapter—in short, make it all your own. Your ability to absorb the information presented in this book and adapt it to your own practical use on the job is just as important as memorizing rules about color, fixture use, or department layouts.

Psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi, writing in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, describes creative people this way: "Creative persons differ from one another in a variety of ways, but in one respect they are unanimous: They all love what they do. It is not the hope of achieving fame or making money that drives them; rather, it is the opportunity to do the work that they enjoy doing." Consider that well over one-third of your time during your career will be spent working in your chosen profession. If you are passionate about what you do, those around you will notice and interesting doors will open.

### The Creative Process in Visual Merchandising

In nearly every retail store there are a few people who seem to have an unusual flair for presenting merchandise. They coordinate trend-right fashion looks effortlessly, set up attractive displays without seeming to think about what they're doing, and arrange effective department layouts with precision and speed. They are highly valued employees because of their special talents. When they "set the floor," merchandise moves and profits grow.

What do these talented retailers have that others may not? They have a solid understanding of retail design principles and of company presentation standards, and

"Creativity is seeing what others can't see, saying what others won't say. It's a juicy awareness that can be triggered by pausing and turning your attention away from the challenge you are facing—to create space for a new idea to emerge."

Judy Bell for design:retail magazine

"Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it."

Steve Jobs

#### AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

- Discuss a variety of processes for creative thinking
- Develop strategies for overcoming creative blocks
- Identify a variety of resources for idea development
- Explain the process of getting new ideas accepted

**"If you feel safe in the area that you are working in, you're not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water than you feel you are capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you are just about in the right place to do something."**

*David Bowie*

**"Working is not grinding but a wonderful thing to do; creative power is in all of you if you just give it a little time; if you believe in it a little bit and watch it come quietly into you; if you do not keep it out by always hurrying and feeling guilty in those times when you should be lazy and happy. Or if you do not keep the creative power away by telling yourself that worst of lies—that you haven't any."**

*Brenda Ueland, author of If You Want to Write*

they use a creative approach to merchandise presentation. Design principles and company standards can be learned, but what about creativity—that extra twist or new approach which is, in effect, a unique signature?

Creativity is not a gift that belongs only to a few individuals. It is true that some people are born with more creative ability than others, but all people can further develop their creativity. What creative people do is open their minds to idea generation through various brainstorming processes. The more often these processes are used, the easier it will be to find creative solutions to problems.

Most dictionaries use the word *productive* as a second meaning for the word *creative*. Being productive means getting results. If your creative work produces results that meet your merchandising objectives, you are on your way to developing your creativity at a professional level.

---

## Two One-of-a-Kind Creative Merchandisers

Gene Moore, vice president and display director at Tiffany & Co. for nearly forty years, made an art form of creative thought in his company's world-famous store. When he died in November of 1998, he left a rich legacy of window design that included wit, brilliant merchandising savvy, and notoriously unconventional methods for getting people to stop and enjoy his visual merchandising creations. In fact, Moore's windows themselves became tourist destinations.

Author Kate Ternus remembers a series of Moore's winter windows featuring diamond-studded snowflake pins (Figure 1.1a). Moore propped the store's small shadow-box windows with artist's drawing boards, barber scissors, and folded construction paper in stark white against a powder-blue background—and used a grade schooler's method of folding paper into tight little triangles and then snipping away pieces to create one-of-a-kind

snowflake designs. Anyone who'd been to an American grade school knew immediately what the windows were all about. Moore let the paper snippets fall to the windows' floors and pinned a half-finished, partly folded paper snowflake to the board. After taking all that in, the viewer would notice a single diamond snowflake pin, the artist's still-life model, artlessly stuck to the drawing boards—as if a third-grader might have such an elegant, jeweled model to work from!

People viewing the windows chuckled as they stood there and commented to one another about how clever the displays were. Ternus thought they were more than clever. She thought they were inspired. What else would motivate absolute strangers to speak to one another on a New York City sidewalk?

Ternus studied Moore's windows. She was out there for every window change. It was an amazing way to learn, and he was a superb teacher. Later in her career, they corresponded. He was pleased to know he'd helped her and flattered to have been thought of as the best.

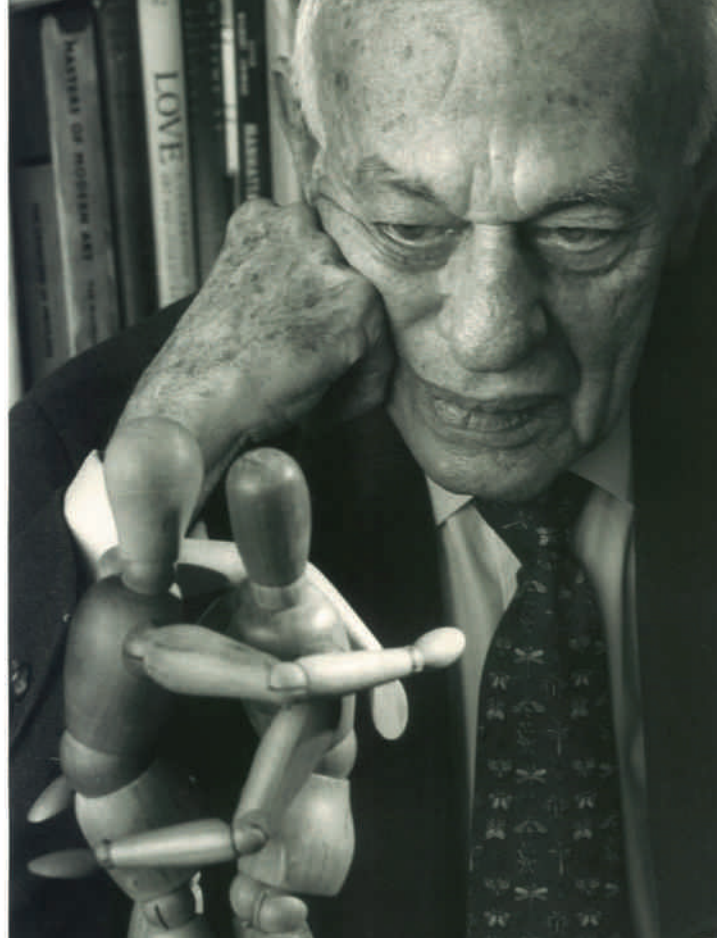
Tom Beebe, now Vice-President, Creative Services, for New York's W Diamond Group—American retail icons Hickey Freeman and Hart Schaffner Marx—says he was fortunate to have Gene Moore as his mentor. Their decades-long friendship began while a younger Tom was doing windows at Paul Stuart. The two men didn't know one another, but were both habitual window shoppers strolling Fifth Avenue, eyeing the displays in all the stores. Then Tom wrote Gene Moore a letter of admiration for a particular set of Tiffany windows and Moore, ever the Southern gentleman, replied. What followed was a long correspondence with many two-hour lunches in between.

Many years later, Tom still treasures the letters and his place in Moore's life. He became part of Moore's family and even spent a year working with him at Tiffany. Today he has become the champion for preserving and



**Figure 1.1a** Gene Moore's snowflake window used simple creative elements to tell an elegant wintertime tale about Tiffany's diamonds. Copyright Tiffany & Co. Archives 2016. Snowflakes by Richard MacLagger. August 24, 1967. Gene Moore Window Displays: Photography Collection 1955–1996. Tiffany & Co. Archives.

**Figure 1.1b** Gene Moore, Tiffany and Co.'s famed visual icon. Photo by Lucy-Ann Bouvman, provided by Tom Beebe.



sharing Moore's archival materials with visual merchandisers worldwide. When Moore retired from Tiffany & Company in 1994, after thirty-nine years and more than 5000 windows, he donated his collection of sketchbooks and photographs to the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum. The seventy-eight mostly black-and-white albums are being indexed and will eventually be available online to retailing students and graduate researchers. Tom Beebe expresses his involvement in this effort in *design:retail* (Jenny S. Rebholz, April–May 2015, "The Lost Archives of Gene Moore"):

*We can't lose this information. It needs to be shared with students, designers and display professionals. There isn't a thing I do that isn't affected by Gene Moore. I am passing along what I learned to students. It is a payback in your career to pass on knowledge, and it's my time to help and to pay back.*

Tom Beebe is himself another version of the one-of-a-kind creative merchandiser. In 2000, trade magazine *vmsd* (*Visual Merchandising + Store Design*) dubbed him a "window magician" known for his flying ties. Gene Moore once said of Beebe, "He's taken men's clothes out of being dull, dreary nothings to real excitement." See Figure 1.2 for examples of his current work with W Diamond Group.

Those apple barrels you see behind Tom in Figure 1.2c contained real apples, and in keeping with his "full speed ahead" mantra, he filled the store with autumn atmospherics, right down to the aroma:

*They were real. Imagine walking into the store and smelling that aroma. By the time we changed the window over to pumpkins a few weeks later, we had refilled the barrels several times. Shoppers ate the apples, staff ate the apples, and we ended up making apple juice at the end.*

**"Being clever is the key, but it's much more than just putting merchandise in the window. Display needs to reflect the company's philosophy to make a true brand statement, yet do it in a way that makes the CEO smile. Even more than that, it has to be compelling, so that shoppers simply have to have the product."**

*Christine Belich, Christine Belich Design, and former executive creative director, Sony*

Tom Beebe is passionate about sharing his visual ideas with young people just starting their careers. Under Tom's direction, and with his eye for detail, the mannequin's gown in Figure 1.2a was crafted by FIT design students:

*I wanted it to look like the sheet music had just blown into the vignette to form that garment—and might disappear just as easily with the next breeze. I loved getting the students involved and we talked about Gene Moore and his windows the entire time we worked together.*

The results? "I always track sales from the windows and we sold that white tuxedo by 10 a.m. the next day . . . and 13 others before we changed them out."

## Outside-the-Box Thinking

The term *outside the box* has found its way into today's business language as a buzz phrase for creative thinking. Another phrase, *coloring outside the lines*, means much the same thing. "Stay inside the lines!" Remember hearing those words? Your kindergarten teacher wanted your earliest artistic efforts to conform to those of your classmates. Coloring inside the lines was your behavioral task; developing eye-hand coordination and following rules were the learning objectives the teacher set for you.

Once you had those basic skills mastered, you were allowed to advance to more creative freehand artwork. However, by the time that happened, you may not have cared about being creative because the desire to do unique things had been "schooled" right out of you. As a five-year-old, your wildly creative urges—curbed for

**Figure 1.2a** Tom Beebe collaborated with the Fashion Institute of Technology in his Hickey Freeman holiday window. Students from FIT created the whimsical dress out of sheet music. This window exemplifies Tom's philosophy: "The goal of any store window is to stop people in their tracks and get them to look." Richard Cadan Photography, Brooklyn. Photo by Richard Cadan.



**Figure 1.2b** Tom Beebe's trademark "flying ties" in his spring season window at Hickey Freeman in Manhattan. Photo by Tom Beebe.





the sake of orderly learning in the classroom—may have been temporarily inhibited.

For a retailer, creativity means you must color outside the lines again in order to find new solutions for merchandising problems you encounter. Being able to move beyond your usual way of thinking about things is essential in today's competitive retail environment.

According to Kurt Hanks and Jay Parry (*Wake Up Your Creative Genius*), "Creation isn't making something out of nothing. Instead it's organizing existing elements into new and different wholes." That can be good news, especially if you see yourself as a non-creative person. It implies that you don't have to come up with totally new ideas, provided that you do some "editing" along the way.

What is editing? It's a term borrowed from journalism, the news industry. News editors

don't normally write the stories you see in print or online. Instead, they assign and oversee the work of staff reporters who actually gather information, interview people, and write the news articles you read. Just before the newspaper is printed or the story is uploaded, editors inspect and edit, or fine-tune, them for content, accuracy, grammar, spelling, and length.

Sometimes reporters think their original story is compromised by editing, but most will admit that editorial changes—shortening a sentence here, changing a word there—make the resulting story or article clearer, tighter, and better overall. This is similar to the process that takes place when visual merchandisers modify ideas they've gotten from other retail sources. Presentations become more focused, more dynamic, and more effective. New (and better) ideas can come from the ideas of others.

"It's very easy for me to say what success is. I think success is connecting with an audience who understands you and having a dialogue with them. I think success is continuing to push yourself forward creatively and not sort of becoming a caricature of yourself."

Lena Dunham

**Figure 1.2c** Tom Beebe, VP Creative Services, W. Diamond Group, in his window of fragrant apples that celebrates the fall fashion season at Hickey Freeman in Manhattan. Photo owned by Tom Beebe.



## judy bell's thinking outside the box

1. **Look.** Visit two or more stores and look at the merchandise presentations.
2. **Compare.** Compare the merchandise presentations.
3. **Innovate.** Combine the best presentation techniques from stores you visited with those in your own store, to create a unique presentation that fits your store's brand image.

### BOX 1.1

#### JUDY BELL'S CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS: LOOK, COMPARE, INNOVATE

To author Judy Bell, thinking outside the box consists of three simple action steps that can jump-start creativity and enable you to explore, edit, and expand on current ideas and practices.

##### **Look**

The first step is to look at what your retail competition is doing. Visit both direct competitors and other categories of retailers. A home fashion retailer may find inspiration in the way colors are coordinated in the window of a fashion apparel retailer. A toy retailer may find inspiration in a book store that carries puzzles and games. If you see that your retail competitors are doing something right with their store's merchandise presentation strategies and techniques, you will have a head start on doing something even better with your own.

How will you know what works for other retailers? You might watch their customers and note how they react to displays in those stores. You can observe which displays appear to be ignored and which seem to have "stopping power."

##### **Compare**

The second step to thinking outside the box is to compare. Once you gather ideas from

other retailers, you're ready to compare them with your own company's presentations. For example, you might compare a presentation at a competitor's store entrance with the presentation at your own store entrance. You might observe whether the competitor used any mannequins or props to draw customers into and through the store. You'd read the directional signage and determine whether it assisted customers to locate departments. You'd read signage on merchandise fixtures and ask yourself whether it seemed to encourage customers to make buying decisions. You'd ask yourself about the effectiveness of the merchandise displays. You'd decide whether merchandise presentation overall seemed to give customers fresh ideas about how fashion or home apparel products could be combined or coordinated. You'd make note of what types of lighting were used to spotlight items or add to the overall atmosphere of the store. You'd wonder about the general feeling of the store—whether it felt good to be in the store or which specific merchandise areas invited you to stay and browse.

##### **Innovate**

The third step, innovate, will be much easier as a result of your observations and comparisons. In this phase of the outside-the-box process, you become an editor. You start planning your store's next merchandise presentations based on effective things you've seen elsewhere. However, instead of just copying what you've seen, you'll put your own spin, or interpretation, on the strategy or technique. You'll be able to look at the original competitive presentation and analyze it—compare it to an ideal display (evaluate its strengths and weaknesses)—and, finally, innovate by creating some new alternatives to the original.

*"Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower."  
Steve Jobs*

*"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after awhile. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things."  
Steve Jobs, I, Steve: Steve Jobs In His Own Words*

## ■ THE SCAMPER MODEL

You often see visual merchandisers carrying toolboxes as they go about their duties. They may need rubber mallets, screwdrivers, pins, and wrenches—the mechanical tools of their trade—as they set up shelving and fixtures, hang signs, and dress mannequins. What you won't see is the “mental toolbox” that visual merchandisers reach into for inspiration every day—the creative tools that they've acquired as they've developed professionally.

In retailing, the creative thinking process can follow several useful problem-solving models. You've already learned about two in this chapter. The important thing is finding the outside-the-box method that works for you.

Some visual merchandisers use Robert Eberle's creative thinking model SCAMPER (a mnemonic for ways to brainstorm for an unusual solution) to solve the merchandising problem at hand. This classic model for creative thinking offers seven options to give your thinking a creative boost. These SCAMPER options are as follows:

**SUBSTITUTE**  
**COMBINE**  
**ADAPT**  
**MODIFY, MINIFY, MAGNIFY**  
**PUT TO OTHER USES**  
**ELIMINATE**  
**REVERSE OR REARRANGE**

**Substituting** strategies involve exchanging one expected element of a visual idea for another. It might mean borrowing an accessorizing strategy from the fashion department for use in the home furnishings area. A fully accessorized fashion mannequin might wear several layers of fashionable clothing, plus jewelry, hosiery, shoes, hat, and handbag. To use a substituting strategy in the home furnishings area, you might apply

the fashion accessory strategy to create a formal-occasion table top in the housewares department. Showing fine linens (tablecloth, placemats, and napkins), place settings of fine china, crystal stemware, silver service, candles, candleholders, a centerpiece, and handwritten place cards in sterling holders for each guest at the table creates a strong—and fully accessorized—home fashion statement.

**Combining** strategies may mean seating a pair of elegantly dressed and fully accessorized mannequins at the table you have just set. Substitute Valentine cards for the place cards and the scene is set for a romantic Valentine's Day dinner party for two. The fashion and home furnishings tie-in also gives you a presentation with **cross-merchandising** impact.

**Adapting** strategies will find the visual merchandiser taking the rainbow-hued progression of colored merchandise used often on women's fashion department walls and applying it to a wall of bedding or bath linens, a display of shower curtains, or an assortment of children's toys. Or, adapting might involve using a stepladder, paint buckets, and brushes as props to display half a dozen pairs of brightly tinted tennis shoes. You simply take an item intended for one use and adapt its purpose to suit your sales presentation.

**Modifying** strategies—magnifying (making something larger) or minifying (making something smaller)—provide an imaginative counterpoint to otherwise routine presentations of any merchandise. One effective display employed a toy action figure to prop a jewelry display window featuring cultured pearl necklaces. Dressed in full scuba diving gear, he appeared to be swimming underwater (the backdrop and sides of the window were covered in sea-blue fabric). The pearl necklaces became a trail of bubbles streaming toward the surface of the water in which the figure swam. Using the toy

**“If you are open-minded, creativity will find connections between the seemingly unrelated.”**

*Jerry Allan, professor of entrepreneurial studies, Minneapolis College of Art and Design*

### cross-merchandising

refers to moving merchandise across traditional department or classification lines to combine elements in a single department or display. For example, books of poetry, romantic novels, candles, bath salts, terry cloth robes, and oversized bath towels could be brought together in a single display.

*Eberle,*

*Robert. SCAMPER: Games for Imagination Development. 1977.*

*DOK Publishers, Buffalo, NY.*

miniature made the small pearls seem much larger and more important in scale than they would have been in a conventional display window. That's an example of **minifying**. Using a gigantic golf ball and wooden tee in a men's sportswear display surely attracts attention—if for no other reason than making shoppers take a second look at what **magnifying** a prop fifty times does to perspective and scale. That second look is the visual merchandiser's opportunity to focus customer attention on the merchandise.

**Putting to other uses** is a strategy that finds the visual merchandiser dressing a mannequin in a crisp white apron but inverting a stock pot on its head in place of the chef's traditional white toque. This is a fun, eye-catching way to focus shopper attention on a cooking vessel. The pot's general shape and undeniable link to the professional cook could make shoppers stop and rethink their cookware choices! The unexpected other use can be entertaining, thought provoking, and attention getting—three good elements to employ in any display.

The **eliminating** strategy is an amazingly useful tool to prevent a creative visual merchandiser from becoming too clever. It is always a good idea to “quit while you're ahead” in a presentation. In the stockpot example, you could easily get carried away with the fun of it all and keep on reaching for even more obvious tie-ins to the chef concept. It might be tempting to dangle cookie cutters from the mannequin's ears as another kitchen-related accessory, but it would be far better

to use restraint and retain the impact of the inverted cooking pot. A useful adage: When in doubt, leave it out.

The **reversing or rearranging** strategy is another method of presenting merchandise in an unexpected way. Mannequins that normally stand on their feet can stand on their heads (if you have a sturdy and reliable way to suspend them from the ceiling grid in a display window). Things normally arranged from smallest to largest can be reversed in order. Mannequins dressed back-to-front can stop traffic. You can have a great time devising new ways to do the opposite of what's expected.

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## Best Practices and Practical Applications

Retailers worldwide use creative thinking strategies. Some very competitive (and successful) retailers actually hire individuals whose principal assignment is to look at what other retailers are doing and develop new presentation concepts based on industry trends and the best current practices.

Highly professional visual merchandising managers make local comparison shopping a regular part of their working week, with occasional trips to different locations in the country to look at the latest store **prototypes**. Visual merchandisers at any point in their careers (from window design specialist to vice president) must use their powers of observation to build professional skills and creative muscle. In all cases, the ability to look, compare, and innovate should really be part of any visual merchandiser's formal job description.

### ■ VISITING COMPETING STORES

As you begin this course, visit your favorite store's direct and indirect competitors. If you currently work for an independent junior fashion store in a local mall, you'll want to keep an eye on other junior shops in the mall.

A **prototype** is the original model on which later types are based. For example, before rolling out a dozen retail stores, a prototype is built so that design features may be tested and refined if necessary. The same process is used in the development of custom merchandise fixtures and visual fixtures.

Retail stopping power makes casual passersby focus attention on the visual presentation and really consider the merchandise. Once focused, they become potential customers and the presentation becomes a “silent seller.”



In today's fast-paced junior fashion market, you'll also want to shop for presentation ideas in international chains like Uniqlo, Topshop, Zara, and H&M, if they are located in your community. You always want to know what the leading specialty and department stores in the retail industry are doing, whether they are your direct competitors or not. Recognized leaders are usually the trendsetters for product presentation.

It is also a good strategy to keep in touch with noncompeting stores that have interesting themes, décor, or merchandise. If your store carries only junior footwear, for example, you may find ideas at stores such as Anthropologie, Bath & Body Works, and Urban Outfitters, which feature other products targeted to the junior customer.

One-of-a-kind stores often provide a wealth of creative ideas. They can quickly develop and implement new ideas without dealing with the top-down bureaucracy that sometimes slows change in a larger operation. The one-of-a-kind store can often change direction and react immediately to a developing retail merchandise trend. You may find more highly innovative ideas for merchandise presentation there than anywhere else. Once you make store observations part of your retail routine, you can begin to compare and improve upon the techniques you see to create new and more effective methods of presentation for yourself and your employer.

## ■ TRENDSPOTTING

As you explore applied creativity and other topics in this text, you will notice that there is a recurring theme throughout. It refers to **trends**, the direction in which things like demographics, economics, politics, and technographics are moving. Fashion trends are greatly influenced by these categories that drive nearly everything we see, do, and think as we go about the business of being human.

The term *trend* is going to appear again and again in this text and in your life. Retail language uses the word as a noun, as a verb, and sometimes as an adverb or adjective. You'll want to add it to your professional vocabulary right away.

To be successful in recognizing and analyzing trends as a retailer, you must understand something about people—who they are, how they live, what they value or believe in, and what they want versus what they need. To a retailer, every trend relates to people and the things they buy in some way. Consequently, you must become aware of trends in:

- **Demographics**—age, sex, income, geographic location
- **Economics**—the financial state of the country influences what we purchase for everyday basics, leisure, entertainment, travel, etc.
- **Politics**—the role government plays globally affects our feelings of security and safety
- **Technographics**—the effect of the Internet and social media on communication patterns, attitudes toward information, and entertainment technologies

Professional retail trend analysts make brave predictions that translate those factors into behaviors that you see at work in your world today . . . and tomorrow, if they're correct. Robyn Waters, former Vice-President of Trend, Design and Product Development for Target, is a trend expert well worth reading. Her first book, *The Trendmaster's Guide: Get a Jump on What Your Customer Wants Next*, outlines an A–Z range of insights for understanding and anticipating trends. As the title implies, it's a practical book written with the retail marketplace in mind. She identifies skills for all readers:

*Anyone can use the tools in The Trendmaster's Guide to become more aware of the world around*

**trends** are the direction in which things like demographics, economics, politics, and technographics are moving. These influencers drive fashion trends in all categories of retail.



*them. Even if you weren't born with a trendspotting bone in your body, you don't have to be a follower forever. Recognizing and reacting to trends is a learned skill as much as it is an art. If you've ever witnessed a trend unfolding and said to yourself, "I should have seen this coming," there's hope. You too can become a Trendmaster and get a jump on your competition.*

Her second book, *The Hummer and the Mini: Navigating the Contradictions of the New Trend Landscape*, goes several steps further and recognizes the contradictory nature of today's consumer, saying that there is more than one right answer. A dictionary definition of the term *paradox* might say that two things may be totally opposite, yet both could be true. An example? Waters writes about the fashion mavens who wear Chanel jackets (ultra-chic and expensive) over worn denim jeans, gold chains of Chanel bling and high-heeled shoes. Trend and counter trend, that's what Robyn Waters believes is happening in the retail world today. And that's what well-prepared visual merchandisers must be ready to implement in their workplaces.

#### **READING TRADE WEBSITES AND PERIODICALS**

Don't limit yourself to visiting retailers to find ideas for what's new and exciting in current practice. You have many additional sources of information available—as close as your computer, mailbox, bookstore, or public library. For example, some retailers offer tours on the Internet, virtually walking you through their stores. Subscribing to monthly trade magazines is an excellent way to visit other retailers and compare. The magazines *design:retail*, *vmsd* (*Visual Merchandising + Store Design*), and *shop! retail environments* can all keep you updated

on the latest visual techniques and fixturing trends because they target retail design and presentation professionals. All magazines are available online, and *vmsd.com* offers a career tab with job postings. In addition to showcasing current window displays in brilliant color and articles detailing current trends and strategies, these publications offer the addresses of hundreds of fixturing and display manufacturers nationwide. They also offer information on seasonal market weeks in New York and Las Vegas, where manufacturers and representatives gather to display their products each year.

To see international stores you can find the world's largest database of windows and displays—over 80,000 from 700+ brands—at *WindowsWear.com*, a subscription-based online service. Their worldwide coverage includes cities from New York to Paris, Tokyo, and beyond. You can sign up for a walking tour of shopping in New York City or a three-day intensive workshop. They also feature an exclusive archives collection dating back to 1931, which is certain to delight and inspire. Check out *Style Guide* ([www.style-guide.biz](http://www.style-guide.biz)) to see beautiful full-color photographs of the latest in-store design and presentation (and click “english” for the English version of this German publication). Another excellent international resource is *Echochamber* ([www.echochamber.com](http://www.echochamber.com)). Click on “Our Story” to learn more about their mission:

*Businesses need to keep on top of what's happening around the world. Our clients are hungry for knowledge but are often too busy to get out there and find it. We created the echochamber to do just that: to feed our clients with information and inspiration. Retail is all about ideas, and if we can learn from one another then we can all develop so much faster.*

To subscribe to their mailing list and receive free monthly updates, click on “Say Hello” and register your email address.

## EXPLORING LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Closer to home, other resources for visual merchandising ideas are community events and local traditions. You can get ideas for retail signs from parade banners, ideas for lighting from theater productions, and inspiration for retail themes from seasonal events. Tapping into local celebrations, ethnic and cultural events, plus local lore or historical information can also trigger ideas for creative retail visual tie-ins. You can find visual ideas everywhere and anywhere, so it is important to be open and receptive to inspiration in any form.

## FOLLOWING SOURCES ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS

Knowledge of current events and cultural trends can also trigger your creative merchandising solutions. The *New York Times* Style section, published on Sundays and Thursdays, features articles on consumer trends, photographs of in-the-street fashions, and the hottest new products from New York City shops. The *Wall Street Journal* offers the latest buzz in business and economics, plus articles on new gadgets and technologies. The Personal Journal section on weekdays and Off Duty on weekends are treasure troves of fashions straight from the runways. *USA Today* runs surveys called “USA Today Snapshots” on the cover page of each section that can be helpful in determining consumer insight. *The Week* magazine offers a digest of the best news columns of the prior week; worldwide events by country; plus recommendations for dining, television, theater, and music. Check it out at [www.theweek.com](http://www.theweek.com). Television news programs like CNN and Fox News are well worth tuning into every day. On Sunday mornings, *This Week*, *Face the Nation*, *Meet*

*the Press*, and *State of the Union* all provide an excellent overview of the week’s events, along with the opportunity to see and hear the people in the news. Review these resources and others, choose your favorites, and build them into your routine. The more you see, hear, and read, the more ideas you will generate.

## RESEARCHING RESOURCES ABOUT HISTORY

Books and movies (new and old) will show you what the world looks like today and what it looked like in the past. They can tell you what people wore, what they looked like, and how they lived. Because fashion is cyclical in nature—and what goes around *does* come around—a working knowledge of fashion history and lifestyles from other eras can be a treasury of adaptable ideas. Don’t overlook college-level electives; history courses, art history courses, and fashion history courses offer valuable insights into the past from which you can develop a view of the future by looking, comparing, and innovating!

Sometimes the best preparation for the visual merchandising of “retro looks” (the retrospective view from previous decades or eras) is cultivating friends from your grandparents’ generation. They’ll tell you stories about fashions, values, and lifestyles from their youth that will put the present into better perspective for you. Ask to see their scrapbooks and copies of old magazines. Photographs from prior generations will give you valuable visual information about why, how, and when people wore the fashions of the day.

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## Top Innovative Thinkers

“Successful innovators,” says business writer Peter Drucker, “use both the right side and the left side of their brains. They look at figures, and they look at people. They work out analytically what the innovation has to be to satisfy an opportunity.”

“Develop interest in life as you see it; in people, things, literature, music—the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls and interesting people.”

Henry Miller

As a visual merchandiser, it is critical to have a vision that includes not only what you will create, but also what it will mean to your company's bottom line. Your goal in any presentation of merchandise is ultimately to sell products, and that goal should always be foremost in your mind. An artistic approach to visual merchandising will be much more effective when balanced with a business approach. Learning new creative thinking techniques and business strategies will not only help you to innovate, but it will prepare you for management positions. Whether working for a small specialty store or for a major corporate retailer, you will advance more rapidly if you have a point of view that focuses your creative activities on a productive end result.

To help you develop a well-rounded style, you can find a list of Business Best Sellers in the *New York Times* Sunday business section. An even more comprehensive list is available through [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com). Click on "lists" and pull up "Business Books of the Long Boom," for the top twenty best books in the past twenty years. When you look over this list and have a basic knowledge of the titles that are most current, it is also interesting to spend time browsing through the business section shelves in a bookstore. This is a practice that is wise to continue throughout your career. The insights you will gain and the techniques you will learn will help you to think outside the box and become a true innovator.

A summary of work from some of today's top innovative thinkers follows. Included are two books on creativity, a wildly popular young adult book series, a children's book, and a unique treasure of a film by a master filmmaker. While seeking innovative ideas, it is best to look at a wide variety of books, whether they cater to adults or children.

#### ■ ELIZABETH GILBERT

Sitting down to read *Big Magic*, *Creative Living Beyond Fear*, is like having a personal

conversation with Elizabeth Gilbert (famed author of *Eat, Pray, Love*) on your front porch. She candidly discusses her own creative process and what you might consider when exploring a way to develop yours. She tells inspiring stories about the way Einstein used a tactic he called "combinatory play," in which he would often play the violin when he encountered difficulty with a mathematical puzzle. "After a few hours of sonatas, he could usually find the answer he needed."

In a chapter called "Pigeonholing," she is asked about the difference in people who are born with creative prowess vs. those who doubt their abilities. She says this is a topic she doesn't even concern herself with: "On one hand I've known brilliant people who created absolutely nothing from their talents. On the other hand, there are people whom I once arrogantly dismissed who later staggered me with the gravity and beauty of their work."

This easy to read, enjoyable book is filled with short chapters that will coax out the "strange jewels" that are often hidden due to misconceptions and beliefs. Once those are abandoned, the door will open to a delightful creative life for any visual merchandiser.

#### ■ TOM KELLEY

A classic book on creativity is *The Art of Innovation* by Tom Kelley. Whereas many other business-related books simply teach innovation, Tom Kelley actually innovates every day as general manager of IDEO. With a staff of over 600, IDEO is one of the world's leading global design firms, famous for the development of the Apple mouse and the handheld Palm. *The Art of Innovation* gives the reader a look at the company's strategies and secrets behind developing a consistent chain of cutting-edge products.

One of the strongest emerging themes in the book stresses the importance of teamwork: "If you distrust the power of teamwork, consider this fact. Even the most

legendary individual inventor is often a team in disguise. In six scant years, for example, Thomas Edison generated an astounding four hundred patents, producing innovations in the telegraph, telephone, phonograph, and light bulb—with the help of a fourteen-man team.”

Along with the teamwork theme expressed in Kelley’s book, IDEO’s overall approach to a creative culture and the internal systems necessary to keep it thriving is a concept they developed that is known worldwide as **design thinking**. Tim Brown, IDEO’s president and CEO, describes design thinking as a “human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

IDEO believes that while everyone has creative abilities, those abilities are often overlooked when most people are still relying on “more conventional” problem-solving practices. Design thinking relies more on people’s ability to be intuitive, recognize patterns, and build ideas that have emotional meaning as well as function. Design thinking wants its practitioners to be able to express themselves beyond mere words and symbols because looking only at the “rational and the analytical” can be just as risky as running an organization based only on feeling, intuition, and inspiration.

Design thinking provides a third model by incorporating **inspiration** (the problem or opportunity that calls for solutions), **ideation** (generating, developing, and testing various ideas), and **implementation** (the path leading from the project into people’s lives). Design thinkers will assess and reassess their designs until appropriate solutions emerge. Visit [ideo.com](http://ideo.com) to learn more about the organization, its philosophy, its projects, its products, and its methods.

Another highlight in *The Art of Innovation* is a five-step method that is refined for the specific needs of each project in progress. One

of those steps can be done every day: “Observe real people in real-life situations to find out what makes them tick: what confuses them, what they like, what they hate, where they have latent needs not addressed by current products and services.”

#### ■ J. K. ROWLING

The Harry Potter book series is brilliantly imaginative; it is filled with fantasy and fun. The writer, J. K. Rowling, takes you on a journey far outside the box of your everyday life. From the minute you set foot into Hogwarts alongside Harry and his cohorts, you are dazzled by the story’s vivid vocabulary, magical architecture, and surprising scenic elements—such as framed portraits hanging in the corridors with painted subjects that speak, sleep, and sometimes even snore. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Rowling writes:

*There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place . . . it was also very hard to remember where anything was, because . . . the people in the portraits kept going to visit each other.*

Harry Potter may have started out on the shelves of the children’s book department, but it wasn’t long before discerning readers of all ages discovered Harry’s many charms, wildly imaginative language, and innovative plot twists.

Reading the eight Harry Potter books and then enjoying the films based upon them will allow you to witness the translation of brilliance from the printed page to the big

**design thinking** is a human-centered approach to innovation that integrates three considerations: inspiration, ideation, and implementation.

screen. It's all about interpretation—something visual merchandisers do every day.

### ■ AMY KROUSE ROSENTHAL AND TOM LICHTENHELD

A dynamic team with several other titles for young readers to their credit, Rosenthal and Lichtenfeld have created a witty world inhabited by punctuation marks in the lead roles, and ! is the star.

On one level, the little book *Exclamation Mark* tells about being a misfit, not understanding one's role in the larger world. On another level, perhaps more importantly, it's the story of finding one's place and enjoying the uniqueness and the important "otherness" of the individual. A chance meeting with a question mark—?—sets the unhappy exclamation mark straight, and he's overjoyed and newly confident.

Released in 2013 by Scholastic Press, Rosenthal and Lichtenheld's book hit the *New York Times* bestseller list in a flash, appealing to young and not-so-young readers for its ease of reading and bold simplicity. You may find it funny, ironic, and inspiring. The illustrations are simple and clever at the same time. As *Booklist* reviewer Ann Kelley pointed out: "a change in the size and color of the font signifies important moments. With the celebrating-your-strengths angle, fun grammar lesson and

many classroom tie-in possibilities, this picture book deserves a !!!" You will probably want a copy for your own desk!

### ■ RICHARD LINKLATER

Looking for some non-print inspiration? Go to the movies! Director, screenwriter, and producer Richard Linklater has created a wide bandwidth of films from *Bad News Bears* to the innovative romantic trilogy of *Before Sunrise* in 1995, *Before Sunset* in 2004, and *Before Midnight* in 2013. The imaginative Linklater wrote and directed the three *Before* films, each featuring the same actors (Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke). You are able to watch the couple meet in their youth and then observe first-hand how they age and change over time.

In another bravado display of both creativity and stick-to-it-ivity, the independent director invested twelve years (2002–2014) creating the critically acclaimed *Boyhood*, which employed an identical cast of actors portraying the lives of a young man and his parents throughout. For that effort, he received his first nomination for the Academy Award for Best Director, as well as Best Original Screenplay and Best Picture.

A single line of dialogue from Linklater's production *Waking Life* (released in 2001) may sum up his approach to creative thought and action: "The trick is to combine your waking rational abilities with the infinite possibilities of your dreams, because if you can do that you can do anything."

## Guidelines for Implementing Ideas on the Job

If you are employed by an independent retailer, you may have a measure of flexibility to follow your own instincts and try new presentation ideas. If you are working for a multiple-unit retailer (e.g., Express, Banana Republic, Old Navy), you must maintain the company's guidelines for presentation.

You may have to wait to find just the right time to make creative suggestions. Even when a company has strict presentation standards that may seem to stifle all visual merchandising creativity, it is still worthwhile for team members to present their best creative ideas. If ten people offer ideas, one or two that couldn't stand alone might be edited, combined, or changed (SCAMPERed) to become one totally brilliant idea. Sometimes good ideas do not gain acceptance initially, but when presented at a later time or to a new audience, they may be more enthusiastically received.



There is a good reason for following company guidelines correctly in every store. Formal guidelines are established to create a consistent image of the store throughout the chain. This is particularly true of **flagship stores**, where the overall appearance of the store is its main identifier in the eyes of its targeted customers (Figure 1.3). Some flagship stores actually become destinations—people simply have to visit them. In fact, “destination retailing” has become a concept in itself. Promoters at Bloomington, Minnesota’s Mall of America can attest to the number of international flights and national tour buses that bring guests to shop in its hundreds of retail stores, play in its indoor amusement park, and dine at its many unusual restaurants. It is planned that the Mall will double in size by the year 2023, after a 2.5 billion dollar expansion to include an NHL-sized skating rink, an indoor water park, and other attractions.

Multiple-unit retailers expend great effort (in marketing research and budgeted dollars) to be certain that overall store and selling space designs, merchandise presentations, and displays are efficient for store staff to install,

safe for customers, have visual impact, feature the merchandise effectively, project the desired company image, and contribute to sales and profit.

No matter which of their stores shoppers enter, the multiple-unit retailer wants shoppers to feel familiar with the store layout so that their shopping experience feels easy and familiar. Providing a consistent store identity to shoppers has the effect of reassuring their belief that they will receive the same quality product and service regardless of store location.

Even in one-of-a-kind stores, merchandise presentation should have continuity; but in this instance continuity refers to consistency between merchandise presentation and the store’s brand image. For example, a store with a country image, making use of hand-crafted wooden tables and reed baskets to feature its products, would not want to introduce gold-leaf French provincial fixtures to its décor mix. Inconsistent messages do not inspire confidence on the part of the shopper. When the shopping scene is confusing or conflicting, shoppers tend to disappear.

### A flagship store

displays the highest ideals of a company’s brand image. Every detail from fitting room hooks to floor coverings reflects the company’s brand. Stores built after the “flagship” is developed are usually modified for cost effectiveness. Examples of flagship stores include Uniqlo, H&M, and Topshop along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.



**Figure 1.3** Excitement surrounds the opening of the world’s largest MUJI store in Shanghai. This flagship store includes Cafe & Meal MUJI and MUJI Books. VCG / Getty Images.

"Creativity is so delicate a flower that praise tends to make it bloom, while discouragement often nips it in the bud. Any one of us will put out more and better ideas if our efforts are appreciated."

Alex F. Osborn

Also keep in mind that the idea you think is brilliant may not be. That's when it's time to practice critical thinking. Be willing to evaluate your ideas as objectively as you possibly can. To be objective, you have to stop listening to your ego.

"The time invariably comes," according to Hanks and Parry,

*when you need to stop collecting ideas and start judging them. All good ideas must be evaluated under the harsh light of critical thinking. The difference between just a good idea and a creative success is the ability to judge an idea and then to apply it.*

"However," they add, "the judgment shouldn't be totally cold and uncreative. Creativity is as important in judging an idea as it is in coming up with one in the first place."

## Building and Sustaining a Creative Work Environment

In a retail environment, it's not enough to have creative ideas, or even to be supportive of others' creativity. You must also be able to prevent idea stoppers. Idea stoppers, according to management consultant Karl Albrecht (author of *The Creative Corporation*), are critical statements (he calls them "verbal bullets") that shoot down creative ideas. Comments like, "We've already tried that," and "I don't see anything wrong with the way we're doing it now," and "Are you kidding?" are negative—Albrecht says they're "toxic"—statements that are guaranteed to stifle creativity. Think about it. Would you have enough courage to offer another idea after being put down like that? Wouldn't you rather develop a reputation for being what Albrecht calls an idea helper—a person who is open-minded, who actively listens, and who writes down every idea for later use?

People may assume that you are naturally creative because your job title says visual merchandiser. With effort and dedication, you can live up to those expectations. Albrecht believes that creative thinking abilities are learned, not inherited. He also says that anyone can think creatively "once you know how to go about it and once you decide you want to." He cites five characteristics that make the difference for innovative and creative thinking:

- **Mental flexibility**—being free of preconceived interpretations and fixed opinions
- **Option thinking**—willingness to give problems further thought and reluctance to jump on the first idea that seems to be a solution
- **Big-picture thinking**—taking the "helicopter view" and rising above the landscape of everyday ideas to see all the factors involved at once
- **Skill in explaining and selling ideas**—being able to develop a concept and connect the facts and ideas involved so that others can understand and accept them
- **Intellectual courage**—willingness to advocate an idea or a course of action that you believe in that is unpopular with your peers

As a visual merchandiser, you are in an ideal position to be one of Albrecht's idea helpers—not only because you're constantly searching for new ideas yourself, but because the company needs to hear and use creative ideas from all its employees in order to remain competitive. If the only thing constant in retailing is change, then only those individuals equipped to respond well to change will maintain their employability within a retail organization.

As an idea helper, you don't need to agree with every idea that's presented. But just as there are statements that stop and devalue ideas (or the people who offer them), there



are statements that can facilitate an exchange of ideas. Prefacing your ideas or the ideas of those around you with comments like, “I’d like to get your help on an idea I’m trying to work out” or “Before we make a decision, let’s review all our options” can help those around you to react more open-mindedly

to any ideas—including your own. In *The Creative Corporation*, Albrecht says the ideal is “someone who realizes that ideas, in and of themselves, are fundamentally valuable; they represent intellectual wealth. In contrast to the idea killer, the idea helper actually helps other people have and express new ideas.”

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## Shoptalk “Thinking Outside the Box” by Judy Bell

**Early in my career** as a visual merchandising director for a chain of women’s apparel specialty stores, a vice president of the company made an unusual request. He asked me to look at our competitors, decide which had the

most inviting presentation at their store entrance, and then copy it in our stores. I had a difficult time with the idea of copying someone else’s ideas; not only did I want our stores to be fashion leaders, I knew that the presentation must fit our own brand image. But I made a trip to Southdale Shopping Center in Minneapolis to see what I could learn. Many of the women’s specialty stores had positioned a table with value-priced sweaters in their entrance. I watched as nearly every female customer who passed by the store stopped at the table to look at the sweaters. Many also entered the store.

I compared those presentations to what we were featuring in our store entrances: two-way and four-way basic chrome fixtures with full-price fashions. These same types of fixtures filled the store, in addition to many simple round racks. I thought about how eye-catching the tables in front of our competitors’ stores were because they were different from the basic fixtures in the store. I also thought about the appeal of showing a value item at the entrance to the store to engage the customers’ interest as they passed by.

With those two ideas in mind, I met with a fixture manufacturer, and together,

we designed a unique fixture for the store entrance. It fit the stores’ brand image, was flexible and could handle both folded and hanging products, and it fit into my budget. Next, I met with a few of our company’s merchants to discuss moving value product to this new fixture and then worked with them to write signage copy. I presented the concept to the VP who had requested the action, and he approved a two-month test in a few stores. I was glad I had decided not to interpret his request to copy our competitors’ presentations too literally and, instead, took the opportunity to innovate. What was the end of the story? Sales went off the charts, and we ordered the new fixtures for every store in the company!

After this experience, I was sold on the idea of looking at the competition before developing any new idea. The inspiration was invaluable. I still use the process of looking, comparing, and innovating every day of my career. I have broadened my base of research to include the Internet, the media, restaurants, and a wide variety of resources. I always begin with a direct look at my competition. I believe that in order to lead, you must be aware of what everyone else is doing. And I never, ever copy!

## DESIGN GALLERY: THE CRYSTAL BALL AT BERGDORF'S

Bergdorf Goodman was founded in 1899 as a purveyor of luxury goods and still proudly sits on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue in New York City. Known for its outstanding and award-winning window displays, a walk around Bergdorf's is a must-see stop on any visit to Midtown. Their dazzling "Crystal Ball" window pictured here was crowned with a Gold Award in the 2015 Winning Windows competition in New York City, sponsored by *design:retail* magazine. One in a series of five windows all befitting the theme of "Brilliant Holiday," these stunning stars celebrated the opening of Bergdorf's new jewelry salon. More than seven million Swarovski crystals, gems, and jewels, all carefully placed by hand on backdrops, set pieces, and objects created a glittering effect.

In *design:retail's* long-running, sixteen-year competition, two editors and one seasoned retail consultant walked the streets of Manhattan touring storefronts that competed for three awards: Platinum, Gold, and Silver. The official judging criteria involved three categories, in which several desirable elements were called out. Look at how well this Bergdorf Goodman Gold Award winner went above and beyond what the judges were earnestly seeking. In the first category, *Originality and Creativity*, the judges looked for "fresh ideas not seen before, an innovative and unique theme, an artistically executed idea or concept and attention to detail with well-selected props." In category two, *Captures the Spirit of the Season*, they evaluated whether or not the window "engaged

emotions, was a show-stopper, appeals to all ages and captures a celebratory, holiday mood." Category three, *Professionalism: Execution and Technical Aspects*, considered such factors as "lighting, mechanics, signing and mannequin and/or merchandise presentation."

The Winning Windows Official Judging Criteria of *design:retail* is a valuable framework to keep in mind as we review other windows in the Design Gallery feature in each chapter. Use it on your own personal tour of storefront windows in your city or local shopping mall. Do you find any windows that would qualify for a Platinum, Gold, or Silver Award? Why or why not?



Bergdorf Goodman's mesmerizing Gold Award-winning "Crystal Ball" window, Fifth Avenue, New York, November 2015. Copyright WindowsWear PRO <http://pro.windowswear.com> [contact@windowswear.com](mailto:contact@windowswear.com) 1.646.827.2288.

## Chapter 1 Review Questions

1. What is Judy Bell's approach to thinking outside the box? Describe each step and give an example.
2. What is the SCAMPER model and how do some visual merchandisers use this model to solve problems? Give an example.
3. What is trendspotting? Give examples that reflect the direction of trends.
4. What is a flagship store? What makes it important in the field of visual merchandising?
5. List at least two top innovative thinkers and discuss how their approach can be applied today in the field of visual merchandising and display.
6. What are Karl Albrecht's steps for building a sustainable environment? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

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## Outside-the-Box Challenge

### Comparison Shopping for Advertised Items

#### Directions:

1. Collect newspaper, magazine, email, or social media ads from at least two different stores that sell similar (or identical) items.
2. Visit the two stores and comparison shop the advertised items featured in each store's presentation. What are the prices, what are the colors or flavors, how are the items similar and/or different?
3. Answer the following questions for each store.

#### LOOK

1. Are the advertised items easy to locate within the store?
2. Are the advertised items signed?
3. Are the displays neat and orderly?
4. Are the displays exciting or eye-catching? Why or why not?

#### COMPARE

1. Which store's presentation do you like better and why?
2. Can you predict which presentation will sell the most merchandise? Explain why you think it will be more effective.

#### INNOVATE

1. What could you do to innovate each of the presentations?
2. Once you've added your own innovations, how much of the original idea will still be evident?
3. Did you use any of the SCAMPER model's elements to edit the original ideas? Explain which element(s) you used. Describe your creative results.

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## Shopping Style Comparison

**Directions:** Customers respond differently to various types of information offered in the displays and merchandise presentations they see. This exercise is about reaching a target customer through visual presentations of merchandise.

#### LOOK

Interview three to five different people (try to vary age, gender, and occupation or lifestyle) and find out what

information they expect from a visual merchandising presentation in a store. Be sure to include descriptive information about the person you are interviewing (e.g., the person's gender, age, interests, occupation). Here are some sample questions for your investigative interviews:

1. Do you notice merchandise displays when you shop?
2. How do you use merchandise displays to help you make buying decisions?
3. When you shop, what type of information do you look for in displays?
4. How would you feel if retailers didn't present their merchandise in any other way besides storing it on shelves and hangers? Would other non-decorative approaches affect your decision to buy?
5. Do you have any pet peeves about merchandise presentation methods currently used in your favorite stores?

#### COMPARE

Summarize the results of your interviews and analyze what they mean in terms of shopping behavior and response to visual merchandising techniques.

#### INNOVATE

Based on your findings, what general recommendations can you make about creating more effective merchandise displays?

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## Critical Thinking

### Activity 1: Discovering Creativity and Meaning in Your Favorite Retail Store Displays

1. Visit your favorite brick-and-mortar retail store.
2. Examine where merchandising ends and visual presentation takes over in order to create narratives enticing consumers to make purchases.
3. Find two visual narratives that you feel really make an impact in the store. Write down the details of the displays and note the message you think they are trying to convey.
4. In your own words, express what these visuals were really all about and include the ideas you have learned in this chapter about how creativity borrows from culture, social issues, and history. Discuss with your class.

## **SAMPLE SOLUTION**

Global diversity is a hot topic in the media, and retailers like Pottery Barn, West Elm, and Ballard Designs are reflecting people of different races, ages, ethnicities, and lifestyles in their store products by featuring African-inspired prints in the bath and bedding areas as well as resin elephant heads, African-inspired side tables, and hand-woven baskets in home accessory areas.

### **Activity 2: Finding Inspiration through Cultural and Social Trends**

The goal of this activity is to encourage you to increase your awareness of cultural and social trends and to begin to use this knowledge to create engaging, timely, visual presentations.

1. Visit your favorite bookstore/library/news websites and write down the top cultural news cover story on each periodical (examine five to ten sources and list them). Examples could include issues involving race, ethnicity, religion, age, social issues, as well as popular themes in music, film, technology, and art trends.
2. In class, report your findings, sharing the most common stories, and discuss which may indicate cultural trends. Your discussion should also include what you and your classmates have seen or heard in the news or in social media.
3. Choose three cultural and social issues and create a list of products that could be displayed together to reflect each of these trends. Are there certain brands that may reflect these trends better than others? Why or why not? Discuss in class how you would design a theme around these products.
4. Discuss how these issues could impact retailing over the next few months or even a year.

## **SAMPLE SOLUTION**

Magazines, newspapers, and other social media indicate that aging baby boomers are increasingly interested in "brain fitness." Related products could include fashionable athleisure apparel, top brand sneakers, brain-support vitamins, and Scrabble and Sudoku apps displayed on iPads. These products could be displayed with a sign: "Mind & Body Workouts."

## **Case Study**

### **Looking, Comparing, and Innovating**

#### **THE SITUATION: PHASE ONE**

On her first day as the new visual merchandiser for the specialty store The Millville, Jane Bartlett is notified by Susan Howard, a store manager, that each of the company's six metro area stores will receive 150 hand-knit sweaters in the following day's shipment. Susan tells Jane that the sweaters are an important fashion item for the season and are the hottest selling trend. This is a get-in and get-out strategy and the sweaters should be sold quickly!

Until Jane was hired to travel among the six stores, Susan had done the visual merchandising for her busy store. She loved doing the store's creative work and often spent more time doing displays than she did doing managerial paperwork. It was corporate headquarters' idea to hire a visual merchandiser to free the store managers from merchandising tasks so that they could handle their administrative duties and meet important paperwork deadlines. The company's other objective was establishing a consistent store brand image in the metro area.

Susan still thinks that hiring Jane was unnecessary. She lets Jane know that she will need to be convinced that a full-time visual merchandising person will make a difference to her store's sales figures. "I'm expecting to see a creative and exciting presentation for those sweaters, Jane," says Susan. It's clear to Jane that she needs to prove to Susan that her ideas and methods can add consistency and value to the store's current presentation strategies.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: PHASE ONE**

1. How do you think Jane should begin the process of delivering a creative and exciting merchandise presentation that will satisfy her supervisor?
2. What does Jane need to find out about her competition? To what elements of their retail operation should she pay particular attention?
3. How can Jane be confident that her presentations will have an impact on sales?

#### **THE SITUATION: PHASE TWO**

Jane used the look, compare, innovate method and toured her store's most direct competitor, another upscale specialty

store. She found their sweaters neatly stacked on shelves in the first wall section to the right of the store entrance. The massive presentation of sweaters made a dramatic impact and anyone passing by the store would be likely to notice them.

In another department store, Jane found sweaters in several different areas of the casual department. A few were shown on a fixture with denim jeans in the rear of the department; some were shown with casual pants in the front of the department; and there was one sweater shown under a coat on a wall presentation.

The outfits that were coordinated with the sweaters were unusual and exciting, but because the sweaters were integrated throughout the department, she thought it would be difficult to find a customer's size. Jane also noticed that one fixture holding sweaters had a conversational sign explaining how special yarns were used in the sweater for added warmth.

Jane compared the presentations she had observed in the two competing stores. She decided she would get the greatest impact in her store by positioning all of the sweaters in one area, as she had seen in the first store. She liked the idea of featuring coordinating items with the sweaters to create multiple sales, as she had seen in the second store. Jane also thought teaching shoppers about special product features with a conversational sign was a good idea.

In her own store, Jane decided to position the sweaters near the entrance to the store. This was a departure from the norm; casual apparel was normally merchandised toward the back of the store, and gifts were normally positioned in the front. She believed the prime selling space at the entrance should be used to feature hot items, and the sweaters definitely qualified. She stocked the sweaters on a four-tiered table, featuring one size (small, medium, large) per shelf. This left the top shelf open, and that is where Jane took advantage of her store's gift strategy.

She presented each sweater in an open, tissue-lined gift box along with a coordinating shirt. The sweaters came in bright colors, so she found some small gift books with brightly colored covers, and matching bookmarks. She placed one in each box, and tied a string of bright raffia around the sweaters and books. Then she added a conversational sign to the shelf.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: PHASE TWO**

1. List at least three things that you think Jane did right.
2. If you were in Jane's position, how would you sell your presentation strategy to the store manager?
3. What should Jane do to follow up with her display to see if it was successful?
4. How long should Jane wait until she moves the sweaters to a new location of the store? Or should she just leave them there? Discuss amongst your classmates.





Illustration - Isabelle MENIN

[www.isabellemenin.com](http://www.isabellemenin.com)

# 2

## What Is Visual Merchandising?

### Visual Merchandising Supports Sales

Visual merchandising, once called display, has evolved from its origins as a store's decorative arts department to its current status as a sales-supportive entity that impacts store design, store signage, departmental merchandise placement and display, store atmospherics, and store brand image. Where once the display department was charged with "making pretty," the visual merchandising department is now challenged with "making sales." In a large corporate retail operation, it is generally part of the retail advertising and in-store marketing department. In **mom-and-pop stores**, sales staff or freelance visual merchandisers may perform the visual merchandising tasks.

To begin our working definition of visual merchandising, we could refer to a dictionary and find that the adjective *visual* relates to images that are taken into the brain by way of the eye. One meaning for the verb form *merchandising* is "promoting the sale of certain commodities." Thus, *visual merchandising* could be defined as the process of promoting the sale of products by producing mental images that urge potential customers to make purchases.

Martin Pegler, long-time "dean of displaymen" and prolific writer on topics related to visual merchandising, store planning, and layout, titled one of his books *Show and Sell*, which says volumes about the business of getting people to look at and buy merchandise.

The title of this text, *Silent Selling*, gives you another short but useful definition for visual merchandising. Effective visual merchandising techniques establish and maintain the store's physical (and mental) image in the customer's mind, providing support for the rest of the store's selling effort. In other words, merchandise should be displayed and signed so effectively that it can sell itself, without the assistance of a sales associate.

The phrase **mom-and-pop stores** comes from early retailing when many retailers were in family businesses and often lived in apartments above their stores. Today, it refers to small independent retailers.

**"Visual merchandisers create the in-store environment that supports the retailer's marketing and merchandising strategies. They set the mood; highlight the merchandise; and invite, attract, welcome, and inform shoppers. They also, somewhat more subtly, make the store a wonderful, joyous place to be."**  
Steve Kaufman,  
Former Editor in Chief,  
vmsd magazine

#### AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

- Define visual merchandising
- Explain how customers process visual merchandising messages
- Describe how retailers communicate through visual images
- Explain how visual merchandising efforts educate customers
- Identify why visual merchandising efforts increase sales
- Explain how visual merchandising efforts support retailing trends



A **target market** is an identified (targeted) segment of the population that research has indicated is a good fit for a retailer's product or service offerings. This is the group at which the retailer aims all of the store's promotional communication efforts.

A **promotional mix** is a combination of communication tools—advertising, in-store marketing, special events, and personal selling, in addition to visual merchandising—that tells targeted customers about a store and its merchandise.

**atmospherics** is a word coined by retailers to describe the elements (lighting effects, sound levels, aromas, etc.) that appeal to our five senses and contribute to the overall environment of a store.

**strip malls** are made up of side-by-side stores with parking lots immediately outside their doors. Some strip malls may have enclosed walkways, but they are not configured under one large roof as conventional covered malls are.

## Visual Merchandising Supports Retail Strategies

Successful stores have mission statements that describe how they will serve their **target markets**. They also have vision and goal statements that describe their ambitions—how they see their stores moving forward. In addition, they have strategies for reaching the goals and realizing their vision by utilizing a mixture of promotional methods. Their challenge is letting their target customer know who they are, what they stand for, and what they plan to do. Clear communication is the key to success.

A store's total **promotional mix** is a combination of communication tools—advertising, in-store marketing, special events, and personal selling, as well as visual merchandising—that tells targeted customers about merchandise. If each part of the mix accomplishes its goal, potential customers will be drawn to the store for a closer look.

Advertising tells customers that a store's merchandise is different, better, less expensive, or more fashionable than products offered by other retailers. When those ad-reading, commercial-viewing customers arrive at a store, they expect to see whatever it is that the advertising has communicated to them—in a setting that matches the promise of the advertising. The visual merchandiser's job is to make the advertised promise of a pleasant and productive shopping experience come true.

Visual merchandisers physically carry out a store's promotional selling strategies by:

- Designing and executing window and interior displays that support advertising goals
- Installing promotional signage for in-store selling
- Producing workable departmental layouts and interior décor
- Devising merchandise fixture layouts for day-to-day operations

- Placing and presenting merchandise on walls and fixtures
- Working as team members with the store's promotional staff

## Visual Merchandising Communicates with Customers

Communication has three basic elements: the sender, the message, and the receiver (Figure 2.1). Unless all three elements are present, communication does not occur. If you call 911 and no one answers your call, for example, communication has not taken place.

If a retailer buys advertising space in a newspaper that is never delivered to the customer's doorstep, how productive do you think the ad will be? If a discount retailer designs an elegant storefront that discourages bargain hunters and annoys upscale customers once they have entered, has the design message reached the right customer?

The retailer is the message sender. The retailer's store, its interior design and selling floor layout, **atmospherics**, merchandise presentation, plus the store's selling services are the unique merchandising message. The retailer has chosen a specific person to send this message to—in hopes of attracting that targeted individual to shop in the store. If that person is open to receiving the message and responds by coming to the store and making purchases, then communication is complete and can be judged successful. That's the retailer's communication goal—attracting customers and making sales.

Every tangible (see-able, hear-able, smell-able, touch-able) aspect of a store sends a message to shoppers. Whether a store is a stand-alone structure, next to other stores in a **strip mall**, or side by side with other stores in an indoor mall, the store's exterior must have a physical appearance that will identify it to its intended market segment and differentiate it

**Figure 2.1** A store exterior that clearly communicates with its core customer and differentiates itself from other retailers. Louis Vuitton flagship store, Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, CA. Copyright WindowsWear PRO <http://pro.windowswear.com> [contact@windowswear.com](mailto:contact@windowswear.com) 1.646.827.2288



from its neighbors. The store's exterior must effectively communicate its message to the customer.

### COMMUNICATING RETAIL BRAND IMAGE

Retail **brand image** is a combination of tangible and intangible factors that describe what a shopper thinks about his or her relationship with a store. Brand image describes not only how the store looks but also how it acts toward its customers. Target, for example, has guests rather than customers; Walmart stations greeters inside its doors to offer carts and pleasant, personal, welcoming messages. What type of brand image do you think those retailers are trying to establish in their customers' minds?

### THE MISSION STATEMENT COMMUNICATES BRAND IMAGE

A store's brand image is generally driven by the retailer's mission statement—a formal expression of the retailer's purpose for operating the business. Sometimes the mission

statement is posted prominently in the store and incorporated into its print advertising as a slogan or identifying phrase. The mission statement summarizes what the company and its products or services are all about, whom it hopes to serve, and how it hopes to do it.

For example, Aveda's body product stores carry this message:

*Our mission at Aveda is to care for the world we live in, from the products we make, to the ways in which we give back to society. At Aveda, we strive to set an example for environmental leadership and responsibility, not just in the world of beauty, but around the world.*

From this statement, you might guess that the company's management wants to build customer trust in the way that its products are developed and manufactured. You could also infer that the company wants the customers to know that by purchasing Aveda products, they are also helping the environment.

### A store's **brand image**

is the retailer's identity in shoppers' minds. It encompasses not only merchandise brands and types but also store environment, reputation, and service. In some cases, the retailer employs the store's name or another branded element on its private-label products, like Henri Bendel's signature stripe pattern on handbags, totes, belts, coffee mugs, and dog leashes.



A **lease line** marks the boundary where store space begins and a mall's common area ends.

"Visual merchandisers are the creative conscience in communicating the product and brand with detail and flair that excites consumers and differentiates your company from others. They must understand the business objectives and go to places others have never been, as visual merchandisers live in and create the environment every day."  
*Tony Mancini, Chief Executive Officer at Global Visual Group*

A mission statement that incorporates a well-known brand promise comes from Target:

*Our Purpose: We fulfill the needs and fuel the potential of our guests. That means making Target your preferred shopping destination in all channels by delivering outstanding value, continuous innovation and exceptional experiences—consistently fulfilling our Expect More. Pay Less.® brand promise.*

Other retail companies may have shorter statements, with philosophies of doing business stated in three or four words. However, the number of words in the statement is not as important as how effectively the retailer is able to get that message across to the customer.

#### SALES ASSOCIATES' RELATIONSHIPS WITH CUSTOMERS COMMUNICATE BRAND IMAGE

Brand image is also portrayed by a high-end retailer's interest in developing ongoing relationships between its sales associates and its shoppers. Members of the selling staff often have "little black books" containing special clients' names, sizes, brand preferences, birthdays, etc. Just the idea that retail operations are interested in creating relationships with their customers says much about the value of brand image. Concern for reputation, responsiveness to customer needs and wants, easy-to-manage credit arrangements, convenient hours and locations, brand and service reliability, fashion leadership, and technological leadership are all intangible factors by which customers measure retail brand image.

#### STORE INTERIORS COMMUNICATE BRAND IMAGE

Smart retailers choose their target customers and build stores and advertising strategies that match their customers' values and self-

images. Throughout the entire store—from the lease line to the back wall and everything in between—the environment should communicate the brand image. Every fixture, sign, and display in the store must fit the brand. The cashwrap (where customers go to check out), lighting fixtures, wall coverings, floor coverings, and even the restrooms should tell shoppers where they are. A good example of a store with a clear brand image is Ralph Lauren. A residential feel with rich, warm woods in walls and floor fixtures is characteristic of every store. The brand is so consistent, you would know you were in a Ralph Lauren store even if there were no signs or logos (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2 Clear brand image in Ralph Lauren; Omotesandō, Tokyo. Kasuga / WWD / © Conde Nast.

Fitting rooms are frequently overlooked when it comes to brand image. Often tucked away into a tiny space, they are difficult for shoppers to locate. Shoppers should never have to ask where the fitting rooms are. If they can easily see them, they may be more likely to try on an item. One successful retailer's mantra is: "The sale is one-half made when the customer is in the fitting room." Stores like Ann Taylor understand the importance of carrying their store brand image into the fitting rooms; they even call them "selling rooms." They are spacious, comfortable, and well lit. There is no gap in décor style or quality between the sales floor and the fitting rooms.

### **STORE LOCATION COMMUNICATES BRAND IMAGE**

Location of stores is also important when considering a store's brand. Have you ever seen a Victoria's Secret store adjacent to an Italian carryout restaurant in a shopping mall? Probably not. Why? Because the two entities

have conflicting brand images and different atmospheric goals. It's hard to imagine shopping for luxurious lingerie in a shop filled with the aroma of a neighbor's garlic and tomato sauce. That's why Victoria's Secret is careful about selecting its locations. It wants to sell perfumes and bath products with its fine lingerie, not pizza. Retail communication is most effective when the message sent is clear and consistent with the image.

Shopping centers must also pay attention to their brand image. The Sevens shopping mall in Düsseldorf, Germany, is one of the best branded malls in the world (Figure 2.3). Seven stories of shops, each with its own identity, all fit under one umbrella because the architecture of the mall is so distinct. In general, shoppers do not like to travel up more than two flights to reach their destination. Malls with numerous floors must employ interesting architectural details to make traveling up irresistible. Sevens Mall does its best through innovative use of lighting and design.



**Figure 2.3** Exceptional architecture and lighting create a strong brand umbrella for shops in the Sevens shopping mall, Düsseldorf. Judy Bell.

Atmospheric elements influence how shoppers feel about *being in and staying in* a retail space. The longer they stay in the store, the more likely they are to buy.

## Shopping Is a Form of Communication

The way people act in a certain environment is a form of communication, too. Retail merchants put the entire store on display, saying symbolically: “Here’s what we have to offer. Here’s our pricing. What do you think?” If customers respond by making purchases, they’re saying: “This is quality merchandise at great prices. We like your way of doing business.”

Over the years, retailers have studied shopping patterns and have passed them down from one generation to another. Have you ever wondered why the less-expensive, generic cereal products are on the lowest shelves in some grocery stores, while the premium-priced, kid-pleasing brands are on the middle shelves, and the “healthy” brands are on the top shelves? Grocers believe that the more expensive brands should be placed on the top shelf, with adult-level sight lines in mind, because they are the decision makers on these brands. Products placed on middle shelves catch the attention of the younger child riding in the shopping cart reaching out to grab at recognizable favorites. As a consequence, bottom shelves may be the least desirable spots for merchandise, but grocers know that bargain hunters don’t mind reaching down to save money.

As retailing methods have become more scientific, formal research studies have been conducted in an attempt to quantify and formalize some of retailing’s common wisdom. In these studies, experts study shoppers

and their behavior. They watch how people act when they’re shopping and then use the information to help retailers sell more profitably. One of the best-known researchers is Paco Underhill, founder of a company called Envirosell. Underhill’s book *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*, details the thousands of hours he and his team of “trackers” have spent observing and recording shopping behavior.

Underhill says:

*The first principle behind the science of shopping is the simplest one: There are certain physical and anatomical abilities, tendencies, limitations, and needs common to all people, and the retail environment must be tailored to these characteristics. . . . You’d think it would be easy to get everything right. Yet a huge part of what we do is uncover ways in which retail environments fail to recognize and accommodate how human machines are built and how our anatomical and physiological aspects determine what we do. . . . The implications of all this are clear: Where shoppers go, what they see, and how they respond determines the very nature of their shopping experience.*

For every truism about consumer behavior, there is a corresponding retail practice that uses the common (or highly scientific) wisdom contained in it. Retailers are learning how to make profitable use of this information, and shoppers are the beneficiaries. For example, did you know that Americans tend to shop at a store in much the same way they walk and drive—veering to the right? When was the last time you pulled out a grocery cart and turned left to start your marketing? It’s almost impossible to do. Smart retailers know to set up their traffic patterns and prime merchandise layouts to facilitate this preference.

Because certain shopping behaviors are fairly predictable, retailers can make use of the knowledge. That's why clearance racks are most often found at the rear of the store or department. Retailers know that experienced shoppers habitually check for bargains, but they also want to guide them through all their regular-priced goods on their way to the markdown racks.

Did you know that it takes furniture shoppers at least 20 seconds to become acclimated to the store's layout before they're ready to do any serious looking? That's why most furniture stores employ an "up" system. Salespeople take turns watching the entrance of the store from a discreet distance, and then wait for those important seconds to tick by before approaching customers after they've entered the store. They are counting: "one, one thousand, two, one thousand, three, one thousand, four . . ."

Those few seconds also equate to distance traveled. When shoppers enter a fashion store, they are so busy getting a feel for the retail atmosphere, they may not be able to process any fashion messages from merchandise positioned directly inside the doors. The best way to use this space is to create entrance presentations with traffic-stopping impact. If you've shopped in an Old Navy store, you know that its "Item of the Week" causes shoppers to pause. Without this strategy, shoppers might move into the store too quickly and fail to get the most important fashion message. As shoppers move the next ten feet into the store, Old Navy has their full attention.

In retailing, the expression "too close for comfort" really means physically too close for comfort. Americans are quite conscious (and protective) of their personal space and they're very uncomfortable in stores that force them to squeeze between fixtures or bump up against other shoppers. This has been a difficult concept for many retailers to grasp since they've been trained to make the most

of every square foot of selling floor space. However, if shoppers are continually jostled by traffic moving through a department or down an aisle, they'll spend less time examining garments or reading labels on packaged products. They may even leave the store.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that retailers create aisles that allow wheelchairs to pass safely between fixtures. Stores that comply with this far-reaching law improve shopping experiences for all. Within the next fifteen years, about 18 percent of the American population will be at least sixty-five years old. People who cannot bend and stretch or see as clearly as they once did will have special needs when they shop. Imagine what a store that does not accommodate this growing segment of the population will communicate to the shopping public. It would be wiser to listen and attend to customer preferences before they become major issues. Communication is a two-way process.

#### **HOW DO CUSTOMERS PROCESS VISUAL MERCHANDISING MESSAGES?**

Think about your last trip into a store that you had never shopped before. Ask yourself:

- Why did you decide to go to the store?
- Were you responding to a specific ad or were you just curious as you walked by?
- Did someone you know visit the store first and tell you positive things about his or her experience?
- What did you see as you walked up to the store's entrance?
- Did the store's exterior send you any messages about what would be inside?
- Was the view through the storefront appealing? Informative?
- When you entered, was the lighting pleasant to your eyes?
- Do you remember any particular scents or sounds?





Figure 2.4 “Outpost” mannequin;  
TopShop, Soho, New York City.  
Ericksen / WWD / © Conde Nast.

- How welcoming did the store’s interior feel once you’d stepped inside?
- Was it easy to tell what the store was selling?
- Did you get the impression that the store was selling merchandise that you’d want to buy?
- On the basis of your first impression, did you decide to explore further?
- Was it clear to you how to shop the store?

- Were you directed to or drawn to the merchandise?
- Bottom line, did you make a purchase?

If your answers were mostly positive, the store’s visual merchandising probably played a large role in you going home with a package under your arm. There is a sequence or set of events that usually takes place for merchandise presentation to result in an actual sale. The retailer communicated something vital to you about merchandise through the store’s presentation methods . . . and you got the message.

### INFORMATION PROCESSING IN A VISUAL MERCHANDISING STRATEGY

Visual merchandisers expose merchandise to potential customers, who process the information in eight stages (see Box 2.1). Imagine that you’re walking into a department store you haven’t visited before, to shop for a new watchband. As you search for the accessory department, you notice a mannequin dressed in a casual outfit with an attractive cotton jacket. That’s *exposure* (Figure 2.4).

If the store’s visual merchandisers have presented the merchandise in a way that shows how it could be used when purchased, you might say, “If I had that jacket, I could wear it with jeans.” That’s *attention*.

If the visual merchandising message is clearly stated—by signage, by location in the department, by accessorizing, by vivid color, and by level of activity in the area—you will reach the *comprehension* stage. You may say to yourself, “The way this jacket is shown, I could wear it to work on casual Fridays. I wonder how it would look dressed up . . .”

The next step, *agreement*, occurs if the product information you’ve just absorbed is credible and compatible with your values, and you mentally file it away—perhaps for future reference. If, at this point, you revert to looking

for the watchband, your *retention* of the mental image of the jacket and later *retrieval* of it will be very important to the store. Will the visual merchandiser's message about the jacket stay with you after you purchase the watchband? Will you ask yourself, "Now where did I see that great cotton jacket? Oh, that's right . . . it was near the entrance. It was on a mannequin, so it should be easy to find."

If the mental imagery of the presentation was strong enough and all the rest of the promotional elements supported the *consumer decision-making* process, you will probably take *action*. If your next step is to purchase the jacket, the consumer information-processing model worked for you—and for the department store.

## Visual Merchandising Supports Selling

In the last scenario, there was no salesperson to suggest the cotton jacket to you as a shopper. The visual merchandiser's presentation of the jacket on a mannequin made the sale. Current trends in store staffing indicate that stores have reduced the number of sales associates on the selling floor to lower operating costs. Effective visual merchandising efforts can supplement and support the sales staff of any store.

Although they will never replace an alert and attentive sales associate, successful visual merchandising techniques may keep customers involved with a display until a sales associate reaches them and completes the sales transaction. If the cotton jacket had been presented on a floor fixture with eleven others in assorted colors, you may not have noticed it.

You were only looking for a watchband, a simple purchase priced around \$19.99, but the jacket on the mannequin caught your eye. Even though you'd been momentarily side-tracked, you followed the signs to the accessories department and purchased the watchband. The next move you made was to try on the jacket.

## stages in consumer information processing

- Exposure
- Attention
- Comprehension
- Agreement
- Retention
- Retrieval
- Consumer decision-making
- Action taken

Shimp, T. *Advertising, Promotion, and Supplemental Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications*, 8th ed. 2010. South-Western Cengage Learning.

Box 2.1

The silent selling of merchandise presentation added \$90 to your shopping bill—for a jacket that you sold to yourself!

According to Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor research:

*Retailers maintain that in-store displays should do the following: (1) communicate the latest trends in fashion and colors, (2) assist the customer in making a buying decision, and (3) create an exciting environment within the store. In addition, retailers are also faced with the challenge of a consumer who is spending less time shopping, making it all the more imperative that visual displays act as instruments of swift persuasion.*

Visual merchandising can transform a shopper into a buyer. It can also increase the average dollar amount per sale. Effective displays teach shoppers about using multiple basic and accessory items to enhance and extend the use of their purchases. It's not

**"A fad gives us momentary joy, and part of the joy comes in knowing that it's momentary. A trend, on the other hand, satisfies a different human need. A trend gains power over time, because it's not merely part of a moment, it's a tool, a connector that will become more valuable as other people commit to engaging in it."**

*Seth Godin, Seth's Blog: Trends vs. Fads, August 21, 2015*

uncommon to hear a shopper say "I'd like to purchase the entire outfit, just the way you have it on the mannequin." That's silent selling at its best.

A fully accessorized visual merchandising treatment educates customers about when and how to wear fashion and trend items. In this way, effective merchandise presentation provides fashion direction to customers who may not trust their own fashion savvy.

Imagine gift shopping for someone whose taste is different from yours. You may not know what kind of table linens to select for a wedding gift if the bride's china pattern is far removed from your own preference. You may not know what kind of socks to wear with a pinstriped suit and wingtip oxfords if you've spent most of your life in boots and jeans. Effective visual merchandising techniques can solve many buying problems for prospective customers who are looking for advice.

Shoppers don't have to have all the answers, but the store's merchandisers do. When they can trust their favorite store's merchandisers to offer them advice, they can relax and enjoy the shopping experience. Educational and tasteful presentations can give confidence (and direction) to shoppers and save them time.

The visual merchandiser can stimulate customers' appetites for artfully presented merchandise in the same way that the gourmet cook stimulates diners' appetites for an artfully presented meal. Pick up any lifestyle magazine and look at the food in the photographs. You anticipate how good the food will taste because your senses are stimulated by the imagery on the paper.

An effective presentation of merchandise is a virtual recipe for making the most of the shopper's investment. The shopper tells others about your value-added services . . . and the shopper comes back again and again.

## How Does Visual Merchandising Support Retailing Trends?

A fashion apparel or accessory item becomes a trend when it is widely desired by consumers. Visual merchandisers have the tools to draw attention to the item and make it easy for shoppers to locate. Product placement, mannequins, props, signage, and lighting may all play a role in highlighting trend merchandise. Every retailer wants to be the first, the best, the leader. The visual merchandiser is the invisible force that is doing a lot of the pushing behind the trend.

### retail realities

**It is possible for fewer sales personnel to manage more customers when the product presentation assists with the selling process.**

### retail realities

**Visual merchandising's effect on the presentation of goods builds add-on sales by suggesting coordinating items for the customer's selection—which creates a value-added transaction for both retailer and customer.**

## THE TREND TOWARD EMPHASIZING INTERIORS

Store interiors have changed, presentation methods have changed, and shopping has changed. In the 1980s, trend reports indicated that interior store layout and wall and fixture merchandising had more impact on sales than store windows did. Many specialty retailers removed traditional street side theatrical display windows and opened up the entire main floor to public view. Windows that once blocked the pedestrian's view of the inside of the store now created an opportunity to view the store's entire shopping assortment. Windows became an invitation for passersby

to enter for a closer look. The visual merchandiser's concern changed from "Are our windows dramatic?" to "Are the windows clean?" Store interiors became their new focus.

### THE TREND TOWARD CONSUMER INTERACTION WITH THE MERCHANDISE

Consumerism, another trend, meant that customers wanted the opportunity to thoroughly inspect products before making a purchase. In the case of expensive or technical products, they wanted expert demonstrations to determine if all of their requirements were going to be met. Lamps needed electrical power, television screens needed moving images, and stereos needed soundproof demo booths.

The barriers of showcase selling also had to come down if retailers were going to reduce selling costs and stay competitive in a growing market. For economic and competitive reasons, stores began to move in the direction of self-service. There are fewer salespeople on the floor now who can remove merchandise from a display case and hand it to a customer or demonstrate an appliance.

Visual merchandisers were challenged to find new ways to put shoppers in touch with merchandise assortments. Improved selling fixtures were created, and store furnishings became more functional as selling tools. Layouts changed to facilitate customer interactions with merchandise. Signage directed traffic and told customers about merchandise on self-service fixtures. Graphics on the walls set moods and explained lifestyles.

### THE VISUAL MERCHANDISER AS TREND FORECASTER

As lifestyles continually changed and new trends accelerated in all areas of shoppers' lives, retailing had to anticipate the changes quickly and provide the latest trend-right merchandise. Competitive retailers added the

task of trend forecasting to their merchandise buyers' and visual merchandisers' job descriptions.

Visual merchandisers have had to become experts at anticipating and responding to lifestyle trends. They study how their target customers live their lives. They try to understand what shoppers want in new products and how shoppers use the products they buy. They must interpret the trends within the store's physical setting so that people know what's important today. Stores must be poised to change and then change again. Smart merchandisers are always looking ahead for tomorrow's strategy because they want to be there ahead of the competition. See [www.echochamber.com](http://www.echochamber.com) for international retail trends.

### THE TREND TOWARD OPEN-AIR LIFESTYLE CENTERS

An interesting recent direction in retail strategies is the trend away from enclosed shopping malls to upscale, open-air **lifestyle centers**. Beautifully landscaped and located in affluent areas, lifestyle centers appeal to time-starved shoppers who want to park closer to their favorite specialty stores and restaurants rather than in the sprawling parking lots surrounding traditional indoor malls. Lifestyle centers include many of the same specialty shops of the enclosed mall but often do not have department store anchors. The Grove in Los Angeles and Bal Harbor in Miami are excellent examples.

The emergence of lifestyle centers may have come about as a result of a lifestyle trend—a certain dissatisfaction with the anonymity of a work life spent in a cubicle with a computer on the desk and fewer human interactions in the business day. As more individuals choose to work from their homes, there may be even less interaction. People long for a neighborhood shopping district "where everyone knows your name."

**lifestyle centers** have an open-air configuration of at least 50,000 square feet of retail space occupied by upscale specialty store chains. Retail categories most commonly represented are apparel, home goods, books, and music. They have one or more table service restaurants, and sometimes include a multiplex cinema (International Council of Shopping Centers).





**Figure 2.5** ION Orchard, Singapore, an integrated retail and residential development. JTB Photo/UIG/Getty Images.

### THE TREND TOWARD INTEGRATED RETAIL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

For those who want to live immediately next to their favorite shopping mall, developers are building high-rise condominiums and apartments with walkways directly into the mall. An example is Galleria in Edina, Minnesota, which links to neighboring Galleria Westin Hotel and Condominiums. Residents and hotel guests can shop in over fifty luxury stores or dine in one of seven unique restaurants or cafes. Another integrated retail mall and residence is ION Orchard mall and Orchard Residences in Singapore. Dwellers can shop in a wide

variety of luxury fashion stores, dine in the ION Food Hall, and conduct business in OCBC Bank, all without getting into their car (Figure 2.5).

### THE TREND TOWARD SMALLER STORES

A full decade into this new century, many big-box retailers who previously embraced a super-sized philosophy have begun to expand their strategies to include a smaller retail footprint—particularly in densely populated urban areas where new retail space is at a premium. Spurred by retail economics and the fact that America is over-stored, industry leaders like Target are exploring the concept

of more neighborhood-oriented stores that can serve niche markets with highly specific merchandise assortments and services. Target's online newsletter, "A Bullseye View," posted this notice August 4, 2015:

*At Target, one of our strengths is the flexibility in our store design. Over the years we've explored many different formats that help us tailor our stores to fit their neighborhoods. In the last three years, we introduced flexible formats called CityTarget and TargetExpress in 14 locations across the country. These stores vary in size and assortment, and allow us to create a more locally-relevant experience for guests in urban areas. But big or small, our stores have one thing in common; They're all Target. So beginning this fall, we'll begin the process of renaming all of our CityTarget and TargetExpress stores "Target."*

## THE TREND TOWARD NONSTORE SELLING

Nonstore retailing is another trend that is affecting visual merchandising. There are hundreds of home shopping opportunities beamed into your living room 24 hours a day on your television. Infomercials don't have storefronts. They don't need them when merchandise is a phone call away. Specialty shopping by mail-order catalogues is another retail trend that reflects today's lifestyles. People who have less time will take short cuts, even if they have to spend a little more to have their purchases conveniently delivered to their doorsteps. A new generation of retailers is counting on it. The Internet offers books, movies, music, clothing, medicine,

food, business services, electronic products, housewares, automobiles, airline tickets—you name it, it's probably there.

While these trends in retailing present a tremendous challenge to in-store retailers, they also present opportunities for visual merchandisers seeking employment opportunities in a growing field. The merchandise on the electronic shopper's television screen or computer monitor has to be presented well even if it is not in a store. Who arranges the assorted goods for the camera? The goods are arranged by a visual merchandiser whose title may be different but whose duties remain essentially the same. They may be called stylists, but what they do is prepare and present merchandise.

An add-on sale of \$2.89 for a pair of socks adds more than 10 percent to a \$25 purchase of denim jeans. Ask people you know if they'd be happy to have a 10 percent increase in their paychecks this week . . . or if they'd like to be earning 10 percent interest on their saving accounts!

retail realities

Value-added products and services are the result of a retailer's efforts to enhance those products or services with information, which allows customers to gain more satisfaction and better results from the use of their purchase.

retail realities

Retail trends are often circular in direction. Today's up-to-the-minute merchandising methods and presentation strategies may be out of fashion in a matter of months, but their replacement strategies may very well come from the past instead of the future.

retail realities