



10 Ways to Create a Dynamic Customer Experience

By Lyn Falk

The way you design and brand your retail space can impact your customers' perceptions and influence their behavior. Creating an engaging environment that reflects your brand, tells your story and caters to your target market is key for business success.

Consider all of the elements that impact the way customers feel and behave in your retail space — layout, signage, fixtures, displays, lighting, etc. — and be sure they are positively showcasing your brand while simultaneously delighting your customers from beginning to end.

1. First Impressions

What customers experience in the first few seconds of visiting your business will make or break their first impression of your brand. It's essential that your selling environment entices customers, especially first-time visitors, to stay and shop instead of turn around and head for the door.

Consider the overall ambiance and style of your store. Is your business professional, with strong

branding and a coordinated color scheme? Are signs visible and easy to read? Does the lighting highlight key focal points? Do traffic aisles beckon the customer? Does music and aroma enhance the initial experience?

All of these elements should work together instantly to create a cohesive and captivating ambience that will get those who enter your store shopping!

2. Traffic Flow/Layout

Once you've drawn customers into your store, you need to make it easy to navigate so they're naturally exposed to all of your merchandise. Separate your store into easily navigable chunks by clearly identifying departments with signage, aisles and fixture styles.

Customers will go out of their way to locate "destination items," or brand-name products that they specifically came to your store to purchase. Therefore, it is beneficial to place this merchandise at the back of your store, where shoppers will

have to pass attention-getting endcaps or island displays full of seasonal products or deals they just can't resist.

If you've noticed there are areas in your store that are visited less frequently, try rearranging the fixtures or brightening the lighting to freshen up that area and make it more attractive to customers.

3. Focal Points

Focal points are well-designed visual statements that stand out from their surroundings and attract attention.

You can achieve this by keeping some empty space around your focal points, elevating them, and/or brightening the lighting above them to attract the eyes of your customers.

They should be placed at 15 to 20 foot intervals in either a zig-zag pattern or in a circle around your store's perimeter to effortlessly lead customers through your space. Examples of strong focal points are themed displays, endcaps and large graphics/signs.



Seven 24-Hour Fixes to Improve Your Selling Environment

1. Add a pop of color to an accent wall or the front of your checkout counter.
2. Rework and refresh a department layout by repositioning fixtures.
3. Add more lighting, such as a strip of track lighting, above key displays.
4. Clean, repair and declutter where necessary.
5. Discard old, unnecessary signs and replace handwritten or taped signage with computer printed signs, and use sign holders.
6. Rotate merchandise on fixtures to draw new attention to older product lines.
7. Add a seasonal prop or backdrop to attract attention and liven up displays.

Focal points should be placed at 15- to 20-foot intervals around your store.

4. Signage

A clear system of signage is essential for helping customers navigate your business and understand the messages you are trying to communicate.

The signage on your store's exterior should be professionally printed, well lit and easy-to-read.

Display your logo high on your facade for auto traffic, and again at eye level where it will be visible to pedestrians.

Don't forget your store hours, website and social media handles on your front door or adjacent window — this information should be displayed on your store's exterior so customers can identify alternate ways to access your business, ensuring that you are available to them 24/7.

Interior signage should be strategically placed to make it easy for customers to navigate your space. Give a consistent "look" to signs with similar functions to train shoppers to recognize their meaning. For example, frame all "sale" signs in one color, and all department or aisle signs in another.

For both exterior and interior signage, it is important to remember that less is more. Customers are constantly being bombarded with visual symbols, so keep signs simple and use few words to ensure that your messages are delivered successfully.

5. Fixtures

Fixtures serve as the backdrop for your products, so they should support your brand and make your merchandise look great. They are the "furniture" in the room so take care to keep them looking good.

In the lawn and garden industry, seasonal changes occur often, so having fixtures on casters can make a reset a lot easier. The fixtures in your store may have a variety of functions so many do not look the same, however, they should complement one another to give your space a consistent feel.

Grouping similar-styled fixtures in a department helps the customer quickly identify the space as a new department.

6. Merchandising

Merchandising, or displaying your products on a fixture in an organized fashion, allows customers to view all of your merchandise and helps them to make quick purchasing decisions.

In the U.S., customers tend to "read" product from left to right, top to bottom. Good merchandising should help consumers' eyes roam fluidly across an entire fixture, not just the shelf at eye-level.

Help shoppers make sense of your merchandise by grouping it according to size, style or color. Always put lighter weight and smaller items toward the top, and heavier larger items toward the bottom.

Fixtures should be well stocked but not over-crowded. Avoid both empty shelves and overflowing fixtures — neither of these creates a favorable impression of your business.

Easily freshen up your store and make old merchandise look new by regrouping products or rotating items to different fixtures.

7. Displays

Displays are well-coordinated focal points that are strategically placed throughout your store. An effective display is simple, incorporates a theme (whether it's color, shape, style or product category), uses props and has good composition.

Displays should stimulate interest and tell a story, making your product look desirable and driving the consumer to take action. They should be changed regularly to hold the interest of returning shoppers and coordinate with the season.

For example, consider how you could use a display to show a customer how easily your product fits into their lives. If your customers are city and apartment dwellers, create a display around urban gardening with tips for growing herbs or other plants in a small space. If your target market values green living, create a timeline showcasing the process of composting.

8. Lighting

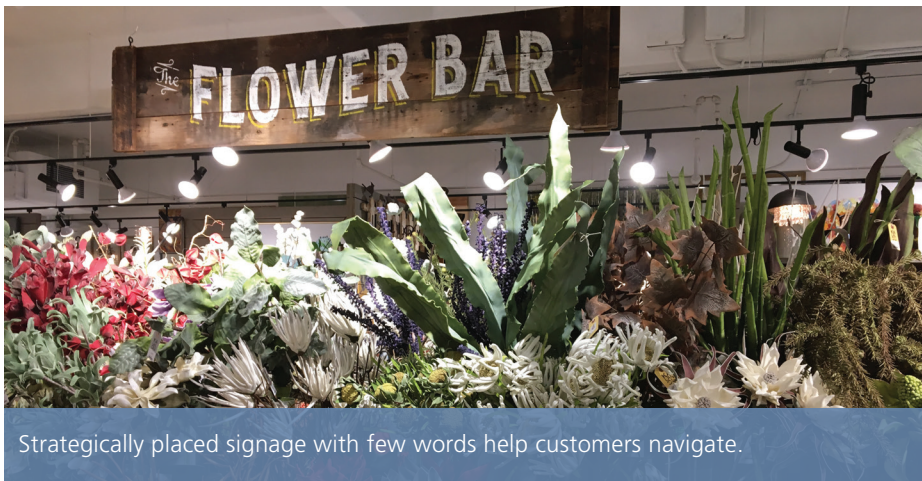
Lighting is one of the most important yet often overlooked design elements in a space, and small adjustments in this category can go a long way toward making a big impact.

In a large room, light sources should be varied to prevent visual monotony. Our eyes are attracted to contrast, so providing a mix of light sources such as track lighting, floor lamps and hanging pendants can satisfy this need for ever-changing light levels.

People are naturally drawn to the brightest points in a room, a fact that you can use to your advantage by ensuring that your store's displays and focal points are brightly lit.

9. Aroma/Acoustics

Sense of smell is a huge part of how people interpret an environment. Creating a positive



Strategically placed signage with few words help customers navigate.



Effective displays are simple and incorporate one theme, such as color.

“smelling” experience in your space has two components: eliminating undesired odors and importing pleasant scents that will have a positive impact on your customers.

First, keep negative odors, such as those given off by fertilizers, at bay by storing the offending products in a separate room (if possible), or use an ionizer machine to neutralize the odors.

Once you’ve gotten rid of any bad smells in your store, you can begin introducing positive ones that will create a memorable, lasting impression with your customers.

Consider what scents will complement your brand and resonate with your target audience. A calming whiff of pine or bright pop of citrus dispersed via essential oils in a crock pot behind your checkout counter will resonate with your customers as they enter and exit.

Another easy and low cost option for increasing your business’ sales is to alter the sounds in your selling environment. The sounds in a store are powerful enough to impact how fast customers move

about the space, the amount of time they spend there and whether or not they make a purchase.

Remove unsettling “noise” from your store by installing soft acoustic absorbing textures, such as carpet, upholstered seating, or fabric ceiling baffles. Put positive sounds into your environment by selecting satellite channel playlists that will appeal to your target markets.

Are female shoppers most common during work week hours? Play music that caters to them during this time. Does your customer base switch to being more family-oriented on the weekends? Then the music you play during this time should change to match this audience.

10. Service Counter/Checkout Stands

A well-designed and branded service counter should be located just inside the front entrance — for friendly staff to greet customers, answer questions, give directions, register class participants, process returns, etc.

Your checkout counters are the last point of interaction with your customer before they leave your store, so they should leave a positive lasting impression. They should be both functional for your employees and customers, and visually appealing.

Functionally, customers should easily be able to understand where to line up, read about your return policies, and access collateral such as brochures, business cards or tags with your social media handles.

Aesthetically, your counter should be designed to match the style and personality of the rest of your store and be branded with colors and your logo to leave a strong, memorable impression of your brand. **LGR**

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