VISUAL MERCHANDISING IN MARK FORMELLE STORES

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The article examines the concept of visual merchandising, its history, the influence of its elements on the consumer decision making process, investigates customer preferences in the organization of visual merchandising and offers a number of recommendations for improving the visual component of Belarusian clothing stores that can be used in practice.

Keywords: visual merchandising; clothing stores, marketing; in-store experience; customer perception.

INTRODUCTION

Customers usually base their first impressions on what they see. That's why the field of visual merchandising can play a crucial role in increasing the attractiveness, atmosphere and quality of customer service and experience inside the store.

Visual merchandising is a set of design and communication solutions of the store, a direction in marketing communications, consisting in the organization and demonstration of goods in the trading floor. It is used to optimize the physical space of the store, highlight products and their features, attract the attention of customers, make them feel comfortable and stimulate sales.

Despite the changes in our world after the pandemic, many people still prefer to buy clothes in offline retail shops. This may be due to people's desire to see the product with their own eyes and the opportunity to try it on. Therefore, we can safely say that offline shopping is still preferred by many consumers in the clothing industry.

RESULTS AND ITS DISCUSSION

It is believed that merchandising technologies were the first to be used by the American self-service supermarket «Piggly Wiggly», which opened in 1916. The managers noticed that if you facilitate the search for goods, make the selection process fun and functional, then customers spend more time in the store and buy 13 % more [1]. According to statistics, 76 % of purchase decisions are made directly in the store, while 80 % of the purchase decision is dictated by the environment of the product, namely its design and layout, proximity to other goods and the price tag [2]. The results of research by American experts indicate that 30 % of all purchases in stores are made under the influence of emotions and impulsive behavior [3]. Merchandising also helps to influence consumer behavior in a certain way and increase sales.

Visual merchandising uses a number of physical components to reflect the brand's image and aesthetics, including color, lighting, space, sound, odor (smell) and technology. The influence of all these elements has constantly been studied by psychologists and economists, including Paco Underhill, a psychologist-writer and founder of a research and consulting company, in his book «Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping».

Visual display is vital for clothing stores, it's preferable to strategically approach the display of the products. The layout of the store determines how customers move around the premises, what they see and where they spend more time.

Window display is a place where customers get their first impression of the store. The right window display serves as a good approach to visual clothing merchandising, which can attract more visitors to the store.

There should be plenty of free space in the store so that customers can conveniently move around the store without disturbing each other and without clinging to the goods.

Color correction is used by the merchandiser on an ongoing basis, because thanks to various color combinations, it's possible to attract attention with accents, hold the consumer's attention and make the store visibly more attractive.

Different color temperatures are suitable for different retail environments. However, it is important to maintain a balance here. Lighting should also allow the buyer to have a good look at the clothes, should not distort the colors in order to avoid situations with consumer dissatisfaction and the return of the goods.

The smell is also important, it should not only be pleasant, show the cleanliness of the room, neutralize unpleasant odors in the fitting room, but also create a specific atmosphere or associations.

Sound, most often music, can even influence a person's decision to enter a store or walk past it. The sound should not be too loud in order not to interfere with consumers to make purchases.

The attractiveness of technology is associated with the current trend towards digitalization, which is especially important for a young audience. Different digital displays and interactive installations can not only help consumers with orientation in the store and among the goods, increase the level of customer interaction with your brand and make the buying process more comfortable, but also visually increase the attractiveness of the store.

In order to find out the relevant problems faced by customers in Belarusian clothing stores, we interviewed 5 people who regularly visit such stores. During in-depth interviews, it has been proven that buyers really pay attention to the elements of visual merchandising and often get a negative experience

due to the inconvenient display of goods on shelves and hangers, small space in the room, loud music and too popular songs, unpleasant odors and inappropriate interior design.

To determine the most preferred solutions in visual merchandising and the importance of merchandising elements for buyers, we conducted a survey among 190 customers of clothing stores (176 people aged 14 to 25 years, 91 % are women). The results were following:

•Despite the impact of the pandemic on our lives, the majority of respondents (78 %) prefer to buy clothes in offline stores.

•85 % of respondents faced situations when they wanted to leave the store or not even enter it, the most common reasons were dissatisfaction with the assortment of clothes, insufficient free space, odor, lighting and design of the trading floor.

•When choosing between warm and cold lighting, 37.4 % of respondents preferred warm, 33.2 % – cold, the rest answered that lighting does not matter for them or that the choice depends on the style of clothing and the store.

•62 % of respondents will feel more comfortable in a room with uniform lighting.

•60 % of respondents rated the importance of fitting room lighting as very important (5 out of 0 to 5).

•88 % of respondents will feel uncomfortable in a room where there is little free space.

•40 % use shopping carts (shoppers) in stores.

•55.8 % would prefer a wide range of clothes, even if they had to search and sort through the goods for a long time. For the remaining 44.2%, a narrow assortment is preferable, when a small amount of goods is located on hangers.

•61 % are more comfortable when clothes are arranged by collections, 22% – by color scheme, 11.6% – by ready-made outfits.

•73.2 % of respondents chose pastel shades as the most attractive for them in the showcases.

•81 % of respondents pay attention to music in stores.

•45.3 % of respondents would like to hear popular, familiar music in stores, 39.5 % prefer calm relaxing music.

•When asked how much your favorite song playing in the store will increase your desire to go there, 61 respondents said that this would greatly increase their desire, and 17 respondents would not be affected in any way.

•75.8 % of respondents would like to see displays in stores that allow them to view a map of the trading floor or an assortment of clothes.

•145 (76.3 %) respondents noted that visual merchandising is important or essential for them. 3 (1.6 %) said that it is not important for them at all.

CONCLUSION

Having identified the main preferences of respondents who are the target audience of Mark Formelle, we also conducted a mystery shopper in order to develop the following recommendations for improving the visual merchandising of their stores.

•Lighting should evenly fill the entire room. We also recommend reducing the sharpness (intensity) of the light.

•Comply with the requirements for cleaning and ventilation of the room; it is not recommended to use aromatizers.

•We recommend placing the speakers evenly throughout the hall so that the music volume is the same in all parts of the store and checking the speakers for serviceability. We also recommend including popular songs that are known to most, but not too energetic.

•We suggest increasing the free space, especially in the part of the store far from the entrance and in the corners, allocate enough space at the entrance and increase the space between hangers to fit at least two people.

•Do not overload the hangers, leave space for the movement of clothes. Do not place clothes too high or low, especially underwear and socks, place clothes at an average level for an adult (160-175 cm tall).

•We recommend arranging clothes by collections and by color scheme and paying attention to the creation of ready-made outfits on mannequins, especially at the main entrance to the store.

•Since the main color in the design of the room is white, for signages and other POS-materials, brighter eye–catching shades should be used, but not abused, so as not to distract customers from the goods. We also recommend installing digital displays that will allow customers to see information about the assortment of goods and a store map.

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