

Selling IN small S-P-A-C-E-S

By: Robert Radcliffe, Sr.

Tired of being frustrated with the size of your store? Sick of looking at bigger spaces that you can't afford? Don't do it anymore! Embrace your space – regardless of its size. Limited space isn't always a disadvantage – sometimes it's a blessing. And your small space can really work for you if effectively merchandise every single square inch.

In September's issue, we laid the groundwork for designing a merchandising plan. You have decided on a look and feel

to keep in mind as you either buy or rework your merchandising systems. Hopefully, you have a sympathetic supplier or suppliers to work with, and a good grasp on how to bring your creative flair to your store's display designs.

Now, we will learn how to customize small (should we call them footage-challenged?) spaces with design options. This may be the most important merchandising tool you have – letting the space work for you to sell more stuff.

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Be at one with the Chi: Chi is the Chinese word used to describe “the natural energy of the Universe”. One element of chi is ‘harmony’. Merchandising successfully in a small space is achieved when all the parts of your store are in harmony not only with each other, but also with your customer. Take note of how your customers proceed through the store. Take pictures of small areas in your store and look at them closely to see how each display melds into the next.

Customizing for customers: Only you know your customer base and what they expect. Are they skipping over certain areas of the store and congregating in others? Try splitting up the more popular items and placing them closer to products that receive less traffic. By purchasing displays that move easily – for example, racks that work in both slatwall or pegboard or displays with casters – you can very easily revamp the visual landscape of your store without even spending a dime.

Money, money money: The only thing you probably wish you had more of than space is money, right? Be firm

on your merchandising budget, but don’t be overwhelmed by potential costs. Consider reworking one part of the store at a time, beginning with where the customers enter. Remember, merchandising (also known as effectively displaying product to increase sales) is a long-range plan made up of specific short-range goals. Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Instead, pick the most deserving part of your store and start there. Then work towards other parts of the store, keeping your ‘look and feel’ as the guide for your display decisions.

The neverending story: Take your merchandising plan and divide it into easily achieved goals. Be firm with your timelines so that you don’t get lost in details and possibilities. Refer back to your merchandising plan and really try and stick to your goals and budget.

Thoughtful displays: Displays that are designed well don’t always cost more, and most times, they hold more products in the same amount of space. Waterfall and rotating displays are perfect examples.

aisle maker



Grandola

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Case study: Below you will see before and after shots of a small store in New Jersey. They knew they wanted a new display system to maximize their square footage. The owners designed a plan, firmed up their budget then set out to find a supplier who could fill their needs. Check out the results.

Keeping your ear to the ground: Small storeowners have a greater challenge when it comes to turning a profit. You need to be smart about the amount and types of products that you offer at your store, and tuned in to how each product is selling. Enter the magic of merchandising! If you have a product that isn't selling but should, a better display might solve that problem. Move it, create a sign for it, incorporate it into a sample page display with other complimentary products.

What's new? We can't emphasize this enough – customers want to know what's new. If you're as good as you say you are, they keep coming back and buying – and they want to purchase what they don't have. Keep your newer items visible – think about a 'what's new' section. In a small store, you can do this even easier – plus you can relocate some of your slower moving items nearby so that customers are encouraged to look at them again.

When all else fails mark down! We all do it – check out the sale rack first. Consumers like a good deal, so mark down items that aren't moving quickly. You may even want to dedicate one corner of your store as your clearance section – but locate it so that the customer has to walk through as much of the store as possible to get there.

Something for status quo: As you redesign your dis-



BEFORE



AFTER



plays and bring in new products, remember one thing – customers want to be able to find what they need quickly. In your grocery store, the milk is always in one place – and if it moved, you’d be frustrated to figure out where it went. Make sure your stock items stay in one place, usually in the back of the store so customers can walk through to get to them. Every effort should be made to keep certain stock items where customers can find them.

It really isn’t about the space you have; it’s about how you use it. Smaller spaces lend themselves to quicker and more

profound changes. But they can also get cluttered and overfilled. Stay true to your merchandising and product plan. Be sure you offer a reasonable supply of new products – especially products your customers are requesting. Think about the small boutique stores you love. The successful ones turn a small space into a fabulous shopping experience filled with fresh products and new ideas. ☞



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