

# IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## SECRETS IN DISPLAY

In stocking, displaying and selling our wares we harbor an often imperceptible conflict in priority — customer draw versus staff efficiency. Your sales team wants orders. They want similar items together, SKU position permanence and possibly a disdain for inventory holes. Customers want and need many of these elements, including a searchable “logic” and of course, full shelves.

However, for a sale to occur, the customer must already know they need an item *or* it has to be proactively displayed to entice discovery. When an employee is stocking our shelves, their priority is for rationality and ease of restocking. Their goal is to “store” our items on the walls, not always to move them out the door.

### DISCOVERY

Thinking back on my own house lamp purchases, they’ve rarely been out of the lamp section of a store, but instead from the sofa, end table or bedroom furniture display. The wife and I would see something displayed next to the units we are about to buy, and — both figuratively and literally — a light would go on. What could have been an



### Products must be proactively displayed to entice customer discovery

untapped afterthought became a profitable “add-on” sale for the furniture store.

We were victims/beneficiaries of customer “discovery.” I don’t think the salesperson ever asked us if we wanted lamps, they were just displayed so compellingly. Context!

We as music retailers can employ the no-brainer ideas like putting straps near the guitars and maintenance kits near the horns.

But what about similar activity “centers” in the store? We can’t depend on the suggestive sales skills of our staff to be the sole source of these transactions, and admittedly, today’s sales culture does not want to be sold. They want to discover.

### CONTINUITY

The other secret to retail display success is something that goes beyond just classifying like products. It exploits the visuals of line, color and a fourth dimensional spatial flow. Most of these are so cerebral they escape all but the best of merchandisers. Things like the geometry of hook placement — are the lines even, are they continuous from product to product? Flow from front to back? As well as simple strategies like color and shape of packaging, all placed in the same area give a subliminal sense of order and, ultimately, comfort to a customer. If they draw, they move! When packages look like each other on a wall, the eye and brain only have to differentiate individual product specs. They aren’t viscerally bumped by the interruptions of corners and brand identity. Consider having as many

of your manufacturer’s product in one area instead of differentiating by instrument all the time. Side note: This also means committing deeper to fewer vendors to give this kind of packaging uniformity.

### CREATING CULTURE

Imagine a customer wants to demo a new guitar. After plugging him in, a salesman was heard saying, “Stupid customer. Didn’t even know we have an amp room.”

Stupid customer? No, stupid salesman. There’s no way a person new to the store is going to immediately know our store’s breadth of resources. Stupid manager for not nurturing a welcoming environment and store culture for new customers. Stupid store owner for not signing the amp room well enough for the newbie to see it was there.

Attention to broad but fundamental elements like line of sight, signage, order and product drama can open a whole new sales floor dynamic. There’s never a single right answer and the best thing you can do is experiment. **MI**

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