Store Design and Display Toolkit for Independent Retailers on Main Streets

Prepared by Lyn Falk, President, Retailworks, Inc.
www.retailworksinc.com

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I Creating a Branded Customer Experience

Your Brand!

aka:
Signature Look
Image
Identity
**Store Personality**
Uniqueness Factor
YOUR story

Your brand represents everything about your business. It's a customer's emotional and cognitive interpretation of what he/she sees and experiences while in your business. It begins with your store's name and identification system, is reinforced through your business's website and social media outlets, and is communicated through the store's design and displays. When it comes to selecting your inventory, the product lines themselves should reflect the brand and meet target market expectations in look, style and price point. Don't cheapen your brand with merchandise that doesn't measure up. Finally, your brand should be seen and felt throughout the entire shopping experience, all the way through to when the customer exits your store and parking lot.

It is the big picture, and the details. It is all encompassing.

It is unique to your business.

A strong brand and visual identity will attract attention and create an emotional connection with your target market. Most important, a successful brand and identity will create a memorable experience that turns first-time shoppers into loyal patrons.
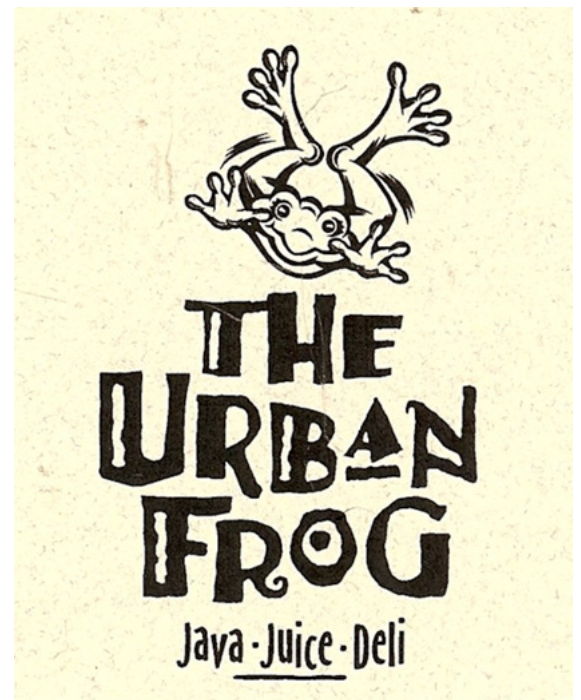
Logo

It's not just your name, color and font. It's also a symbol, icon, graphic, photo, and/or catchy tagline.

- Your logo represents your image in 2-D form.
- It should reflect your business' mission and style.
- Your customer should see it several times throughout his/her shopping experience.

How strong and effective is your business logo?

When was the last time it was updated?

Does it still portray who you are?

How many places do you have it posted on the INTERIOR of your store?

Website/Social Media Platforms

Many first-time customers will first be exposed to your brand through your website or a social media platform.

Home page and Social visuals should give the same impression as your storefront and your store interior, and use your brand colors and fonts.

Photos of your storefront and store interior should proudly be displayed.

Your "About Us" page should help customers understand who you are and what your brand stands for.

How well are these digital formats currently expressing your brand?

Exterior
Don't underestimate the power of "curb appeal"!

Does your exterior make a statement?

Does it reflect your business' image/brand?

When was the last time you "audited" your exterior?

Audit Checklist - for your storefront and front entrance, and BACK facade and entrance if you have one:
- landscaping
    - *Is everything healthy looking?*
    - *Is the area groomed and kept up?*
- signage (marquee/illuminated, eye level, store hours, address #s, open sign)
    - *Is your sign for automobile traffic well illuminated and easily seen?*
    - *Are the signs on your door and in your windows up to date, easy to read, and in nice sign holders?*
    - *Do they include store hours, website, social media icons?*
- finishes (color, textures)
    - *Are your brand colors represented?*
    - *Does anything need to be repainted?*
- lighting
    - *Is there something on your facade that should be illuminated (other than the main sign)?*
    - *Are the windows well lit and all lights are working?*
- parking
    - *Is it obvious where customers can park?*
    - *Are signs needed to identify and direct customers?*
- music/aroma
    - *Can you pipe music or an aroma (that go with your brand) out onto the sidewalk?*

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- decorative accessories (awnings, banners/flags, benches, planters...)
    - *Do you have awnings, banners/flags, benches, planters, sandwich boards, etc., to attract attention from a distance? If so, do they reflect your brand?*
- window displays (theme, composition, props, illumination, signage)
    - *Are the well designed with a recognizable theme, have good composition, and include fun props?*
- overall image and "look"
    - *When you stand back and look at your storefront, does it look great, tell a story, and celebrate your brand?*
- entrance door and handle
    - *Are your entrance doors and/or the door handles unique? Are they attention-getting and memorable? These are great opportunities to begin tactile engagements with your customers.*

Perception

Webster's Definition of "Perception":
"Awareness of one's environment through physical sensation."

Evolution of "Customer Perception":

1) Exposure - a customer is first exposed to your store in the physical realm when they enter your store

2) Interpretation - in a matter of a few seconds upon entering your store, they make a judgement, form an opinion, and "interpret" your store and brand. You have either met their expectations, disappointed them, or exceeded their expectations. This is a critical turning point as it's at this point when they decide if you're worth their time to do some shopping.

3) Reaction - immediately following the very short "interpretation" phase, the customer decides to leave or stay, and if they stay, where they want to go in your store.

4) Behavior - after the customer begins shopping, the store "experience" they have will determine if they buy, and return.

How strong and effective is your business' image?

What is your customer's PERCEPTION of your image?

Five Senses

How are you reinforcing your brand through each of these senses?

Taste - i.e.: signature snack/treat, beverage
Touch - smooth or textured surfaces
Smell - signature aroma
Hear - i.e.: promotional jingle; radio announcer; playlists for store interior that relate to your brand and appeal to your target market
Sight - icon, graphic, mascot, see decor/theme/style below

Design/Theme/Style

All of these items must be carefully selected and designed, and coordinated to support your brand:

- **Spatial proportion/layout/focal points** - how you lay out your store determines how much of your store your customer will shop
- **Lighting** - it's one of the most important elements of creating a great selling space (see more on lighting later in this Guide)
- **Color and texture** - these appear in your paint colors, floor and wall finishes, and on your ceiling. They all need to work well together and help create your store's identity/personality.
- **Other sensory elements** such as sound/music/noise, and aroma/odors, are critical to creating an enjoyable shopping experience. Addressing acoustics, removing odors, and imparting the right aroma can make a big difference in how long customers stay and shop in your store.
- **Overall cleanliness** - your customers will judge you on the cleanliness of your store, and your restrooms (if you have them available to the public). Don't underestimate the power of a clean store!
- Signage **- it helps define the space and** product lines (see more on signage later in this Guide).
- **Fixtures and furnishings** - take time to think about what you bring in to your store to house your product lines and the seating pieces your customers will sit on. Are they all in good condition and coordinate with one another? Like the furniture in your home is a reflection on who you are, your store's fixtures and furnishing are a reflection of your brand.
- **Merchandising & Display techniques** - keeping stock levels at "critical mass" and incorporating key principles will help sell more products (more on merchandising and display later in this Guide).
- **Visual décor** - ie: artwork, plants, trim work, mannequins, props, these final pieces are icing on the cake and what pull the theme/style of the store together to make a strong and memorable visual statement.
- **Shopping carts and hand baskets** - are they branded and easily accessible to shoppers?

RETAILWORKS

- **Amenities** such as kids areas, dressing rooms, restrooms, snacks/beverages served, educational and interactive components, seating and consulting areas – are they all well designed and properly located?
- **Overall comfort level (psychological and physical) while shopping** - ie: are temperature and humidity at proper levels?
- **Is the checkout/service counter area well designed?** Does it display your logo, and have impulse items in "like" containers? Are shopping bags branded? Do your shopping bags equal the quality of your merchandise? Higher end products do not belong in plastic bags.
- **Staff** - are they well trained to greet, communicate, and sell, as well as dress to represent the brand? ie: uniforms, name tags, colors
- **What are your customers' last impressions as they exit the store?** What's the last thing they see/experience before they walk out the door? Is it fun? Memorable? Does it invite them back?

How well do all of these elements support your brand?

Avoid hodgepodge, eclectic materials, and multiple colors and textures, as they will just be distractions from your merchandise. At some point, visual overload sets in and customers exit early without purchasing.

How do you know if your brand is working, comprehensively?

It is used consistently by all your employees in every location on all promotional materials? (signage, tags, decals, flyers, bags)

It is used consistently at all your events outside of the store

It is quickly recognized by local residents and your regular customers

A good, memorable, working brand is often unknowingly used on a consistent basis in its correct format by everyone who interacts with it.

Conclusion

Your brand is more than your logo. It's EVERYTHING your customers see, touch, smell, hear, taste, and feel.

Every decision you make should go through your "brand" filter:
- ***does it support, reflect, or celebrate your brand?***
- ***will it not distract from your brand image?***
- ***will your target market easily accept it, or be confused by it?***

If it passes the "brand/target market" test, then it's a go.

In the long run, "less is always more". Keep is simple. Customers will remember more when it's not overwhelming.

II Creating Attention-Getting, Cost-Effective Window Displays

Windows are valuable storefront real estate.

Are you making the most of them?
How often are you changing them?
Do customers comment on them?

The purpose of a window display is to:

1) attract attention of passerby

2) arouse interest in theme of display or products being featured

3) motivate consumer to enter the store by creating desire for the product or the store in general - this is powerful!

Whether or not you're a display whiz, here are some important tips to keep in mind when thinking about creating a window display.

Display Types

1) One item - select one oversized product or prop to make a single statement

2) One item - multiplied to fill the space can also make an attention-getting statement

3) Pull together a collection of related products and props to create a theme, whether via color, type, style, or use. Assemble them in a manner that utilizes the elements and principles of design (see lower right image) to create good visual composition/balance. Products and props stacked into a triangle shape provide a focal point at the top, then the eye moves throughout the entire display. Odd numbers of objects (ie: mannequins) placed in a window are more visually pleasing than even numbers.

4) No products at all is also an option, where signage and messaging or oversized photos make the statement.

Display Concepts

Keep displays simple. A few larger key elements say much more and sell more than a lot of clutter which can create to visual chaos. Use negative space to your advantage.

Illuminate the window displays 3x brighter than the store interior. Use 3500K high lumen output bulbs in recessed light fixtures or track heads.

Use signage minimally. No hand-written signs, and all signs should be in nice sign holders. No scotch tape - it's unprofessional.

Use props that relate to the display theme and help catch attention.

Backdrops are great eye-stoppers. They don't have to be so wide that pedestrians can't still see into your store.

Always keep your brand in mind when creating your displays.

Design Tools - the elements & principles of design are your best friends when planning and assembling a window display. Using them is how you create good "composition".

NOTE: The words highlighted in red are the most effective at attracting attention when used in a display.

Elements of Design - these are words that describe objects
Line
Shape
Size
Texture
Color
Form
Weight

Principles of Design - these are words that describe what you do with objects

Objects that contrast with their surroundings, which can be by illuminating something to be brighter, leaving some negative space in-between it and other objects, or contrasting in color, will attract attention.

Multiple objects of the same kind that are repeated in a specified area will attract attention.

And anything that has movement, will attract attention.

Contrast
Repetition
Movement
Symmetry
Proportion
Dominance
Direction
Positive/Negative Space
Dark/Light (Illumination)

Display Prep/Maintenance
· Wash windows, inside and out.
· Hang a ceiling grid above each window to hang products, props, and backdrops.
· Always keep all light bulbs working.
· Change windows every 2-4 weeks if you have a lot of regular patrons and/or are on a busy street.
· Change before items start to fade.
· Clean floors of windows when changes are made.
· Check window displays every day to make sure nothing has shifted, fallen, faded, etc
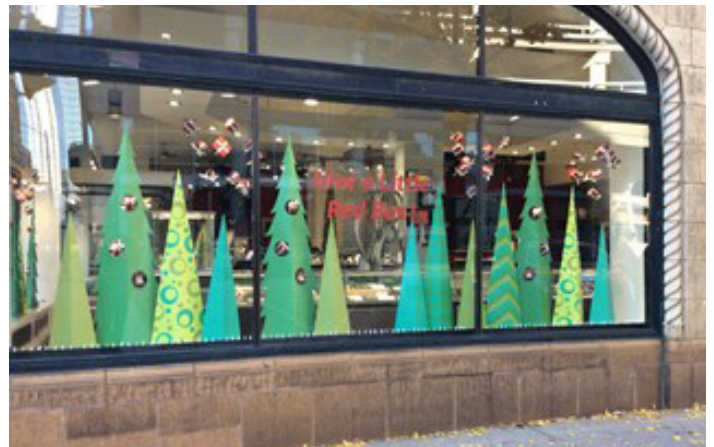
Planning and Budgeting

Start planning in October for the following year's displays. Place on a calendar:
- idea brainstorming, taking new product lines into consideration and planned promotions
- purchasing/making/procuring of props
- installing the display; photograph; post on social media
- maintenance of display
- removal of display

Assign yourself, a staff member, or volunteers to do this work - students from local tech colleges or universities in design/theatre programs and retired art teachers make for great display artists!

Put some $ aside each month to use for props, signs, labor, even if it's $50/month.

When you put a calendar together, assign the tasks, and put funds aside, the work WILL get done. It becomes a part of your regular store operations.
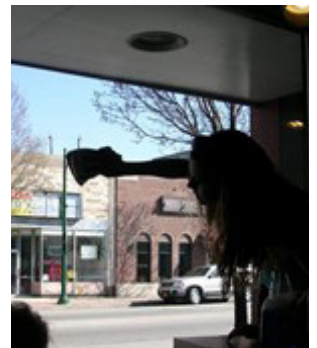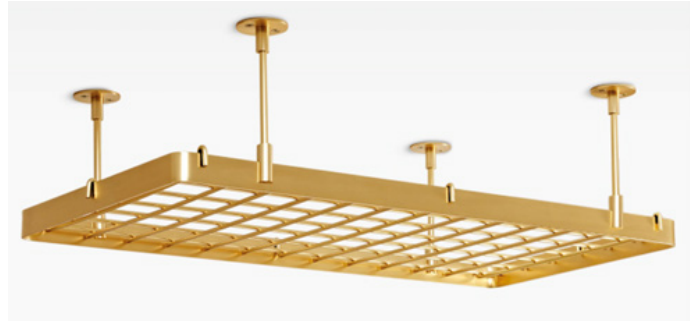
30 Props & Display Accessories No Retailer Should be Without

1) Ceiling grids

2) Track lighting, table and floor lamps

3) Ladder and step stool

4) Foam core (for signs, backdrops, making props) and Styrofoam —different thicknesses/sizes

5) Rolls of paper, kraft and colored (use on floors, as backdrops, to wrap boxes), wrapping paper

6) Fabric (solid, stripes, polka dots, seasonal patterns —for draping and hanging as backdrops), felt, shower curtains, drapes

7) Wood dowels or drapery rods with decorative finials (for suspending backdrops)

8) Spray paint

9) Wood crates and risers

10) Plexiglass risers (all different sizes)

11) Plate stands (also known as easels — several sizes)

12) Vases, bowls, baskets (all types of vessels)

13) Silk/Dried florals

14) Decorative balls, spheres, marbles, rocks, stones, sand, etc. (for fill)

15) Picture frames (all sizes)

16) Plexiglass sign holders (5x7, 8-1/2x11, 11x17); some with suction cups

17) Placemats and cloth napkins

18) Tissue paper and tulle (netting) (i.e. for stuffing bags)

19) Strands of white holiday lights

20) Clothes line and clothes pins

21) Mannequins, busts or torso forms

22) Wood display ladder

23) Umbrellas

24) Buckets

25) Old suitcases

26) Pickett fencing

27) Carpet squares

28) Furniture pieces (tables, stools, dressers)

29) Lightweight folding screen

30) Old bikes

Where to Find Props:

· Craig's List
· Borrow from neighboring retailer (acknowledging with sign)
· Rummage sales, flea markets, estate sales
· Dollar stores
· Other retailers going out of business
· Local theater (after they have finished a play)
· Students in art/design/ theater program at local school (they're creative!)
· Craft stores
· Home building stores

Display Tool Box Essentials

- Tape — Duct, Masking, Foam, Double-Sided
- Scissors (one for fabric, one for paper, one for heavy duty - labeled appropriately)
- Mat knife (box cutter) and Exacto knife with a selection of blades
- Wire cutter
- Glue — white, fabric, superglue
- Goo Gone
- Hot glue guns + lots of extra glue cylinders
- Pliers —needle nose and regular
- Hammers — hard head, small tack, rubber
- Ceiling clips (if you have a suspended ceiling)
- Binder clips
- Suction cups with hooks
- Fishing line (microfilament) and 15, 30 and 60 lb. test weights for hanging
- Heavy-duty stapler and big box of matching staples
- Metal ruler and 25' retractable measuring tool
- Box of T-pins and straight pins
- Black and silver wire
- Rope/twine
- Colored threads and needles
- Drawing utensils — pencil, thick tip black marker, white chalk
- Pad of paper
- Small level
- Picture hangers — all types
- Work gloves — fabric and latex
- Duster, rags, glass cleaner
- Hand vac
- Travel iron

III Creating Focal Point Displays Inside Your Business

Focal Points

Why are they so important?
Strategically placing well defined focal points will lure and lead customers effortlessly throughout your store. They command and direct attention.

They serve to:
- attract and direct the eye (the feet follow the eyes)
- define departments and product lines
- inform; tell a story
- break up large areas of merchandise
- add to the personality of the story/support the brand
- add interest
- add excitement
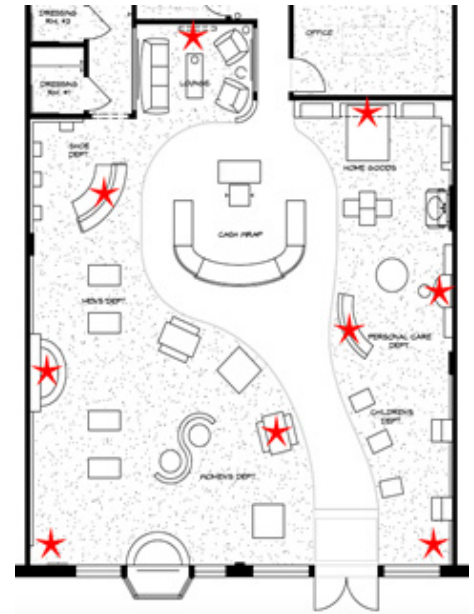
Place focal points every 15-20 feet throughout the store, starting low up front, higher in the middle, and the back wall being the final focal point. As long as there are open traffic aisles available to easily walk from one focal point to another, the customer can effortlessly walk the entire store. This layout keeps you from overloading the store with fixtures and no visual breaks. Focal points provide "points of interest", which can help sell products and services.

Examples of key focal points:
- nesting tables
- end caps
- display vignettes
- colorful backs of showcases, or props inside showcases
- mannequins
- risers / platforms / elevated displays
- architectural elements (water fountains, columns, etc)
- artwork
- large signs
- ceiling elements
- accent colored wall
- rotating (moving) objects
- seating areas
- interactive displays
- demo stations
- selfie stations

How many focal points do you currently have in your store?

Are they placed where they are helping customers move throughout your store?
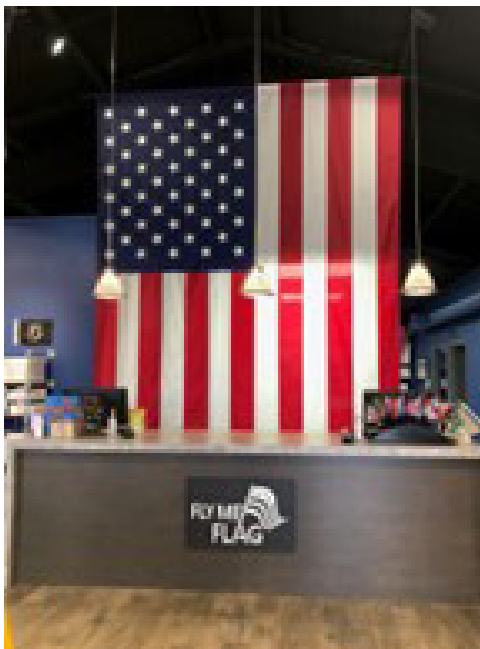
IV Creating Signs Your Customers Will Actually Read

How many signs are currently in your store? How many do you think customers are actually reading?

Sign pollution is alive and well in the retail industry!

Logo

Starting with the most important sign, your logo, which may not only be your store's name, but a graphic symbol and a tagline.

Your logo represents your image in 2-D form. It should reflect your business' mission and style.

Your customer should see it several times throughout his/her shopping experience.

How strong and effective is your current business logo?

When was the last time it was updated? Does it still portray who you are?

How many places do you have it posted on the outside and inside of your store?

Signage - Exterior

There are several types of signs to consider for your storefront.
- a large logo sign that can be seen by both auto and "across the street" traffic; illuminated at night
- on storefront door or window glass
- logo sign at eye level for pedestrian traffic
- store hours
- list of key products, vendors, and/or services
- website and social media icons, QR code or hashtag

If you're not using vinyl decals, then place signs in acrylic sign holders or frames - no scotch tape!

Signage - Interior

Signs are most effective when they are part of a coordinated "system". Sign design guidelines should address fonts, colors, materials, size, layout and sign holders.

Each category of signs should have its own distinctive design element, yet relate to the "sign system" as a whole. A coordinated sign system helps train your customers to see, read and interpret signs quickly.

Examples of categories of signs:
- name identification (logo)
- department
- promotional
- product specific (features and benefits)
- sale
- store policies/services
- directional
- vendor
- price tags

Each sign in your store should have a distinct purpose:
- to inform
- to enhance the customer's perception of the store and/or merchandise
- to move the customer throughout the space/community
- to motivate the customer to shop/buy

Hand printed signs should be avoided except for delicatessens and food retailers who change their prices daily , and the person doing the writing has exceptional handwriting!

How effective are your signs?

Do your signs reflect your brand?

History Timelines/Award Wall

What story can you tell through graphics?

Lifestyle photos can evoke a lot of emotion without any words.

Creating a timeline or an award wall is a great way to tell your story with graphics and signage. Whether it's about you and your background, or that of the store itself, or even the history of the building you're in. People love a good story so don't be afraid to tell yours!

V Selecting Lighting That Will Make Your Store and Product Lines Come Alive

Lighting

(NOTE: Lamps is the industry's term for light bulbs)
Lighting will make or break a good design.

When selecting a lighting system for your retail environment, consider the following:
- store style/brand
- color and reflective properties of surrounding finishes
- ceiling height
- amount of light and the kind of light needed in the store and on the products (foot-candles)
- maintenance of light fixtures/ lamps

There are four types of light to consider:
- amount of natural light coming into your store throughout the day
- overall ambient lighting, i.e. 2x2 or 2x4 LED panels, fluorescent tubes, pendant fixtures, or recessed cans; general rule-of-thumb is to have 40 foot-candles on the selling floor
- accent lighting, i.e. track lighting, wall washers, case lighting; the lamps in the track heads should be illuminating focal point displays 3x brighter than the surrounding areas
- decorative lighting: this is where you can have fun with decorative chandeliers, pendant lights, floor and table lamps; these are often used over checkout counters, deli counters, seating areas, anywhere a visual accent is needed

The most important part of a light fixture is its lamp. When selecting a lamp consider the following:

- lumen output (the brightest of the light): the higher the wattage, the greater the lumen output
- color temperature: lamps come in different Kelvin degrees and are generally available in 2700K, 3000K, 3500K, 4100K, 5000K; 3500 is recommended for most retail environments but diamonds need 5000K
- color rendering index (CRI): this is how well the lamp shows color in its truest form; lamps are rated on a scale of 1-100; lamps chosen for a retail store should not be below 85 CRI

Vary the light levels in your store—avoid one type of light as we don't respond well to monotonous light levels over time.

Keep all your lights working. And if some are still working, but their CRI has shifted, they can detract from the overall look of the store and the products they are illuminating. Change all burned out and color-altered lamps immediately to keep your store looking sharp. After all, artificial light sources should be more than a source of general illumination, they should serve to enhance your brand, your products and the overall customer experience.

Finally, don't let the average electrician determine your lighting. Make sure you find a knowledgeable lighting designer who is experienced in illuminating retail stores. The right lighting can change everything!
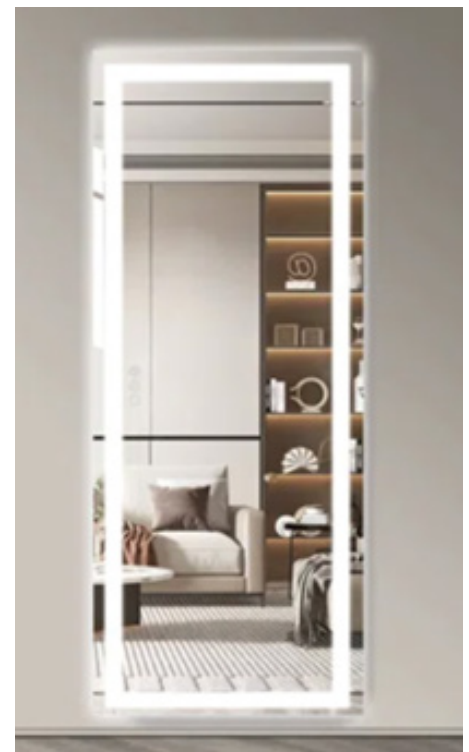
VI Turning Vacant Store-fronts into Vibrant Opportunities

Vacant storefronts don't do anyone any good.

Like a smile with missing teeth; darkened windows affect first impressions of downtown:
- they pull other occupied spaces "down"
- pedestrians walk by vacant storefronts faster
- dark spots are not inviting (can be scary)
- creates perception the community is not doing well

Property owners are often the biggest obstacle to getting a display in their building. When you do get permission, here are the items to ask them:

- how to best access to the space (keys, lockbox, call someone)?
- can anything be attached to the walls or hung from the ceilings?
- what level of involvement do they want with creation of the display and installation?
- how much of the space can be used?
- how much of the windows can be covered?
- length of time display(s) can be in the window(s)?
- can windows have "live" activations from time to time? For instance, hiring a quartet, assembling a fashion show, or having young Irish dancers performing in the windows on a weekend when there is a popular event/festival going on in the community.
- are there any items left behind in the space that can be used in the displays?
- who will be cleaning the windows, inside and out?

- who will be changing out any burned out light bulbs; are any timers used or available?
- liability insurance in place and current?
- information needed to promote the space for lease:
    - text about space and/ or contact info
    - photos/graphics
    - logo(s)

Then it's time to conduct a physical audit of the space
- photo
- measure
- check power
- number and location of working outlets
- heat, A/C, ventilation
- security alarms
- lighting (switches, dimmers, timers)
- ceiling (drywall, ACT, grid panel)
- fixtures, props, supplies left behind that can be used?
- backdrops needed to hide ugliness?
- historic significance to play a part?
- glass (tinted, cracks, adhesive residues, opacity)
- awnings (condition, operable?)
- overall maintenance/ cleanliness
- access into the space (front, back, door widths)
- parking for unloading

Once the property has been well surveyed, then it's time to get creative!
- identify team members (volunteers, creatives, makers)
- identify all the storefronts involved
- create timelines (design, fabricate, install, changeout, remove) for each storefront
- identify budgets; even if it's only $50 a window!
- create a theme for each window, or develop a community-wide campaign
- will you promote community events and/or businesses
- will they have a seasonal theme
- provide displays illustrating ideas for types of business to lease the space
- sprinkle in a "live" weekend activation now and then
- Regardless of the theme, all displays should be: attention getting, engaging, thought provoking, and informative.
- determine if displays should be long lasting and reused in future vacant windows when the spaces are leased; if so where can props be stored in-between use
- review all city sign codes
- identify props needed (purchase and/or fabricate)
- design all signage (window vinyl, interior)
- determine actual costs; rework if necessary to meet the predetermined budget
- determine where props and backdrops will be made and/or stored
- determine how to transport finished items to the storefronts
- present ideas to interested parties

After the designs have been developed, it's time to fabricate, then install the displays
- identify roles for each team member
- purchase/fabricate props and backdrops
- conduct a site visit to all windows a few days before install to:
  - check power, lights

· clean window glass and inside (if needed)
· transport props and backdrops
· unload
· install
· illuminate
· add "displays by ____" stickers in corners of
  window if appropriate
· photograph (day and evening)

**Never forget ongoing maintenance. Determine
who will:**
· conduct regular drive bys or walk bys (once a
  week initially)
· fix or replace leaning, broken, fallen,
  faded props
· clean windows, vacuum bugs as
  needed

**Over time, the displays may need to be
freshened up, especially if they were done
in winter, and spring has arrived! Displays
can be updated with:**
· new seasonal touches/props
· new merchandise
· new signage

**Hopefully, the displays have been successful at getting a tenant to sign a lease so
it's time to remove the displays:**
· remove all items inside, and any vinyl on the windows
· clean windows and interior
· turn off lights if appropriate
· return key to property owner and alert them of vacancy of space

It can be difficult to kickstart a Vacant Storefront Display Program, however, once
you get a couple done, they get easier and even more fun! You'll be surprised
how many other property owners of vacant storefronts will be intrigued, and over
time, may offer their storefront up for a display. And don't forget to get the media
involved. The publicity will help spread the word that a storefront is up for lease,
and may just pique the interest of a business owner in pursuit of that kind of
space.

No vacant storefront should ever be left behind!