



## EVALUATE YOURSELF: Is your business visually appealing to your prospects?

It's often said you get but one chance to make a good first impression, and if your business is visually unappealing, you could be missing out on a lot of prospects—who would otherwise become paying customers—without even realizing it!



The importance of your retail operation's appearance can't be underestimated. According to DotActiv, the visual appeal of your store makes up nearly 80 percent of a shopper's overall impression of your brand.

The challenge in enhancing the visual appeal of your business is twofold. Before you can impress consumers with your products or services, prices and attention, you first need to attract them enough to walk through the door. Once they're inside, it's important to keep them every bit as interested so that they don't turn around and walk out right away.

### Seeing the big picture

But how should you proceed? In the company of a key manager, valued employee, trusted customer or—better yet—a design professional, walk around and through your premises while casting a critical eye on anything and everything. But first, you may want to stand back and gain an overall impression—be it from down the block, across the street, in the parking lot or in the passenger seat of a passing car.

Many facets will factor in to that all-important first impression. The size, shape, design and color of your building. The cleanliness of your location and its neighborhood. The attractiveness—or lack thereof—of your neighboring stores.

Some of these considerations will be within your power to influence while others will not. But there are several areas in which you have considerable power to improve the appeal of your business.

### Focusing on exterior signage

Whether placed at the curb, displayed in the foreground, mounted on your storefront or applied to your front windows or doors, your store's visual elements are the first impression you will make with consumers—making them particularly vital to your marketing success.

If commissioning new signage, be sure to employ attractive designs, and/or distinctive colors and shapes to make your efforts stand out. Also, consider the power of illumination

on exterior signage, especially if you operate in the early mornings or after sundown.

Of course, whether yours is a new business or a well-established one, be on the lookout for added opportunities to augment any existing signs with new ones. Seasonal window and door graphics are one suggestion. Parking lot signs—overlooked by many—are another. Then there are vehicle graphics, which promote your business all over town when on the road and serve as an additional billboard while parked at your business in between deliveries or service calls.

Whatever your solution, the extra investment in added signage may be well worth it. After examining fast food stores, a retail chain and car dealerships in Southern California, a major study concluded that the addition of a new building sign, pole sign or freestanding multi-tenant sign added between 5 and 15 percent to a site's sales revenues. Some of the greatest increases came when retailers added new signage to a side of the building that previously had none!

### Looking inward to displays and more

Having considered the visual appeal of your business to pedestrians and drivers on the outside, you'll want to turn your attention to evaluating the inside of your store.

Visual merchandising refers to the coordination of all physical elements in a place of business and how they're used to project the right image to customers. The "right

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image,” of course, invites interest in your goods or services, prompts purchases and generally makes shoppers feel good about where they are conducting business!

The first element of visual merchandising—the storefront—is covered in the preceding section. As mentioned, it includes your store’s signage but also outdoor lighting, banners, planters, awnings, windows and, of course, the building itself in terms of design and setting.

Store layout is another key aspect of visual merchandising. You’ll want to consider the way floor space is employed to serve consumers and facilitate sales in your evaluation. You may wish to break down your analysis by *selling space* for interior display and transactions, *merchandising space* for inventory, *customer space* for restrooms and dressing rooms as well as *personnel space* for break rooms and other employee areas.

Another factor in visual merchandising is your store’s interior decor. Examine the selection of floor and wall coverings, lighting, colors and store fixtures—all of which can powerfully affect its overall image.

Finally, you’ll want to carefully examine the fourth element of visual merchandising, which pertains to signage and displays. Of particular interest will be point-of-purchase displays designed to promote impulse purchases. Store decorations—such as banners, props and signage—are often used to evoke the mood of a holiday or season. Then, too, there’s the interior signage you’ll use to attract, direct and inform your visitors.

In this part of your evaluation, you’ll want to ensure that signage and displays are current, attractive and in good condition. Pay special attention to this last point in your evaluation. Per one study, about seven in 10 consumers believe that a business’ signage reflects the quality of its products or services. In other words: A sign that’s in poor condition will reflect poorly on your commitment to quality.

Give some thought to periodic signage updates as you complete your evaluation on visual appeal. Per a study released by a California university, nearly 60 percent of businesses reported that changing the design or enhancing the visibility of their signage had a positive impact on sales, number of transactions and profits. The average increase? About 10 percent!



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