

This is the first in a four-part series of articles on visual merchandising
For more information visit www.naturalproductsonline.co.uk or www.viridian-nutrition.com



In tough trading times like these, not only is it imperative as a retailer to offer a great product mix, but to really maximise the potential of your products you also need to have great visual merchandising. In short, you need to create a totally compelling retail experience!

To highlight the vital role of visual merchandising in maximising customer sales, **Natural & Organic Products Europe** and **Viridian Nutrition** are launching the Visual Merchandising Challenge 2010 (see box at the bottom of the page for more details). This major new industry initiative is aimed both at driving up the standard of VM in health food retailing — and as a way of recognising and rewarding current best practice.



Over the next four issues of *Natural Products*, **Rachel Dawes**, visual merchandising specialist of White Paper Display, will be taking us through the 'hows' and 'whys' of visual merchandising and giving us some insights into the various visual techniques available.

This month: Windows on Your World

VISUAL MERCHANDISING: What is it? Why do it? What are the benefits?

How do you get a customer to enter your shop, buy a product and return. What drives *you* to buy something from one shop rather than the other — aspiration, brand awareness, perception, association, cost?...All of the above? Visual Merchandising has many fundamental principles that can be applied and utilised across a broad spectrum of product types, customer profiles and areas of business.

We all know what we *don't* like when it comes to shopping, but do you really know what you *do* like, and why? Visual Merchandising can work on both a conscious and sub-conscious level. In-store creative displays showcasing a product group or brand can act as signposts to a department — working on a conscious level, whilst merchandising particular brands and products at specific heights with strategic adjacencies will work at a more subconscious level.

What does your shop window say about you?

Your shop window is the most important selling tool you have — getting the customer through the door is the hardest task. Once through the door, the product, supported by strong merchandising and customer service, can begin to sell itself. Your window needs to explain in an instant who you are, what you sell and why they should shop with you, not your competitors.

Before you can move forward with new concepts and ideas you need to review your previous window displays and designs. What did and didn't work? What were the strengths and weaknesses? Visual merchandising needs to be reviewed just as frequently as any other area of your business.

Back to Basics

Standards — this is not a technique, but a discipline. I don't need to tell you how important it is when selling food to maintain impeccable standards for hygiene reasons but it will subsequently work for you on a visual level too. Get your standards working hard for you at a minimal cost; is



The use of tradition and nostalgia delivers the essence of this product

your external fascia as clean and tidy as your sales floor? Do you have paint work that needs retouching, brass to be polished, guttering that needs replacing? Make sure these things are taken care of with just as much due care and attention as the internal displays and the windows themselves. This may all sound obvious to some, but for others it can be forgotten on an ever increasing 'To do' list.

Look to the high street and competitors for inspiration and understanding. How have they answered your question of who they are, and what they sell? Have they worked with their surroundings i.e. town history, local interests, heritage and architecture? Or have they themed their windows by displaying product and signage corresponding with the season, holiday, or an upcoming event?

To maximise the opportunities that a window can create, you need to under-

stand what direction will work best for you. Looking at who your customer profile is will help steer you to your answer. Is your customer, location and product better suited to a traditional display that is clear, clean and simple or do you need to 'stand out from the crowd' with something more modern, fun and quirky?

Some basic principles are as follows:

- **Have conviction: Know your message — if you don't, neither will your customer.**
- **Choose a layout: Allow the customer to focus on your message — don't try and have every item you stock in every corner of your window, let it 'have room to breathe'.**
- **Be precise: Pay attention to detail (retail is detail) — are the labels facing as they should be, visible tickets removed, excess display equipment removed, and are you using clean equipment?**
- **3D: Look to include height and/or depth.**
- **Review: On completion, review and consider each element, remembering that sometimes less is more.**

With a well thought out design, and the above principles considered, your window will display your chosen message with confidence and conviction. A shop window portrays who you are...what does your shop window now say about you?



Using seasonal or industry themes keeps it fresh

Get inspired!

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The Visual Merchandising Challenge 2010 is an exciting new initiative aimed at recognising and rewarding excellence in the vital retail area of visual merchandising.

Our competition will seek entries from right across the natural products retail scene.



Four shortlisted entrants will be challenged to create a 'Winning Window' at Natural & Organic Products Europe at London's Olympia on 11-12 April 2010. The overall winning store will win a fabulous weekend for two in New York!