

This is the second in a four-part series of articles on visual merchandising
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Visual
Merchandising
Challenge 2010

VM

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Over four issues of *Natural Products*, **Rachel Dawes**, visual merchandising specialist of White Paper Display, is taking us through the 'hows' and 'whys' of visual merchandising and giving us some insights into the various visual techniques available. Find out more about Rachel's approach to visual merchandising at www.whitepaperdisplay.com



A quick and easy tip — Pull forwards and front face all products for a tidy display. Revital Health Shop, Wigmore St.

This month: Selling with the seasons

IN LAST month's issue we outlined the basic principles of Window displays, how to understand and work with your strengths with regards to your location and customer and to ensure clarity with any message you are trying to convey. This month we will focus on Seasonal windows and planning for the new year ahead.

Christmas, the biggest single commercial event in the calendar with all its hustle and bustle and some tills ringing more so than others, has now passed . . . until next year! With this in mind it is the perfect time to review the past year's seasonal window schemes and to plan the year ahead. To ensure you are able to review previous windows, I would advise creating a calendar events file. This is to catalogue with photos of previous shop window schemes and any 'hotspots' or related internal merchandising. I would also include sales history, preferably for the duration of each window. If you haven't kept a record so far, then there's no better time than the beginning of a new year, to get started.

Here is a list of events per season and the general health related issue connected, to get you started:

Spring – All about detox and healthy eating habits

- Valentine's Day – fertility
- Easter
- Mother's Day – women's health

Summer – All about the weight-loss and holiday health

- Father's Day – men's health

Autumn – All about organic food and drink, and remedies

- Organic Fortnight
- Halloween and Bonfire Night

Winter – All about preventing illness (colds/flu, SAD, joints)

- Christmas — seasonal gifts and foods

What do you consider to have been your visual highlights and low points across the year? Examine and critique each season.

Questions to ask yourself

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of each window?
- Could your display have been stronger? Product bold enough? - Best placed for visibility? Well lit?
- Could your message have been delivered with more clarity and authority? Was the signage strong enough? Was your message clear? What would you change in hindsight?

Be honest with yourself and each other — if it didn't work, learn from it and move on to the next idea.



Featuring gift wrapped items in your window highlight the gift options for the season — Culpeper, Covent Garden

The year ahead; once you have reviewed the past you need to look to the future and plan the seasons ahead including design ideas, props, layouts and P.O.S. This is important if you want to maximise each selling opportunity and increase your customer awareness of who you are, what you do and what you offer.

Start as you mean to go on . . . January

We all know, and have no doubt experienced, the guilt after those additional mince pies and second helpings at the dinner table over the Christmas period.

January sees the biggest uplift in gym memberships, healthy eating food sales and marketing campaigns of any time in the year. It has for this reason, the biggest potential to convert new customers into the world of healthy living and your store. BOGOFs and 241s, etc lend themselves to big and bold displays and whilst this may not be the most inspirational style of window it can and should still be aesthetically pleasing and engaging. Go big and bold if you must, but importantly do it with accuracy and clarity. These displays, window or internal, need implementing with authority.

- Implement with Authority
- Display with Accuracy
- Signpost with Clarity

These three things will help your big and bold display grab the attention of passers-by.

If you are making in-house signage make it as professional as possible, always continue with the same layout, font style and spacing to ensure consistency. This is especially important if you are displaying more than one offer (consistency leads to neatness and lends itself to symmetry — symmetry is one of our most instinctively appealing patterns. If the customer is enticed you have implemented a successful window display!)

Keep it simple! It is well known in retail that customers do not read signs in their entirety in-store or via your window, but just because they don't read them in full doesn't mean you don't need them — it means you need to be clear with your message, highlighting only the percentage off or price and the item, for example. Unless you have impeccable handwriting and you are a retailer whose brand is about tradition and nostalgia, steer clear of handwritten signs. At best they will look ugly, at worst, unprofessional. If you are fortunate enough to afford a budget for printing on a larger scale, I would advise highlighting key offers and or highlighting an overall percentage off, remember less is more — it's better a customer sees you have an offer on than be unable to see anything for the blur of words as they pass by. Make full use of your P.O.S from suppliers – ask for more, be specific with sizes and messages, don't sit back and wait to get what you're given to find it doesn't hold the potential you had hoped — if you don't ask you don't get!

Finally, Look at the correlation between each season and current event and how each can be connected to the health industry and the products you sell. Get them working together and supporting each other allowing you greater depth of ideas and avenues to create a stronger campaign and greater sales opportunities.

Having reviewed the past year, what will your New Years resolutions be?

Download an entry form now!

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The VM Challenge 2010 is an exciting new initiative aimed at recognising excellence in the vital retail area of visual merchandising. Our competition invites entries from right across the natural products retail scene. Four shortlisted entrants will be chal-



lenged 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! Download an Entry Form now at www.naturalproducts.co.uk