

10 **WAYS** **TO LIFT** **FRONT-END** **SALES**

*Fixture, Display, and Merchandising Solutions
that Boost Front-End Performance*

madix

INNOVATION ON DISPLAY

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Creating the Perfect “Steak” Sandwich

According to SelectUSA, the United States has over 3.6 million retail establishments, 95% of which are comprised of independent and privately held businesses. While smaller organizations inherently have more of a challenge maintaining a strong presence in the field, larger corporations also know that the retail industry is one of the most competitive in the world. To stay in the game, smart retailers must be perpetually innovative. They must be willing and able to take the initiative, anticipating industry trends and making relevant changes to satisfy new consumer demands.

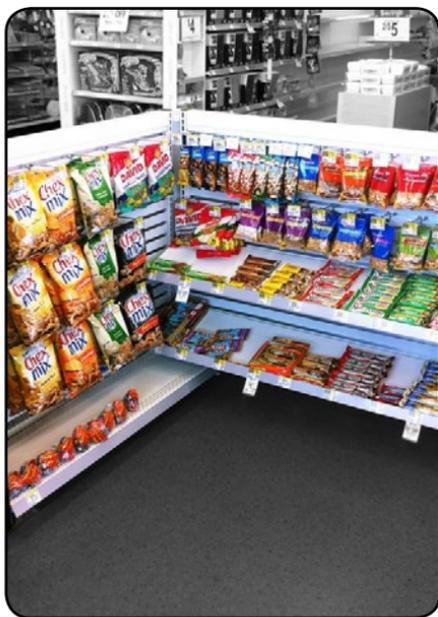
Merchandising and marketing strategies are the most susceptible to industry impingement, and as such, they’re usually the first areas to be restructured when sales performance starts to flag. Yet poorly executed elements of store design could also be inhibiting factors. In [10 Ways to Lift Center Store Sales](#), an analogy is drawn to stress the role of the center store, citing that if the perimeter provides the sizzle, then “center store must serve steak” (3). But if the exciting, must-have merchandise is left to the perimeter, and the hearty and wholesome items to the center store, what can the front end bring to the table?



For most store layouts, the front end serves a dual purpose as both the entrance and exit (provided, of course, there is only one public doorway). It is the first area a customer visits, and the last. Theoretically, this should mean that the front end commands twice the potential of making a sale, since the exposure level is doubled. A fully optimized front end capitalizes on this characteristic, assuming not only the responsibility of initiating the sales process, but also serving to close it. In other words, the front end holds the store together—like the bread of a sizzling steak sandwich.

What are the Facts about the Front End?

Traditionally, the function of the front end has revolved around impulse items and upsell potential. But in today's shaky economy, definitions have changed. While consumers are still spending money, they now do so with more prudence, and they've developed a knack for stretching a dollar as far as possible. Impulse sales have lost their potency, and as such, the front end's role has begun to deteriorate. More and more retailers are folding their cards, pulling away from risky front-end strategies in order to invest more resources in the center store and perimeter.



Yet this self-preservation tactic can ultimately backfire. More than just the checkout area, the front end is also the face of a store. If the front end is presented as sparsely populated with little available to meet the shopper's needs, he or she may draw the conclusion that the same will be true for the rest of the store, as well.

A few years ago, Dechert-Hampe Consulting initiated an ongoing research experiment to better observe consumer shopping behavior in the front end. The study, published as *Front-End Focus*, has garnered positive support and sponsorship from several large retail organizations, such as Mars Chocolate North America, The Coca-Cola Company, and Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company. The participation of many leading grocery retailers has also been crucial, and the data these companies have provided on product sales and merchandising conditions reveal some interesting insight on how shoppers react to various front-end cues.



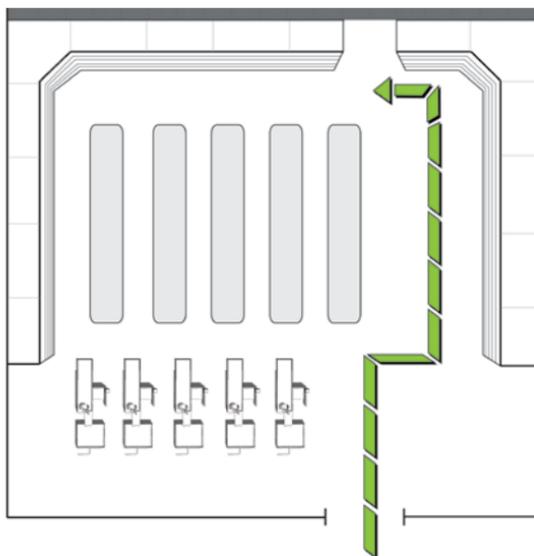
The results indicate that up to 90% of shoppers will purchase items from the front end on a weekly basis, with the key power categories comprised mostly of impulse items like candy, magazines, beverages, accessories, small novelties, etc. On average, upsells at the checkout counter contribute over 1% of a store's total sales—a seemingly nominal amount at first glance but can, in fact, equate to more than the contributions of “all but a few major product categories and even many entire departments” (Dechert-Hampe.com).

Given the evidence, retailers cannot afford to ignore their front end, and in fact, they stand to gain a considerable increase in profits simply by optimizing this area of the store. While there is no single solution to achieving this feat, the following are ten smart suggestions for kick-starting the process.

Solution #10: Make a Grand Entrance

A door is a door, right? People go in, and people go out—there’s not much variation to it. But when half the battle of retail sales is getting customers inside the store, the front door becomes an invaluable tool, with the ability to make a lasting first impression upon visitors. Whether that impression is good or bad depends upon the location, type, and accessibility of the entrance itself.

Observation of consumer shopping behavior has shown that people have an inherent tendency to shop in a counterclockwise direction—a pattern that reoccurs often in nature, as with the migration of elephant herds (Sorensen 76), the earth’s rotation upon its axis, and even the direction of planetary orbit around the sun. The science behind this habit in humans has yet to be determined, but some specialists theorize that the predominance of dextral (“right-handed”) people might have some influence. Others argue that rightward movement is a learned preference, in the same way people who drive on the right-hand side of the road also tend to walk on the right-hand side of a pathway. Instinctive or extrinsic, retailers are nonetheless advised to position their front entrance on the right-hand side of their store to oblige a counterclockwise trajectory.



If a store has only one entrance, the optimum doorway location is to the right, initiating a loop that facilitates the shopper's natural inclination to move in a counterclockwise motion. The checkout registers (placed to the left of the entrance) close the circle.

Centrally located entrances are, by far, the least advantageous. While a retailer can execute a quasi-successful strategy using an entryway on the left, center entrances are quite literally the doorway to chaos. Customers who enter to the left will either A) gravitate back to the right, as if guided by some unseen force or, if the retailer has implemented smart merchandising and layout cues, then B) continue left, subconsciously acting in compliance with a “forced path” layout (Ebster and Garaus 12). But customers entering from the middle have no guidance, no indicators telling them which way to go, and so they simply wander. This lack of order not only serves to confuse and upset the shopper, but it also creates additional “choke points” that could have otherwise been avoided.

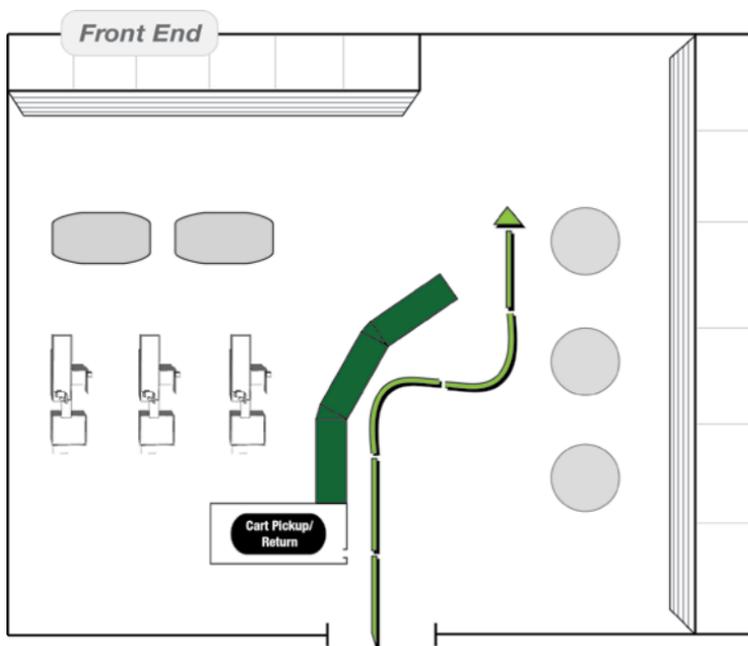
A retail choke point is any flaw or breakdown in procedure that generates roadblocks in a store’s merchandising plan. In the case of center entrances, roadblocks arise with the presence of too many choices—which may seem like a paradoxical concept. But when a customer can go right or left or diagonally through a store (even zig-zagging, if he or she chooses), any semblance of order is lost, and if customers consistently demand anything from their shopping experiences, it’s order. “Consumers frequently follow scripts when shopping,” according to Ebster and Garaus (44); if that script is taken away, the consumers flounder, and in the process, key merchandise gets overlooked and unsold.

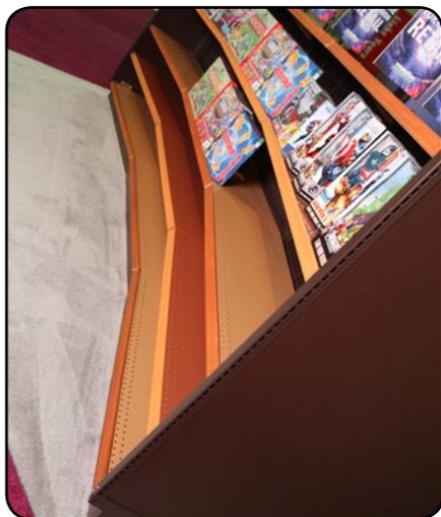
Does this mean a store with a center entrance can’t be salvaged without major renovations? Not necessarily. Retailers who find themselves with a less-than-optimal doorway have a few cost-effective solutions at their disposal. For example, if an entrance cannot be relocated pragmatically, then it can at least be enhanced.

The *type* of door matters, and making the appropriate adjustments is usually a quick fix. Static (manual) doors present the most physical barrier, which can be a deterrent, so clear glass that offers an unobstructed view into the store is the best fix for manual door types. Revolving doors are sophisticated in appearance and conveniently hands-free, but they serve to herd people inside at a pre-determined pace that is usually not to the preference of the customers. Apart from a completely door-free interface (such as those found in mall department stores), automatic double doors are the best recourse, as far as accessibility is concerned.

“A good entrance draws people—not just those who mean to go in, but those who do so out of impulse” (Whyte 100). With this in mind, a more drastic (but also more effective) solution might be to widen the entrance. In fact, the wider the better. Broadening the entrance invites social interaction: people meeting up, hanging out, and chatting. Congestion might seem like a counterproductive goal, but as Whyte notes, “customers stimulate customers” (97). People amassing outside a store peaks interest, which attracts more people. Retailers can capitalize on this social effect, as long as they ensure that their doors are spacious enough to accommodate the crush. A communally cramped doorway is good; a *physically* cramped doorway is not.

Retailers who need to direct traffic a certain way in compliance with their merchandising scheme—but don’t have the resources to completely redesign their entrance—can build a physical path that implicitly guides the shopper’s movements. Gondola runs and freestanding fixtures, for instance, can act as a subtle buffer to point customers to the right or left, while at the same time presenting additional merchandising opportunities. It is important, however, that any front-end displays be low and non-obstructive, so as not exacerbate the “landing zone” effect. (See Solution #9)





Shoppers gather cues from display placement, and the way fixtures are positioned in the front end of a store can help direct traffic in accordance to a retailer's merchandising plan. The **Curved Wedge Gondola** by Madix (featured above) is one possible solution, functioning as a path that leads customers to the right, where a series of power displays (see Solution #8) create openings for additional sales.

Solution #9: Clearance for Landing

Since the entrance is the only part of the store that every customer *must* visit (Ebster and Garaus 7), it should theoretically be hot property for promotions. And it would be, were it not for the curious “landing zone” phenomenon that most people experience as soon as they step inside a store.

The landing zone or transition zone—or, as Paco Underhill coins it, the “Twilight Zone” (42)—is the area just beyond the front entrance. It covers a span of approximately five to ten feet, and it is virtually useless where merchandising is concerned. Why? Because customers undergo a mini psychological meltdown during the transition from outside to inside, experiencing a moment of disorientation so acute, they’re practically blind to anything and everything within their immediate vicinity. They’re too focused on their main objective (such as finding the toothpaste aisle—or shoe section, or beauty department, or wherever it is they need to go to get what they came in for) to pay attention to anything else.

Experts on consumer behavior tend to agree that until the customer passes through the transition zone, he or she is “not truly in the store yet” (Underhill 44). Put any sort of signage near the doorway, and people won’t even acknowledge it, even if it says “BUY ONE, GET TEN FREE! ANYTHING IN THE STORE!”

So what can retailers do to ensure that this small (but significant) section of their store does not go to waste? Larger stores have more options, Underhill suggests, because they can afford to sacrifice some space at the front to provide for more of a “threshold experience,” or anything to slow a customer down before he or she gets to the merchandised zones (45). Smaller stores, however, must get creative. The trick is to construct a figurative speed bump to jolt shoppers out of their disorientation, something to say, “Hey. You are inside the store. Pay attention.” Once again, the type of entrance can be a big influence in this regard. As mentioned previously, automatic doors provide less of a barrier and do wonders in favor of accessibility, but perhaps they can be *too* accessible, doing nothing to slow customers down and thereby extending the landing zone. A few simple calibrations to off-set this issue could include special lighting that further delineates outside from inside, or alternating floor colors and textures (Underhill 45).

The biggest decision retailers have to make is whether or not they're going to attempt anything in the landing zone, or if they're going to minimize the area as much as possible. To accomplish the latter, a store must facilitate the transition stage in every way they can. Avoid floor-to-ceiling racks and fixtures, as these block the customer's view of the store, exacerbating his or her disorientation. Instead, try using presentation tables or low shelves near the entrance, if absolutely necessary (Ebster and Garaus 60). Bins, rolling baskets, or low-tiered promo tables are multifunctional and easily re-positioned, giving retailers flexibility at the landing zone's perimeter without crowding the customer.



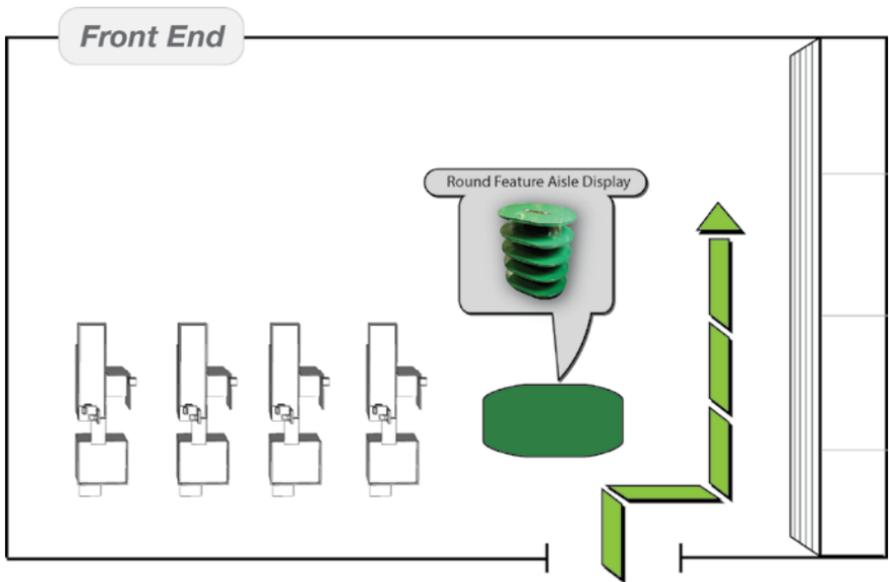
For retailers who provide shopping carts for their customers' convenience, the [Cart Corral](#) from Madix is the most holistic solution to minimizing the landing zone. Designed to maximize front-end space in retail stores of all sizes, the [Cart Corral](#) is a multipurpose unit that not only organizes shopping carts, but also provides an unobtrusive platform for merchandising, creating an organic speed bump as customers slow down to grab a cart. This unit can also be customized to accommodate specific merchandising needs.



Solution #8: “Maybe Later” Merchandise

Mitigating the landing zone’s impact is generally a fail-safe technique that most retailers find adequate for their goals. The intrepid retailer, however, might consider throwing caution to the wind and breaking all the landing-zone rules. When done correctly, the results can be amazing, leading to coveted sales opportunities. Nevertheless, merchandising the landing zone is a risky strategy and therefore can’t be attempted half-heartedly.

“Just ignoring a rule,” Underhill cautions, “or bending it a little, is usually the worst thing you can do” (47). To obliterate the rules, retailers must create displays so vibrant, so flamboyantly ostentatious, shoppers are literally stopped in their tracks. Such displays, known as “power displays,” should be similar to point-of-purchase (POP) displays in their visual appeal and prominence. However, where POP displays are engineered specifically toward impulse buys, power displays located near the store’s entrance should have a more oblique agenda, proposing ideas for later purchases.





Unlike most freestanding fixtures, the **Round Feature Aisle Display (RFAD)** from Madix delivers the aesthetic appeal necessary for the front end while maintaining the functionality demanded for high-volume center-store and perimeter sales. Plus, with its curved design, the RFAD eliminates harsh angles that are not only visually austere, but a potential liability. Create vivid power displays with a variety of custom colors that pop!

Effective “maybe-later” merchandise plants a suggestion that grows more and more compelling as the shopper makes his or her way through the store. Therefore, merchandise featured on power displays should also intersect customers at other key locations of their shopping path, in order to foster the seedling suggestion for future purchases. Customers will remember the merchandise featured on power displays just as well as (if not better than) the “sizzling” merchandise in the store’s perimeter, so that even if the suggestion is not immediately effective, it will still serve as an influence on future shopping trips. This approach works best when the displays are uniform, since the repeated image acts as a mnemonic for the shopper. For this reason, using the same fixture type and aesthetic configurations is paramount.

Solution #7: The Pit Stop

There are three types of shoppers that retailers need to consider when planning the layout of their store: the “fill-in” group, who come in for a cursory refill; the “stock-up” type, who are making more extensive purchases for the long haul; and finally, the “quick-trip” shopper, who needs only very specific items and wants to get in and out as quickly as possible (Sorensen 38).

Most stores are designed to meet the demands of the stock-up shoppers, since this group averages about twice the transaction amount of fill-in shoppers, and nearly five times that of quick-trip shoppers. Yet it is the last group, the quick-trip shoppers, who account for approximately two-thirds of all shopping trips (Sorensen 133). While a stock-up shopping trip might be more pragmatic, the upsurge of quick trips directly correlates to society’s growing predilection for convenience. Shoppers are willing to spend more money for the sake of saved time.

“The most important role of a space (in this case, the store) is its ability to facilitate the goals of its occupants” (cited in Baker et al. 122). And yet, according to Sorensen, eighty percent of the quick-trip shopper’s time is wasted (25). Due to convoluted store layouts, customers are forced to navigate through the entire store on a coerced scavenger hunt just to find one or two items. For smaller stores, the extra time such a mission takes is a token annoyance, but in large, multi-department stores and supermarkets, the minutes pile up quickly.

Retailers who are unable to meet quick-trip shoppers’ needs are at risk of losing a sizeable chunk of sales. Research on perceived merchandise value suggests that customers automatically apply a convenience tariff during the purchase process. “Every product has a ‘time price’ that is implicitly included [in customer’s evaluations]” (cited in Baker et al. 128). In other words, an item’s worth depreciates with the more time and effort a customer must spend finding it. Conversely, a customer will perceive higher-priced merchandise as being worth the cost if it is more conveniently located.

Due to its advantageous location, the front end has the most capacity for addressing quick-trip shoppers’ needs. The challenge lies in discerning what, exactly, those needs are. Though quick-trip shoppers are the predominant shopping class, very rarely do they all want the same products, and for logical

reasons, retailers cannot situate every relevant CPG (Consumer Packaged Good) category in the front end.

Mike Twitty, Shopper Insights Director of Unilever Americas in the U.S., says that while there is no way retailers can precisely predict the patterns of quick-trip shoppers, there are still ways to maximize these shoppers' in-store experience. "Stocking the most frequently purchased categories in a convenient way assures that you have the assortment for the broadest array of Quick-Trip shoppers" (cited in Sorensen 143).

Some stores have begun implementing small, boutique-like "convenience" cells near the front end that are specifically catered to the quick-trip shopper. These cells often look and function like a store-within-a-store; they can also be expensive to implement, sometimes requiring extensive remodeling and construction. The same result can be achieved, however, without going to such extremes. By simply re-allocating front-end space and applying tractable displays, retailers can quickly and efficiently adapt to the ever-fluctuating exigencies of quick-trip shoppers.



Solution #6: “Fixturing” the Problem

Sorensen explains that the ideal store should have fixtures that are a maximum of 66 inches (2.6 meters) high; no more than 30 feet (9 meters) long but preferably in between 15 to 20 feet; and the structure should always be “sloping back from the shopper” (82). Physical fixture placement should be as wide apart as front-end space will allow, so that people can navigate the displays and other shoppers without constriction.

But customers aren’t the only ones who need freedom of movement. “Anything on castors works well in the front end, particularly for temporary or seasonal displays,” says Madix, Inc. Product Manager, Steve Otten. Why? Because static fixtures cost retailers time and money. Mobile fixtures, on the other hand, allow flexibility to adjust floor plans and merchandising schemes on a regular basis, so retailers can better adapt to new industry trends without incurring extravagant costs.

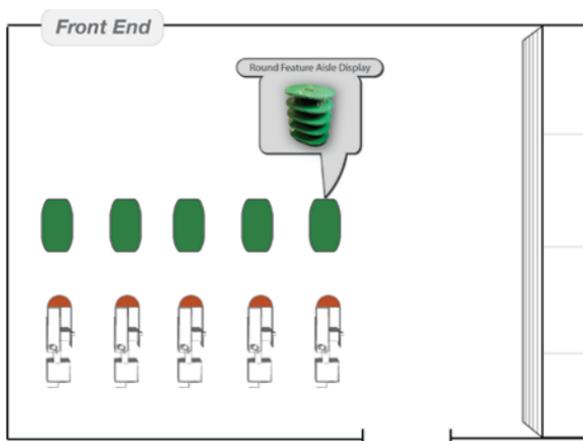
Other factors to remember when considering front-end fixtures include the following:

- *Pyramids.* Tall, towering “warehouse” units are becoming obsolete. Shorter, less intimidating fixtures are much more preferred, but cutting inches off height also means losing valuable merchandising space. To compensate, “pyramid” structures are recommended, with tiers that rise at an angle, not straight up-and-down.
- *Curves.* Another archaic practice is the use of fixtures with boxy bottoms and linear frames—elements that infuse spaces with a cold, stark appearance. A rounded, soft interface, however, encourages customers to shop at a more leisurely pace.
- *Personalization.* Retailers understand that in order to be the best in their segment, they’ve got to offer something different, something their competitors lack. Why should exceptionality be limited to distinctive products? Fantastic merchandise needs an equally great platform for optimum performance, which is why many retailers turn to custom fixtures and shelving. Custom fixtures can be tailored to address specific needs of a store without superfluous (or insufficient) configurations that will require updates and

replacements to be done quickly. Simply alternating the colors or finishes of standard fixtures can create a distinctive appearance.



Madix's **Luxe** line creates a custom appearance with the practicality (and cost-efficiency) of standard fixtures.



In the diagram above, the **Round Feature Aisle Display** extends the potential for impulse buys in the checkout area. The mobility of this fixture allows for easy adaptation to frequent changes in merchandising schemes and front-end layouts.

Solution #5: Light It Up

All forms of life exist today thanks to the power of the sun and its light. It is unsurprising, then, that light exerts a number of physiological and psychological responses from many animals—man included. Research and scientific experimentation has proven that exposure to light appears to be associated with key rhythmic changes in several mammalian biological functions, such as physical activity, sleep, food consumption, water intake, body temperature, and more (Wurtman 75). Different types of light also influence mood and behavior, as evidenced by the increasing popularity of phototherapy (“light therapy”) as treatment for depression, sleep disorders, and other psychological conditions.

This biological dependency upon light prompts smart retailers to make conscious decisions about their store’s lighting schematics, as “in-store illumination is also an important determinant of store atmosphere” (Ebster and Garaus 125). Having the right lighting can support the image retailers want to build for their store, establishing at the same time a mood beneficial for shopping. And just as effectively as signs and graphics, lighting gives customers cues, helping them orient themselves in their surroundings.



How does this apply to the front end? Delores Ginthner, Associate Professor of Interior Design at the University of Minnesota, emphasizes the need to establish a uniform message respective to every space. Ginthner states:

There are other elements [other than lighting] in the space that affect our subjective impressions... make an even stronger statement by having the lighting express the same impression as the other elements. (3)

Brighter lights incite feelings of arousal, creating more of a desire to buy. The front end, as home of the impulse buy, should therefore incorporate a brighter lighting environment than the rest of the store. Not only does this increase the potential for impulse sales, but brighter lights are also recommended at the front for practical reasons. Customers, after all, need to be able to see better during the checkout process.

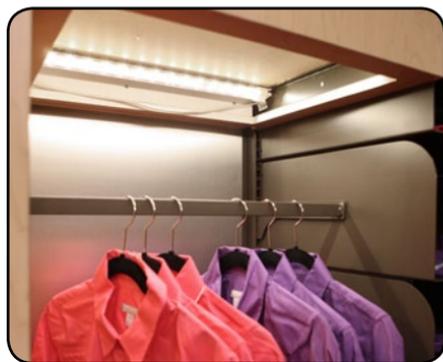
Front-end displays can create a selling advantage if individually illuminated. In the way that moths are attracted to bright sources of light, Ebster and Garaus claim that consumers, too, "will spend more time in front of a lighted display than they will in front of an unlighted display" (126). Concentrated beams from a directional or point light system can achieve the right impact, depending on how merchandise is displayed.



Retailers also have the option of specialty lighting, wherein the fixture itself is illuminated. Illuminated fixtures work well in the front end for riveting upsell displays, arresting the notice of passerby on his or her way to the checkout counter and instilling the impulse to buy.



"We've found that retailers first observe others using lighting for specific merchandise categories, or they read information on retail lighting and decide to experiment by testing in a few stores. Several retailers have conducted tests where control stores are selected whose demographics closely match test stores; LED lighting is installed, and sales results are measured. Every test has resulted in the retailer implementing a rollout of LED lighting for those merchandise categories in a substantial number of stores. While the investment is not small, the return more than exceeds corporate ROI objective." - Steve Kramer, Director of Product Development at Madix, Inc.



Solution #4: Graphic Communication vs. Too Much Information

If a picture is worth a thousand words, just imagine how much graphics and in-store signage are worth to a retailer. According to POPAI, the global association for marketing at retail, POP displays and in-store graphics stimulate up to sixty percent of consumer purchases. This fact is because customers shop primarily with their eyes, responding strongly to colors, shapes, and images.

Words, however, are a more complicated element. “Shoppers will read very little while shopping,” Sorensen claims (51). Too often, in an attempt to be helpful and informative, retailers bombard their customers with too much information. Since very few customers will plow through dense fields of written content, wordy presentations have little to no impact on shopping behavior. If the merchandise doesn’t speak for itself, then the entire display may be completely overlooked.

Similarly, the wrong image in the wrong place and time can convey a confusing or erroneous message. Too much color, not enough color, or the wrong myriad of colors can also create confusion. Even the nitpicky details, such as a serif font versus a sans-serif font, can determine the sway of a visual advertising campaign.

Though ostensibly a simple recipe, the truth is that effective signage and graphics are comprised of multiple ingredients. The good news is that most of these steps are basic, and as long as they’re all accounted for, the end result will be a success.

The following are core components of a proactive visual campaign for the front end:

1. *Informative.* The primary job of all front-end signage and visual displays is to provide information and shopping cues. Yet, as mentioned previously, signs cannot venture into the “TMI” zone. While all written copy should be brief and to the point, it can still provide helpful communication and details about the merchandise on display. This is especially necessary for promoting unfamiliar brands or new products.

2. *Clear.* The message and purpose of all content (images, colors, words, etc.) should be easily understood. Visual elements (not attributed to a specific brand or product) should correlate with the store's intended image.
3. *Visible.* What use are signs and graphics that remain unseen? According to vision research in relation to retail, "shoppers scan horizontally more than vertically" since two-thirds of muscles in the human eye are genetically designed for horizontal movement (Sorensen 51). Promotional signage in the front end should therefore be installed at an eye-focus level of three to five feet, situated to accommodate horizontal eye movement. Directional signage, however—such as signs pointing out the location of the checkout counter—should be high, since visual attention is drawn vertically when people are traveling (Sorensen 51).
4. *Evocative.* According to Ebster and Garaus, "archetypes and pictures leading to biologically programmed reactions" will impact the widest range of shoppers (93). These types of graphics draw upon psychological schemas, or networks of associations within the mind of the consumer. Schemas could involve anything from babies, who symbolize everything warm and cute, to the Outback in Australia, which evokes a sense of adventure and excitement.
5. *Theatrical.* Visibility and noticeability are two separate characteristics. A visual display can easily be seen, but if it doesn't register in the viewer's mind, it remains unnoticed. To compete in the front end, retailers must incorporate graphic elements that are impressive, fascinating, and compelling.





Solution #3: O.C.D. (Organized and Clean Displays)

“Clean and simple” is a rudimentary rule where product displays are concerned, and most retailers have some form of recovery or facing procedure in place for maintaining display appearance. But when pressed for time or resources, the attention to these little details is first to be sacrificed—often to the detriment of sales.

Dr. Iana Castro, an assistant professor of marketing at San Diego State University, has performed in-depth research on how disorganized shelf displays and limited product quantities can influence consumer purchases. A study done in collaboration with her colleagues Andrea Morales and Stephen Nowlis has found that people are less likely to buy “when the products are limited in quantity and on messy shelves than when they are fully stocked on organized shelves” (124). Even if the products are packaged, people tend to view disorganized merchandise as contaminated.

Furthermore, dirty and/or cluttered displays project a poor overall image for the store itself. Customers may come to the conclusion that disorganized shelf displays mean the retailer does not care, or does not respect the merchandise.

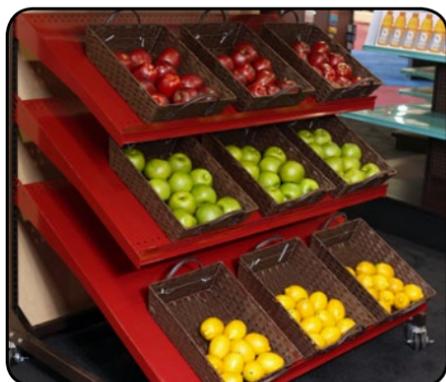
Maintaining display appearance can be a tedious and time-consuming task—particularly in the front end, where people are making last-minute decisions before checking out, casting unwanted items aside upon whatever shelf is closest. But going the extra mile will definitely pay off, encouraging sales instead of deterring them.

Retailers can achieve the O.C.D. effect by following the three R’s:

1. *Remove.* Some product displays might feature perishable merchandise, such as fresh flowers or baked goods, etc. Items that have exceeded their expiration date need to be removed immediately, so as not to compromise the integrity of the display.
2. *Replenish.* Displays need to be appropriately stocked to provide a sufficient selection of brands and products. Sparsely populated shelves do not attract attention and project a neglected impression. But retailers must also be careful not to overstock

a shelf, as too many options can create a muddled effect, like trying to paint with too many colors at the same time. Remember, less can be more. Select the most commanding brands and organize them in a cohesive format for the optimum effect.

3. *Recover.* Understandably, customer service comes first. But whenever there is a lull in business—or before the store opens and after it closes—retailers should encourage employees to take the time to straighten shopped shelves, aligning products according the store’s merchandising plan.



Solution #2: Perform Right on Queuing

In an ideal retail setting, there would be no lines. Registers and card readers would never experience technical difficulties; customers would always be amiable and pleasant; no one would *ever* pay by check, and cashiers would process transactions at superhuman speeds.

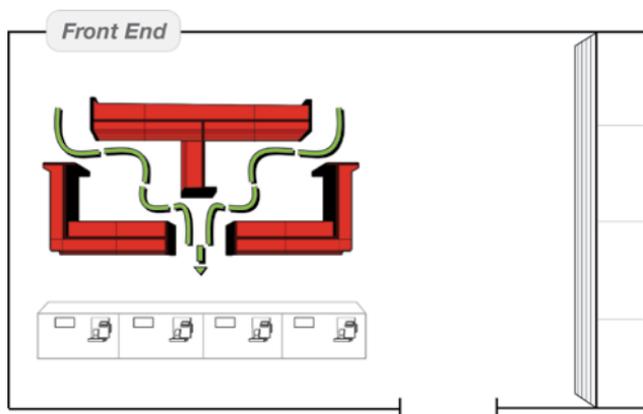
But this is the real world. No matter how efficient a checkout system is, there will still be lines. And where there are lines, chaos and frustration are sure to follow. To combat these negative influences, retailers need to implement a streamlined queuing system. Re-establishing a semblance of order mollifies customers, and their perceived wait time decreases, making them less likely to bail without buying.

The traditional queuing procedure involves individual lines and multiple checkout counters. This system allows customers the autonomy of judging for themselves which line is shorter/faster moving. But the traditional method has also proven less efficient and more likely to increase perceived wait times than the rising trend of a single queuing line with multiple registers at the end.



“A queuing system feeding to multiple registers has the potential of minimizing customer frustration,” says Shawn Kahler, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Madix, Inc. “Just as important, it allows the retailer to effectively leverage any wait time to promote sales of impulse merchandise and services.”

An article in the Wall Street Journal reports that this is exactly what Old Navy (a subsidiary of Gap, Inc.) is doing, and in the process, the company is putting a new twist on impulse merchandise. To avoid the appearance of a supermarket, Old Navy has selected novelty items like superhero lunch boxes and glittery piggy banks (Smith 3). The sentimental knick-knacks provide upsell opportunities as well as distractions for queued customers, and the single-line system ensures that the exposure level for each product category is consistent.



Madix's streamlined **Queuing System** incorporates the more efficient “one line, multiple registers” method for checkout queues, providing a comprehensive platform for upsells and impulse buys while customers wait.

Solution #1: The Checkout Checklist

Front-End Focus claims that on average, front-end checkouts deliver around \$5.5 billion in sales a year. But improving merchandising in the checkout area could provide an additional \$2 billion.

“Focus at the front-end checkout should be on the ‘Power Categories’ that represent almost 80% of front-end sales and profits,” advise the experts at Dechert-Hampe Consulting.

Other studies suggest it’s not just the type of merchandise that creates impulse, but also the layout in which it is displayed. Recall the pattern of eye movement mentioned in Solution #3. Since people scan displays in a horizontal direction, the “power” merchandise (which can actually vary, depending on store type and projected image) should be made available at eye level (4-5 ft.) and touch level (3-4 ft.). This is because after examining merchandise at eye level, customers’ eyes tend to jump to touch level.



The most common eye pattern of a typical shopper scans eye level (4-5 ft.) in a horizontal direction from left to right, down, left, then back up. The larger circles indicate the areas that receive the most exposure.

Developing and implementing a consumer decision tree model for the checkout counter can help retailers determine what their specific merchandising power categories are. Decision trees map how certain products and brands outperform one another in relation to shelf organization, offering critical insight into customers' buying behavior. These models also present forward and backward calculation paths, representing different outcomes and the optimality of the decision-making process.



Retailers: Decide What Solutions Make Sense for You

Evaluating the relationship between the front end and the rest of the store requires retailers to carefully consider the cost of sales. Given its potential to increase overall profits, leaving the front end underdeveloped is a poor strategic maneuver. An optimized front end makes non-productive time productive, potentially giving retailers “five times the sales” (Sorensen 41). Retailers should therefore revisit the fundamental principles of the consumer shopping process, adapting the front end to collaborate with the rest of the store to better deliver total customer solutions.

After all, what’s a good steak sandwich without the bread?

Innovative Front-End Store Configurations

The display fixture experts at Madix, Inc. are available to provide free consultation to retailers who wish to explore fresh, new ideas on how to maximize front-end sales, creating a holistic shopping experience that drives profit. For more information, please contact John Clontz, Director of Marketing and e-Business: jclontz@madixinc.com or (214) 515-5400.



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