

# DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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COMMENTS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE INVITED AND WELCOME.

Readers are invited to submit comments, criticisms and suggestions regarding the material which appears in this department. The Editor also will undertake to answer questions regarding general problems of business management. Letters of general interest will be published, but the writer's name will not be revealed without his permission.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EFFECTIVE DISPLAY.

*(Continued)*

Size, contrast and isolation are not the only mechanical ways by which a display can attract attention to itself. In fact, none of them is effective unless the display is in a position to be seen. That fact should be self-evident, but it is amazing how many people expect a display to work wonders for them when they have it located in a place where it can't possibly be seen by the great majority of people who pass by or come into the store. Most of us are so wrapped up in our own affairs and interests that we have little time or attention for things going on around us. Go into a store intent on buying a stamp or to make a telephone call and the chances are that not one of the dozens of displays in the windows or in the store itself will make the slightest impression. Certainly those which are out of normal range of vision won't.

That is why some windows and some spaces in the store are so much more valuable for display purposes than others. Many druggists have told me that they could sell "anything" which they showed alongside their cash registers. Why?

Allowing for some pardonable exaggeration and enthusiasm on the part of my druggist friends, it is perfectly apparent that display space around the cash register is valuable because it is a natural stopping place. Every time a sale is made the druggist must walk to the cash register. The natural thing is for the customer to walk there, too, and stop a minute while waiting for change.

That idle minute, while the druggist is making change, is enough for many a display to catch and fix the roving eye of the patron. There begins the possibility of a display to create another—a companion-sale.

Windows seen as people get off the street cars or in direct line of vision from some distance have greater attractive power than those not so fortunately situated. Sometimes windows in front of which people stand waiting for street cars have this extra value. This is true if the waiting people are homeward bound. On the other hand, if they are going down town and are attracted by the display while waiting for a street car the thought that flashes through their minds is, "That does look good. I'd like one of those, but there's no use of my getting it now and carrying it all the way down town and back. I'll get it on the way back."

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Most druggists know only too well that the evanescent impulse to buy which was so strong at the time this thought passed through the prospective patron's mind will, most likely, be gone forever when she finally does come home. She may have forgotten all about her earlier desire, or the attractions of the stores she has seen in the interim may have taken all her money and she couldn't buy what she once wanted, even if she did remember her earlier decision.

It would be foolish indeed for me to try to set down what it is that makes one window or inside display space a better sales producer than another. These variations arise from variations in the architecture of the store, the habits of people who pass and who enter the store, the characteristics and purchasing power of these people and the kinds of merchandise which are displayed and sold in the store.

What I do say is that with an understanding of the abstract principles which give selling power to displays a merchant is in a position to determine accurately just how to make the most profitable use of the display space he has, taking into account the individual characteristics of his own store. Here the aim is to set down the abstract principles. The smart merchant will see quickly enough how to apply them. For instance, with respect to position as a factor in attracting attention to display, the alert merchant will determine by careful observation, experiments and tests just what places in his store are most productive for the display of various kinds of goods. My job is to point out that position (as well as the number of other things being discussed in these articles) helps a display to attract attention. The merchant's job is to determine for himself in his own store just what these positions are.

Position has an influence on the drawing power of a display not only with respect to where the display itself is located but also with respect to the arrangement of the articles in the display. That, however, is a whole subject in itself and I'll go into that in detail in a later article.

A smiling salesman appeared one day in a city office and addressed himself to the young lady presiding over the typewriter in the reception room.

"Do you realize," he began, "what harm you are doing to your eyes by operating day after day a typewriter with those shiny nickel and white keys? Your desk light makes them reflect a glare in your eyes which is bound to affect sooner or later even the strongest vision. What you should have on your typewriter is a set of these soft rubber, dull green caps which fit over each one of those keys and absolutely eliminate all glare as well as protect your fingers."

"But I never look at the keys," countered the young lady. "I was taught touch typewriting in school and my eyes are always on what I am copying—not on the keys."

"What are you doing that for?" she added as her eye was drawn to the unperturbed salesman methodically moving his hand back and forth in a horizontal arc at about the level of his waist.

"That was just a little experiment. I thought it would catch your eye. That illustrates the very thing I wanted to make you realize.

"You may not think that you are looking at those shiny keys because your mind is on other things but your eyes are drawn irresistibly toward them just as they were toward my moving hand although my hand was out of your range of vision at the time."

This salesman has pointed out two very important mechanical means which can be employed effectively to draw attention to displays—motion and intensity. People's attention is irresistibly and, many times, involuntarily drawn to displays by moving objects or by the very intensity of the display just as this stenographer's eyes couldn't help but be drawn involuntarily to the bright, shiny keys of the typewriter or to the salesman's hand moving outside her range of vision at the time.

This salesman's argument also illustrates the danger of too much motion or too much intensity in a display.

Motion attracts attention surely enough, but too much of it makes a person dizzy and therefore he is in no interested frame of mind to study the display after the moving objects have attracted his attention to it. In the same way, too much intensity defeats itself. The eye is repelled after the first glance, instead of being fixed attentively upon the display.

A haberdasher was anxious to create the impression that his store was the local headquarters for evening clothes. He dressed a form in a dinner coat, black vest, gleaming white shirt, studs and so on, and stood the form in the center of his most prominent window. All about it were heavy dull black draperies. Thus he achieved the attention compelling power of position, isolation and contrast. In addition, concealed behind the top valance of his window was a powerful spotlight trained to shine directly down upon the stiffly starched white shirt. The effect was marvelous. The attention of people all around was drawn to the window as if by magic. But once they had responded to the attractive power of the display they turned away from it almost as quickly as they had first turned toward it. That is the two-edged influence of intensity as a factor in effective display. It has a magnetic power to draw people's attention but the very strength of this power is such that any attempt to look more than an instant will repel them. Anyone is attracted, even against his will, by a strong light but once attracted he won't look long at it, because that is unpleasant and people naturally turn away from unpleasant things.

For the purpose the haberdasher had in mind, the display was excellent. He merely wanted to impress upon as many people as possible the fact that he sold evening clothes and accessories. The details of his merchandise could be studied later by his customers in other displays and inside the store. He chose the display method with the greatest attractive power, sacrificing everything else for it.

Numerous toy dealers have found that the drawing power of displays of miniature railroads is increased immeasurably if the trains are in motion. The physical fact of motion does the trick. However, the wise toy dealer knows that people don't get a very good chance to acquaint themselves with the merits of a miniature train when it is constantly whirling around a circular track. The merchant therefore has some of his trains standing still so that once a person's attention is attracted by the moving train, he also has the opportunity to study, leasurably, trains which are not in motion. And what is true of displays of toys is just as true of displays of drug store merchandise.

It is thus easy to see that motion has some of the same two-edged characteristics that have just been mentioned in connection with intensity. Too much motion defeats the power of a display to hold attention, although motion always proves an excellent aid in attracting attention.—(A third article in this series will appear in the next issue.)