

# Hardware

## BUSINESS ADVISOR

## See Your Store Through New Eyes

*Have you ever wondered how others see your store? Well, stop wondering and look for yourself. Tomorrow morning, instead of heading straight to your business, stop off at a couple of competitors' stores first and be sure to take along a clipboard. You'll want to take notes.*



**A**fter touring other successful hardware stores, you'll probably see things you don't like or would have done differently. That's normal. It's easier to be critical of other businesses. This step is an important way to "warm-up" your evaluation skills and to learn what turns a customer off.

Now it's time to take a critical look at your own place of business. Try to put yourself in the mind of a typical consumer. You are so used to your surroundings that you can't actually see your store clearly. You fail to notice dog-eared, sun-faded signs or you convince yourself that their condition really doesn't matter.

If a ratty, bleached-out "Yes, We're Open!" sign is the first thing a new customer sees, the

initial impression won't be grand. It's time to re-evaluate. Today, look with a stranger's eyes.

### A New Pair of Glasses

The moment you spot your storefront, your interest should be piqued. Once through the door, you should feel that you've found a great place to shop. The layout and design of the displays should visually sell the merchandise for you.

If your store is located in a strip mall, view the storefront from all directions to discover how it looks to passersby. The name and address should be prominent. Canopies and signs should be bright and colorful. Paint should be fresh and clean. The store should be well lit, inside and out. All the signs should serve a purpose and, if they're lighted, they

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# See Your Store Through New Eyes

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should be in good working order. (No “Sm th’s Ha dw re”.)

So, what’s your overall impression, stranger? On a scale of 1 to 5, how interested are you in checking out the merchandise? Note your response on the clipboard. If you have any immediate thoughts on improvements, note them also.

## Window Shopping

Busy shoppers will usually look at your signs and the merchandise displayed on your front apron. Write down what attracts you first, then next, and so on.

The merchandise outside should reflect the range of your products, including style, assortment, and price range. By changing the displays frequently, as often as every two weeks, you stimulate repeat business. If there’s nothing new, why stop and look? To make things look different, you can even rearrange the merchandise; put the wheelbarrows on the left instead of the

right and the mowers in front instead of in back of them. This kind of change is quick, but makes the customers take another look.

Now review the store for order and cleanliness. Do you see clutter, dusty pots, smudged windows, and ripped sacks of feed, fertilizer, soil, and cement mix? Everything should be bright, shiny, and alluring, including the sidewalk and exterior of the storefront.

## First Impressions

Now it’s time to step inside. Note the first things that grab your attention. Whatever they are, do they pull you into the store and make you want to stay for a closer examination?

The longer customers browse, the more likely they are to purchase something. Strategies to accomplish this vary from providing provocative and interesting merchandise and displays to offering simple creature comforts, such as shopping

carts, complimentary coffee, and a comfortable chair for a tired shopper or waiting companion. Above all, the trip through your store must be interesting – not confusing or boring. Aisles should be uncluttered and wide enough to walk unhindered. This also allows customers using strollers, walkers, and wheelchairs to pass freely, thus

inviting everyone to have a closer look.

Are seasonal displays, impulse items, and markdowns in place near the front? If not, you should consider this method of creating a buying environment. However, don’t limit yourself to the front. Properly displayed impulse items will draw customers deeper into the store. Walls should be well stocked and brightly lit, featuring big, bright signs to lure customers to each side of your store.

Among your most valuable merchandising areas are end caps. Change these regularly so that customers see something fresh and new on every trip. To make sure the end-caps are changed often, divide the responsibility among your employees. Tape an index card to the back of the end caps, noting the date each change should be made and which employee should make it. Otherwise, these routine changes might be overlooked and you’ll miss chances for more add-on sales and other profit boosters. End cap displays can double or triple your sale of featured products, provided they are changed every two or three weeks.

Now direct your attention to the rear of your store. Can you see anything back there, or is it dark and drab? Your back wall displays and signs should be big and bold, encouraging people to move further inside. Too often, the far wall becomes cluttered with all those things that are out

of season or nearly out of stock. Relegate those items to a display near the point-of-purchase counter for quick liquidation, and reserve your back wall for merchandise that would entice you to walk all the way

through your store just to get a better look. Do you use cross-merchandising ideas to encourage add-on purchases? This idea is a proven winner, so you’re missing out if you haven’t tried it.

## Planograms

For additional help on merchandising, you can access hundreds of TruServ’s suggested retail-focused planograms on [Membersonline](#).

## Target Marketing

Two groups that every storeowner should be mindful of are the “Boomers” and the “Silvers.”

The age 50-plus Boomers are the largest and fastest growing group of consumers, representing more than 35 percent of the population. Possessing 43 percent of the country’s total discretionary income and 77 percent of all financial assets in the U.S., Boomers are an expanding customer base that a successful business owner must take seriously.

Just as important are the 35 million active seniors, representing a lucrative Silver market. Keep in mind that the ratio of women to men increases dramatically with age, as women outnumber men 3 to 2 by age 65.

To attract these rapidly growing consumer groups, you will need to be more Boomer- and Silver-friendly by:

- Placing merchandise in their visual range – not too low or too high
- Printing easy-to-read and larger, high-contrast signs and labels
- Raising the overall light level, reducing glare, and avoiding reflective surfaces
- Removing clutter from shelves and aisles
- Reducing the need for reaching up and stooping
- Providing easy-to-open doors, strategically placed chairs for brief rests, and shopping carts or some other assistance with heavy items.

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# Sex Appeal

Depending on your store’s merchandise mix, your customer demographic may lean toward one gender over another. In order to be successful, you need to attract both sexes. The tactics vary significantly.

Men tend to see shopping as a project. They want to get it over with quickly. As soon as a man steps inside the front door, he starts shopping with his eyes, looking first at nearby displays, and then turning his attention to the back wall and brightest wall areas. If he can’t see what he’s looking for quickly, he probably won’t bother to ask for assistance. If the store layout is confusing, he might decide to head for another store rather than try to figure it out.

Make sure you have something near the front of your store that men will be interested in, preferably something they can touch, since men are more tactile than women. Put some of your power tools close to the door to get men to step forward.

Women tend to start with a front fixture and wander throughout the store, stopping to look at merchandise as they make their way toward the back. This means putting attractive, colorful items toward the back to entice women to meander through the aisles.

Make sure specials and product offerings are well marked, with larger signs in the back rather than in the front.

Women tend to ask for directions, instructions, and assistance.

Other tips for shelf merchandising are:

- Avoid displaying expensive or important merchandise below waist level, where it’s perceived by customers to have less value.
- Don’t shelve merchandise too high, or customers will be unable to see or reach it.
- Don’t allow displays and end caps to jut out into traffic areas. Make shopping your shelves a pleasure, not an obstacle course.
- Use round-edged tables in high-traffic areas to avoid customers being poked or their clothing being snagged by a sharp edge.

## Silent Salesperson

Well-placed, high-impact signs should announce your products and services, promote specials, and guide customers through your store. Your signs should look professional and maintain a consistent theme, color, and style. Get rid of any old, mismatched, or faded signs. Having no signs is better than displaying scuffed-up, seen-better-days, crayon-marked poster boards.

Whenever possible add a few words along with the price to inform shoppers of product benefits. For example: “Keep tile floors cleaner longer – \$4.99.”

Be sure that price tags are attached to every item or shelf area. If something isn’t priced, many shoppers will simply pass it by. There should be consistency in your price tags. It may be a little thing, but it makes a big impression. You won’t gain sales with faded, hard-to-read, stained, confusing price tags or signs.

## Pay Here

Customers appreciate efficient and convenient checkout. Once they’ve finished shopping, they’re anxious to move on to the next errand, return to work, or go home. The area should be big enough for customers to unload their shopping carts easily. Your counter should be uncluttered so you can write up orders, sack merchandise, and allow customers to write checks without delaying others.

The counter should be situated to allow you to welcome customers and monitor activity inside the store.

Don’t allow your checkout counter to look like a catchall for mail, fliers, coupons, tape dispensers, etc. It’s the most important workstation in your entire store. Below the counter, make sure you don’t have a jumble of note pads, order forms, and paper and plastic bags. Organize the space so that materials are instantly at hand.

Always provide a front-counter method for customers to get on your mailing list by signing up to receive circulars, newsletters, to attend workshops, or to enter a drawing. Display impulse merchandise, such as tape measures, work gloves, or a small, but eye-catching new product, to increase your add-on sales.

## Repeat Customers

So, how did your store fare? Would you want to return for another shopping trip?

A store designed specifically to entice walk-in customers and welcome regulars is a goal that must be fine-tuned and maintained. At least once a year, look at your store as if you were seeing it for the very first time to make sure it is a place that would win you as a customer. ■

