

# Retail Planning 101:

## Store Design and Layout Made Easy

HERE IS AN EASY STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CREATE SMASHING STORE LAYOUTS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR CUSTOMERS COME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN

By Anshuman Bhargava

→ The goal of a retail store is to maximise sales and generate as much profit per square foot of floor space as possible. Besides optimising physical space, a store also needs to offer a unique experience to customers and support the brands it sells. At the same time, it needs to remain fresh, flexible and intriguing to maintain the interest of customers and ensure repeat business.

Retailers to a large extent rely on the design of the store and its layout to meet these objectives and pull customers in through the door. Together, these elements unite all aspects of the retail experience – the window display, interior design, fixtures and fittings, lighting, architecture and other disciplines – to deliver maximum bang for your invested retail buck.

Could we simplify and organise this important process? A rough step-by-step guide follows to help you design your store right.

### START HERE OR END UP NOWHERE...

**Concept:** You should begin by asking the following questions to yourself: What is the concept for the store? What do you want it to be? What is the story? What is the brand experience? How do you want the customer to feel in the store? You should summarise the answers to each in five words or less.

**Mood Boards:** Create a “mood board” based on the concept. Include all images, reference articles, objects and cuttings that convey the desired store atmospheric onto one vision board.



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**Colour Charts:** Compile a colour chart. What kind of a colour scheme do you want? Who is your target customer? Department stores usually have neutral colours and let the merchandise stand out. Niche stores on the other hand experiment with stronger, bolder colours.

**Inventory:** Study the existing elements including the building structure (columns, beams), non-movable store items (washrooms, offices, storages), display units and furniture.

**Merchandise:** Ask yourself: What is the merchandise to sell? What are the “adjacencies” – the sequence of merchandise placement? What are their characteristics? What is unique to them? Also, take into account the traffic movement, themes, forecasts and collections.

**Plans:** Include the existing structure. Use graph paper for right proportions. Make use of planograms as these are a convenient way of planning the merchandise organisation.

### BE A DESIGN STRATEGIST

Based on the above information, sketch your store layout. Keep the

following in mind while doing so:

**Design Principles:** Whether you design a new store layout or renovate an old one, you need to follow the design principles of *balance* (a sense of calmness and looking “right”); *rhythm* (the flow of merchandise); *proportion* (how an element looks in relation to its surroundings); *texture* (people buy after touch and trial), *harmony* (décor should gel with the merchandise); and *emphasis* (focus points, feature merchandise). Try to use tension (play of materials and surfaces) and the element of surprise (“I did not expect that!”).

**Design Elements:** These include line, shape, texture and colour.

**Design Strategies:** Layer the design elements. Use focus points, lighting for emphasis and variety in experience. Your aim as a design strategist is to create a multi-sensory experience for customers so that they visit the store again and again.

### TOOLS OF THE TRADE

**Grids:** Ceiling-hung grids add flexibility for lighting and suspension of props. Depending on the store focus points, they can be shifted.

**Fixtures:** Stores use a number of moveable fixtures to display products. Tables – which some retailers call “the single most important fixture in the retail industry” – can be installed or moved easily depending on the merchandise plan. They can act as introductory fixtures near entrances or in mid-aisles where they can feature new items or offer regular items which passers-by could shop on impulse. Mannequins (like tables) allow creation of easy focus points. Other tools include shadow boxes, island displays, kiosks, enclosed boxes, drapers, and raised platforms. All these can be rearranged in endless creative configurations.

**Store Layouts:** Most free-standing fixtures can be easily rearranged but it helps follow tried-and-tested store layouts. The typical ones are: (i) the *grid layout* (where fixtures are positioned in a check-board pattern with strong vertical and horizontal aisles that run across the store); (ii)



the *free-flow layout* (where fixtures are loosely grouped in interesting formations that encourage browsing); (iii) the *loop layout* (where there is a “racetrack” traffic aisle in the middle of the store); (iv) the *soft aisle layout* (where fixtures are grouped together and there are five-foot aisles along perimeter walls); and (v) the *minimal layout* (where the fixtures are less and placed in a simple gallery-like manner, usually in high-end stores).

**Screens:** Moveable partitions/screens can divide the space in endless ways.

Mirrors can balance optical weight across installations.

**Graphics/Signage:** Graphics and signage are useful in providing emphasis and highlighting the focus points. They can even add the punch colour to an otherwise neutral scheme. Since they can be easily changed, the look of the store can change easily too. By using graphics, fonts and photos, new stories can be easily created around product installations. Further, their repetitive use adds a binding element to the store design. They also act as traffic regulators and directional pointers.

**Columns:** These non-movable items have multiple uses in store design. They can act as backdrops for product displays. We can hang banners and decorative props from them, wreaths can adorn them, and garlands can entwine them. They also delineate a department’s beginning and end. Columns can be lined up on either side of a major aisle, adding vertical

highlights on a horizontal floor. They can be a signboard for an area, or a store directory. Columns can even be a four-sided mirror. You can take advantage of their rhythm and repetition and their obvious verticality and visibility and use them creatively.

#### THE MERCHANDISE

- The merchandise needs to be presented in an orderly manner. It needs to be colour-coordinated and/or pattern-coordinated.
- Zoning is foremost. The front

one-third of the store is the most crucial for the retailer. His prime merchandise needs to be there.

- Impulse items should be placed in high-traffic zones, such as lift lobbies and cash counters.
- Store-sight lines, especially from the entrance, should be clear from front to back.
- Adjacencies need to be adhered to. Relationship of merchandise to one another is very important.
- Feature items need to be emphasised. They are usually from the latest collection. If sale items are to be emphasised, they should be highlighted by means of graphics showing the price reductions and percentages.
- Lighting plays a role in creating emphasis, mood and variety.
- Themes need to be consistent and coordinated with the merchandise.

#### WINDOW DRESSING

- Windows usually require backdrops. As much as retailers want the passerby to see through the window, people tend to concentrate on what’s in the window, not what’s behind it.
- Backdrops are strong design elements that can be altered depending on the season and collection.
- Elements of window dressing include mannequins, raised platforms, grids for hanging props, lighting, colour and texture. All these are easily modifiable with the merchandise to create stories.

#### IN CONCLUSION

There are countless ways of laying out the store. By following the above simple guidelines, you can easily create several workable diagrams for the store’s design. You can modify them with the seasons and create interest throughout the year. The customer would never get bored and would keep coming back! ❏

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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