

Deli Merchandising

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Merchandising is the fine art of bringing your products to life through eye-catching merchandise arrangements, hand chosen props, appropriate lighting, pleasing packaging, signage that sells, color, vibrancy, quality and quantity. Food merchandising is a key element to any foodservice operation, and is especially valuable for any business trying to gain more business and higher profitability. Well-merchandised products create a higher sense of quality, interest and perceived value. This, in turn, can create higher sales, stronger customer loyalty and more profit for your company.

One of the most basic rules of visual merchandising is the better the product looks, the more the customer will buy. This is not new information to any operator. But knowing you have to merchandise and how to merchandise are two completely separate issues. Merchandising properly involves planning and a good eye for detail. Every aspect of your displays should convince the potential customer to enter your store and buy something.

Do Your Homework

Before you start to create a visual merchandising strategy, you should do some research and make a plan of action. Start by visiting or looking at pictures of successful deli operations, not just around your area, but worldwide. Write a list of all the things that make the delis successful. There are some fabulous books and research materials available, so you should go to a bookstore or do some research on the web.

Next, look at your operation and determine what are your weak points and what are your strong points. Ask the customers — they can often provide the best information about what you should be doing in order to make your business more successful. Since doing a complete overhaul of your business is exceptionally expensive and time consuming, focus your energies on improvements that will make a substantial difference. Oftentimes, the improvements that need to be made are strictly cosmetic, with no need to rebuild your store from the ground up.

Attract Attention

The first step is convincing customers to enter your store. You can do this with signage and displays that catch the customers' eyes or by having an enticing aroma that draws the customer into the store. Getting the customer into the store is harder than selling them something once they are in, therefore your entrance and visual appeal from the outside of your operation has to be better than any of your competitors. Effective marketing practices also are a

great way of getting customers into your operation. Give your customers a reason to come to your store by sending out coupons on the latest specials or items of interest.

Create Eye-catching Displays

Once you get the customer into the store, you still have a lot of work to do in order to get them to leave with a purchase. Generally, as customers shop, their eyes move from top left to bottom right. Build your displays so that your props, signs and packaging direct the eye and point to the products you want to sell. Also, keep in mind that when customers walk into a facility, they tend to travel towards the right hand side. Put your bestsellers

and highest priced items on this side to promote their sales.

The use of color and accent lighting are integral aspects of visual merchandising; use directional lighting that forces customers to look where you want them to, and use bright vibrant colors that attract attention. Brightly colored napkins add a touch of charm to your displays. Every display should have a focal point to attract attention.

How you display your products on the shelf also can either increase sales or make the product go unnoticed. Using contrast, whether by shape, size or color, can lead the customers' eyes towards your product. Gift baskets filled with your products not only look nice displayed, but they also reinforce your company's name and promote easy gift sales.

Cross Merchandise

Items grouped together (i.e. sandwiches and soups) enhance the sales of both items, and ultimately you sell more. Use signage, displays and POS materials to cross merchandise these items with a view to encourage sales. Sampling products together also increases the sales of both products. Giving your customers a taste of your newest cheese on a great cracker will increase the sales of both of the items. You should build a display around the sampling that incorporates both of the items that are being sampled.

Another thing that increases sales is having recipe cards or meal suggestions beside the sampled items. At 6 p.m. most customers don't know what they are preparing for dinner. Give them a recipe that features ingredients they can purchase at your store. Even better, let them try the finished product so they know they like it (the best recipes for this are ones that take around 20 minutes to prepare).

Every deli operation should follow the fundamentals. These include cleanliness, freshness, full shelves, clear signage and cross merchandising. These are all things that have a large impact on the sales and the perception of the store by the customer.

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