

HIGHLIGHTING YOUR MERCHANDISE

The effective use of lighting is an often overlooked aspect of merchandise display. Granted, it probably does more harm than good to light an ineffective display (it tends to emphasize its shortcomings); it is equally harmful to illuminate a good display ineffectively. The more complete your presentation, the more attractive to the eye, the better your chances of selling.

The purpose of lighting tends to be obscured in the pro shop. It becomes a source of vision, rather than a visual magnet. The light fixtures are usually set to flood the selling area, giving equal light throughout, with the most light either deliberately set on the counter with the cash register or on the middle of the room. This evenness of light tends to create a collage, which requires the buyer visually to isolate the elements in which he might be interested. The net effect is distraction and detraction. Instead of enhancing the merchandise, this type of lighting makes it resemble a sea of shapes and colors.

The first principle of effective display is to understate. One outstanding item effectively stated draws more audience attention than several diffused "specials." It is often a good idea to focus the prospective customer's attention on a single bargain and then use graduated lighting to draw his attention to the item next to that and

Here are some basic rules about how to use lighting effectively to sell merchandise in the pro shop

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then the item next to that and so on.

Colors are an important part of clothing. You want them to leap out at the buyer. If they grab his attention, he'll be convinced that he'll grab attention in them. You want to suggest, "Think of the comments the other guy or gal will get if you don't buy it first." A sure way to do this is to highlight the dominant color of the fabric. Poor lighting dulls the color, can even change it, but the proper selection of colored lights will dramatize the manufacturer's carefully created concept. A yellow light on a yellow shirt can be most effective, especially if the yellow is flanked by darker colors, say, navy blue or black.

There are, of course, many subtleties to lighting. Do you want to light from below or above? Do you want to use a spotlight? How about flashing lights and displays that use motion? Again, general rule is don't overdo. Use different types of lighting on different types of merchandise. This tends to give them an identity. Again,

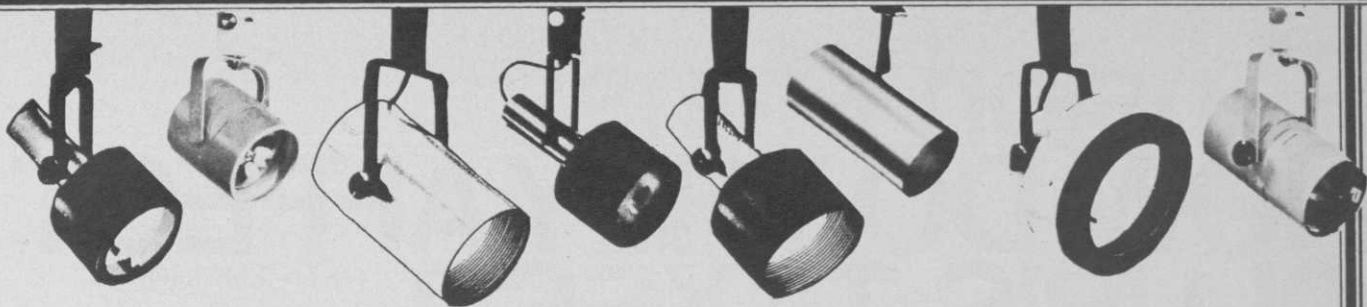
though, make sure you're leading the buyer through the shop with your display and your lighting. Nothing should detract from, or conflict with, your main display. Some element in that primary display should match up with something in the next display, the one that you want the buyer to go to next. If you're featuring a shirt and slack ensemble, you want to lead him to color-coordinated shoes. Let him glimpse the shoes in the background as he looks at the ensemble. Highlight with effective lighting the color in the shoes that matches the outfit. Notice I said ". . . glimpse the shoes in the background. . ." not "put the shoes under the outfit" or "next to the outfit." By giving him a dominant focus (the outfit) and then giving him a distant but distinctly secondary focal point that is related, you'll draw him from one to the other and help him make the connection. The added benefit here is that he'll move to that secondary point and pass other *related* items as he goes back and forth between the two points.

To conclude this article on lighting, let's examine the different types of lighting available to you and talk a little bit about the effectiveness of each.

INDIRECT LIGHTING

Bulbs set behind a valance or a baffle





mounted on top of the display will throw light downward. In the same fashion, lighting can be directed upward by the use of floodlights or footlights. Indirect, side lighting can also be achieved by using upright panels behind which bulbs are mounted so that the viewer cannot see them from the front. To hide lights totally from view might require an excessive expense. Set panels so that the lights are hidden from a distance or use soft lights that are themselves enclosed. Top shelves should be top-lit, middle shelves side-lit, bottom shelves bottom-lit.

BACK LIGHTING

Perhaps the simplest and most dramatic lighting source is back lighting. You can use an ordinary bulb to highlight a photograph by mounting the photograph on a large circular or square background of cardboard or Masonite. Remove the shade from a small table lamp and center it behind the cardboard so that the bulb is hidden. The effect is astounding. A dramatic halo radiates from the background perimeter.

LIGHTING FROM BELOW

Set a small lamp in an opaque box and cover the top of the box with a ledge of frosted glass. Place the object to be displayed on this glass ledge, centered but slightly back, so that the light will both illuminate the object and throw

interesting shadows on the wall behind it. Be sure to put some holes in the back of the box so the heat can escape.

SPOTLIGHTING

As the name implies, it is used to project a circle of light on a single important element. If you want one color of a colorful display to stand out, spotlight that color with a matching light. You can spotlight with articulated lamps (desk lamps with joined and segmented floating arms), clamp-on lamps (squeeze brackets which easily clamp to a shelf or ledge or the edge of a panel) or ball lights (globe lights which are especially effective as window spotlights to half-flood, half-spot a mannequin).

MOTION DISPLAYS AND LIGHTING

Although a certain eye-catcher and an excellent means of presenting a great number of items, motion displays are complicated and expensive. The cheapest way to get this type of display is to go to a liquor store, most of which are full of motion displays the liquor companies make and distribute. These displays are discarded every so often and replaced. The mechanism is what you're after. Once you have this, you can use it to propel your own display. One suggestion: Try showing colored photographs of matching outfits. If you have the money, you can also try projecting slides onto the wall of the dining room or the shop itself. □

