

# Visual Connection

**Elena Maurer**, managing director of brand/retail German subsidiary Liganova Pvt Ltd India, discusses the growing relevance of visual merchandising with Susanne Weller



## How relevant is VM in modern retailing?

Visual merchandising is very important to modern retailing. In fact, 85% of the retail sales rely on the subconscious “shopping behaviour”. It is a driven impulse of action which acts on all human senses. Therefore, VM plays an extreme part towards a successful retail business; taking into consideration that VM is not only “product placement”. It is far more beyond the classical description. Nowadays, the VM concept captures certain parts, such as retail store architecture, store atmosphere (music / scent / lighting / changing rooms, etc), product placement and product enhancement, customer activation, POS activation, etc. Nevertheless, this needs to be strategically put in place with the overall brand awareness and its image. All retail marketing relevant silos need to speak one “language” towards the consumer. And in the end the product is the king - the brand needs to have the right product for its target group! We believe that the sales staff plays a key role for a sales driven retail business, therefore, regular training is very important.

## How can store interiors communicate with the consumers?

A visual merchandiser can create store interiors that connect with the consumers in many ways, always depending on the brand message. A lot can be done through a strategic product placement, so having the right product range is important. We always say that a client decides within five seconds if he/she will

remain in the store or not! Meaning, a retail store should approach the consumer from the outside towards the inside of the store. Therefore, the store façade, the window display, the entrance area, the store atmosphere, the lighting, music, fixtures, colours and materials, all contribute towards those five decisive seconds during which the customer decides if he/she likes the store or not.

## Your advice on window display?

A shop window can call attention to the merchandise within, throughout a seasonal “strategic marketing calendar”, where the brand meets the product and its customers. A common mistake that should be avoided is trying to communicate more than three key messages within a window. Continuity is key! Observe and judge your window design as if you were the customer. Change window displays every two to three weeks, although there is no rule as each brand is different from another.

## Your perception and experience of Indian retail?

The retail business in India is fast and fascinating. One can see a huge movement that is happening in the past few years, and this is only the beginning. India is very informed and the expectations are nearly as high as compared to Europe - sometimes even more. The value for money is well respected in India, and each project conception needs to be tested and verified throughout an onsite implementation process. We observe from mostly our own concepts, weeks after their implementation, to better understand customer reaction and shopping behaviour.

In the European countries, product display and visual appeal is given a lot of importance. As seasons change, the merchandise collections and even the planograms undergo a change. In the process, the store acquires a new look. This seasonal phenomenon or during new product arrivals is often supported by theme-based props and decoratives. This is still a new concept in India.

We also do a store analysis before starting a VM project, and we identify the brand’s DNA at the existing point of sales. Our clients understand that VM services is a holistic approach throughout the store where clients interact with the brand and the product. We have been responsible for the conception, design and implementation of the onsite set up and window design for The Collective in Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore. For fashion company Reid & Taylor we have created the

window design and the visual language of their two-storied 250m<sup>2</sup> flagship store in Bangalore. Our other clients in India include People, Raymond and Louis Philippe. Further, we have been consulting the luxury department stores by creating VM guidelines and training. In-Store Asia 2011 has been honouring this retail project with two awards in the categories “Best Window Display” and “Best Visual Merchandising”. ■

