



Are you ready to

TRANSFORM

your store?



SPRINGFAIR
AUTUMNFAIR

SAVE THE
HIGH STREET

Retail
MAKEOVER
MISSION



VISUAL MERCHANDISING & BRAND IDENTITY TOOLKIT

From John Abbate: Building your brand story through strategic display

Retail Design and Visual Merchandising Expert John Abbate, with international experience in meanwhile space projects, retail consulting, customer experience, visual merchandising [VM] and retail store design conception, is passionate about using his skills to support the evolution and vibrancy of the UK's high streets. He is a fellow of the British Display Society and has worked with brands such as Ralph Lauren.

CREATE YOUR BRAND DECK: THE FOUNDATION OF EVERYTHING

Why It Matters: "Brands need brand decks because it's really an easy way to understand their unique story and have a point of reference. It's their formula." - John Abbate

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMER [TARGET MARKET(S)]

- Find pictures that represent your customer's style. What does their world look like?
- Build a visual mood board with images of their lifestyle that matches your brand personality.
- Include relevant lifestyle images from your product catalogues
- What does their ideal home look like?
- What other brands/stores do they visit?
- Where do they go on holiday (as well as their dream hotel or resort)?
- What restaurants do they go to?

STEP 2: BUILD YOUR VISUAL

- What is your 'elevator pitch'? Summarise what you think your brand is all about. Approach it from the perspective of the brand itself
- Collect images that express your brand personality through interior design, inspirational photography, and specific visual references that set the mood.
- Notice which pictures stand out: "That picture means something", "That feels spot on", or "That picture is not us."
- Include visuals showing paint colours, textures, and lifestyle elements — not just products.
- Create a mood board that encapsulates your brand essence.

STEP 3: USE THIS AS 'YOUR FORMULA' OR BRIEF

"That formula becomes your reference point — whenever you need to make a decision or implement a change, you return back to it to guide

Window Dressing Methods

THE 2-SECOND RULE

"If someone looks at a window, they will look at it for less than two seconds. So, you need to communicate very quickly."

Have a window calendar laid out for the whole year and plan it in advance.

Here are some common window theme techniques. You can rotate them or choose ones that are more on brand and use consistently:

METHOD 1: BRAND LAUNCH WINDOWS

- **FOCUS:** Single brand spotlight
- **SETUP:** Dedicate entire window to one new collection or brand
- **PROPS:** Work with brands - ask what they use in their own stores
- **STORY:** Celebrate the arrival with cohesive styling
- **REFRESH:** Monthly or with new deliveries

METHOD 3: COLOUR STORY WINDOWS

- **FOCUS:** Monochromatic or complementary colour schemes
- **SETUP:** Pull products in same colour family across brands
- **PROPS:** Minimal, in matching tones
- **STORY:** Visual impact through colour harmony
- **REFRESH:** With trend changes or seasonal shifts

METHOD 2: LIFESTYLE STORYTELLING

- **FOCUS:** Complete lifestyle moment
- **SETUP:** Product focus presented in a narrative i.e. Mother-daughter styling (OSO example), vacation looks, work-to-weekend
- **PROPS:** Display items that reflect your visual identity as portrayed in your brand deck and build a story and create a theme for the product focus. Where the seasonal story meets your brand identity.
- **STORY:** Show how products fit into real life i.e. for OSO a Mediterranean ambiance with the bust form looks as actors in the scene created with the props or for Taba Naba, an extension of a gardening story inspired by their brand and topical seasonal story.
- **REFRESH:** Seasonally or for special occasions.

METHOD 4: TREND SPOTLIGHT

- **FOCUS:** Key seasonal trends (like crochet, as mentioned in transcript)
- **SETUP:** Mix brands that carry the trend
- **PROPS:** Reinforce the trend theme
- **STORY:** Position store as trend authority
- **REFRESH:** Every 4-6 weeks to be topical and up to date



Advanced VM Strategies

CREATE CUSTOMER FLOW

- **FRONT DISPLAYS** draw customers in and act as your second window, especially when seen from the outside. The ideal customer journey is 'See – Try – Buy'. The window attracts attention; the customer looks in the store and is drawn in. This front display is also referred to as the 'hot spot'. Perimeter merchandising in this area will often display new products or rotate product categories to keep the journey fresh for loyal customers.
- **MIDDLE AREAS**, the customer journey continues, and this is where shopping is most likely to happen, so try to encourage exploration and let VM be your silent seller until you engage them.
- **BACK ZONES** can be about house experience and discovery if you have space for experiential retail (events and workshops) or are often where fitting rooms are if you sell apparel. Best sellers can also be merchandised toward the back of the store to encourage customers to experience the entire store from back to front.
- **TILL AREA** captures last-minute add-on sales, items to test. Do not over-display the cash desk; sometimes, one item nicely displayed can be more effective. Leave space for wrapping purchases.

THE POWER OF PROPS

Props play a key role in visual merchandising — they help set the scene, give context to the products, and make displays more engaging and memorable for customers

SOURCING PROPS:

- Help tell stories, but should not compete with products, which is always the hero
- Props are best to put in areas that are not primary selling zones. Top shelves, on the floor or used to reinforce a table top display story. Windows are usually where props can be most effective to tell stories
- Props can also be practical and used for product display e.g. trunks for nesting tables, items that act as risers or jewellery displays
- Sourcing props can be done locally in your town rather than online
- Your brand deck will help you choose what style of props is appropriate
- Home decoration, vintage stores or charity shops can be good for unique character pieces
- When sourcing props stay laser-focused on your brand story when shopping
- Filter through the many options using your mood board reference

BREAKING UP VISUAL MONOTONY

- Mix textures within colour stories
- Vary heights in displays
- Use solid pieces to break up busy patterns
- Use basic rules of composition to make pleasing displays to look at
- Create visual triangles with product placement
- You can balance displays with a central storytelling highlight display with product merchandising on either side. This allows for an focal interesting display that leads to easy choosing of the product for purchase

Brand Identity through VM

THINK LIKE A BRAND, NOT JUST A SHOP

"A lot of independents... don't think of themselves as brands. They just think of them as this little shop."

KEY QUESTIONS: STORY

- Does your shop have a professional atmosphere with high standards, like chain stores?
- What's your brand personality?
- How does every display reinforce your identity?
- What story does your space tell about who shops there?
- How do customers feel when they walk in?

CONSISTENCY ACROSS ALL TOUCHPOINTS

- Window displays reflect and are inspired by the brand mood board
- Interior displays tell a cohesive story and are easy to shop
- Product placement supports the customer journey
- Props and colours align with brand identity, but the right balance to not overdecorate and keep the product the hero
- We are encouraging add-on sales and upselling



Quick Win Action Plan

DAY 1: BRAND IDENTITY

- Identify your core customer profile
- Complete brand deck exercise
- Audit current displays against brand identity

DAY 2: WINDOWS

- Choose one window dressing method to implement
- Source 2-3 key props that support your brand story if doing a life style window
- Create your first brand-focused window display
- Make a yearly calendar to map out and plan for your window displays well in advance
- Allocate a budget to do key selling period windows

DAY 3: INTERIOR FLOW

- Map the customer journey through your space, having zones for new products, best sellers, and add-on sales
- The flow allows for easy and effective navigation that makes sense and excites the customer
- Use hot-spots following the story in your window to encourage 'See – Try – Buy' or near the till for add-on sales

ONGOING: REFINEMENT

- Observe customer behaviour and dwell time
- Keep product moving around to avoid 'blind spots'. 'You may hear 'Is this new? I haven't seen it before', when the product was lost, and now can be found.
- Adjust based on what's working
- Create a journey that helps the customer experience the entirety of your space and offering
- Plan next month's brand storytelling themes

Remember

"It all starts with that mood board... which relates back to the customer."

The foundation of great visual merchandising isn't about following rules - it's about knowing who you are as a brand and communicating that story through every visual choice you make. Basic VM techniques go from Macro to Micro and are like a good book:

- The store exterior and windows are the cover
- The zones are the chapters
- The merchandising within a zone are the paragraphs
- How products are displayed, in what order, and mixed together are the sentences, grammar and punctuation

Make your store a pleasant and engaging experience that reads well and has them coming back for more.

For more tools and resources, visit our *Inside Retail* hub at Spring & Autumn Fair, or register for a free ticket to any of our upcoming trade shows:

[SPRINGFAIR.COM/INSIDE-RETAIL](https://springfair.com/inside-retail)