

4.3 The art of noticing: market ‘asymmetry’ – the art of visual merchandising and its impact on shoppers’ experience

Objective

The objective of this task is to observe how large stores organize their shelf space for the twofold objective of improving the shopping experience for customers, and improving their economic performances. Large stores have the apparent objective of making more revenue, and they tend to do this playing on quantity. The merchandise's rotation speed, typically measured as the average time a given item spends on the shelf before being bought, is crucial. Large stores want to minimize that time for several reasons. Quick rotation means fewer warehouse costs and implies customers find what they want quickly, and they can use their time buying more or better enjoy their experience. Besides, a fast and successful shopping experience also translates into higher customer rotation and more revenues.



Figure 4.3a - Serviced cosmetics department in a large department store.

Instructions

Watch the following TED talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeQ7C4JLpug> to learn how experts use eye-tracking technology to map shelf space based on customers viewing habits and attention. Take note of noticeable tricks and solutions that are presented.

1. Pick a large store such as a supermarket or a large department store (we suggest picking up a store where you regularly shop).

2. Take a walk in the store and observe how merchandise is displayed by paying particular attention to whether the display is primarily symmetric or asymmetric.
3. Extend the analysis to the store's layout to see if it has any symmetry (or asymmetry)
4. Make some sketches of what you notice.
5. Overall, report at least 5 cases in which symmetry is deliberately or accidentally broken (e.g., in the way products are displayed on supermarket shelves) and comment on why such a breaking occurs and the consequences on the shoppers' behaviour. Use the following table to answer these questions (see example in the first row). Try to spot bad displaying or layout solutions that slow down rotation).

Observed symmetry or asymmetry	Intent (make assumptions)	Observed consequences on shoppers' behaviour	Would you suggest any change?
Layout symmetry: Dairy eggs and frozen food at the very end of the supermarket opposite to fresh produce that are near the main entrance.	Push customers to walk across the store anyway to get products that are likely to be bought with high frequency so they can buy more of what they do not need right away. Help customers to buy products that need refrigeration at the end of their shopping.	Some customers would prefer to have quicker access to frequently bought items such as milk and eggs.	Add a quick-buy stand near the entrance for shoppers in a rush.

References

Burke, R. (2014), How stores track your shopping behavior, TEDxIndianapolis, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeQ7C4JLpug>