

MANNEQUIN MARKETING

HOW TO USE MANNEQUINS TO CREATE EYE-CATCHING
DISPLAYS THAT GENERATE PROFITS

By Ruben Chavez

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

This e-book was written with the sincere desire to help you get the most out of your mannequin purchase. Whether you're a small business owner, event planner, brand promoter, or anyone else who needs to create effective displays, we encourage you to **share this e-book** with anyone else who you think might benefit from it. You are also free to print it.

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Table of Contents

Introduction **WHAT IS MANNEQUIN MARKETING?**

Page 4

Merchandising = Marketing • The birth of mannequin marketing • CLASS checklist • Boutiques, tradeshow and special events • What makes a successful display?

Chapter 1 **CONNECTION**

Page 8

Mannequins are like Tiger Woods • Don't be creepy • Realistic mannequins • Abstract mannequins • Mannequin Forms • Full size mannequins • Personalize your merchandise • One is the loneliest number • Lifestyle merchandising

Chapter 2 **LIVELINESS**

Page 14

iMannequin • A mannequin by any other name • A mannequin wedding • Tell a story without telling a story • Mannequins for Dummies

Chapter 3 **ATTRACTIVENESS**

Page 18

Cosby show episode • McDonald's and Mannequins • Shoppers are visual people • Two aspects of attractiveness • Classy mannequins vs. "Bargain bin" mannequins • Preventative mannequin maintenance • Emphasize your products, maximize your profits • Increase your average transaction size

Chapter 4 **SIMPLICITY**

Page 24

So...what's your point? • If you say 10 things, you say nothing

Chapter 5 **SHOCK VALUE**

Page 26

Combat boots and dresses • The "cocktail party" question • How to get your business featured on CNN and increase your sales by 30%...with Mannequins! • Stop 'em dead in their tracks • Give them something to talk about • Play with their emotions

Epilogue **THE LAST MANNEQUIN STANDING**

Page 29

Introduction:

WHAT IS MANNEQUIN MARKETING?

Using mannequins to display your merchandise and promote your business is a remarkably profitable sales strategy if done properly. Most people don't immediately associate mannequins with the concept of increasing profits as much as they might with creepy scenes or cheesy movies*, which is exactly why using these versatile displays gives you such a tremendous advantage as a small business owner, store manager, or sales director.

The reality is, most small businesses severely underestimate the benefits of these time-tested merchandising tools. How many store owners or managers do you know who are experts in the art and science of effective product display, otherwise known as **visual merchandising**? Probably not many. It's no secret that retail sales is largely a presentation game. Yet it's bewildering why so many businesses put such extensive effort into marketing and advertising aimed at attracting customers to their store, but pay little attention to the visual presentation of their merchandise. That's the retail equivalent of inviting guests over to your house for dinner, only to inform them upon arrival that you've not actually prepared any food, but only desired their presence. You can be sure they won't be coming over to your house for "dinner" very often with that bait and switch move.

Merchandising = Marketing

Before we go any further, let's first reframe the phrase "visual merchandising." This terminology is too abstract and general for our purposes, so let's dissect its core meaning. Merchandising is the arrangement of products in a retail environment. As previously mentioned, the art and science of doing this in a visually appealing manner is known formally as *visual* merchandising. But what is the end goal of merchandising? Essentially, it is to get people to buy stuff. This is, incidentally, also the end goal of *marketing*.

In fact, the legendary marketing guru Jay Conrad Levinson, who is responsible for some of the most famous and successful advertising campaigns of our time, defines marketing in his book *Guerrilla Marketing* as "every bit of contact your company has with anyone in the outside world." Most business people are familiar with the subject of marketing and feel more comfortable talking in terms of marketing rather than "displays" or "merchandising." Therefore, to more clearly articulate the purpose of this book, I will replace the term 'visual merchandising' with *mannequin marketing*—'mannequin' because that is the primary display tool we'll be discussing and 'marketing' because it's an easier

term to grasp than 'merchandising.' It will also help you to more easily remember the true purpose of merchandising.

The Birth of *Mannequin Marketing*

In 2008 I had an epiphany that prompted me to write this e-book. I realized that most business people do not have any background in display, which, in retail sales is a serious handicap. Many store owners, I noticed, were approaching their merchandising in a very haphazard manner. This was due in no small part to the fact that there was (and still is) a serious lack of information available pertaining *specifically* to the effective use of mannequins for commercial display. After all, displaying with mannequins is much different than merely stocking merchandise on shelves or racks.

To add insult to injury, most businesses dangerously undervalue the importance of proper merchandising principles, especially as it relates to the use of mannequins. The truth is, visual merchandising (or in our case, mannequin marketing) is a viable sales generator and has been for decades. In fact, studies have consistently shown that clothing sells better when displayed on mannequins and body forms rather than on conventional displays such as racks or hangers. Unfortunately for you, (or fortunately, if you decide to follow the advice in this book) these facts are consistently overlooked by retail businesses in virtually every category. Larger department and chain stores are more keen on this, but smaller operations all too frequently underestimate the value of effective mannequin displays. That's why it's to your advantage to understand that, whether you own a vegetable stand or a high end boutique, visual appeal plays an undeniably critical role in sales and, ultimately, in customer loyalty.

There are specific principles involved in the creation of effective mannequin displays, all of which can be easily learned and applied to your particular business or situation. This is true even if you have no background in display at all. Although mannequin marketing is not an exact science—and I admit there's no *guaranteed* formula for constructing a "successful" mannequin display—all effective displays do, indeed draw from a common set of characteristics that makes them more likely to succeed.

After having conducted exhaustive research in the fields of consumer psychology, visual merchandising, and mannequin display trends, as well as personally working with numerous retail store owners, I've distilled the most essential elements of successful displays down to five principles. These five principles can be easily remembered using the mnemonic device CLASS, which is an acronym for **Connection, Liveliness, Attractiveness, Shock value,** and **Simplicity.** (Of course, it's purely coincidental that our company website is ClassyMannequins.com). As a bonus, the word itself is also a reminder to always display your products with elegance and style. Here's a brief overview of the CLASS Checklist, which we'll be covering in greater depth throughout this book:

Principle #1: Connection

How will you connect on a personal level with your customers through your mannequin displays? First, decide who your customer is. Determining exactly *who* you're trying to appeal to will make it much easier to display the most appropriate types of mannequins and merchandise for your business. Make people feel like they belong in your store. Personalize your merchandise.

Principle #2: Liveliness

How will you bring your displays to life and make them more interesting? Take advantage of the fact that mannequins are the only type of display tools that are able to have a sense of personality. Give them names. Use props. Create storylines. Make them more like salespeople and less like shelving units.

Principle #3: Attractiveness

How will you ensure that your mannequins help create a favorable first impression of your place of business on prospective customers? Make your displays easy on the eyes. The most beautiful, highest quality clothing and accessories in the world will look unattractive on a cheap or even slightly damaged mannequin. Mannequins are like salespeople; make them look nice. Create eye-catching displays using your most visually appealing and best-selling items.

Principle #4: Shock value

How will you leave a lasting impression on your customers and get them to talk about your store, company, and products with others? Be unexpected. Be provocative. Think outside the display case. Take risks. Be controversial. Display odd clothing combinations that may not be liked, but will be remembered. Consider not using mannequins to display merchandise at all, but rather as publicity tools.

Principle #5: Simplicity

How will you communicate your sales message clearly and quickly to your customers? Find your core message and translate it visually. Most of us process information more effectively if it is presented visually. Display mannequins in a way that conveys your sales message and converts passersby into shoppers and ultimately into buyers.

Therefore, the goal of this book is to help you consistently create CLASSy displays (cheesy, I know). Obviously, you'll want to customize each idea that is presented to fit your particular store environment, marketing appeal and customer base. Trust your instincts. Experiment. Test out new techniques. Implement new ideas. You'll find excellent starting points and muses throughout this book. Having said that, I'm certainly not naïve enough to think that every single idea presented here will work for every person in every situation all the time. But by and large, these principles are applicable under almost any circumstances. Regardless of the type of mannequins you use or even

the type of business you own, the CLASS checklist will give you a “leg up” on your competition. (Pardon the mannequin humor).

Store Displays, Trade Shows, and Special Events...Oh My!

Mannequins can be used effectively in a variety of different environments and for a variety of purposes. The information and advice contained in this guide is tailored for small businesses, such as clothing boutiques, hat and wig shops, sporting good stores and other small retail establishments. Of course, these businesses aren't limited to promoting themselves only within the property lines of their storefronts. Many also wisely participate in other promotional activities to show off their products, such as trade shows. However, for ease of writing (for me) and reading (for you), I'll usually refer collectively to all the different types of venues in which you might use mannequins as 'store' or 'shop' throughout this book. Regardless of the environment in which you choose to use your mannequins, this guide will help you realize their full potential as functional displays.

What makes a “Successful Display?”

Your precise definition of a “successful” or “effective” mannequin display may vary slightly, depending on your particular situation. For instance, if you're organizing a trade show display, you probably want your mannequin to succeed in catching the attention of people passing by your booth, causing them to stop and inquire further about your products and/or services. If you own a clothing store, you'll likely judge the efficacy of your displays by how well an item sells when it is shown on a mannequin relative to when it is not.

Fundamentally, however, there are two main purposes that mannequins serve: 1) To promote buying and 2) To promote the image of your business or cause (which ultimately leads to buying). That's worth repeating: **An effective display is one that either has a measurable positive effect on the sale of the merchandise it displays, or, at the very least, favorably promotes your company's image.** The most attractive, cleverly designed mannequin display is useless if it does not serve at least one of these two purposes. Ultimately, an effective display should prompt action. So, too, should an effective book. My hope is that this is one such book. Go forth and display with CLASS.

*Ruben Chavez
Tucson, Arizona 2009*

* *The Mannequin* is a 1987 film about a young artist who falls in love with a mannequin he creates.

Chapter 1:

CONNECTION

Who is your customer? This is the basic question that needs to be answered before any effective merchandising (or *any* marketing for that matter) can take place. As the saying goes, you can't be all things to all people. You need to decide who your ideal customer is and what type of person you want to appeal to. This is the essence of connecting with your shoppers.

Ultimately, people want to *feel* a certain way when they wear new clothes and buy new things. There's a lot more to the psychology of buying than merely purchasing what fits. It goes much deeper than that. People have certain psychological needs, which are amplified when they shop. Customers have big egos. They have a need to feel unique and express their individuality. They want to project an attitude or a social standing. This is especially true of the more affluent customers of high-end stores and boutiques.

Why do people shop at *your* store? If this is a difficult question for you to answer, then you do not know your customer well enough. Pinpointing your target customer makes it easier to more accurately determine their specific psychological needs and pander to them accordingly.

Mannequins Are Like Tiger Woods

How do mannequins fit into this equation? First, it's important to understand the role that mannequins play in a store setting. They are, in essence, your company's spokespeople. Since mannequins are often displayed prominently in store windows or toward the front of the store, they are usually the customers' first point of identification with your store. In a sense, they *represent* your store. Just as the Cover Girl models represent that brand, so, too should your mannequins represent your store. Just as Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan largely represent the image of Nike, so, too should your mannequins represent the image of *your* business. If not your business, then certainly the immediate location where you have them displayed.

It may seem ridiculous to compare mannequins to celebrity spokespeople, but in a store environment—especially in a small business environment—they *are* the celebrities. (I would also add that they are pleasantly less expensive than an endorsement from Tiger Woods).

Don't Be Creepy

If it's true that mannequins are the customers' first point of identification with your store, then it would make sense from a psychological standpoint to ensure that they *represent* your customers in some way. The idea is to make your customer feel like they belong in your store. Therefore, mannequins should look like your customer.

I'm not suggesting that you have wax figures made of your most loyal shoppers. That's just creepy. What I mean is that your mannequins should resemble your customer on a basic level. For example, if your customer base is made up of largely Hispanics and your shop is located in a part of town where Hispanics are a relatively large demographic, then you probably don't want to have 20 towering Caucasian supermodel mannequins with blonde hair and blue eyes displayed throughout your store. That's not relatable. In this case, more ethnic-looking mannequins may be appropriate.

As a small business, you have the luxury of being able to do this since you can appeal to a more targeted customer base, as opposed to, say, a department store that needs to appeal to the masses. Ultimately, your choice of mannequins must also take into account the type of merchandise you sell and the aim of your business. It's important, however to at least be aware of this factor.

Realistic Mannequins

In this regard, realistic mannequins—as opposed to abstract mannequins—usually prove to be the most relatable. Realistic mannequins can be great assets because customers can easily identify them to be of a particular ethnicity, gender, and even social standing.

A study done by two cognitive psychologists showed that a customer's perception of the suitability of a store was largely dependant upon answering the question "Who else shops there?" If the clientele was judged to be of the same socio-economic standing as the shopper, the subject was more likely to frequent that place of business.

We naturally gravitate to places where there are people like us. As silly as it may sound, mannequins are often the first human figures that passersby see in or around your store, trade show booth, or place of business. This is why it's important that your mannequin displays immediately connect with your customer. In her book *Vital Mummies: Performance Design for the Show-Window Mannequin*, Sara K. Schneider writes:

"The primary argument still advanced in favor of the realistic female mannequin is that in all figure types, it most readily permits the customer to imagine how a particular garment will look on her. This process is, in part, a matter of identification and projection. The customer both sees herself in the mannequin and sees the mannequin ideal body instead of her own

imperfect one. Women have been trained, perhaps by exposure to retail modeling to project their own bodies and personalities onto that of a figure wearing a garment they desire.”

Abstract Mannequins

By contrast, abstract mannequins are ageless, non-ethnic and sometimes even gender-neutral. Because of these characteristics, they tend to lend themselves to being more dramatic than realistic ones. In fact, many fashion designers *prefer* abstract mannequins over realistic ones because they want the attention focused on the clothing rather than on the mannequin itself. It’s even been said by some mannequin designers that abstract mannequins may convey the greatest effect of realism of all. This opinion stems from the argument that people are more apt to “mentally switch places” with an abstract mannequin because it has less of an identity than a realistic one, thereby being somewhat more of a “blank slate,” which the customer can then fill in with his or her own identity.

However, this seems to only be true in *some* cases. Juniors’ clothing, for instance, usually sells better on abstract mannequins because children have a better imagination and can envision themselves in a particular item more readily than an adult can.

As a general rule of thumb, abstract mannequins become more effective and more appropriate the more upscale your store is. If you prefer to keep your displays more neutral, abstract mannequins are a better option than realistic ones. The type of mannequin you choose, however, ultimately depends on your assessment of your customers’ perception and preferences.

Mannequin Forms

Also known as body forms, the word ‘form’ is a general term referring to any one of several isolated segments of a mannequin’s body. For instance, if your company sells only T-shirts, you may choose to display them on a torso form to emphasize the product. Likewise, pants are often displayed on isolated leg forms. This is a more cost-efficient way of displaying your merchandise, but tends to limit your display options to a certain extent.

A tried and true way of displaying men’s clothing in particular is with mannequin body forms. In general, full bodied males are less commonly used to display traditional merchandise than mannequin forms are. This practice dates back to the very early display days during WWII when male mannequins were not used at all, the reason being that if you were to see a male fashion mannequin in a window dressed to the nines, it would look starkly out of place. After all, many men at that time were at war, far from being fashion icons.

Full Size Mannequins

This term refers to standard “department store” mannequins that most people think of when they hear the word ‘mannequin.’ These mannequins have all four limbs and are usually standing, but are sometimes found in other positions as well. They generally offer the greatest flexibility in terms of constructing a CLASSy display. The term is used throughout this book, mainly to distinguish between partial body forms and full-body mannequins.

Personalize Your Merchandise

Regardless of the type of mannequin you use, the paramount advantage of high quality display mannequins—and one that you should exploit relentlessly—is that they *personalize the merchandise*. Mannequins help shoppers visualize what they would look like in a particular outfit or wearing a particular item. When people see a mannequin dressed in a garment that piques their interest, you want them to think something along the lines of: “If I buy that item, I’ll look as good as that mannequin does!” This is the fundamental psychology behind the customer-mannequin connection. This works because, contrary to popular belief, many of us give ourselves the benefit of the doubt when it comes to our physical appearance, even if we may outwardly feign modesty or insecurity. In our heart of hearts, we want to believe that we’re at least somewhat “mannequin-shaped.” Help customers to see themselves wearing your merchandise by showing them how it looks on attractive bodies.

It’s important to keep in mind that there are certain articles of clothing and even entire categories of merchandise that look terrible when displayed by themselves, without a mannequin. For example, various types of loose-fitting dresses literally look like an empty sack when they are displayed alone on a hanger. They simply have no shape whatsoever by themselves because they take the form of whatever body is inside them. Do your customers a favor and put an attractive body inside them. Emphasize this type of merchandise by displaying it on a mannequin, whether it be a partial body form or full size model. Demonstrating how clothing, accessories and other merchandise look on an actual human form makes a significant difference in how well you visually connect with your customers and how well your products sell.

One is the Loneliest Number

There are certain items that should *never* be displayed alone, such as necklaces, rings, and other jewelry. These items always look better and make a better connection with your customer when they are displayed in a way that helps people construct a mental image of themselves wearing the item. Necklaces, for example, are infinitely more attractive when shown on velvet busts or ring finger displays rather than hanging loosely on a small rack or in a tray. However, you can increase the effectiveness of your jewelry displays even further by showing them in a more realistic way. For instance, instead of

displaying necklaces on smaller, more traditional v-neck velvet necklace stands, place them on mannequin head busts. For rings, it may be advantageous to display them on an elegant mannequin hand instead of individual cookie-cutter ring finger displays. You might even consider cross-selling jewelry by displaying it on full size mannequins already displaying other merchandise (more on cross-selling in a later chapter).

Doing these things makes it easier for shoppers to quickly identify something they like. Most people don't have the time or desire to dig through racks and shelves of clothing to come up with a perfectly matched ensemble. It's much more convenient for a customer to look at a mannequin that is already sporting the hottest selling outfit of the season and think to themselves, "That looks great! I would have never thought of that combination." You want to make the decision making process as easy as possible for your customer.

Fortunately, you have a very important factor working in your favor that makes this work. That is, the majority of shoppers and passersby automatically assume that whoever dressed the mannequins in your store paid careful attention to aesthetics and put a great deal of thought into what merchandise to display. If it's an outfit, they're likely to assume it's the most fashionable combination in the store. If there are shoes displayed with it, they'll figure that if they decide to buy the outfit, those shoes would be the most sensible option to round out the ensemble.

As pathetic as it may sound, many of us want decisions to be made for us. Of course, put in those terms, we'd never admit that, but it's true. Leave less decision making up to your customer. Use market research, previous sales data, and in-store surveys to create merchandise combinations you know will appeal to your clientele. This may seem obvious and commonsensical, but it is amazing to see how often this principle is neglected.

Lifestyle Merchandising

A term you'll want to commit to memory is *lifestyle merchandising*. It plays a crucial role in connecting with your customers. Lifestyle merchandising means reflecting your customers' world within a display. Put differently, it means depicting a snapshot of their lifestyle using mannequins. This is especially true for window displays because they lend themselves to more theatrical scenes. Robert Kowalczyk, a former visual merchandiser for Saks Fifth Avenue, once said: "When one of my assistants dresses a mannequin, my first question is, 'Where is she going? She's not just standing there in the store. She's jogging. She's at the club. She's on her way to a cocktail party.'"

Let's say you own a casual women's clothing store located near a college campus. You display a full size female mannequin in your store window and dress her in your best selling halter top, low-rise jeans, and stylish flats. So far so good. Then you dress the

window to match the season, putting up a canvas backdrop of greenery and sunshine. Now, this would probably look very attractive. However, what does it say about your customer? Specifically, what message does it communicate? The truth is, it's a rather general display.

Now, take the same mannequin and instead put a backdrop of a college football game, maybe an enlarged photo or canvas mural. Then accompany the lone mannequin with two or three mannequin friends, maybe a male and a couple female companions. What you've just done once again is *personalize the merchandise* for your customer. You've shown your products in an environment where your customer is likely to find herself and, more importantly, in a place where she is likely to *enjoy* herself. Note that the underlying assumption in this scene is that other people in this setting would be dressed similarly, subtly playing on our desire to assimilate. This type of display makes it easier for her, psychologically, to visualize herself wearing and ultimately purchasing the merchandise.

The fundamental principle of lifestyle merchandising is that you can sell more of an item by invoking a situation in which it can be realistically worn or used attractively, in which it is needed and in which it can enhance your customer's image. Therefore, not only should it be your goal for your customer to visualize herself *wearing* a particular item, but also for her to *visualize the environment* in which she might use that particular item. It's about relating to the customer and showing them that your company and its products are for *people like them*.

Next: How to bring your mannequin displays to life...

Chapter 2:

LIVELINESS

In the context of mannequin marketing, liveliness refers to the human-like qualities that mannequins possess. After all, they are your “silent sales staff.” Mannequins are, in fact, the best salespeople you’ll ever have, if used correctly. Imagine having sales associates who never take breaks or call in sick, always show up on time, and don’t even require a paycheck! Or, what if you had a beautiful supermodel modeling your merchandise full-time in your store or all day long at your trade show booth? In this regard, mannequins are the closest thing to reliable employees you’ll get without actually hiring new people (and much less expensive, I might add).

A helpful way of thinking about the Liveliness principle is as an extension of the Connection principle. Emphasizing the liveliness of your mannequin displays helps to solidify the customer-merchandise connection. Two of the best ways to create a sense of liveliness in your mannequin displays are: 1) to give your mannequins a sense of personality and 2) build a storyline into your displays.

iMannequin

Mannequins, more than any other type of display, lend themselves to having a sense of personality. This may sound strange (and possibly creepy) since they are, of course, inanimate objects, but compared to standard “cold” store fixtures such as shelving units, racks, and hangers, they are much “warmer” displays.

A stellar example of a company putting this principle into practice is Old Navy, who has recently produced a series of television commercials and internet ads that humorously anthropomorphize their mannequins. They give them names, voices, and emotions. They even go as far as creating mini-biographies of the lives of each “supermodelquin,” told through a cleverly spoofed documentary of an E! True Hollywood Story. Before reading any further, it would be to your advantage to take some time to watch a couple of these ads. They are educational as well as very entertaining. To view them, go to www.ClassyMannequins.com/oldnavy.

Obviously, Old Navy is in a different league than you are. They have the budget to pull off an advertising campaign this elaborate, whereas you probably do not. That doesn’t matter. It’s not the specific media that is important, it’s the principle: Add personality to your mannequins.

A Mannequin by Any Other Name...

I personally know the owner of a boutique that sells purses, hats and other accessories who has a number of mannequin heads displaying some of his merchandise in his front store window. What's unique about these mannequin heads is that they all have names, which his customers have chosen through a voting sheet he has at the checkout counter. In fact, he's gone as far as having nameplates made for each head, which he places in the window, along with a brief story of the merchandise. It's a small, family-owned shop and his customers get a kick out of it.

In extreme examples, even partial body forms can be anthropomorphized in this way, giving a more comedic effect to the display. Certainly, a lower body pant display form named Frank will cause people to chuckle a bit.

Another way to create a persona for your mannequins is make use of props that customers can relate to. Examples of this include having a mannequin listening to an ipod or talking on a cell phone. Humanize the display, but not in an eerie way. Mannequins have a stigma of being creepy; obviously that is not the goal here.

The second way to inject liveliness into your mannequin displays is to make them part of a storyline. The Old Navy advertisements are great examples here as well, but there is also another one I'd like to share with you.

A Mannequin Wedding

The manager of a snowmobile business wanted to draw attention to a month-long sales event his store was having. He used the mannequins in his front store window to act out a mini-drama over the next few weeks, suggesting a romantic relationship between a male and female mannequin. Eventually, people became so eager to watch the story unfold that they began paying visits to the store just to see what would happen next.

The story climaxed in—get this—the *marriage* of the mannequin couple. Now just how do two mannequins get married, you ask? The same way two people would, of course! The store manager joined the local celebrities in matrimony in a ceremony held at a park, which a large number of people from the community attended. Not only did this business gain the attention of prospective customers, it also received free publicity through local news coverage. You can see the entire Mannequin Wedding video here: www.ClassyMannequins.com/mannequinwedding.

The point of this story is that your customers should feel that they're part of what's taking place in your displays, rather than being an unseen observer or outsider. You can choose to extend your storyline or over a period of days or weeks, depending on your message and situation. This will get people talking, but more importantly, it will turn

your mannequins into *dynamic display pieces*. This cannot be said about many other merchandising tools.

Tell a Story Without Telling a Story

An easy, effortless way to insinuate a storyline and bring more liveliness into your displays is to place your mannequins in groups of three to five. Their close proximity alone, combined with clever posing and positioning is enough to suggest a relationship between them. People will tend to fill in the blanks with their own assumptions and experiences. Relationships are always relatable; we all have them and we all think we know a thing or two about them.

Back in the 1950's and 60's, during the early display days, this concept was described as a situation window. At that time, these were much more elaborate mini-dramas that occurred inside store windows. Visual merchandisers back then even compared their profession to that of theater directors. In fact, the art of visual merchandising was often called street theater.

Mannequins for Dummies

ClassyMannequins.com has variety of high quality mannequins that are appropriate for many different types of displays and satisfy a wide variety of needs. However, if you happen to find a mannequin that you like but it does not have the functionality you need for a certain unique display idea, don't be afraid to get creative. Think outside the box. For instance, the arms of full size mannequins can often be loosened and swiveled in their socket. Experiment with leaning your mannequin against a wall to give it a different pose and make it seem more lively. You might consider covering the metal base with a sheet or other floor covering to give the displays a more seamless effect.

You should treat mannequins like living, breathing beings and not dummies. If you treat them as dummies, all they will be are inanimate objects—lifeless displays, no better than racks or shelves.

Next: How to boost sales by making your mannequin displays more attractive...

Get an Edge on the Competition

ClassyMannequins.com offers two levels of membership to our customers. Each has special benefits such as discounts, extended product guarantees, and early notice of new product releases.

Find out more at www.ClassyMannequins.com/membership.

Chapter 3:

ATTRACTIVENESS

In an episode of *The Cosby Show*, Vanessa, the middle daughter of the Huxtable family, shocks her parents by suddenly announcing that she is engaged. Her parents have never met her fiancée, nor were they even aware she had a boyfriend.

She unexpectedly brings Dabnis, her fiancée, over to her parent's house to meet them. During the course of their conversation, her parents discover that Dabnis is almost ten years older than Vanessa and works as a maintenance man at her school. To make matters worse, Dabnis reveals that Vanessa and him have been engaged for six months and also admits that they told his parents about their engagement as soon as it happened.

Vanessa's parents, offended and disappointed, reluctantly invite Dabnis over for dinner that night, where Cliff, Vanessa's dad, bluntly tells him that they just do not like him. Dabnis becomes apologetic, but Cliff explains that it is not he, but Vanessa, who is to blame.

Cliff tries to put the situation in perspective for the young man. "Do you have a favorite food?" He asks Dabnis. "Something that you really *love*?"

"Oh yeah," Dabnis says with a smile. "On occasion I enjoy a nice, juicy steak."

"Steak! Steak! There you go!" Cliff says excitedly. "Now, just imagine...we've got the Porterhouse—no white lines in it at all. Now what would you like to go along with it?" He asks Dabnis.

"Uh...some crispy potatoes!" Dabnis responds enthusiastically.

"No problem!" Cliff snaps back. "Now, you've got mushrooms. You like your mushrooms?"

"Yes Sir." Dabnis says with a smile.

"You can *smell* it, can't you?" Cliff engages him.

"Yeah!"

"You smell the potatoes?"

"Yes Sir!"

"Smell the mushrooms?"

"Yes Sir!" Dabnis is practically drooling.

"*Sautéed!*" Cliff exclaims.

"Smells good." Dabnis says hungrily.

"Mmm, boy!" Cliff grins. "Alright, now I'm going to serve it to you. But I don't get a plate. I take the garbage can lid and I turn it upside down, after taking it off of the garbage can." Dabnis looks puzzled. "I take your steak, your potatoes and your sautéed mushrooms and I give it to you," Cliff says, as he pretends to place the imaginary food in one hand onto an imaginary garbage can lid in the other. Dabnis' expression turns somber. Cliff takes a serious tone, "Not too appetizing, is it?" He pauses and looks Dabnis dead in the eye. "It's in the *presentation*. That's the way she brought you here" he explains, gesturing to Vanessa, "on a garbage can lid."

Attractiveness, in the context of mannequin marketing, refers to the presentation of your displays. Presentation is important in most areas of life, but doubly so in retail merchandising and display. It can literally be the difference between a struggling business and a profitable company. We are a visually oriented culture. In general, if a product doesn't look good, we're hesitant to purchase it—even if it truly is a quality product. Whether you like it or not, we *do* judge a book by its cover, albeit subconsciously.

McDonald's and Mannequins

Using mannequins attractively is similar in principle to the methods that fast food joints use in their TV commercials. The burgers are picture perfect. They look *delicious*. Fluffy bun. Juicy, perfectly shaped patty. Crisp lettuce. Deep-red tomatoes.

You're hungry.

But when you get to McDonald's and reach inside your bag for your burger, all you find is a patty shaped like Texas on a soggy bun.

We'll assume your merchandise is not "a soggy bun."

The principle to glean from fast food advertising is to visually "hook" your customer. The reality is that your merchandise may not look as good on your customer

as it does on the mannequins. That's okay. There's a far lesser chance of losing revenue due to a return than due to a customer never purchasing the item in the first place because of an unattractive display.

Shoppers Are Visual People

About 65 percent of us fall into the category of those who communicate, learn, and process information more effectively through visual sensory input rather than auditory or kinesthetic. Not surprisingly, about 5 out of 10 customers make purchase decisions based on the visual presentation of a product *alone*.

Because we are visual creatures, we need to see ourselves wearing a particular outfit, accessory, or garment before we buy it. It's a natural part of the buying process for us to want to see how an item looks on an actual human form. "Is this shirt tapered or boxy?" we wonder. "Will those jeans hug my butt or do they have a loose fit?" Most customers don't have the time or patience to take every single item that interests them into the fitting room. Usually, a quick judgment is made, based solely on how an item looks on the hanger plus any mental images the customer can conjure up. Unfortunately, these quick judgments usually do not work in favor of the merchant.

Two Aspects of Attractiveness

The principle of Attractiveness can be segmented into two parts, both equally important. They are:

- 1) The physical appearance of the mannequin itself
- 2) The appearance of the display as a whole (of which the mannequin is only a part of)

We'll take each one in turn.

Classy Mannequins vs. "Bargain Bin" Mannequins

Let's start with the attractiveness of the mannequin itself. I wish I didn't have to write this part because it seems so painfully obvious, but, unfortunately, it is needed.

You want to use *classy mannequins*. That means attractive, customer-friendly mannequins. The opposite of classy mannequins would be cheap mannequins. We affectionately refer to these types of displays as *bargain bin mannequins*.

With cheap mannequins (as with most things in life) you get what you pay for. Saving twenty bucks on a display is pointless if it is ineffective and does nothing to enhance the appearance of your store or merchandise. The mannequins sold at

ClassyMannequins.com are premium quality, cutting-edge displays, proven to be effective in retail environments as well as in other promotional settings.

Why? Because we hold our manufacturers to extremely strict quality standards. When they send us a shipment, our Quality Assurance team carefully inspects and tests each item to ensure that it meets our specifications. This sometimes results in mannequins being refused due to even slight imperfections. However, this is not the case with most mannequin distributors. I know of several companies that frequently sell mannequins at “discounted” prices. These are usually mannequins that are either damaged or irregular in some way. Unfortunately, this information is usually not disclosed on their website and the product image that is used to sell the mannequin is normally a photo of the product *without* imperfections, from the manufacturer.

Yes, it’s important to use mannequins in your retail displays. Yes, its important to display your products and/or merchandise on mannequins as much as possible. *But*—and this is a big ‘but’—it *can* work against you. If you display your products on poor quality mannequins, for instance. Doing so does your customers—and your business—a huge disservice. Mannequins that are damaged (even slightly), deformed, disproportionate, creepy, old, cheesy-looking or unrealistic should be either refurbished or replaced.

It is extremely off-putting as a customer to walk into a store and see clothing displayed on a mannequin that is chipped, cracked, or simply looks odd. It may seem like a small thing, but if you’ve ever been in a serious romantic relationship, you know that *it’s the small things that count*. By the same token, if you want a serious *business* relationship with your customers, you must **pay attention to the small things**.

Regardless of the type of mannequins you use, make sure they are well-made and high quality. They should be constructed from durable fiberglass and have a flawless finish. They should not look stiff, like blow-up dolls, but have a natural human pose. Above all, they should *attract* customers and not repel them.

Proper maintenance is also an essential part of keeping your displays looking impeccable. Unlike humans, mannequins do not heal by themselves. When they receive nicks, scratches and breaks, you can’t just put a Band-Aid or a cast on them and expect them to be okay. The most common problems you’ll face in maintaining a mannequin are:

- Breakage (on the floor, during use, while transporting)
- Nicks and scratches
- Smudged make-up and dirt

There are companies that specialize in repairing and refurbishing old, damaged and used mannequins. However, depending on the type of mannequin and the cost involved, you may be better off by replacing the entire mannequin.

Preventative Mannequin Maintenance

Of course, the most cost-effective way to handle mannequin maintenance is to *prevent* damages and signs of wear and tear in the first place. Here are a few quick tips on preventative mannequin maintenance and storage:

1. When not in use, store your mannequins properly. You can buy “mannequin covers” that provide some cushion for them in storage. However, I’ve found that simply using bubble wrap is more effective (and less expensive).
2. When storing full size mannequins, wrap each individual finger in bubble wrap. These are the most vulnerable and commonly damaged parts of a mannequin.
3. Cover the mannequin’s face with a piece of felt cloth to preserve the makeup. Then wrap the entire head itself in bubble wrap. Imperfections on the face are the hardest to hide, so it’s important to take this precaution.
4. If you need to transport your mannequins, do so in a bin that is lined with cushion. At the very least, line it yourself with bubble wrap.
5. Buy some mannequin paint and keep it handy for touching up any nicks or scratches as they occur. See www.ClassyMannequins.com/resources for sources of mannequin paint.
6. Always have clean hands when handling your mannequins.
7. If your mannequins get smudges of dirt, use a mixture of toothpaste and water to clean them. Use a soft or old toothbrush to gently clean the smudged area in a circular motion.
8. When planning your displays, make sure they do not obstruct traffic. This will greatly reduce the number of customer-caused damages to your mannequins.

Emphasize Your Products, Maximize Your Profits.

The second aspect of Attractiveness refers to the appearance of mannequin displays *as a whole*. Obviously, you want all your displays to be eye-catching. You want them to get noticed. This is done primarily by displaying the right merchandise in the right way.

In retail, more than in any other type of business, you appeal to your customer by displaying eye-catching, attractive stuff right in front of their eyes. Likewise, mannequin marketing is about connecting your customer to your product. Almost always, this begins visually. Quality, well-made mannequins combined with well-thought out displays signal class. This ties back into marketing because, in a sense, it's all about how products and information are presented to the consumer. We all know examples of products that have been marketed so well that they outsell similar ones that are superior.

Increase Your Average Transaction Size

Using mannequins to strategically cross sell merchandise is a sneaky (but completely ethical) way of increasing your average sale. Mannequins give you the ability to subtly demonstrate how a particular item, which, by itself may not be terribly eye-catching, becomes super-stylish when combined with other merchandise.

For example, if you're showcasing a new line of designer hats on a series of mannequin heads, consider draping a scarf around each of them that complements the hat (that is, of course, if you also sells scarves). A good percentage of customers will splurge on the hat-scarf combo because they like the way it looks. It subliminally signals to them that the scarf *belongs* with the hat. However, if the combination had not been suggested by a savvy Mannequin Marketer, chances are much lower that the customer would have purchased the additional item. Congratulations, you've just increased your transaction size!

In this respect, visual display is actually a form of customer service in that it has the power to point customers toward what they might need, help them find what they want, and demonstrate how they might put it to use.

Seventy-seven percent of customer apparel purchases are of an unplanned nature. In other words, they are impulse purchases [Source: POPAI "Consumer Buying Habits Study" *Inglewood, NJ*]. Customers may be hesitant to purchase an item or item combination because they are unsure if it will look good. Make it easy for them. *Show* them it looks good. There's no better way to do this than with a classy-looking mannequin. You can't get this benefit with a shelf or hanger. Hangers allow you to display one, maybe two items at once; mannequins allow several.

You can take advantage this cross selling technique whether you're using mannequin heads, torso forms, jewelry displays or full size mannequins. You can cross sell everything from hats to shoes. You're choices are limited only by your imagination (or, more realistically, by your inventory). In a nutshell: **Make the customer feel like they're missing something.** This is how demand is created and trends are started.

Next: How to visually communicate your message and draw your customers in...

Chapter 4:

SIMPLICITY

This chapter will be fittingly to the point and easy to understand. In a word, simple. We've already discussed the importance of deciding who your customer is. Equally as important is deciding what your core message will be—not just of your company, but of each display you create. What message do you want to convey to your customers? Whatever it is, it should be *clearly communicated* through your mannequin displays.

There are two types of customers: shoppers and passersby. Or, if you prefer, customers and potential customers. Your goal, of course, is to turn the passerby into a shopper. Attracting their attention is the first step toward selling your merchandise. To do this, your displays must convey their point clearly and quickly. If they don't, people's attention will drift somewhere else.

So...What's Your Point?

If you're going to use props in your displays (which you should), if you're going to use story lines in your displays (which you should), and if you're going to use mannequin groupings (which you should), you need to do so with a **purpose**. Clearly communicate what is taking place in your presentations. Demonstrate a clear and understandable relationship between the mannequins, the merchandise, and any props used. There should be an obvious reason for your mannequin to be there. More importantly, your customer should be able to recognize what that reason is with a mere passing glance.

Let's say you sell hats and the core message you want to convey is "our hats are so fashionable, they will make you envied among your friends." To translate this message visually, you could display one of your best selling hats on a realistic, standing female mannequin in a coquettish pose. She might be stylishly dressed in a glamorous outfit, have beautiful makeup, and be surrounded by two or three other mannequins that are obviously admiring her and the gorgeous hat she's wearing. These other mannequins would not be wearing hats and would be slightly shorter than the one who is. They would also be more plain-looking, maybe even all white. You can see how this setup clearly and visually communicates the intended message.

If You Say 10 Things, You Say Nothing

The only way to successfully achieve visual clarity in your displays is to decide on a single message you want to communicate in each display. Only one. Get down to your core message. Don't confuse the customer. A successful attorney once said that if you make ten points in your closing argument—even if they're all very good points—when the jury

goes to deliberate, they won't remember any of them. Make one point and make it clearly. Don't try to communicate everything in one display. As renowned display artist, Toshi explains, "The visual merchandiser must make the merchandise not only beautiful but also easy to understand. A stunning composition which cannot be read in an instant cannot make a successful display."

Next: How to get people to talk about your business behind your back...

Chapter 5:

SHOCK VALUE

When I talk about shock value, I'm referring to the element of unexpectedness in your displays. Mannequins are so ubiquitous in department stores that customers usually tune them out, often not even giving them a second glance. This is due in part to the excessive amount of visual pollution in our world today. There is only so much visual sensory input that we can consciously notice. The principle of Shock Value will help you create displays that *command* attention and *refuse* to be ignored.

Combat Boots and Dresses

One way to get attention is to use unusual, unexpected, flamboyant, or outrageous merchandise combinations. For instance, you might dress a female mannequin in an elegant gown and combat boots or high heels and shorts. These type of displays will not appeal favorably to all customers. In fact, they're likely to be abhorred by some customers, but that's okay.

Creating polarizing displays may be in your best interest. This is a principle that celebrities and other people in the media use all the time. Not everyone is amused by the outrageous antics of Paris Hilton, still most everyone knows who she is. Regardless of what peoples' reactions and opinions are to your display, using this principle will catch the interest and, at the very least, the *attention* of people who come in contact with your business. Whether they love it or hate it, one thing people will always do is talk about it. If people talk about your displays, they will also, by extension talk about your business. This is a good thing.

The "Cocktail Party" Question

If a customer of yours was at a cocktail party, would she tell her friends about her experience at your store? This is a helpful question to ask yourself about your displays, as well as other parts of your business. Obviously, there are many ways to get people to talk about your store, including stellar customer service, excellent quality products, et cetera. But are these things interesting or newsworthy enough for a customer to use in an anecdote at a cocktail party?

However, even if customers don't say *anything* to anybody else, surprising clothing-accessory combinations will leave a lasting impression on them and give them a sense that your store and its merchandise are on the cutting edge of fashion. That's usually a good impression to leave.

How to Get Your Business Featured On CNN and Increase Your Sales By 30%...With Mannequins!

Kenny Tessel, the owner of a small barbeque restaurant whose sales were declining due to the recent economic downturn, used a scantily-clad female mannequin to boost business. He purchased the nearly six-foot tall, large-breasted mannequin and placed her just outside his shop near a busy street holding a sign with the daily specials. He even gave her a name—BarBe Q (cute, huh?). Sales picked up immediately. In fact, according to Tessel, after just three weeks, he had *70 new customers* enter his store and make a purchase, increasing business by a full *30 percent!* Tessel maintains that “barbecue is the new ‘sexy’.” Even more noteworthy is that his story drew **national news coverage on CNN**. When was the last time *your* business was mentioned on CNN? You can watch the full news clip here: www.ClassyMannequins.com/barbeq.

This strategy was effective mainly because it was unexpected. After all, how many restaurants use mannequins in their marketing? Not many. Clothing stores, yes. Restaurants, no. Unexpectedness, however, was not the only reason for this display’s success. This is also a near perfect example of using the entire CLASS Checklist to create an effective display. Let’s see how it stacks up.

:: **It makes a connection.** Granted, probably more so with male customers than with females, but still...

:: **It is lively.** The clever name BarBe Q. anthropomorphizes and personalizes the display.

:: **It is attractive.** Again, the appeal here may be more to males, but there is no doubt that BarBe is a fine-looking model. And since she was purchased new, she is in great physical condition as well.

:: **It is simple.** One look and you know what is being communicated: “Barbecue is the new sexy.”

:: **It has shock value.** A voluptuous mannequin promoting a barbecue restaurant? Huh?! (Her bikini top/denim skirt/baseball cap combo also makes you do a double take).

Stop ‘em Dead in Their Tracks

L. Frank Baum, one of the first famous American window trimmers (and author of *The Wizard of Oz*) once wrote, “The job of the visual merchandiser is to arrest the gaze of the passerby...and the job of selling is half done once you have transformed the passerby into a lingerer.” Therefore, your goal is to stop the forward motion of the scurrying pedestrian. This is the window display’s primary purpose. The Shock Value principle helps you to accomplish this purpose.

Give Them Something to Talk About

Another clever strategy for achieving this goal is to use window displays as platforms for visual commentary on social and political issues. In many cases, the more controversial the topic, the better. This is a technique that has been used with much success by long-time visual merchandiser Candy Pratts. In the street theater displays of the turbulent 1960's, Pratts and other display powerhouses used mannequins as characters in suicides, bomb threats, drug overdoses, murders, and other stark scenes of photojournalistic reality. This can obviously be a touchy strategy to use, depending on your location and the nature of your business, so use it with discretion.

Play With Their Emotions

The psychology behind the principle of Shock Value is to create an emotional response within the customer through your displays. Customers make purchasing decisions far more frequently and easily in an emotional state than in an analytical state. Most purchases, if analyzed long enough can be made to seem illogical, unnecessary, or even ridiculous. Beyond necessities like toilet paper, many of our purchases, for all intents and purposes are unnecessary. However, you obviously *do not* want the customer to think this way. In fact, the entire economy would crumble overnight if most people had this mentality. We *like* to buy things, even if we don't absolutely *need* them. It makes us *feel* good. That's why you want customers to get emotional about buying from you.

Disarming customers with shocking mannequin displays does two things. First, it gets their attention by breaking their "guessing machines" ("A mannequin in front of a barbecue joint? Huh?"). Second, their reaction to the display puts them in an emotional state. Dan Kennedy, one of the greatest copywriters and marketing geniuses of the past 50 years wrote, "Developing a personality for your business is the key to outselling any competitor you might tackle or who might choose to tackle you. We live in an experience economy. People want more than just the things you have to sell. They want to *feel* something while they're buying from you."

Epilogue:

THE LAST MANNEQUIN STANDING

If you remember absolutely nothing else from this book, remember this: **C-L-A-S-S**. That's it. That's all the information you need to create mannequin displays that make your business stand out and your display dollars pay off.

Connection

Liveliness

Attractiveness

Simplicity

Shock value

And finally...congratulations! You can now count yourself in the top 3% of small business owners who have educated themselves on the subject of visual merchandising, let alone *mannequin marketing*. By following the principles outlined in this booklet and remembering that:

Merchandising = Marketing

...you truly have an edge on your competitors—regardless of the type of business you're in.

I sincerely hope you've found the information presented to be useful, or at the very least, entertaining. We'd love to hear your feedback on this e-book or anything else you'd like to comment on. Send your messages to info@classymannequins.com. And, as always, stay classy.