

OUTLET DESIGN: THE BASIS OF COMPETITIVE EDGE AND MAINSTAY OF THE CORPORATE IMAGE

Vicent Adam

Head of the Moidecar Project Department. Burriana. Spain.

ABSTRACT

Faced with the changes in the global economy, companies have had to identify new mechanisms and practices to maintain or find a niche in the market. To be more competitive, companies have shifted from competing on the basis of price to competing on the basis of quality, which has also led to an emphasis on design.

As far as the ceramics sector is concerned, both at the national and European level, in recent times this has led to a change in demand so that manufacturers, until now the main clients for exhibition furniture, now find themselves complemented by the distributor of ceramics, bathroom furniture and fittings, and building materials, towards whom products are increasingly geared.

Distributors are becoming increasingly aware of the direct link between exhibiting and sales. They are paying ever more attention to their showrooms and making efforts to improve them, and the way they present their products. A direct consequence of this is that the way products are exhibited is becoming more and more important.

In a sector in which displays have to compete in a market of ever more sophisticated diversification –many older shops have understood the need to update and modernize and newly created ones know they have to back new trends in display solutions – setting up a showroom or a sales outlet is a byword for building an image, communication and creating memorable experiences.

Design is the main reason we are attracted to or reject a product, space or experience. It is the source of differentiation and therefore one of the main ingredients of competitive edge. It is not in vain that a good design and appropriate display can ensure the success of a particular collection.

The function of design in the sales outlet is to achieve the creation of an integral display project with a unified image, a space in which consumers autodefine themselves as users of the products which are commercialized there, and to convey a consistent message via a display approach that attracts and holds the client's attention.

The sales outlet must be attractive and the corporate image must be well groomed. Correct merchandising management (display devices and furniture), as well as more specialized advice for the end client, should be priorities in commercial establishments.

Manufacturers of display solutions are setting new market trends, not only in terms of technological innovation but also aesthetically and in the way space is conceived in the shop.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are five essential pillars on which to base and tackle the difficult decision of: "How to envisage a new exhibition?"

These points have to be addressed together, keeping the entire development process very much in mind.

- DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS
- CURRENT/POTENTIAL CLIENT YOU WISH TO TARGET
- FUNCTIONALITY
- AESTHETICS
- COST

2. DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS

The ceramic sector has undergone significant **development** with respect to the conception of the showroom. It is increasingly dedicated to image and presentation, and to finding "added value" that will ensure they endure in the market.

Years ago no attention was paid to how a product was displayed. Rather it was a question of the more products the better and there was no logical distribution so the elements displayed were devalued and sales objectives failed to be met. This is why from the outset it is very important to think about your display needs when conceiving the showroom to avoid mistakes that have been made in the past.

Nowadays it is not so much a question of the number of elements that need to be displayed to achieve sales, but rather of ensuring that the products displayed are attractively exhibited to the client. It is better to have fewer products but well displayed.

So display requirements have developed and have gone from being a mere display vehicle for products, which fulfil display function without going any further, to constituting an integral, more complex display system which, in addition to displaying elements, helps to sell, integrate and bring the showroom together as an aesthetic whole, all with the aim of making the display “**functionally aesthetic**” - in other words **practical, functional and aesthetic**.

Some pictures in which these differences in display development are clearly discernible are shown below.

In the first picture no attention is paid to aesthetics or general coherence.



In the next picture we can see a well-ordered display that meets “Integral display solution” criteria.



2.1. WHAT DISPLAY SYSTEMS CURRENTLY EXIST?

We need to distinguish between two types of display system: **Concrete and Integral Systems**.

Concrete display systems are usually classified according to the type of furniture or, in the case of the ceramic sector, the type of panel used and we can distinguish the following types:

Wall cladding:

- **Double-sided book display unit.** High capacity but awkward to use. Half of the display items cannot be seen and to see the last panel the rest have to be moved.
- **Display unit with panel opening sideways.** High capacity, very functional and aesthetic. This display unit has the advantage that all the display items are at least partially displayed, which is very useful when there are a lot of products, as it makes it easier to find a particular product. It is simple to use but should not be overemployed as it can be repetitive and monotonous. You need to know what to combine it with.
- **Parallel-sliding display unit with linear panels.** Functional and aesthetic with two displays which are entirely visible and the rest hidden or partially hidden from view. It is easy to use and the client can interact with the unit extremely easily. It needs to be borne in mind that it has much less capacity compared to the other two units.
- **Double-sided perpendicular-sliding display unit.** Its storage capacity is enormous, practically 20 display items per m² but the downside is that only the first and last items are visible (in some models), the rest being kept from view, not to mention that it has to be arranged carefully to avoid creating a cluttered effect.

Flooring:

- **Drawer display unit.** As its name indicates, this unit displays items as if they were in drawers. In order to see items they have to be taken out and they are arranged perpendicularly. It offers a lot of room in little space but is quite awkward to use and the product is hidden from view.
- **Horizontal display unit.** Much more convenient to use than drawer display units, given that all the exhibits are visible and they are arranged parallel to the client (from right to left and vice versa). With items that are normally square the most common format is metre x metre. It displays tiles in their proper position, parallel to the floor. It is a low-standing display unit measuring approx. 1m in height, allowing it to be placed in central areas of the expo. Its main problem is the inconvenience of viewing items which are low down, close to the floor.
- **Sloped panel display unit.** It is similar to the previous display unit but much taller, allowing items to be displayed in an inclined position for better

visibility and convenience when moving the panels. As it is sloped, the items can be bigger. It displays items more ergonomically than in a horizontal position, but the downside is that its ideal position is against the wall, given that in central areas it blocks the rest of the exhibition from view.

As for panel sizes, by far the best facing panel measures 1x2m, although the trend seems to be towards bigger and bigger panels in an attempt to ensure the products on display have real impact and sell on their own merits.

But we have to be careful with these trends for large panels. The ideal solution is to combine different panels, using mainly a Standard size, which will ensure our task is not difficult. We have to stand out but in a functional way. And this is where we touch on our most important subject, **integral display systems**, which afford solutions to more complex challenges in which various factors intervene.

An integral display system treats the showroom as a mutually sustained whole, not as a series of display units, in which the entire showroom responds to the same functional and aesthetic parameters so that the end result is homogenous and all sales and persuasive tactics at our disposal are used without us having to limit ourselves exclusively to the display unit. We can also combine it with other types of elements which can help to integrate the entire display, such as using images and communication for support, in order to break away from the cold impact display units by themselves may sometimes have.

We could distinguish an infinite number of integral display systems but we will confine ourselves to 3 more usual types:

- INTEGRAL DISPLAY SYSTEM FOR MASS SALES
- I.D.S. FOR RETAIL BOUTIQUE-STYLE SALES
- MIXED I.D.S.

INTEGRAL DISPLAY SYSTEM FOR MASS SALES

These are usually large displays, located on the outskirts of towns or cities, on industrial estates or in retail parks. They are characterized by the following:

- They have a lot of products on display, as many as possible and the more options for each product the better. There is a lot of diversification and many elements on sale from different sectors.
- Products are grouped into areas that tend not to be mixed.
- Nearly all the products are treated in the same way, without giving precedence to any particular product.
- The showroom must be organized so that the client can visit it alone, without being accompanied by a salesperson.
- Visitor flow and the positioning of products need to be considered very carefully.

- A wide central aisle/s with narrower walkways.
- Checkout points at the exit.
- Direct and aggressive communication
- Low-cost presentation
- General lighting



I.D.S. FOR RETAIL BOUTIQUE-STYLE SALES

Generally a small display in an urban setting.

Its features include:

- Not much product but high-quality and very well displayed.
- Products are grouped in different settings.
- Top-selling products are displayed so they really attract attention.
- The idea is to be different by being aesthetically daring, by standing out.
- The use of top-class materials and attention to detail.
- Importance is attached to the shop window.
- Lighting needs to be carefully considered and must highlight the product.
- Subtle, seductive communication.
- Importance is attached to the technical area, where certain clients may create their compositions.
- Comfortable work areas, where the client feels at home.
- Customer service table instead of a reception area.



MIXED I.D.S.

Most showrooms would fit into this category.

A mixed integral solution suits large, small or medium-sized spaces for urban or out-of-town expos and all types of client.

It combines the best features of the two systems described above.

- Only products that need to be are exhibited but they are well displayed.
- Good use of ceramic display units, using their features to advantage depending on the product we want to display.
- The showroom is divided up into areas according to products.
- Top-selling products are displayed so that they attract more attention
- It attempts to stand out from the competition by means of ultramodern touches or exclusive design
- Different but well distributed jobs to cover the whole showroom.
- Close attention to where products are positioned, as well as client flow.

- A lighting project tailored to the product displayed. Lighting needs to be assigned the importance it deserves, given that good lighting really enhances the product. And when we say good lighting we are not referring to how much lighting but to good distribution. We need to experiment with the different tones each type of light can give us, using lit-up areas that contrast with others that are less so to highlight a particular product, etc.
- Explicit communication that informs.
- Reception area with customer service tables.
- The latest trend: Blending in



3. CURRENT/POTENTIAL CLIENT YOU WISH TO TARGET

We would need to base our choice on the purchasing power and tastes of different clients.

- In urban areas we would target consumers with refined tastes who want to stand out from the crowd, are looking for ultramodern, high-class products and demand personalized attention. The logical solution would be to create a boutique-type showroom.

- On the other hand in a retail park, in a large showroom and for informal visitors, who will almost certainly like to look at a lot of products without anyone bothering them and who like to find special offers, a display designed to achieve sales on a mass scale would be the most coherent solution.
- For every kind of visitor the logical solution is to set up a mixed expo, in which the client who wants to can get personalized treatment and there is a wide range of products of varying quality, and a technical workshop for professionals to complete the client spectrum.

We must not make the mistake of wishing to apply concepts for one type of display system to another to which they do not correspond. For example, if we are considering setting up a mass sales display and we make the mistake of trying to make the product too different to give it that “added value”, this may result in target consumers for that type of shop rejecting the product because they think it is not within their means.

It is also important to know the country our client comes from when we design a display project, given that the way work is conducted can vary widely from one country to another, and we will need to take this into account when we work out a distribution pattern which accords with specific working patterns. It is the same with aesthetic tendencies. These are not the same in every country. They are governed by economic and cultural factors operating in the country in question and, why not, even by religion.

For instance, in some sectors *Fēng Shui*, which determines the best way to arrange a space to optimize the circulation of energy so it can have a positive influence on our homes or workplaces, is the in thing.

This is another way of providing added value, whether we believe in it or not, but when it comes to applying this or that idea, we have to be very sure about who we are targeting.

4. FUNCTIONALITY

The particular need to be met will have to be thoroughly defined from the outset in order to work out the most convenient form and the distribution of the various elements, thereby achieving an overall result which is as coherent and functional as possible.

The more functional the display is the better it will be to work with.

- Good arrangement of display furniture.
- Aisles that are wide enough to ensure ease of flow and to ensure the client wants to go round every part of the exhibition.
- Good visibility – create low-standing elements in the entrance to avoid giving the impression of entering a tube and aim to ensure that on entering an exhibition the visitor immediately has an overall vision of how the elements are laid out.

- Job briefs which are wide-ranging and complete. It is becoming increasingly important to offer personalized service if what you want is to stand out. To achieve this strategically different service points need to be located throughout the exhibition so that the public is served at all times.
- Good lighting. It is extremely important to know what we have to light up and what response we want to create. There are many types of spotlights, halogen, halogenide, and fluorescent lights, etc. Whether we use one or the other will depend on the effect we want to create and our consumption requirements.
 - Halogenide source: more natural light, low consumption, high initial lighting costs.
 - Halogen light: warmer light, higher consumption, lower initial lighting costs.

We must also take into account the size of the exhibition, given that if it is a large exhibition motion sensors can be fitted, which is worth bearing in mind to save on energy costs. However, this means a halogenide light source cannot be used, as it is a type of lighting which takes time to come on so we would have to use halogen lighting.

There is currently a new attitude to lighting, where it is not so much technique we are after but rather emotional impact, but without this being in any way incompatible with reducing consumption, a very important factor that needs to be considered. This way we can have more light, given that savings on ever more sophisticated energy sources will permit us to experiment with better lighting.

It is also important to install decorative lighting that provides warmth in an attempt to eliminate the impersonal feel that shops have had up until now, thus conveying sensations to the consumer that make him feel at home when he enters a showroom, and to complement this with the rest of the surroundings: there should be an area with sofas, where you can have coffee, equipped with a play area for children to make the shopping experience as pleasant as possible.

- Coherent signposting. For large exhibitions it is essential to indicate where products are because making someone walk round an enormous exhibition if he is only looking for a specific product can be a mistake and when he finds it he could be tired of looking.
- Life cycle of products: It is important to recognize that exhibitions must be dynamic. For many years exhibitions were created with extensive staging that quickly became obsolete. Nowadays there is a demand for all the elements to be interchangeable so that new products can be offered continually, given that this is what the market needs. New products are always being developed and they need to be exhibited.

5. AESTHETICS

Currently the possibilities for treating surfaces are immense and of course we must not forget that ceramic materials of every colour, finish and function, imitations

of fabrics, parquet, etc. are most in demand. This opens up a world of opportunity that we need to exploit.

Over the years fashions and technological developments have gradually changed and we always need to be aware of the latest trends to combine all the constructive and decorative elements at our disposal.

We can use any type of material, especially iron and wood, which can have a range of finishes such as plywood, laminates, lacquered finishes, etc., combined with all kinds of decorative paper, images, plotters and so on, which enable us to give a different personality to the elements, but always as a complement to our product and not forgetting that the most important thing is the product we are exhibiting.

As far as aesthetics is concerned, there are no rules that have to be followed. We must always be creative and non-conforming, and always ask ourselves why things are as they are so we can be open to new possibilities and not stagnate.

The idea of all this is to create a brand image directly related to the aesthetic impression we want to convey in our showroom. We have to pay close attention to this aspect because the way we reflect what and how we sell will be what makes our shop attractive to particular target consumers.

Current trends in concrete display units are unanimous: **Minimalism**. There is a definitive move away from furniture which is aesthetically robust, which stands out more than the product on sale. The real aim of minimalism is to highlight content and not context, which we manage to do by studying new technologies that fulfil the same function but more aesthetically.

6. COST

When we are considering designing a new establishment to sell products it is very important to know what cost levels we want the display to be geared to. This point is very much linked to one we have met before referring to the consumers we wish to target.

As far as the product is concerned, it is not so much a question of the price of the product as of quality. Nowadays our society is starting to pay in return for better quality. These are the consumers we need to target, as they are the ones who are interested and who value design as added value.

7. CONCLUSION

This clear tendency for design to change the style of sales outlets will give us an advantage over our competitors when it allows us to combine strategic elements and product quality, and not just as an option but as an effective means of improving the current position towards which the market is tending to move. There is a tendency to “humanize” the shop, thus lending added value and creating brand image.