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Marketing strategies
in women's fashion retailing
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All other images used are photographs taken by the author.

Introduction.

Retailing is the final sophistication of the process of exchange, delivering the product to those who need or want it (Burney et al, 1990, p.6).

I believe that consumers choose retailers as much for their image and the design of their stores as for their goods. It is my opinion that by using the right combination of marketing techniques, any store with average product can be successful. As the goods of competing retailers converge, I consider the image of a store and the design principles it uses to be the main form of competition. I recognise that quality and price are elements that many consumers consider when making a purchase, but I am convinced that retailers must link the image and design of a store in order to make sales. I do not believe that price and quality alone will sell clothes. I have observed garments of similar quality and style selling in successful stores for often twice or three times the price of the same garments in other less successful stores. The only difference between the competing stores is their image and design. I will highlight the reasons I feel these principles to be of intrinsic value to the retailing of garments.

Retailers and designers concern themselves with the layout and selling techniques of a store which create an overall image that the consumer is drawn to. I believe that retailers create images which reflect the desired price, style and quality that their consumers would like to buy. I maintain that it is the store image that makes the difference between a successful store and an unsuccessful one. For retailers to thrive, the habits of consumers must be observed and responded to. This thesis will examine the intricacies of various marketing tools used by retailers to target consumers and will emphasise the role that image and design play in the buying process.

As there is no ideal in terms of store image or design that is appropriate to all clothes retailers, and as every market is made up of individuals who have varying tastes, I will make special reference to an example of various targeted markets. From this starting point through examples in Dublin stores I will analyse implemented design features and selling techniques which must be

periodically re-evaluated in relation to new possibilities and competitive developments. The basis of my study is formed by theories in published articles written by design consultants, store directors and retail analysts. I will apply their theories to stores in Dublin to show how successful they are in applying the principles of the retailing process to meeting and going beyond the consumer's expectations. As retailers realise the need for effective marketing tools, they must also constantly be aware that the initial potency of every marketing tool declines because of imitation or changing styles. As a result, retailers should try to offer something extra to lure consumers. I will focus on the way in which improvements are being made and finally suggest what I believe will shape the future for both sides of the retailing process.

The first chapter explores the different types of store image that exist to appeal to targeted consumers. The following chapter examines the store design and how the layout of a store entices purchases. Through presentation techniques, the third chapter describes a store's various communication strategies, and in the final chapter the future of the retailing process is examined.

Chapter 1: The image of a store.

Clothes shopping is usually about pampering, more commonly called retail therapy. Retail therapy is reputed to create instant pleasure for predominantly female consumers (Connor, 1997). As a form of escapism from the trials of everyday life women are encouraged to go shopping. The recreational ground for women is the high street store. The more expensive the impulsive purchase, the better the consumer feels as their 'need' has been satisfied. *"Shopping - especially shopping for clothing - is about ... the desire for self-gratification and a desperate human urge to make oneself current"* (Moore, 1998, p.35). In the 'nineties clothes shopping is about satisfaction. A person often shops out of curiosity or boredom, and it is the job of the retailers looking for profit to ensure that the consumer will want to shop in their store and return to it by making the experience of shopping an enjoyable one.

In order to successfully form the image of a store, retailers must understand their target audiences. When they have identified who this target market is, then they must build an identity that will appeal to their target. By applying retailing skills which respond to consumer's desires (The Retail Group, 1997, p.54).

There are many techniques that help in identifying a store's target audience:

1   Observation - consumers should be observed, either through closed circuit television or on the store floor (Connor, 1997). What is to be noted is the consumer's appearance. Carrier bags from other stores are an indication of competition. The age bracket of shoppers, their companions and how frequently they visit the store indicate to the retailer the consumer's buying potential (Moore, 1996, p.42).

2   Market research - In order to get to know what a customer is looking for the retailer must ask questions. By talking to customers, both informally and through controlled market research, the retailer gets to know what type of people they are and what kind of service they expect. The customer

is the most valuable asset to the retailer and it is imperative that the retailer comprehends this. It may be necessary for a retailer to alter the store design or change buying or merchandising decisions to respond to the needs of the target market. For a retailer this may mean building a comfortable shopping environment in which it is a pleasure to shop. In addition, good relations with suppliers ensures that the store has facilities which meet consumer requirements.

3   Categorise - in order to effectively interpret the needs of targeted consumers they should be categorised. Females make up the majority of consumers so retailers have focused on categorising them (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). They can be categorised according to:

- the clothes they buy,

- where they buy them,

- what kind of style they are

- and how much they pay (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary).

From this knowledge retail analysts have found a way to divide consumers into target groups formed on the basis of the quality, price and style that they are interested in.

Retailers form categories in order to target consumers. I have taken an example of some targets, which categorise consumers as:

fashion enthusiasts,

thirtysomethings,

price-led replacers,

interested label seekers

and non-conformists.

Individuals are usually comprised of a little of each of the aforementioned groups, and it is these elements in a person that are stimulated by the image and design of stores as it is through the elements that retailers can highlight the price level, standard of quality and style bracket which maximise appeal to consumers. Retailers tend to target their marketing tools on the basis of these categories to attract a specific consumer type to their store, but often who they attract into their store depends on an individual consumer's psyche.

The first group I have referred to, the 'fashion enthusiasts', are teenagers who shop in such stores as *Topshop*, *Miss Selfridge* and *Warehouse*. They spend three times more than any other consumer type (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). They are interested in wearing whatever is the latest fashion trend. Retailers catering to these consumers, therefore, have focused on fashion and pricing more so than quality (knowing that they are usually students or in relatively low paid jobs). The store and the consumer share the understanding that fashion items, once they go out of fashion, will never be worn again. As skirt lengths, trouser widths and colours change every season, in order to stay fashionable this group of consumers will buy whatever the latest trend is and disregard what has been fashionable in the past. If the quality is not of a very high standard, it does not matter, because the garments will not be kept for any length of time. The fashion enthusiasts are quick to judge a store by its appearance so in order for retailers to make an impact on these potential customers they must appeal to their sense of style.

Retailers appeal to fashion enthusiasts through bright, colourful window displays such as those in *Miss Selfridge* on Grafton Street. They target this group by creating an exciting, lively in-store atmosphere, choosing their merchandise accordingly, selling fashionable clothes cheaply. *Topshop* in the Jervis Street shopping centre is also typical. The music pounds, the lighting is similar to that of a nightclub (bright and colourful spotlights), and one wall is covered with large television screens showing video clips ranging from fashion shows to music videos. The theme is very much that of youth culture. They sell mirrorballs and sparkling make-up to appeal to teenagers. They also have a discount for students, which gives the consumer group a positive feel about the store when they have bought something. This positivity is especially important for retailers who cater to fashion enthusiasts because this group tend not to be exclusively attracted by one specific brand or store and are therefore more easily persuadable. They would be attracted by a store that has treated them well previously and are therefore likely to return.

A store which attempts to appeal to this market but fails, is *Mark One* on Thomas Street and *Catch* boutique on Mary Street. These stores sell similar garments at comparative or lower prices to those in *Miss Selfridge* and *Topshop*, but yet they are less successful or popular. The reason for this is

because *Mark One* and *Catch* fail to create a store image through their lack of attractive store design and unenticing selling techniques that appeal to teenagers. If *Mark One* and *Catch* were to design their stores according to some of the techniques examined in the following chapters I believe that they could improve their sales and perhaps even compete on the same level as *Topshop* and *Miss Selfridge*.

Another group of consumers who have been targeted by retailers are the 'thirtysomethings' (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). These consumers are usually career-orientated and/or busy with children as well as being reasonably secure in their financial capability. They are a group who above anyone else enjoy the whole experience of shopping. These affluent 'thirtysomethings' have discerning tastes and high expectations of the shopping experience. They demand quality from the merchandise as well as the stores in which they shop and are willing to pay the cost of that quality. Retailers who cater to this market respond to their aspirations. They provide high standards of service and a chic contemporary store image (Greaves, 1998, p.101). *Whistles* in the Westbury Mall, *The Design Centre* in Powerscourt Townhouse and *Havana* in Ballsbridge offer these services and 'thirtysomethings' who shop there believe they are buying quality and exclusive garments that are not going to date or be worn by everyone they know. Stores which are spacious, comfortable and have a relaxed, subdued atmosphere appeal to this group who unlike 'fashion enthusiasts' are more likely to be irritated than persuaded by excessiveness.

Arnotts is a prime example of how a store's image and design have affected consumers perception of the store. The target market of *Arnotts* is 'thirtysomethings', but before the store's recent face-lift it was unsuccessful in reaching this particular group. I am convinced that it is through the store's new image and recent design improvements which are more in-tune with the needs of 'thirtysomethings' that it is now achieving success unknown to them five years ago. It is due to *Arnotts* new image that more designers such as *John Rocha* and *French Connection* are willing to supply their merchandise to them.

Those who are attracted to excessive presentation of garments are known as the 'price-led replacers' (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). They spend their shopping time browsing through piles of garments above which there is a bargain sign. They thrive on finding a bargain. Although they range in age from twenty-five to forty-five, unlike the 'thirtysomething' group they have a lot less money to spend. Whereas the 'fashion enthusiasts' are initially attracted by fashion, and the 'thirtysomethings' are interested in quality, the 'price-led replacers' want to see price tags before making purchasing decisions. Once retailers appeal to 'price-led replacers' through bargains, every other marketing aspect takes second place. As long as the shopping environments are practical and the offers are good value for money the 'price-led replacer' is satisfied. End of season sales are the best times for all retailers to attract 'price-led replacers' to their stores. *Penneys, Dunnes Stores* and *Guineys* of Talbot Street are examples of stores which attract 'price-led replacers' throughout the year. They have aimed for a reputation of having good value and offering comfortable clothing which, although it may not last for years or be the latest trend is considered to be a bargain.

Dunnes Stores have used selling techniques and the brand image to advertise that the store is good quality and good value. Unlike *Guineys*, which offer the same type of goods at similar prices, *Dunnes Stores* is nationwide while *Guineys* remains on a single street in Dublin. I suggest that the difference is not location but the store image and design that is the distinction between the two. *Dunnes Stores* attract consumers more successfully than *Guineys. Dunnes Stores* uses selling techniques such as advertising (the slogan - "Dunnes Stores better value beats them all") and promotions (such as out of season sales) to attract custom, *Guineys* has no such slogan, campaign or promotions. *Dunnes Stores* has laid out merchandise in such a way that makes it easy to view, with the use of clear signage and lighting that shows the true colours of garments. Its in store music is non-descript and this helps to create a subtle timeless atmosphere, unlike *Guineys* which constantly has loudspeaker information advertising as to where and what the best bargains are. This interruption can interfere with a customers decision to buy.

The fourth consumer group which I have referred to, the 'interested label seeker', spends all of their shopping time getting the right look together (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary).

Ranging in age from seventeen upwards, what distinguishes this group from other shoppers is that when they shop, 'label seekers' do not look at the price or the fit of a garment, they look for the label. They shop in stores they recognise as offering a lifestyle to which they aspire. This group are conscious that people recognise where they bought their clothes and enjoy the assumed envy of others. They buy the labels that are known and trusted. These labels reflect their personality and the 'look' that people who recognise the label associate with it. Designer labels usually have a strong identity because of stereotyping. It is to this that 'interested label seekers' relate. When a label creates an image, it also creates a lifestyle. Designer labels are used to make consumers believe that the image they project is more important than what they are wearing, or how much they have paid for it. These brand label logos are used on packaging, in store on hangers, merchandise displays, walls, ceilings, signage and anywhere else that the consumer will be aware of them and the retailer can reinforce the image and identity of the label.

BT2 attempts to put itself into the 'logo label' mentality through its use of logos all over the store. Apart from the *BT2* logo (which is projected on walls throughout the store and outside using gobo lights) and signs at escalators informing what is on other floors, the only other letterformed information are the logos of designer labels, which are everywhere. The fitting room signs are even made up of pictorial images of a female and male so that they do not conflict with the letterformed signage (ie. the logos). Among the many labels considered desirable by 'interested label seekers' are *Polo Ralph Lauren, DKNY, Dolce & Gabbana, Levi's* and *Tommy Hilfiger.* These are often copied but an interested label seeker will always be able to tell the difference between the impostor and the real thing and would never buy the impostor in spite of the price difference (Moore, 1998, p.42).

Among consumers there are many others who do not fit into the above retail categories. Most are known as 'non-conformists'(Losada et al, 1998, television documentary), and can often be just as easily manipulated as 'conformists'. This more illusive category may include older shoppers who do not act their age and eccentrics. Eccentrics like to stand out in a crowd. Not being particularly fashion-conscious, they will normally wear anything to be noticed. Being of any age or social standing, achieving a look which is 'different' is imperative. This may stem from high fashion

to bohemia. In their search for individuality, non-conformists think they are leaving the high street behind but while the clothes may be different, the retail experts (Shane, 1995, p.6) believe that 'non-conformists' are just as influenced by the very selling techniques they try to avoid in conservative stores. Charity and vintage stores often frequented by 'non-conformists' have a level of service similar to that of boutiques, that is, one to one. It used to be that the charity store was like a jumble sale, now they profit from employing techniques used by conventional high street stores for their layouts and by using methods such as colour blocking (Moore, 1996, p.59). This enables the consumer to make a faster and a more reasoned choice because they can compare similar coloured clothing with ease.

Oxfam has recently revamped its stores using colour coding to present garments. It is just as important to *Oxfam*, as well as other charity and vintage stores, that customers get what they want just as if they were shopping on the high street. Like other image conscious stores, the layout and presentation is vital to appeal to consumers.

While most 'non-conformists' choose not to shop on the high street, there's a growing number of them who make the choice to go there (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). Older shoppers who do not wish to be shackled by age restriction, desire what the younger person wants. They have money to spend but would rather not be seen wearing the clothes traditionally associated with older people. Continuing to be glamorous and sophisticated may mean shopping in young people's stores. The problem is that no fashion retailer wants to associate their store with older people. It goes against the very nature of what fashion is about. Fashion is about the new and the interesting and is, by implication, for the young. What fashion retailers should realise is that by the millennium the fastest growing sector of the clothing retail market will be the over sixties with a high disposable income (Losada, 1998, television documentary). Retailers will have to include these shoppers in their target markets in the future.

A store needs to be clear about it's identity - who is the target audience? Once it has answered this question clearly the store employs the techniques outlined in the next few chapters to

appeal to this target group. All of the successful retailers mentioned in this chapter are very clear on who their target audience is and what type of store image they require. *"Brand image is about good store design and packaging as well as stimulating windows and original advertisements and ensuring they work together"* (Portas, 1997, p.57). Through branding retailers can create strong visual statements. It is important for a brand identity to be clearly communicated throughout a store on all merchandise from basics through to accessories. Brands are the personality of a store and by their existence, encourage consumers to buy in and be part of the retailer's identity. 'Interested label seekers' rely on the image that accompanies branded clothing to project an aspirational lifestyle. A brand has the power to form and change a person's perception of a product by its name and the advertising campaigns which promote it.

Chapter 2: The design of a store.

Source: Portas, 1995.

Fig.1. 1980s style window display.

Store interiors.

A retail store relies greatly on many aspects of it's physical attributes to achieve profitable success. These attributes include the window display, the layout and the store's signage. They make up the design of a store. It is my belief that inventive design contributes to a store's image which attracts consumers. In the 1980s, design was too often used to disguise the weakness of 'product' and 'service' with big-budget theatrical displays (see Fig.1). The similar nature and quality of competing high street products means it is difficult for the product alone to entice the consumer. Therefore emotive factors such as atmosphere, the pleasure of shopping, information in the form of advice and guidance and the quality of service delivered to the customer along with the physical attributes which help to produce the image, are employed as tactics to help persuade customers to purchase. These are the demands that drive the contemporary retail environment (Shane, 1996, p.5).

Space.

The demanding and discerning 'nineties consumer wants well designed stores which are comfortable and enjoyable to shop in. They enjoy the leisure activity of shopping and design can contribute to making shopping an enjoyable experience. I believe that consumers behaviour can be influenced through the manipulation of space in the design and layout of a store. In 1995 a survey was commissioned by the design consultancy Tilney Lumsden Shane of one hundred major retailers

on the essential role of design in retailing in the UK. It revealed that design is now needed more than ever by retailers who want to be successful . Nearly ninety percent of respondents considered design to be a primary factor in attracting shoppers' attention; when asked, ninety three percent were positive that design is a highly effective tool for controlling how people shop once they are inside the store (Shane, 1995, p.5) proving that the design, which includes the layout of a store is of huge importance to the retailing process.

The role of design, in practice, is to organise the environment so that people can move through a store easily, enjoying the shopping experience and seeing more of the goods on display. This customer orientated approach to retailing puts design high on the retailer's path to success. It is not an end in itself but it is used as a means to creating new environments which send a coherent and consistent message to shoppers. It is about making shoppers feel good, and showing the products to their best advantage.

> Retail design rests in the idea that the retail space you enter represents a vivid fantasy of the shop owner, captured and realised by the architect or designer. (Corre, 1997, p.10).

Architects and designers encourage consumers into and around stores. They are employed to maximise the effectiveness of every square inch of a store. In order to do this as well as encourage the shopper to buy they have devised a set of design features that influences shoppers' direction through the store and the order of the goods they see (Fitch, 1996, p.19). Effective on all types of shoppers, these design features are generally adhered to by architects and designers. The shop window is the first element of a store that communicates and can affect the consumer.

Window display.

The power of a window display at street level is rarely equalled. It exists purely as a showcase to attract custom to the store (Fig.2 & 3). Shop windows now promote image and lifestyle above clothes. They convey what the store is all about and who it is intended for and are to be used to create an individual and distinguishing identity for the store. Their twenty-four hour role is not to drive sales directly but to creates stimulation for the shopper, making them an attraction for consumers to come into the store.

Fig.2. Direct and simple window display - shows confidence, appeals to a targeted group who would be attracted by the striking display.

Source: Portas, 1995.

Source: author.

Fig.3. Original and humourous window display appeals to young people e.g. 'fashion enthusiasts' who generally have a good sense of fun and like their clothes to express this.

The window is supposed to attract attention from a radius of 25 yards away (Moore, 1998, p.35). This is the '25 yard' rule invented by retail psychologists, who state that a radius of this distance is crucial for making shoppers curious enough to go in. Windows are, therefore, a lead into the store (fig.4).

Source: Vogue, 1998.

Fig.4. Window display that gives an idea as to what is inside the store - a person would be drawn to the window initially by the bright colours and then by the idea of the window display being included in the layout of the store, not just as a static fixture.

The effect of carrying the theme of a window display into the store can be subliminal but in terms of building an identity it makes all the difference. *"[Windows] can't just be pretty pictures. They have to sell"* (Fitch, 1996, p.7). While Fitch believes the window is solely created to sell, I believe it's purpose is to support the image of the store and create an interest in what kind of store is inside. Portas (retail consultant in the UK) advises that *"Windows don't have to be literal or product led otherwise everyone on the high street would be using the same language so, don't use merchandise as a starting point"* (Portas, 1995, p.24). They should never be art for art's sake but should be inventive enough to enhance a store's image. This makes its merchandise more desirable and thereby will increase sales. Too much merchandise on display can, however, defeat the purpose (see Fig.5).

Fig.5.

This window display has no focal point. Merchandise is scattered throughout the display and there is no concrete image or theme that creates interest for the passer-by, neither does it attempt to stimulate a consumer's sense of quality or style. The window is a valuable marketing tool that this store has not taken advantage of. Portas believes in the power of the window display to attract custom. She says that:

> Fashion is not all that amazing, and retailers should go one step further and glamorise it, giving customers a sense of excitement and entertainment. The windows should be used to put sex, glamour and fun back into the business. (Portas, 1995, p.12).

The start of successful retailing begins in the window. It is those retailers whose windows are different, original and appear to be doing more than simply offering goods for sale that are more successful (Fig.6 & 7).

Fig.6. Garments hanging from branches is quirky and makes a passer-by look twice.

Fig.7. Pop art themed window - striking display that targets self-assured 'thirtysomething' group.

Source: author.

Source: Portas, 1995.

Successful windows should give the impression of spontaneity and simplicity, often showing a sense of humour but always leaving an impression of the personality and individual character of a store (Fig.8) focusing on the overall image that a consumer will be aware of and seduced by.

Source: Mark Inglis.

Fig.8. This window display is made up of three thousand plastic cups. It shows originality in a youthful manner, emphasising a strong identity that young people are seduced by.
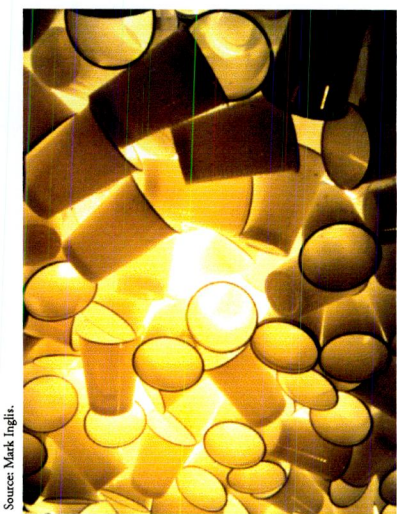

Source: Mark Inglis.

Fig.8a. Close-up of plastic cups.

Matthew Ashby, the artistic director of the twelve stores of the *Ted Baker* chain, explains the reasoning behind the approach which he calls retail theatre:

> We use our windows to give an impression of our stores. Because they are changed at least every month, they show we are on the ball. Because they are unique and off-beat, they show we do not take ourselves too seriously. People understand that we are entertaining them. (Moore, 1996, p.47).

Ted Baker stores follow window display through with themed point-of-sale material. For example, when they designed an alien-themed window, customers were treated to sherbet flying saucers. The better the display, the more immediate the impact on selling. Contrary to the usual themed or visually stimulating windows, many more expensive retailers often block out the windows to create an exclusive, private feel (see Fig.9, 10 & 11) because from the street the visual bombardment of attention-grabbing windows can have the opposite effect and deter customers from entering the store. This display technique tells the consumer that these stores are serious about their garments' exclusivity, thereby expressing an image that appeals to consumers who value exclusive garments.

Fig.9, 10 & 11. Window displays that block out the store interiors give an exclusive, private feel to the store, which appeals to consumers who want exclusive garments.

The 'nineties has refined the display techniques of the 'eighties by marrying product and display and confirming this throughout the store. The idea is to have the interiors and window display relate to each other so that the person who is initially attracted into the store by the window, is not visually confused by the interiors sufficiently to walk out again. They should know what to expect of the store by the character of the window. The window's role is to attract people into the store, while the role of the interiors is to convert customers' interest into a decision to purchase. However, Portas thinks that *"creating in-store displays in the style of the windows* [for instance, using mannequins in-store to recreate the window] *is a mistake, the two play very different and separate roles"* (Portas, 1997, p.57). She sees windows as providing the opportunity to create amazing sets or backdrops for products, however 'in store' other elements take effect and change the way products need to be displayed to their best advantage.

Relating and recreating windows are two separate effects. 'In store', varying degrees of lighting and products can often clash against each other when there is a dense display of merchandise. Window displays give an impression of the store's image, but 'in store' displays need to get relevant product messages to as many customers as possible.

Decompression zone.

Once inside the store a design feature which is used to influence the consumer is the deliberate decompression zone. Just inside the entrance to the store is a space kept clear of merchandise where the individual is given breathing space to turn from pedestrian into shopper (see Fig.12). Architects and designers believe that within this space nobody will buy, so the retailers leave it free from merchandise.

Source: author.

Fig.12. The decompression zone in Arnotts, Henry Street.

It is roughly about five paces, which is how long the experts say it takes the customer to acclimatise to their new environment (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). In every store that can afford the space there is a decompression zone. Those who cannot afford this space, for example *Warehouse* on Grafton Street, have set clothes rails as far back from the door as they could. However I feel claustrophobic in this store, which I believe is in some way due to the lack of a decompression zone.

Source: author.

Fig.13. The decompression zone in *BT2* on Grafton Street.

Focal points and fast-tracking.

Once consumers have passed this space (Fig.13), the retailers begin the job of selling again. It is our natural inclination to move to the right when we enter a store (this pattern is known as invariant right) (Moore, 1996, p.47) and leads to the marketing tool of placing stock here that has not been selling very well. All customers are then likely to see these items before any other in the store. As with all human behaviour we must understand this is not guaranteed to work all the time as some shoppers fail to follow the retailers' plan.

Jigsaw is a store that seems to position high price items such as coats and suits in this area. I believe that this is because *Jigsaw* tends not to sell as many of these items as they do less expensive ones and therefore they place them in this area, in the hope of selling them quicker as they are the first garments a customer sees in the store. Now that the consumer is inside the store, the designers ensure they manoeuvre through the merchandise as effectively as possible. This is done through fast-tracking. Walking on a hard floor is quicker than on a soft floor, so by having two surfaced floorings

- one hard, one soft, the retailers manage to slow us up or make us walk faster where they think this is most effective (Fig.14). The retail psychologists claim that they can force us to move in their pre-determined way through a store.

Fig.14. Fast-tracking in *Brown Thomas*, who have used marble tiled flooring for the fast-tracks and soft carpeting where retailers would like customers to spend more time.

This is particularly relevant in department stores where the fast tracks (hard floors) are like garden paths, perfect vantage points for merchandise to be displayed on carpeted 'beds' on either side (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary) (Fig.15). Joint managing director of Beatties, a U.K. based department store, Christopher Jones says,

> As a consequence of what we have seen in America, we believe in authoritative walkways - wide enough so customers can be comfortable and walk in any direction, walkways which change direction as often as possible to slow down the pace and allow us to introduce theatre spots on the way turning it into a journey of discovery. Different walkways correctly positioned will open up unexplored backwaters of the store, leading customers to more products and opportunities for us to sell. (Sinclair, 1996, p.11).

Fig.15. Fast-tracking in *Arnotts*.

Once again, the design of a store conveys the desired image - in the instance of *Brown Thomas*, luxurious marble and soft carpets reflect the opulent image for which that store strives. *Arnotts* on the other hand has used wood panelled flooring to achieve a clean pared-down image.

Another design feature is blocking. Retailers deliberately place merchandise in the middle of the 'paths' between clothes racks to tempt consumers to stop (see Fig.16). Stopping breaks up our movement and forces the consumer to look where they are going through the store, giving the appearance of more options than they might have thought were there. *"Shoppers love the idea that they are discovering something new and different"* (Moore, 1998, p.35).

Fig.16. A table strategically placed to 'block' in *Racing Green* on Grafton Street.

The design of a store, including lighting and layout should encourage people to browse and look into every corner. Terence Conran writes that,

> people's taste develops by being shown something different .... people are always looking for something slightly idiosyncratic and a little bit different, something they are proud to have discovered (Burney, 1990, p.30).

Positioning.

A store should please customers all the way from the point of display through the point of purchase to when they get their purchase home. It should not be cluttered with merchandise as this

gives a claustrophobic affect and does not leave room for merchandise to 'breathe' nor be visible or accessible. The key tools that most retailers use to create the impression of space are flooring, fixtures and lighting. The emphasis must be on structured layouts which allow goods to be merchandised in a tactile and accessible way, encouraging the customer to shop the breadth of the floor rather than allowing them to hone-in on one product and ignore other areas of the store. 'Nineties consumers need space to shop and they need layouts and displays which entice them into parting with their money. Bernard Dooling (Creative Director of design consultancy 20/20) says that a quality carpet and/or timber floor are very important because of the effect the floor has on the browsing shopper. But flooring and walkways are not useful alone, they work together with the products and the design of a store to aid retailers in their quest for sales. Once product groups have been allocated space in the store, they need to be positioned. The best-selling areas are those

> that are easily visible and accessible to customers, such as fixtures [set back from] the door or gondola units facing the shop entrance. [They] should also ensure that the layout is logical, with casualwear grouped together, for example. It is important that [the customer is guided] through the sales process (Livingstone-Smith, 1997, p.54).

The best-selling products can therefore be positioned strategically within the store to encourage consumers to shop the whole area. If these and all other products were to be located at the perfect height most convenient and comfortable for the customer to make a selection, this area would be between eye and hand height (see Fig.17). Ideally, all merchandise should be at that level.

Fig.17. Shelving is low enough to see products and reach them.

In the past a space might have been filled floor to ceiling with merchandise. Today, thanks to architects' and designers' increased knowledge about what layouts work, retailers are providing the

kind of environment that customers will enjoy and return to. Small details such as a sofa or chairs

for customers, the lighting, the fittings and the overall ambience of the interior of the store all help

to make the experience more enjoyable (Fig.18 & 19). The ambience created gives the customer an

impression of the store's image which, as I have said, I consider to be the main element in persuasive

retailing.

Fig.18. Relaxed atmosphere - apparent from colour scheme and plush seating.
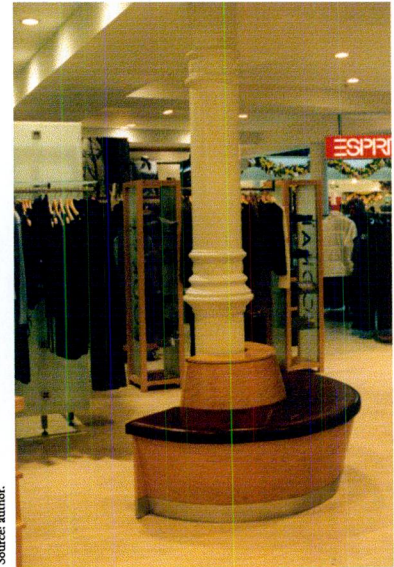

Fig.19. Benches are made available to take a break.

Fittings.

In terms of fittings, Peter Cunningham (partner in design consultancy Cunningham Leigh)

understands the importance of store design as a marketing strategy. He states that

> flexibility in display units is crucial so that attention can be directed to different items.
> Shelving units should be big enough to enable customers to easily pick up merchandise
> and unfold it but not so big as to fill the store and create a claustrophobic atmosphere.
> Units should also have an in-built signage system so that all merchandise can be clearly
> identified in style and size. Using a mixture of off-the-peg and specially designed units
> can be a way of stamping a unique style on a store (Moore, 1996, p.59).

However, there should be no unit that attracts more attention than the products which are on it. The

idea is to make the products look their best, and the correct fitting unit for products helps to make

this possible. Lighting and space add further refinements. *It can make the difference between a*

stimulating, lively environment and a flat uninspiring one (Moore, 1998, p.36).

Lighting.

Contrasting lighting effects can highlight certain areas and change the pace and mood in store. Lighting is also useful to show up the true colour of products. Rather than the old style of illuminating products with neon or bright lights which detract from the colours, retailers now express particular qualities of products through lighting (Fig.20).

Fig.20. Bright and spacious, but lighting is almost neon so true colours may not be obvious.
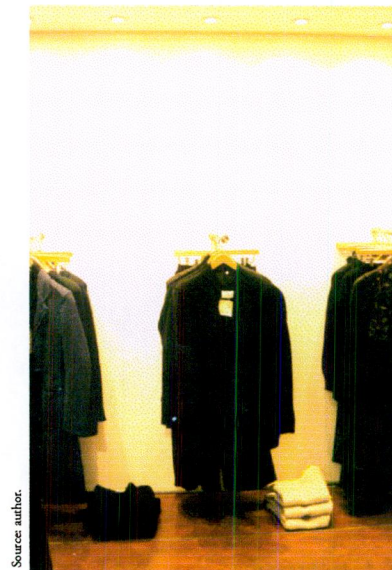

Fig.21. Garments are subtly lit.

It does not have to bring attention to itself to be successful. It can be subtle (Fig.21) or can give dazzling effects (Fig.22) - either way, lighting provides a dramatic presence which cannot be equalled.
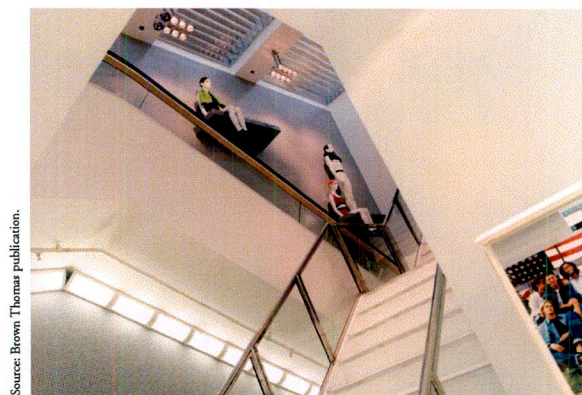

Fig.22. Lit brightly to emphasise new, modern store.

Ladies boutiques may use chandeliers (*Louise Kennedy*) to echo the prestigious nature of their stores, whereas price-conscious stores (*Penneys*) use spotlights to highlight the true colour of garments, placing emphasis on garments themselves rather than their surroundings. *BT2* (see Fig.20 previous page) is a store that I feel has not used lighting to its best effect. The style of the store is modern and minimalist, but it has used overly bright almost neon light which I find is all but blinding! It has gone overboard in its pursuit of clean-cut simplicity, and as a result the interior space is garish.

Finding the balance can be difficult for a designer. They must be aware of brightness and light distribution, product size, contrast, colour, form and texture. Likewise, the effect that lighting from within has on the exterior of a store should be considered. The most effective nocturnal store lighting ensures that both exterior and interior space complement each other sufficiently to stir curiosity whilst creating a pleasant aesthetic (Fig.23). This night-time view is as important as the window display. Designers can now *"develop customised lighting systems that boost a store's contemporary image and reinforce its retail concept"* (Barr, www). Shoppers receive clear messages about the store's image by the use of its lighting.

Source: Sportswear International, 1998.

Fig.23. Store lighting by night.

Mirrors.

Creating and sustaining a recognisable image is the job designers and architects attempt to do for retailers in order to influence or encourage consumers in every conceivable way. It may only be a myth that retailers deliberately distort mirrors to make the consumer appear to be thinner, but they will admit to using lighting in a complimentary manner for the shopper. Since decisions to buy

are generally made when a consumer looks at a garment on themselves in a mirror, retail psychologists have concentrated on lighting and positioning of mirrors. One of the most effective ways of creating a complimentary environment is to conceal lighting behind mirrors or by having etched glass on either side of a mirror (Fig.24). This illuminates the body and face eradicating shadows and minimalising bulges and lines (Fig.25).

Source: author.

Fig.24. Note lighting to side of mirror.

Source: Brown Thomas publication.

Fig.25. Mirror and surroundings so bright that shadows are few.

Lamp colour can give a warm glow, making the face look healthier and giving the impression of a better-looking version of a person. By creating this type of ambience, women may feel that the garments are what is making them look so good; it would not occur to many that it may be the lighting.

Ambience.

The way the customer feels when they are in a store is very important to retailers as they want to make every visit to their store as enjoyable as possible. Comfort encourages spending and the atmosphere created in a store dictates the level of enjoyment for a customer. In order to make the store a place that customers don't want to leave, retailers ensure that it is heated in winter and air-conditioned in summer. *"A new shopability culture has emerged, where creating a pleasant stimulating*

environment for customers goes to the very heart of store values" (Taylor, 1998, p.30) - Charles Kessler of Kesslers International.

Through aromatic and acoustic effects, a shopper's mood can often be influenced. In-store aromas can also give the retailer a way of building brand awareness and enhancing a brand image as well as creating an atmosphere in which a customer feels comfortable. The aroma may not necessarily relate to the merchandise being sold, but it creates a pleasant environment which may captivate a customer, giving the store a competitive edge. For example, in a store where the target customer is a mature lady, the aroma may be a rich, floral scent which complements its customer profile, whereas a fashion store for teenage girls may have a vibrant and fresh aroma. An aroma is usually diffused around the store via an air conditioning system or by a unit which sprays the aroma into the air every few minutes.

Retailers realise that a pleasant aroma will get a better response in terms of sales than no aromas, or worse - an unpleasant smell. *"If a customer walks into a store which smells stale they will associate it with a store that's going nowhere. They will also associate a good fragrance with quality"* (Moore, 1998, p.35) believes David Wring, owner of a young fashionable street and sportswear store in the U.K. which echoes my belief that a pleasant aroma enhances the brand image.

Likewise, music is important in setting the tone of a store. Music in store is now playing a more important role than ever, helping to create an exciting atmosphere that evokes positive moods in consumers who are then encouraged to remain in the store longer. This increases the likelihood of purchasing and the level of impulse buying. Playing soothing music during peak shopping hours and playing upbeat music during the slower morning hours encourages consumer spending according to research by Price Waterhouse (April, 1988). This revealed that a successful store atmosphere lengthens the time customers spend browsing and also increases store productivity which reiterates the belief that design elements play a powerful role in creating a successful store image. The atmosphere is especially important in cases where the shopper is not familiar with the store and its merchandise. Consumers rely heavily upon their moods and feelings in guiding the

decision-making process. Pleasant encounters reflect a positive store image and can significantly increase the probability of the customer returning to a store, thus helping to create the store's customer base.

Signage.

Another element of store atmosphere that appears to have an effect on customers' moods is the signage. It includes in-store graphic communications in the form of signs which are used to give the customer information (Fig.26 & 27) and can have a lot to do with how a retailer wants to portray their store.

Fig.26 & 27. *Arnotts* signage system - clear and unobtrusive.
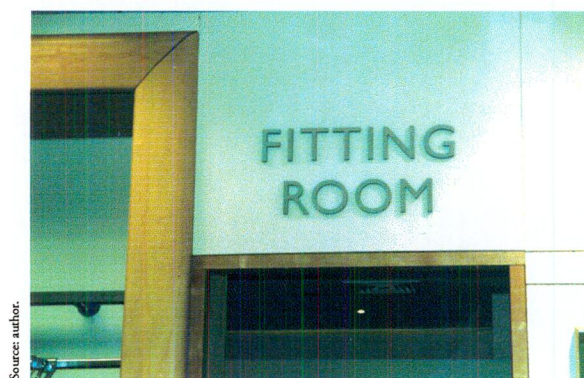
Logos are a part of the signage system of a store.

NICOLE FARHI   *Paul Smith*   M♥O♥R♥G♥A♥N

Examples of logos.

In consumer product marketing the role of graphic design is paramount. Everywhere we turn we find a graphic message - consequently the public is receiving a sort of sensory overload of graphically beamed messages from advertising to public services information. In order to cut through this clutter and send out a clear and unique communication to our target audience a strong and evident style must be established. - Doug Tompkins (Burney, 1990, p.62).

Signage and graphics are an integral part of a store's message and they form the brand image. *"As so much money is being spent on signage and graphics today, it is really becoming an incredible retail art form"* (Pennington, www). It is essential that product information is presented in such a way that consumers can read and understand the information quickly. This is why many retailers will use images instead of words. Images appear to speed up consumer information processing. They should convey a store's image simply and clearly. Of all the elements that make up a store's image, the logo is the one which reinforces the identity.

The logo reinforces the brand name both inside and outside the store. A fashion logo usually makes use of simple type, no image or illustration included. Simple typefaces tend to portray an understated easily recognisable name. For example, *Jigsaw* has used widely spaced uppercase italic letters in a seriffed typeface and has a distinct, classy yet simple logo which reflects the store's image. The word *Jigsaw* is not dependent on knowing English. Since it is not a proper name, it means the same to non-English consumers as to English speakers. *Oasis* falls into the same category. Also an acronym such as *C&A* will cross linguistic barriers. In each of these cases the name is a logo which is instantly recognisable as a graphic rather than having to be read as text. For instance, *Blarney Woollen Mills* or *Kilkenny Design Centre* have to be read - *Gap* and *Whistles* don't.

J I G S A W

Like *Jigsaw*, *Dunnes Stores* also use uppercase seriffed letterforms, however *Dunnes Stores* has succeeded in making the logo look quality and price based rather than prestigious and refined by the use of colour. The use of the colours in this case, green and red are the determining factors - green indicates quality while red indicates value for money.

DUNNES STORES

The *Whistles* logo also uses simple type but it is made up of handwritten letterforms. The 'dot' on the 'i' is a squiggled star. I think this was made a feature to draw attention to it's femininity and away from the irregular letterforms which could otherwise look awkward. The logo reflects the personal touch for which the *Whistles* store stands. It has the subheading of 'A MODERN RESPONSE' on labels giving the impression that *Whistles* has 'responded' to consumer needs.

Whistles

A MODERN RESPONSE

Brand logos are a visual signature which, when put on products, emulate the quality, style and personality that is the identity of the store. Changing the style of a logo too often, or at all results in the customer becoming confused. There is the risk of the brand identity no longer having the same strength of character and assurance attached to it. Logos are used 'in-store' on everything from swing tags, labels, stickers, hangers, receipts etc. The key to successful use of a store's logo is repetition.

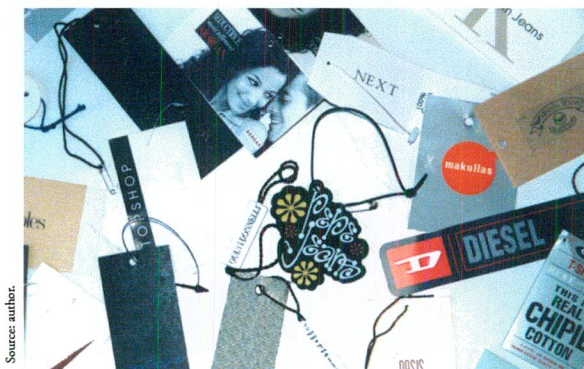Fig.28. A selection of the variety of 'logoed' swing tags used on garments.

Source: author.

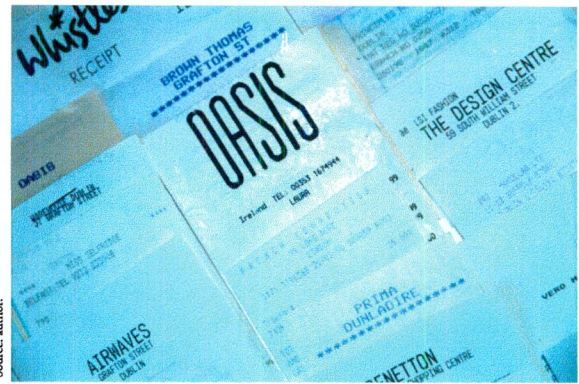Fig.29. Labels reinforce the brand identity through their use of fabric, colour and logo.

Source: author.

Source: author.

Fig.31. Branded receipts.

Source: author.

Fig.30. Branded hangers.

Outside the store logos promote brands in many different forms, the most common being billboard advertising, promotional postcards, brochures and shopping bags. Phil Cleaver, creative director at Et Al corporate design consultancy in the U.K. believes the chainstore *Oasis* is one retailer which has managed to incorporate most elements with their logo. He says

> *Oasis* has recognised that the logo should be used to communicate the brand, its logo is consistent in the changing rooms, on the till receipts - everywhere. The bags, which can be used as a form of walking advertising are also good. This creates a whole branded shopping experience (Moore, 1996, p.51).

With reference to Cleaver, the *Oasis* customer will not forget the logo or the store. This helps to create a reputation for the store and visually communicate an image of what the *Oasis* style is the next time the customer sees the logo. The more memorable the logo, the more effective it is as a visual selling technique.

Chapter 3: Presentation techniques.

Visual merchandising strategies are generally concerned with the presentation of goods in a store which involve the hanging and folding of garments, and the staff and service provided. Stores not only display merchandise; they offer the consumer an individual experience. The store environment, achieved through design, is the key to this experience and it is this that gives one store an advantage over another. The design of a store includes visual merchandising strategies and it is these strategies which reinforce the brand image and stimulate consumers to purchase. There are more essential elements to visual merchandising than just display. *"Whatever you do with visual merchandising, it should be part of the marketing plan"* (Portas, 1995, p.24). When Portas refers to the 'marketing plan', she includes window display, in-store merchandising, advertising, public relations and promotions. *"The marketing plan is about laying out product in the right way in the right place to make it totally and utterly enticing to the customer. It is about the shell of the store and everything inside the store and how it goes together. These component parts include fixtures, lighting, signage, ticketing, props, product and layout"* - L.Davies (Moore, 1996, p.59). A marketing plan should be used to create an exciting shopping experience.

The visual merchandising structure of a store depends on the target market. Stores which have a lower density of merchandise such as *Whistles* in the Westbury Mall and the ladies department of *Brown Thomas* are visually more attractive because it is well known that isolating a garment renders it more precious (the 'art gallery' syndrome). Piling clothes high tends to evoke the 'bargain warehouse' mentality, rendering the product less valuable. Stores which use this kind of visual merchandising structure include *Dunnes Stores* and *Guineys* of Talbot Street. The only instances where stores like *Brown Thomas* and *Whistles* would have densely presented garments is at sale time when price is more important than presentation to the consumer. Retailers pay rent according to the square footage of the store. A garment which is isolated will take up more square footage than densely presented merchandise, so becoming of more value to the retailer. The result being that it is more expensive than the densely presented product.

Colour.

In terms of presenting garments, how they are positioned is important when building the visual structure of a store. Items positioned according to similar colours together is known as colour blocking. This helps to create a good visual structure which enhances store image. Each season a store could have a different feel and the strong use of three or four seasonal colours facilitates this and also draws the eye to key pieces of merchandise, especially when they are spotlit. This 'colour blocking' lines up similar styles not just by colour but by shade, usually starting with lighter colours on the left and moving to darker on the right. Colours that do not complement the line-up should be presented separately. In general, stores that I have researched have adhered to this practice but there are a few which have not and the difference between the two is obvious. For instance, *Hobo* has colour blocked items well (see Fig.32) whereas *Arnotts* in the example I have shown below doesn't appear to have followed any structure, leaving the presentation slipshod (see Fig.33). It is imperative that retailers keep in mind that it is the consumer who is enticed by good design and repelled by badly designed presentations.

Fig.32. A good balance of well laid out merchandise.

Source: author.

Source: author.

Fig.33. An example of bad merchandising.

Hanging.

A store's decision to hang or fold may appear to be a simple display method, but is actually worked out according to space availability. For retailers who are short of space, the options of forward hanging or side hanging garments is a dilemma. *"In an ideal retailing world every item would be forward hung"* - D.Cane (Moore, 1996, p.60). A forward hanging garment relies on its aesthetic quality to attract customers. Side hanging is more practical regarding space and it encourages a more physical nature of shopping. Each style of hanging complements different kinds of clothes, because stores sell a variety of merchandise. To illustrate this, women's boutiques do not fold dresses or eveningwear whereas jeans stores rarely hang merchandise. Most stores, however, employ a combination of forward hanging, side hanging and folded options to enhance variation within similar garments, whilst maintaining an accessible, good looking space conscious environment, one which depicts a positive store image.

Fig.34. Forward hanging garments.

Fig.35. Side hanging garments.

According to retail experts (Portas, 1997, p.57), hanging merchandise either forward or to the side should be organised by length - short items on the left, getting progressively longer towards the right and moving from light colours on the left to darker colours on the right (see Fig.36).

Source: author.

Fig.36. Light colours on the left, dark colours on the right.

It is a good idea for retailers to experiment with different hangers - plastic hangers being of lesser quality and used in stores with less expensive merchandise like *Penneys*, rather than wooden or padded hangers which take up more space and are luxurious rather than basic and therefore used in luxury merchandise stores like *Khan* in Blackrock and *Havana* in Donnybrook. Varying the situation of garments in the store over two or three week cycles so that the customer always sees something new is a refreshing concept which helps to retain consumer interest. What is most important is that the merchandise should be as accessible to the customer as possible either through forward or side hanging garments, ensuring the customer's satisfaction with the store.

Folding.

Benetton are firm believers in folding instead of hanging garments - they have an annual turnover of over £1.5 billion worldwide and produce one thousand million garments every year (Losada et al, 1998, television documentary). They have discovered that when the consumer picks something up they are less likely to put it down. To put the garment down the customer feels obliged to refold the item consequently engaging the customer with the garment. This engagement is important to the retailer because the customer has then come one step closer to purchasing. When the customer can feel the quality of the garment they are more likely to be tempted to purchase as

they are already captivated by it. This discovery lends support to my belief that a store's visual structure, in this case folded merchandise, can encourage a customer to buy.

Fig.37 & 38. 'Colour blocked' garments - the use of which is a trademark of Benetton.

Garments should be organised by style, size, colour and print. Plenty of space between piles of garments will allow for the product to 'breathe', thereby creating a feeling of quality (Fig.39).

Fig.39. Space between garments allows them to 'breathe'.

The drawback of folded merchandise is that it requires constant upkeep and is therefore in danger of looking so neat that customers feel too intimidated to touch it or so untidy that the customers view the store as one which is badly maintained, *Benetton* however, are well-known for their folding

policy and so consumers do not feel intimidated when they shop there as they might in another store which was not renowned for this policy if it began to fold its merchandise. Folded merchandise often necessitates clear and easily read signs, as it is not always apparent what the merchandise is without picking it up. With clear signs someone who knows what they are looking for can find it quickly and easily.

Promotions, public relations and advertising.

It is imperative the retailer understands consumer requirements. It is through this understanding that retailers can design stores to satisfy consumer desires. The relationship between the retailer and the customer is strengthened by the use of marketing tools. Promotions, public relations and advertising both in and out of store are tools which are too often underestimated. Innovative in-store promotions are important consumer marketing elements. In-store fashion shows every season with the possibility of a visiting designer could make all the difference to a retailer's customer base. *"Invitations to shows makes people feel included and valued in our business. They help us build relationships with customers"* (Moore, 1996, p.53), says David Dalby, owner of a UK designer independent store. These relationships give customers the sense that there are personalised stores. If a customer can connect in a personal way through the image that the store reflects, they are more likely to be loyal to that store because it gives them a sense that they are special and valued by the store.

Advertising is probably the main link between consumers, retailers and prospective suppliers. Advertisements associate a store with a way of life using stereotypes. They can attract suppliers and consumers that aspire to or are linked to this lifestyle. They have the power to shift the image and success of a store. Advertising can speak to people who are not familiar with a brand or a store. As a marketing tool it works better than promotions because it is not only seen by those who shop in a store, but also by those who may not even have known of a store's existence. Advertisements can promote a store's image through radio, television, magazines and billboards. They aim to invoke positive feelings about a store through entertainment, promoting special deals or simply by reflecting

lifestyle aspirations. Although these feelings are transient, over time they can have the power to shift attitudes and affect preferences.

I have included two examples of advertisements that target an intended market well and two more which appear to be sending mixed messages. Firstly figure 40 is a magazine advertisement for *Calvin Klein* clothing. The image shows a beautiful woman who appears to be relaxed, sitting in luxury and comfort. The tone of the advertisement is subdued. The logo is the only written information. *Calvin Klein* are not concerned with informing the viewer of where to buy this merchandise. It is simply promoting an image. It has created an atmosphere of harmony between the figure in the image and her environment. The advertisement blends luxury and beauty the mark of which is interpreted by the viewer as being the image that characterises *Calvin Klein*. They have managed to target a luxury market well through this advertisement.

Fig.40. Effectively targets intended market.
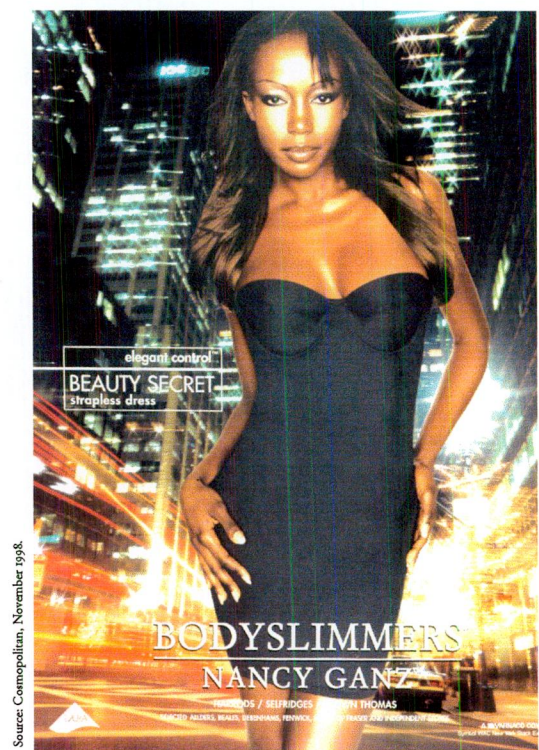
Fig.41. Mixed messages as to who is the target market.

Also intended for the luxury market is *Bodyslimmers* (Fig.41) which, the viewer is informed, are only available in selected stores. These garments are as expensive as *Calvin Klein* goods, yet the image that is portrayed through this advertisement is of merchandise fit for another type of market altogether! Perhaps it is because the figure in the advertisement is standing in the middle of a busy street at

night, in her underwear that I understand that it is definitely not appealing to a luxury market. Aside from the fact that the advertisement has no focal point, lights around the figure conflict with the typeface misleading the viewer as to the market *Bodyslimmers* mean to be targeting. This advertisement is an example how image reflects brand identity but does not attract the targeted market.

Firetrap (Fig.42) has used a computer-generated futuristic style image of figures. As a double page spread in a magazine, the effect is vibrant and energetic. The spirit of *Firetrap* is perceived as innovative and active, which targets a young, vivacious consumer. *Chipie* (Fig.43) has also tried to appeal to this consumer group, but I believe it fails to achieve this in this advertisement. Firstly the model used in the advertisement is too old to appeal to the teenage market they seek and secondly, the colours used are gaudy. I think the idea was to bring across a club scene image, but instead the advertisement looks dated and not at all intriguing to teenagers. It is unsuccessful in portraying an exciting image that teenagers find irresistible.

When advertising has been so successful that a consumer is curious enough to visit an unfamiliar store, it is essential that the in-store experience fulfils and if possible goes beyond the potential customer's expectations and reflect the image that advertisements suggest.

Fig.43. Gaudy colours do not enhance the appeal of this brand.

Source: Cosmopolitan, November 1998.

Fig.42. Teenage market is targeted well in this advertisement.
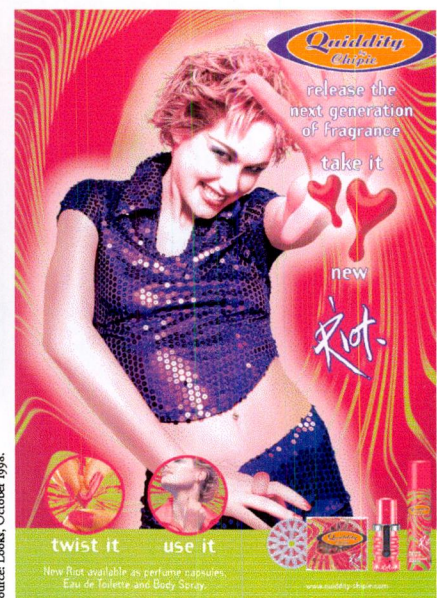
Source: Looks, October 1998.

Loyalty cards.

Loyalty cards or store branded credit cards are another way of establishing a link with customers but they do not always appear to work. *"By definition, fashion consumers are not loyal,"* says Clive Vaughn, retail consultant at Verdict Research, *"if a retailer gets his fashion statement wrong no loyalty card will have customers beating a path to his door"* (Moore, 1996, p.53). Loyalty cards work best when they offer the customer something different. *Brown Thomas,* for example, offer their loyalty card customers an introductory ten percent off all items in the first month of membership, as well as invitations to private shopping evenings, sale previews, special offers and promotions. However, as soon as a competitor makes a similar offer their value is challenged, and the notion of prestige attached to loyalty cards diminishes. As a result, retailers look to other public relation means to draw in customers. Some retailers offer free handouts at the till counter or on purchase. These insignificant offerings leave 'feel-good' qualities with the customer encouraging their return. For the 'feel-good' factor to work the customer must interpret that the retailer is appreciative of their custom and is willing to take careful effort to ensure their satisfaction.

Suppliers.

Promoting a store to a supplier is important because it is the supplier who decides if their merchandise is suitable for a store. A strong supplier-retailer partnership seems to be the best way of answering customers' needs in order to achieve high sales. Working together, a supplier can see the aspirations of the true target market and help to supply a retailer with merchandise that will sell. Retail portfolios contain the image and the philosophy of a store as well as its target market, how it is merchandised, the brands that are stocked and the store's location in order to give an impressive message to prospective suppliers. Many suppliers are concerned with what labels their garments are merchandised alongside as the price and quality must remain at a similar level to those already displayed. The image that the store depicts to a supplier also reflects on how the consumer views the store. Therefore by creating the right image throughout the store the retailer will attract the intended target market in terms of consumers and suppliers, reinforcing the point about Arnotts for example,

who are now attracting suppliers (such as *John Rocha*) that had previously been unwilling to use them as an outlet for their merchandise.

Services and staff.

Service and staff provide the key elements to a fulfiling shopping experience. The first step to ensuring excellent service is to coordinate staff and customer. The customer should be able to relate to the staff as this inspires confidence in the customer. This is especially true in the sixteen to thirty age group, where the opinion and approval of peers is taken into consideration when deciding on a purchase. For instance, fashion enthusiasts tends to want their friends to agree with them. Teenage girls are predictable enough in how they shop that retailers design changing rooms to encourage peer approval. In most high street teenager-targeted stores in the changing rooms are tiny cubicles which means shoppers are forced into the communal area to view themselves in the mirror where their friends are usually waiting (for instance. *Miss Selfridge* on Grafton Street). Staff in these stores know not to interfere with these shoppers while they are communal buying. The only service staff can provide is to make sure the customer is stocked up with whatever they need.

Not all customers want to take part in display approval however, especially if it means getting into comparisons with others. Retailers have come up with the perfect solution to self-conscious shoppers - a buzzer in the cubicles. This allows the shopper to relax as the staff will find for her what she needs. The sales assistant becomes involved with the customer, making it easier to ask for another size or colour. In turn, the sales assistant can offer style alternatives. If a customer redresses, it is unlikely that she will return to the changing rooms and so the 'buzzer booth' allows the customer to find something that looks good without public display. *Gap* in Belfast have a buzzer system but I have yet to see this system used in Dublin.

It is important for a retailer to encourage their staff to offer advice and to be honest and diplomatic in the changing rooms as well as being helpful and friendly on the shop floor. Staff should also be knowledgeable about the merchandise on sale. Good staff should acknowledge customers

even when they are busy. This relaxes customers and makes them feel welcome. Although many stores in Canada have 'greeters' at the entrance ("How are you today?"), I cannot see this becoming established in Ireland. Staff are the customer care area of retailing; not only should they be attentive and professional, but they should look suitable too - whether this means that they are given a purchasing discount on clothes in the store (as is the case in *Oasis*) or supplied with clothes to wear as a uniform (like in *River Island*). Either way, they should look like they 'belong' to the store they work in; out of place they would interrupt customer confidence. For instance, it is rare to see a young staff member wearing the latest trend from the high street in a lady's boutique; it is likely the staff would be of similar age and style to the customer and target market.

Retailers need to consider all of these various tools which I have outlined to realise and reinforce their store's image because without creating an image a store will remain stagnant. Through intelligent presentation and by putting merchandise into targeted styling situations, every retailer has the ability to market products in such a way that makes an impact.

Chapter 4: The future of image in fashion retailing.

Terence Conran, chairman of a multi-million pound retailing group wrote of what he believed shopping should be about in the 'nineties:

> It begins with the outside; the windows should be imaginative, constantly changing and a good advertisement for what's inside. As you enter the shop ... there should be a sort of bustle inside and staff should be pleased to see you, polite without being servile. They should want to help customers, while talking to them on equal terms, not in that old-fashioned, 'Are you being served' hierarchical way.
> The idea of shopping in the future is going to be based on that spirit. It is more difficult with a chain of stores but if the principles are there, and a good relationship between head office and branch staff, you should be able to sustain it. (Burney et al, 1990, p.27)

Since the publication of Conran's thoughts in 1990, many high street retailers have adopted his predicted criteria and presently operate according to his basic formula. I believe that in the next decade retailing will take Conran's ideals and move them a step further with the computer technology that is coming to the forefront of all businesses today. In the future the role that image plays in the retailing process will become more evident through computer technology. How much of an effect this technology will have remains to be seen but there is evidence to suggest that it will play a significant part in developing the image of retailing.

There have been predictions made for the future. Many researchers have suggested the possibilities of computer shopping via the internet and digital television as taking over from traditional store shopping. Stores would then become obsolete (Evamy, 1995, p.81). There is a stronger opinion that the experience of store shopping in the future will be one of entertainment and excitement, and this experience will secure the future of the ritual of store shopping (Pine et al, 1998, p.97). Both of these arguments shall be discussed in this chapter and I give my prediction on the future of image in fashion retailing.

Computer shopping already exists in the form of interactive CD catalogues on the internet and digital television. By next year it is estimated that the total 'shopping-through-screens' market

will be worth £10.5 billion (Evamy, 1995, p.80). Evamy predicts that on-screen shopping will be of particular use to both *"retailers and a lazy population"* (1995, p.82). He claims retailers will have to reconsider the attraction of stores in comparison with on-screen multimedia shopping. Perhaps it is possible, he suggests, that if computer shopping in the future replaced traditional shopping then manufacturers would find little need for a retailer and would sell straight to the consumer on-line (1995, p.82). The concept of store shopping would therefore be threatened by both television and computer-based retailing.

Computer shopping offers the consumer convenience. It is a twenty-four hour service, which is of particular benefit to those who work during store opening hours. It provides a service to those who live in places that do not have many or any stores nearby. It offers the consumer enormous freedom of choice. Due to reduced overheads, on-line goods are often cheaper than they would be in stores (Baudrand, 1998, p.243). The introduction of the 'smart card' - a plastic card containing individual body measurements in a barcode (which receives information from a booth-sized three-dimensional body scan that records a detailed body profile) adds a new dimension. Used in conjunction with on-screen shopping, the consumer can preview themselves in clothes before they have bought them (Baudrand, 1998, p.244). This eliminates a previous problem recognised with catalogue shopping where there is doubt over whether garments ordered fit correctly.

By taking advantage of technology, retailers can introduce new practices into the traditional shopping environment. They can capitalise on the environmental dimension that screen shopping does not have. By creating store interiors that dazzle with visual and sensory excitement through interactive technology, the consumer will continue to find the experience of shopping both stimulating and surprising (Evamy, 1995, p.84).

> A computer can easily control virtually anything electronic in a retail store, including interactive sound effects, interactive feature lighting, video systems, multi-zone audio systems, player pianos, fireplaces, water fountains .... each can be triggered individually or in combination with motion, location in a space or interaction with a sensor (Ranney, 1998).

Every retailer can use interactive technology in their own way, reinforcing the image of the store and the brand identity associated with it while distinguishing its personality from other stores. Through sight, sound and motion the retailer can reinvent a store's appeal.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) think that as a result of technological advances and changes in retail stores, retailers will be able to make the transition from selling a service to selling an experience. They will have the ability to deliberately design engaging experiences that command a fee. By offering fun activities, fascinating displays and promotional events they think retailers will engage customers in a personal and memorable way, so time spent shopping is converted into 'shoppertainment' or 'entertailing' (Pine et al, 1998, p.99). Consumers pay for garments in stores and there is a growing opinion among business people (Pine et al, 1998) that consumers would pay to go into the store if they knew that an admission fee would guarantee a memorable experience. For instance, in *It's Magic* in St. Stephen's Green Shopping Centre people enjoyed playing with the gadgets and 'toys' but left without paying for what they valued, namely, the experience. Perhaps, as Pine and Gilmore believe, if the consumer had paid an admission fee, the store would not have closed down. Instead, it may have made a profit and increased its number of interactive gadgets and other attractions to enhance the customer experience resulting in more success.

In America, some shopping malls such as the *Minnesota Renaissance Festival* and the *Gilroy Garlic Festival* in California already charge admission. These are seasonal festivals which are referred to as outdoor shopping malls. Consumers deem the fees acceptable because they offer the consumer experiences based on captivating and enticing themes while they shop (Pine et al, 1998, p.101). For this kind of store retailing to operate successfully retailers need to design an effective theme that incorporates the goods and services along with the image and the brand identity of the store and which appeals to the target market. At the right price, maybe this style of store retailing is the future image of retailing.

Evamy (1995, p.82) believes that by reconsidering their role, retailers can learn how to use technology to their advantage in store environments. However, I maintain that interaction between

the store environment and customers gives the customer an individual experience, one which a two dimensional screen cannot offer.

In my opinion, in-store entertainment will be successful, but paying for that entertainment through an admission fee is doubtful as I think most consumers would not be able to justify spending money before they know whether they like the clothes inside. Perhaps this may change as technological advances in retailing rise, and interest in novel experiences in-store becomes more apparent, but in the immediate future, paying an admission fee into a clothes store in Dublin is unlikely. Like Burney, I think that "Whatever comes next, it will build upon the past, and yet equally it will reckon on being different in order to survive" (Burney et al, 1990, p.127).

I also believe that computer retailing will not be used to replace traditional retailing, but to enhance it. Andy Myring (1996, p.21) writes that it will be used as part of the information gathering process by consumers to make shopping easier - for instance to check competitive prices, to check availability of a garment or to order for home delivery after seeing a garment in-store. In order for computer retailing to work successfully, the consumer must know or learn how to use the technology that provides this service. It must offer consumers something that store retailing now lacks in order for consumers to change their habits. It must also have an image on-screen that is consistent with the image of the store in order for it to be trustworthy. Through computer shopping, the consumer can save time, money and effort. However, it is not a substitute for touching, feeling and in some cases smelling products which only a store shopping service can provide. It cannot replace the leisure activity, entertainment and sociability that accompanies store shopping. Those who perceive shopping as a social activity will not enjoy computer shopping in the same way. London Business School predicts that the evolution of computer shopping in the home could take more than fifteen years (Myring, 1996, p.21). The Henley Centre (UK) foresees home shopping increasing, but by the year 2000 will only account for approximately 3.7 percent of overall retail sales (Myring, 1996, p.21).

I believe that the technology predicted to take over from shopping as we know it may be stretching the expectations and adaptability of retailers. As many of them do not yet observe best

practice in modern retailing techniques, there is no reason why they would leap into the future. Some retailers catering primarily to the youth market (*BT2*) are more likely to spearhead the integration of new advances, but traditional stores (*Clerys*) will be slow to change.

In any event, both can exist side by side. Television and newspapers co-exist; live theatre and cinema co-exist; television did not replace radio. While there will be some overlap, retailers are not about to be destroyed by on-line shopping. Some retailers may even make a virtue of the past and not adapt at all for nostalgic reasons. Some traditional practices (for instance, the overhead wire system in the *Bad Ass Cafe*) will always remain and become even more of a crowd puller. Thus I maintain that technology will have an affect on the retailing process and a store's image, but it is a long way from replacing store shopping as we know it.

Conclusion.

In this thesis my aim has been to highlight the vital importance of image and design in the retailing process by examining the women's clothing business. I found that through marketing devices used by retailers and designers, consumers can be influenced and encouraged to purchase. Amongst the devices are:

designing the store to appeal to the target customer, whether that is a student or a mature woman, a fashion conscious shopper or a price conscious shopper; laying out the store window to entice the passer-by by projecting an image that the store can deliver; arranging for different floor surfaces to speed-up or slow-down the browsers; positioning garments in such a way that shoppers are drawn to items of more value to the retailer; having shelving and fitting units which present and do not detract from the merchandise on display; lighting the store to highlight the products and to ensure that the colours of garments are reflected accurately; positioning mirrors and lighting them to compliment the purchaser and the garment; creating a comfortable ambience through temperature, sound and smell; ensuring that signage is clear, informative and uncluttered; designing logos that are evocative of the style of the store and are internationally understood; arranging garments by complementary colour; hanging garments for best presentation effect; folding garments which are appropriate and which invite the customer to pick up.

Other devices employed by retailers which I have examined include:

promotions and advertising; loyalty cards; relationships with suppliers; staff education.

Finally I have looked at how I believe the future of fashion retailing will evolve and how the role of image and design will remain central to best business practice. Together with practical presentation techniques, retailers have managed to combine the dynamics of a store with the desires of consumers. Although these desires are constantly changing, the shopping 'experience' and the image that accompanies it make it interesting for consumers to access stores that otherwise would not have been appealing.

Since it is through a store's image that consumers relate, I have tried to show how this image helps to establish a unique selling position for a store which distinguishes and differentiates it from others. I have attempted to illustrate that the purpose of design in a store is to create an ambience which relates to the overall image that the retailer wants to portray in order for the target market to be interested enough to purchase.

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