

PRODUCT PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT IN COMMERCIAL AREA

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Abstract. The decision of a consumer to buy a particular product is being influenced by various factors: advertisement, brand or public relations; however, the final decision is being made when the consumer is at the place where the product is sold. Taking into account the limited range of products and the parameters of retail space, products are placed so as to facilitate the search and to encourage unplanned purchases. According to the Marketing Theory the term for methods of selling the product in retail stores is called merchandising. Due to the development of trade and technology these methods are more frequently applied to other commercial areas, such as direct sales, catalogue sales and e-commerce. Moreover, this sort of commercial distribution applies not only to products, but also to various services. By analysing the merchandising manifestations in four separate commercial areas, the authors have concluded that product placement principles match in all the areas, but their efficiency differs. The authors presume that merchandising is the placement of products in commercial area and the efficiency of merchandising can be as well evaluated outside the boundaries of classic sales.

Keywords: merchandising, product placement, e-commerce, electronic marketing

Introduction

Under the conditions of contemporary economic recession businessmen and merchants have to face the problem of increasing the volume of product distribution. The development of market and technologies goes hand in hand with the development of new methods that help to catch the attention of customers. Advertising, which up to now has been considered the main marketing instrument, has lost its efficiency. The satiety creates customer confusion when they must choose

between two or more similar products. In the course of time the attitude towards advertising started to become more negative and sometimes even caused the opposite effect.

It would be wrong to claim that advertising is not necessary; however, the use of advertisements in business is being considered as a self-evident action, not as an innovation that leads to the increase of turnover.

The statement that consumer will notice quality products has become outdated. The market of goods and services is satiated to such an extent that merchants are trying to find new ways how to attract customers' attention.

“Taking into account the fact that approximately 60-70% of customers make their final decision shortly before purchasing the product, every businessman wants the customer to make this decision in favour of his products” (Богачева, 2011). Consequently, it is necessary to increase the chance of the product being noticed and decrease hesitation before making the decision.

That is why the attention of the customer should be attracted without influencing the customer directly, i.e., without the use of advertisements, brands, staff and other methods which create a sense of pressure.

Many merchants have come to a conclusion that product placement in retail places has a significant role in successful sales. “Assortment of goods which can be easily looked through facilitates the making of the decision and stimulates customers to make impulsive purchases which can amount up to 50% of sales revenue” (Славянская, 2007).

Nowadays this method is widely known as merchandising – the set of measures to be taken to prepare the products for sales area. Merchandising, just like any other marketing activity, has developed in the course of time. It is being influenced by both internal and external trade factors. Along with the development of technologies and the change of consumer generations, new ideas and opportunities of product promotion appear. Innovations in the field of merchandising increase the competitiveness of enterprises and become the key to success more and more often. In future merchandising can progress as a marketing instrument and provide fresh results for businessmen in new spheres of commerce, for example, in e-commerce. However, up to now not much research has been carried out to assess the efficiency of merchandising outside the traditional retail place.

The purpose of the article is to assess the efficiency of product placement principle outside retail business environment.

Research methods which have been employed in the process of investigations are as follows: assessment, comparison, grouping, quantitative and statistical methods, tables. The theoretical and methodological background of the article is based on scientific research, publications in mass media and professional literature; statistical information from official sources as well as information obtained by the authors during the research process.

Product Placement Assessment in Commercial Area

“The development of merchandising can be traced back to the end of the 18th century when business rapidly shifted from small shops to large stores” (Marie, 2011). New methods of product placement were developed and improved, which lead to the increase of the turnover.

The contemporary concept of merchandising can significantly differ from the concept of merchandising which was in use two, five or more years ago. This is the main reason why different definitions of merchandising can be found in economic literature. Studies on the term “merchandising” have been carried by such researchers as Geipele (2007), Farfan (2011), Doug (2011), Baraba (2011) Chando, Hutchinson, Bradlow and Scott (2011). According to the authors of this paper, one of the most appropriate definitions for practical purposes is as follows: “Merchandising is the display of products which makes them appealing, attractive, accessible, engaging, and enticing to shoppers in a retail store. Visual merchandising utilizes displays, colour, lighting, smells, sounds, digital technology and interactive elements to catch customers’ attention and persuade them to make purchases. Visual merchandising helps convey the image of the brand and reflects the personality of the target markets that the retail store wants to attract” (Farfan, 2011).

The authors of this article have focused on investigating the use of merchandising in retail shops. All the applied methods have been viewed in three dimensions – height, width and length. Shop equipment, product layout planograms and other instruments that help to catch customers’ attention were analysed. All these instruments are used in order to influence the customer and encourage him or her to notice particular products or product groups.

During the investigation it was discovered that the sales of product, depending on its placement in the shop, is being influenced by such factors as the size of the product, amount, testing, political economics, seasonality and brand. For example, “if tooth brushes are placed next to tooth paste, the turnover increases by 8%” (Заржецкая, 2005). However, “after carrying out the corporative modification of vertical placement (separate section of shelves, where the products of a particular manufacturer or product group are placed) the turnover increases by at least 25%” (Богачева, 2011). According to statistics, “people pay 50% more attention to the products which are placed at their eye level” (Заржецкая, 2005).

Consumers’ psychology and physiology has a significant role in merchandising. “85% of people that enter the sales area move forward with an inclination of going left, whereas 40-60% turn into the central part” (Заржецкая, 2005).

Each gender browses products in a different manner. “Men are more likely to notice products which are placed on the top shelves as they are used to looking in the distance and do not

notice objects that are nearby. Women, on the contrary, pay detailed attention to the objects which are near and are less likely to notice products in the distance” (Богачева, 2011).

By knowing the human psychology, it is possible to affect the senses – hearing, smell and sight. “Approximately 70% of visitors pay attention to music which is played in the shop and 50% of visitors admit that good music makes shopping more pleasant and provokes the desire to make a purchase” (Заржецкая, 2005). Calm music can slow down the walking speed of the buyer, as a result consumers can make more purchases. However, it can also cause drowsiness and indifference. On the other hand, “fast and aggressive music encourages to move faster, which reduces the number of impulsive purchases but can cause annoying feeling” (Удалова, 2003). “The first studies on the use of scent in business in USA showed that after the use of scent the number of shop visitors increased by 16%” (Терщенко, 2009). By decorating the shop in certain colours it is possible to affect the human blood pressure and behaviour activity. For example, the dominance of warm colours causes activity and consumers can make more purchases, which is seemingly good. Yet, warm colours speed up the consumer flow which decreases the time spent in the shop, thus, decreasing the turnover. Cold colours can slow the pace of consumers which increases the time spent in the shop, maximizing the chance of more purchases. However, there is a disadvantage – “cold colours influence the consumers in a way that makes them react to the products more passively and also make the consumers more hesitant” (Geipele, 2007, p. 133).

Depending on the number of clients and the characteristics of product which is being sold, the product can be placed in fixed places to form a habit and to create a comfortable shopping process (e.g. in food retail), or the opposite – the location of the product can be changed regularly, so that the consumer would pay attention to goods which might have been left unnoticed during the last visit to the shop (e.g. in clothing retail). Another key element of merchandising is the sales area. “Shop equipment, which is effectively placed in a restricted space, increases the turnover by 30-40%” (Блохин, 2007). Designation of different shop areas provides an additional 2-3% of turnover (Сысоева, 2011).

“Approximately 1/3 of turnover can be lost, if there are any difficulties looking for a specific product in the showroom” (Богачева, 2011).

However, it is important to note that shop equipment cannot occupy too much space. “Approximately 60% of sales area must be left to the consumer flow. Goods, which are placed in the entrance zone that occupies only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the shop, ensure approximately 40% of the total turnover” (Крестова, 2007). When planning the size of shop departments, it is important to take into account their return, for example, “cash-desk zone may provide 20% of the total turnover” (Евневич, 2007).

By summarizing all the previously mentioned theoretical aspects and the conducted practical investigations, the authors have classified the elements of merchandising in three groups – product, people and place [see Figure 1].

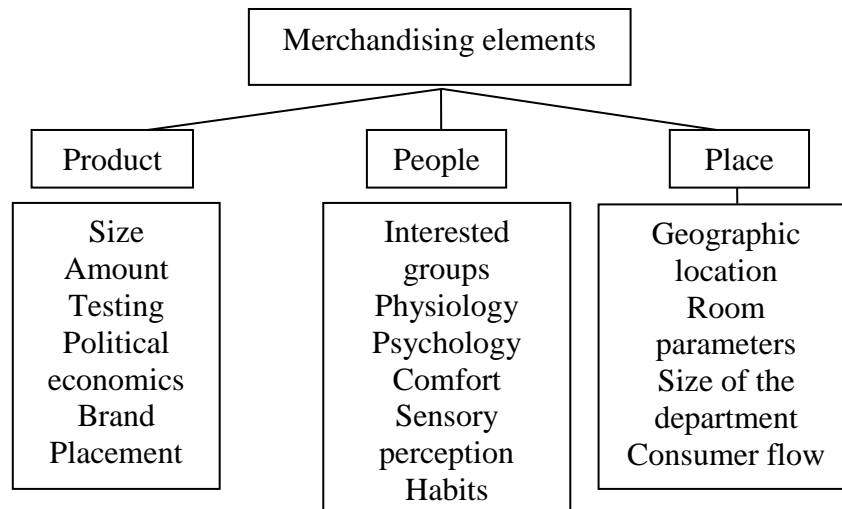


Figure 1. Merchandising elements and their influencing factors

Each of merchandising element groups has many sub-elements which explain and particularize their significance. The authors of this article presume that this classification can be used to analyse product placement not only in shops, but also in other commercial areas. By employing the previously mentioned classification the authors have conducted the analysis of product placement in e-commerce and have substantiated the essence of the proposed merchandising definition.

Product Placement and its Classification

Contemporary merchandising theory merely recognizes retail shops as its only field of operation. The authors of the article consider this assumption rather narrow as trade has existed long before the first shops were opened. Taking into account the fact that one of the three elements of merchandising is the sales place (see Formula [1]), the authors have come to a conclusion that merchandising can be applied to other commercial areas as well (see Formula [2]). Due to the fact that in classic sales place, i.e., in the shop, goods are placed taking into account the height, width and length of the room, the shop can be defined as a three-dimensional commercial area. Consequently, all the other commercial areas can be classified according to the number of their dimensions. Thus, catalogue can be characterized as a two-dimensional commercial area which consists of height and width. One dimension corresponds to direct sales, whereas electronic dimension corresponds to e-commerce.

$$M = \begin{cases} P1 \\ P2 \\ P3 \end{cases},$$

Where:

M – merchandising (in its former understanding);

P1 – place (retail shop);

P2 – people (interested groups: consumers, sellers, producers).

P3 – product.

Formula 1. Merchandising elements.

$$M' = \begin{cases} P1' = 1D + 2D + 3D + ED; P1 \leq P1' \\ P2' = P2 + G; P2 \leq P2' \\ P3' = P3 + S; P3 \leq P3' \end{cases},$$

Where:

M' – broader merchandising concept;

P1' – commercial area;

P2' – interested groups;

P3' – products;

1D – one-dimensional commerce (direct sales);

2D – two-dimensional commerce (catalogues);

3D – three-dimensional commerce (retail shops);

ED – electronic dimension (e-commerce);

G – generations of interested groups;

S – services.

Formula 2. Merchandising elements in other commercial areas.

The essence of the concept “merchandising” varies along with the changes in base elements of merchandising elements and their interaction. Thus, the authors of this article offer the following definition of merchandising: “Merchandising is the product placement principles in commercial area.”

Unlike the former definitions, this definition implies that the commercial area of merchandising is not only a shop, but also direct sales, catalogues and e-commerce.

To confirm the developed definition of merchandising, in January-February 2011 the authors of this article conducted a survey of trading enterprises. The survey was carried out electronically. The number of participants-trading enterprises was 136. Both genders participated in the survey. The results showed that, similarly to classic commerce, product placement principles are being employed in other commercial areas as well. 89% of respondents acknowledged that electronic environment must be considered as commercial area. Thus, it can be concluded that particular merchandising principles can be attributed to the product placement in e-commerce.

Product Placement Assessment in Electronic Commercial Area

By classifying merchandising in three additional commercial areas, it is important to note what product placement principles exist in these areas and what their economic efficiency is. After studying each of the four proposed commercial areas, the authors have come to a conclusion that all merchandising theories are based on the theories that can be applied to classic retail business, i.e., equal methods are being used, taking into account the specifications of alternative commercial areas.

In order to assess the increase of turnover which is influenced by the use of merchandising outside the classic commercial area, the authors of this article have analysed the merchandising principles of the Internet shop “mojo-jojo.lv”, which belongs to the enterprise “Media magnat”. For the purposes of the research “mojo-jojo.lv” “NeoCube” product assortment was chosen. “NeoCube” is a cube that has been made from 216 high-quality magnetic spheres. This cube can be transformed into different figures and ornaments.

The main reason for choosing this product was its high sales rating on the mojo-jojo.lv web site. By visiting the web site of the Internet shop, one can see that chrome, silver and golden “NeoCube” is among the leaders of sales. The authors of this article presume that this position significantly increases the chance of “NeoCubes” being bought. However, outside the entrance zone there is a black, blue, red and violet “NeoCube”. After summarizing the “NeoCube” assortment sales data, the authors discovered that the turnover of entrance zone “NeoCubes” is much higher than the turnover of the assortment which is not in this zone (see Table 1).

Table 1. “NeoCube” assortment turnover in a given period sorted by colour

Colour	Zone	“NeoCube” average monthly turnover, items.	Price of one “Neo Cube” item, LVL	“Neo Cube” average monthly turnover, LVL
Chrome	entrance	44	12	528
Silver	entrance	24	13	312
Golden	entrance	21	15	315
Black	outside entrance	22	13	286
Blue	outside entrance	10	16	160
Red	outside entrance	3	16	48
Violet	outside entrance	7	16	112
Total	-	131	-	1 761

Source: Unpublished data of “Media Magnat” Internet shop “Modžo-Džodžo”. November 2010 – April 2011

Knowing that Internet shop *mojo-jojo.lv* placed chrome, silver and golden “NeoCube” products in the entrance zone, the authors of this article equalize this placement to the classic shop entrance zone, which, according to statistics, provides 40% of the total turnover (Удалова, 2003). This means that “NeoCubes” which have been placed in the entrance zone of the Internet shop, must provide at least 40% of the total turnover of the assortment. To determine, if the assumption is true, the authors have made the following calculations by using Formula [3]:

$$IT_{e.inc.per.} = \frac{\sum (Pr_e \times P)}{\sum (Pr_{sort.} \times P)}$$

Where:

$IT_{e.inc.per.}$ – entrance zone assortment part of the turnover, according to the average income in a period of time;

P (price) – price of the item;

$\sum Pr_e$ – entrance zone product turnover, according to the average number of items sold in a period of time;

$\sum Pr_{sort.}$ – the turnover of all production assortment, according to the average number of items sold in a period of time.

Formula 3. Entrance zone assortment part of the turnover.

According to the research conducted by the authors of this article, it is possible to calculate the turnover of the entrance zone assortment by using Formula [3].

$$IT_{e.inc.per.} = \frac{(Pr \times P)_{chrome} + (Pr \times P)_{silver} + (Pr \times P)_{golden}}{(Pr \times P)_{black} + (Pr \times P)_{blue} + (Pr \times P)_{red} + violet}$$

$$= \frac{44 \times 12 + 24 \times 13 + 21 \times 15}{22 \times 13 + 10 \times 16 + 3 \times 16 + 7 \times 16} = \frac{1155}{1761} = 0.65587 = 65.6\%$$

The obtained result shows that the entrance zone of the Internet shop ensures 65.6% of the assortment turnover, which is significantly more than in the classic commercial area.

By using the available data on different sales places' entrance zone turnover parts from the total turnover (see Formula [4]), it is possible to calculate the e-merchandising factor change coefficient in comparison to its use in non-digital environment:

$$MK_{e.cor.inc.} = \frac{IT_{e.inc.per.} (internet)}{IT_{e.inc.per.} (market)}$$

Where:

$MK_{cor.inc.}$ – merchandising entrance factor correction coefficient, calculated by income;

$IT_{e.inc.per.} (internet)$ – Internet shop entrance zone part of the assortment turnover, according to the average income in a period of time;

$IT_{e.inc.per.}(market)$ – shop entrance zone part of the assortment turnover, according to the average income in a period of time.

After the calculations regarding the turnover of Internet shop *mojo-jojo.lv* were made, the following result was obtained:

$$MK_{e.cor.inc.} = \frac{0.65}{0.4} = 1.6395$$

By evaluating the merchandising possibilities that would lead to the increase of “NeoCube” turnover, the authors of this article propose another principle, which is shared by both electronic environment and regular shop, i.e., the placement of related goods. “According to statistical data, related goods increase sales by 8% in shops” (Заржецкая, 2005).

In case of “NeoCube”, the related goods are smaller cubes which can be used as supplements or spare parts to the larger cubes. According to the data of *mojo-jojo.lv*, it can be seen that smaller cubes amount from 12.7% up to 34% of the original cube turnover [see Table 2]. In addition, the part of the small black “NeoCubes” is the smallest (12,7%), taking into account the fact that the number of original black “NeoCubes” sold is equal to the number of other colour cubes sold – on average 22 items per month [see Table 2].

Table 2. The turnover rate of “NeoCube” related goods

Colour	“Neo Cube” turnover	“Neo Cube” average monthly turnover, items	„Neo Cube „ average turnover of spare parts, items	The ratio of small “Neo Cube” turnover vs. the original “NeoCube”, %
Chrome	262	44	11	25.6
Silver	143	24	8	34.3
Golden	126	21	6	27.0
Black	134	22	3	12.7

Internet shop does not offer spare parts for the black “NeoCube” as related goods, unlike from the original size sales leaders (chrome, silver, golden). Thus, the authors have come to a conclusion that effective placement of “NeoCube” related goods can increase the sales of small black cubes. When the level of other small “NeoCubes” is reached, the sales revenue can increase 2-3 times.

If the price of one small cube is 2 Ls, these products can bring in additional 6-12 Ls per month. By using Formula [5], the authors show the increase of black “NeoCube” assortment group (small and large cubes), if the merchandising related goods method is being used:

$$GT_{sort} = \frac{T_{sort.rel.} \times (FG_{sort.rel.} - 1)}{T_{sort}}$$

Where:

GT_{sort} – the increase of product assortment turnover;

$T_{sort.rel.}$ – related goods group turnover;

$FG_{sort.rel.}$ – related goods group future turnover;

$T_{sort.}$ – all assortment turnover

Formula 5. The increase of product assortment turnover.

$$GT_{sort} = \frac{T_{small.black} \times (FG_{small.black} - 1)}{T_{all.black}} = \frac{(3 \times 2) \times (3 - 1)}{(22 \times 13) + (3 \times 2)} = \frac{12}{292} = 0.041096 \approx 4\%$$

The result shows that the turnover of the entire black “NeoCube” group assortment would increase by 4%, which differs from the available statistical data regarding the return of this method. Thus, similarly to the entrance zone merchandising efficiency correction coefficient, the authors of this article determine the turnover of related goods group by using Formula [6]:

$$MK_{rel.cor.inc.} = \frac{IT_{rel.inc.per.}(internet)}{IT_{rel.inc.per.}(market)}$$

Where:

$MK_{rel.cor.inc.}$ – merchandising related goods factor correction coefficient, calculated by revenue;

$IT_{rel.inc.per.}(internet)$ – the increase of Internet shop related goods assortment turnover by average revenue in period;

$IT_{rel.inc.per.}(market)$ – the increase of shop related goods assortment turnover by average revenue in period.

Formula 6. Merchandising related goods factor correction coefficient, calculated by revenue.

$$MK_{rel.cor.inc.} = \frac{4\%}{8\%} = 0.5$$

The obtained result proves that in comparison to a non-digital environment, the output of product placement in the Internet shop is two times smaller. However, the entrance zone effect in *mojo-jojo.lv* overcame its return in a regular shop 1.7 times. Thus, the authors conclude that the effectiveness of merchandising principles in an alternative commercial area, unlike in a retail shop, can be both greater and lesser.

The authors of this article presume that the boundary value of turnover correction coefficient is 1. If the boundary value is lesser than 1, the turnover rates are poor and it is necessary to take

well-thought-out measures to improve the entrance zone or product assortment placement. If the boundary value is larger than 1, the turnover rates are satisfactory; however, it is always advisable to improve these rates.

By using the proposed calculation system, enterprises can control, analyse and compare the efficiency of entrance zone, related goods or other merchandising principles, as well as analyse and forecast product placement. The authors of this article suggest that turnover rates of different goods should be compared in terms of one merchandising factor. This can significantly improve the sales growth of particular goods or product groups.

Conclusions

This paper presents new evidence on merchandising principles what are based on the product placement in commercial area to increase the sales. These principles are developed according to the interactions of the 3Ps of marketing (product, people and place).

On the basis of the research done by the authors was concluded that the concept of merchandising can be attributed not only to retail shops, but also to other business areas. On the basis of the research and survey done by the authors, the classification of merchandising according to the number of dimensions of commercial area had been developed: 1D – direct sales, 2D – catalogue sales; 3D – retail shops and ED. The authors suggest that merchandising should be defined as product placement principle in commercial area.

Research also confirmed that by using merchandising principles, customers' psychology and physiology is being affected through the sensory perception. Unlike classic marketing instruments, the principles of merchandising are non-verbal and their influence is being felt by humans to a lesser extent or not felt at all. After studying direct sales, catalogue sales and e-commerce, the authors have determined that product placement principles are employed in these sales forms as well.

The authors concluded that merchandising principles employed in all four commercial areas included in the research are based on the classic principles which are employed in retail shops; however, the efficiency of these principles may vary. For example, the entrance zone in the Internet shop provides larger turnover than the same zone in a retail shop. Related goods, on the other hand, provide smaller turnover than that of a retail shop.

This research reflects only a part of the given theme; accordingly the authors are planning to continuing researches in this field for ensuring more in-depth analysis of merchandising aspects in retail.

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