



KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

Value for money will continue to be the watchword for retailers when they look to fixtures and fittings in the coming months.

Alberta Ferretti's custom-made dress rack is based on magnetic hangers adhering to the metal elements.



Above Beijing's Lane Crawford department store features chain-mail curtains to add an edge to the merchandise.



Right An elegant and eye-catching accessories fixture, custom-made for Alberta Ferretti's West Coast Los Angeles flagship apparel store.

Few experts believe retailers will be spending big bucks on complete fit-outs of their stores, but at least there are some grounds for optimism for the balance of 2009.

Geoff Russell at Zapwall, specialists in slatwalls and slatwall display stands, is happier when looking ahead – now that retailers are no longer “like rabbits caught in the headlights” as he regarded them in the first few months of the year.

And, he believes, “we all have to lift our game a bit and have to be that much more alert.”

In terms of fitting out stores, he believes value will continue to be the key. “If I can offer retailers a flat-pack option as opposed to a made-up one, they will take the flat-pack to save the extra freight cost,” he says.

Except for new stores and retailers opening in new locations, full fit-outs are not likely to be high on the agenda, according to Russell. “I can foresee that retailers will continue to do half or a quarter of their shop while they continue to operate as it’s less stressful to do it that way,” he says. “I think spending will be at about the same level as now, people will be cautious and not wasteful. They won’t get back into high-flying times for a while.”

He predicts that manufacturers and suppliers will concentrate on their core products and not look to diversify too much over the coming months. “We’ll have some brainstorm, but it will be in the field we’re in – we’re not going to go away and do a lot of things in metal and glass, for example; we work with melamine so we will continue to develop that.”

The retail sector changes its attitude much more frequently than its manufacturing counterpart, Russell

believes, and there is a tendency to start to panic when there is no one in the shop.

“The retail sector changes its attitude much more frequently than its manufacturing counterpart ...”

But he thinks that the trend in the coming months will be for people to adjust their overheads and embrace the challenge of operating in a difficult economy.

“The Chinese word for crisis and opportunity is the same,” says Russell. “It’s a wonderful thing to take on board, and I think the good players will find they have the chance to consolidate their operations while the weak players will drop out.”

“These are exciting times with big opportunities.”

CHALLENGE

Michael Eden at GDM Group agrees with that assessment, saying: “there will be a lot more roll-outs of particular fixtures to suit particular products. Retailers will look to keep themselves fresh by doing part-refurbishments.

“They’ll have less money and be looking to stretch it further, so our challenge is to meet that,” he says. “Everybody wants value for money, but that’s not to be interpreted as just wanting the cheapest price.”

Eden’s Wanganui-based company specialises in custom-made fixtures and fittings for the retail stores, and he believes that both innovation and value will be keys in the coming months.

“There’re a number of ways in which we’ve been allowed to be innovative in terms of our customers,”



PURFORM
MANNEQUINS

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he says. "We're able to provide a joinery and metalwork solution and are finding that a combination of those is providing a more cost-effective solution, and that will continue to be so.

"There's more of a focus by our customers to ask how they can do things most cost-effectively, and they ask how many units they can get for a certain amount of money and we're looking at different materials to get that. "For example, in some situations, instead of us using high-pressure laminate we're powder-coating board."

The trend towards looking for more value in fixtures and fittings has seen customers more concerned than ever about weight. The more the weight, the higher the freight charges and, Eden says: "now they're looking at the whole package – how much does it cost to ship it, how much does it cost to assemble it on-site.

"In some instances customers are going for powder-coated metal and plastics which are cheaper than joinery. Where strength is not an issue they are going for an acrylic or laminated glass rather than toughened glass because it's a lot lighter."

Other material being increasingly used includes LED lighting. A significant reduction in cost means it can be used, particularly in features, to give shelving a brighter look even when the retailer has opted to use slimmer shelving or lower-priced construction materials.

LEADING BY DESIGN

One current trend that Eden believes will continue is that of retailers aiming to lead by design. "There will be people who won't spend because they don't have the budget, for example, but there will be more emphasis on design and the point-of-difference to entice the increasingly discerning shopper" he says.

"It's not just going to be about design; it will be how customers do their buying and the overall offer. The

fixtures are just a small part of that offer, but the retailers that are going to be leading the way are going to be the innovative ones.

"The public has an expectation of being able to crack some really good deals price-wise, however something to avoid is where the only difference is price. You must offer to be able to offer innovation and difference constantly."

For Ben Purdy of Purform, manufacturers of mannequins for the past decade, less is more. "I believe that the less you see of the mannequin and the more you see of the clothes, the better the use of mannequin. That's why I always advise people to go headless, unless they want to sell headwear, purely to keep the customer's focus on the garment."

In the shorter term, retailers can make the most of their budget by the creative use of mannequins, he says. "It's how retailers use them – that's an area they could sharpen up on. It's about how many they use and how they use them in the store to get people right up and personal with the clothing – not just a single item, but an entire outfit. These

days, the aesthetics are quite modern; the mannequins are made from very durable plastic where the paint's infused into the plastic so you don't get chipping. Now we make full-sized mannequins with magnetic arm points which really help with the dressing."

There's more of a focus by our customers for them to ask how they can do things most cost-effectively, and they will ask how many units they can get for a certain amount of money.

Purdy feels that, too often, stores are designed by architects who don't fully understand the basics of apparel retail. But he can see that there are some retailers, such as Hallenstein's, who do things well and the successful clothing retailers lead the way by paying attention to design. "It's an integration thing, that's the best thing people could do with mannequins: understand how useful they are in the store."

Looking longer term, Purdy believes new greener materials will come into the industry – already there are companies manufacturing mannequins from soy, while Purform's own plastic models are already recyclable. The economic downturn has meant that retailers are opting for mannequins that are more durable and easier to dress.

Clothing is very much an impulse factor. It's much more unplanned, so the point-of-sale is where you can nab sales. ■

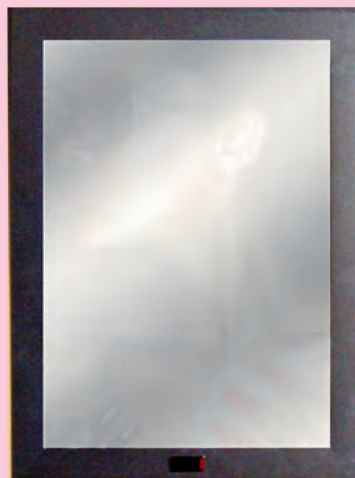
By **Andy Morris**, a freelance writer based in Auckland and a regular contributor to NZRetail.

A NEW MEDIUM OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Triggered by a sensor, this medium called mirroradd utilises previously unusable, yet valuable, marketing space by converting mirrors into high quality advertising images when someone approaches. It is a mirror that turns into an advertisement – and back to a mirror again.

There are two options available in this unique product; a lightweight frameless acrylic mirror version (pictured) or an aluminium framed glass option, both with sensor to the front. The framed option pictured has a door to access the visual duratran making it easy for anyone to change without taking it off the wall!

Available in all your standard A4 – A0 visual sizes, either portrait or landscape, mirroradd will take your standard duratran visual.



The units themselves are LED lit, 40mm deep and the sensor can be adjusted to suit from 0-1.5m.

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Michael Eden

With over 30 years' experience in retail display systems, Michael Eden at GDM Group is well qualified to state that innovative, cost-effective ways of displaying merchandise can be the point of difference for a successful retail business.

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