HUBERT®

The 6 Elements of Food Merchandising

How to Turn Passive Shoppers into Active Buyers

What You'll Learn

How to turn passive shoppers into active buyers through the 6 elements of food merchandising, including:

Landscaping	Texture	Color	Décor
6	11	14	17

Communication & Signage	Cleanliness & Sanitation
22	25

In this guide, we'll walk you through each element and provide the insights you need to go from basic food merchandising to advanced.



Starting with the Basics... What is Food Merchandising?

Food merchandising at its most basic level is about making food look good, and convincing customers to buy it. Go a little deeper and you'll see it's a combination of great food, visual marketing, and common design principles.

Goal of Food Merchandising: Turn passive shoppers into active buyers.

We hear the cliches all the time, that a picture is worth a thousand words, or that we eat with our eyes first. They may just be sayings, but there are hard-based stats to prove they're correct.

Humans process images

60,000 times

faster than words, and the brain retains 80% of the images it sees vs. only 20% of what it reads.

*Physiology & Behavior

The human brain forms its first impression of a product in

50

milliseconds.

*Physiology & Behavior

The attention span of a shopper on average is only

8

seconds.

*Intelligence Node

Has the Pandemic Eliminate the Need For Food Merchandising?

This pandemic restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and other foodservice providers got away with minimal or no storefront operations. This unprecedented time—and the rapid decrease of shoppers in stores—diminished the importance of displays. Your business may have also shifted resources around to survive and you may now find yourself without a proper food merchandising plan as customers have fully returned to shopping in-store.

Although customers have returned, employees haven't. The Great Resignation in food service means that for many hotels, cafeterias, restaurants, and supermarkets, there is a lack of potential employees who:

1. **Understand the importance of proper food merchandising**
2. **Can apply these fundamental principles to achieve great displays and increase sales**

Since most COVID restrictions have lifted, the importance of proper food merchandising is once again paramount to your storefront operations.

The six elements of food merchandising are essential for training your new employees on what to do when crafting displays, or to reference as a refresher if you're coming back to the art after a while.

The 6 Elements of Food Merchandising

While no one knows for certain what specific style and design will appeal to each and every person, we do know a general outline of what elements can have greater influence of stopping a shopper in their tracks, increasing the length of their attention span, and driving more interest in a product—**ultimately leading to more sales.**

High-level overview of each element of food merchandising:



Landscaping

Increase interest in your displays by landscaping—or manipulating the shape, form, and elevation of a product.



Texture

Attract attention and create a “feel” to your display with various textures, or surface appearances.



Color

Set the mood, attract attention or even make a strategic statement with color.



Décor

Elevate the effectiveness of your display with interesting décor. Crates, vases, and other props can double as containers to increase the perceived value of your foods.



Communication

Communicate with your customers and guide them through a display with strategically placed signage.



Cleanliness & Sanitation

In the food industry, nothing turns a customer away faster than food cases and displays that look dirty, unkept, and most importantly —unsafe to eat.

Landscaping:

The 1st Element of Food Merchandising



What is Landscaping?

Since landscaping is the base for which you'll build your entire display on, it's often where you should start when merchandising your food.

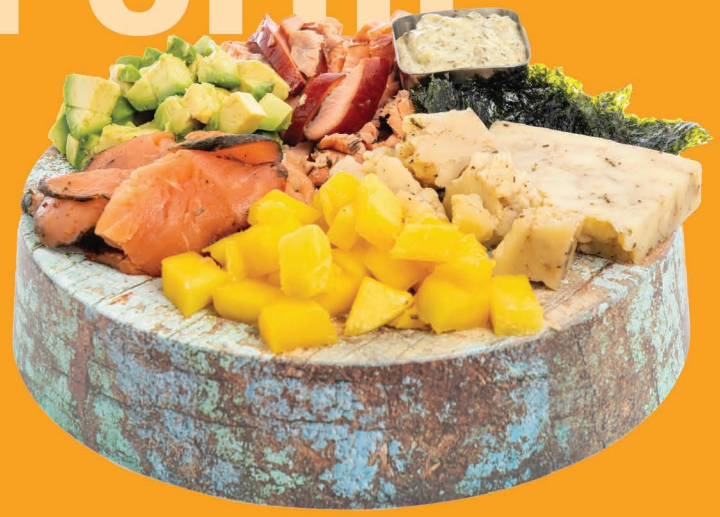
Let's dive a little deeper →

In food merchandising, landscaping refers to the act of manipulating the shape, form, and elevation of a product to increase visual interest. Good landscaping can guide a customer's attention to the merchandise and increase the amount of time they spend looking at an item.

Shape



Form



Elevation



The Importance of Shapes in Food Merchandising

Shape: Displaying your products next to or on interesting shapes is an effective way to draw attention to them.

Example:

Consider showcasing jars of jams & jellies by placing them on top of a shorter cylinder. The matching shape of the jar and the cylinder will extend the long proportion of the jar in a unique and interesting way.

Alternatively, the round edges of the jars could be emphasized with a sharper, more angular shape like a cube or square. When it comes to shapes in your display, the most important thing is that there is something visually interesting drawing attention to your merchandise. How you choose to generate that interest is your own creative decision.

Common Products for Shapes in Food Merchandising:

Round Mango Wood Riser



Shop Now

Rectangular Faux Wood Riser



Shop Now

Round Butcher Block Riser



Shop Now

See All Products for Landscaping

The Importance of Form in Food Merchandising

Form: Displaying your product in a stack or taking the product out of its container to showcase the actual food.

Example:

In the example of the displaying jams & jellies, the jar is part of the merchandise, which limits some ability to manipulate the form. Still, you could solve this problem by presenting multiple jars next to one another and considering the form they take together. You could form them into a heart for Valentine's Day, for example.

Alternatively, you could place some jelly in a sample bowl, giving customers a chance to interact with the product.

Common Products to Highlight Form in Food Merchandising:

Round Melamine Bowl



Shop Now

Melamine Bowl with Stainless Steel Insert



Shop Now

Black Bowl with Light Wood Inside



Shop Now

See All Products for Landscaping

The Importance of Elevation in Food Merchandising

Elevation: Presenting food or products at different heights is a great way to draw attention to your display.

Example:

When elevating the jars of jam or jelly with the cylinder, you are naturally emphasizing them above their surroundings, like the tallest building in a skyline. However, just choosing one item and elevating it above all the rest is not all you should do. Each item should be planned out carefully and make sense in context with the merchandise surrounding it. A tall, visually interesting jar can draw attention to less visually interesting, but still relevant, items below it. In essence, the jars are acting as a form of decoration themselves.

Common Products for Elevation in Food Merchandising:

Stainless Steel Pedestal



Shop Now

3-Tier Round Display Stand



Shop Now

Tiered Acrylic Riser



Shop Now

See All Products for Landscaping

Texture:

The 2nd Element of Food Merchandising





Why is Texture in Food Merchandising Important?

For starters, it makes food more exciting, engaging, and interesting for customers. To do it right, you need to have the right display bowls, trays, and pedestals to match the texture of your food.

Example: fresh fish on a bed of ice.

The coldness of the ice will reassure the customer of the freshness of your item, while the implied hardness of the ice will make the supple fish more appealing. Surrounding the fish with leafy greens will give another indication of freshness and health which will make your merchandise more attractive.

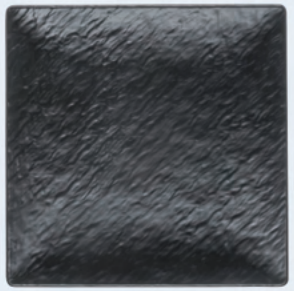
Common Products for Texture in Food Merchandising:

Textured Display Bowl



Shop Now

Black Textured Tray



Shop Now

Honeycomb Tray



Shop Now

See All Textured Products

Color:

The 3rd Element of Food Merchandising





Color

Color is one of the most powerful ways to impact your food merchandising. It's visible from far away and can evoke emotions just based on the color you choose (more on that to come).

To fully understand the importance of color, you can relate it to other sensory experiences like aroma and smell. Science has proven that color serves a very similar role—as smell—in influencing our purchasing decision. This opens up avenues for your branding and creativity to entice customers with colorful displays that suggest certain flavors or experiences the customer wants.

Check out the 5 most common colors for food merchandising →

The 5 Most Common Colors in Food Merchandising

It's important to note that, just like all sensory experiences, the effectiveness will vary from customer to customer. Color associations with food can vary across cultures and national backgrounds, meaning there is no perfect combination of colors that will make your food appealing to every customer. As with the rest of the elements, only time and practice will reveal the best combination of colors to enhance your merchandise.

Here are five common colors and how food merchandisers use them to influence purchasing decisions.

Red: By far the most popular color in food merchandising, red can evoke feelings of energy, passion, and intensity. Take a look at almost any fast-food organization to see some prominent uses of the color red.

Tip: When paired with the colors orange and yellow, red helps to create the feeling of hunger.

Blue: Blue can evoke feelings of security, safety, and happiness. However, blue is also a cool color that is known to suppress appetite. Blue is best experimented with sparingly given this known property, but that doesn't mean you have to ignore it. Blue can still be a part of your display with the proper creative touch.

Yellow: Bright, uplifting, and happy. Often used in food merchandising to grab the attention of shoppers.

Orange: Spontaneity, playfulness, and an increase in energy. Orange sits in between yellow and red on the color wheel as well as in our associations with certain feelings and emotions. The color orange is associated with the fruit and can be a positive for your display: the relation between freshness and citrus can enhance raw foods like meat or fish. If red feels too intense and yellow too relaxed, orange could strike a happy medium for your display.

Green: Perceived as the color of nature, green will evoke feelings of freshness, the outdoors, relaxation, and harmony with the environment. Green is an understated and calm color which can be seen as a minor contrast to the brighter and more suggestive yellow.

Décor:

The 4th Element of Food Merchandising



Décor

A beautiful, textured display is incomplete without some form of décor.

Decorating should be seen as the finishing touch to reinforce the main theme of your display.

What does decor look like in food merchandising? →



Lighting in Food Displays

Lighting is an incredibly important technique to get right, and one of the most difficult. There are two main factors to consider when lighting your product:

1. How much light to give a product or display
2. What color of light to use

Example: butcher's display case with red meat.

Knowing that customers view the color of meat as an indication of its freshness and quality, we also know that any discoloration in a cut of meat will make it appear tainted to a customer and negatively impact their decision to buy it. It is important, then, to use light that will emphasize the deeper red tones in the meat which customers associate with appetizing freshness. A warmer tone of light would be appropriate compared to a washed-out yellow or white light which may make the meat appear grayish.





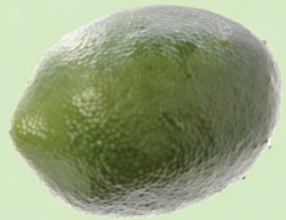
Fake Food as Décor

Making use of fake food is a fantastic way to display visually appealing food without worrying about spoilage or any minor imperfections in the product. Staging your product with fake food will last longer and more consistently impress customers thanks to the ease of creating a perfect-looking replica.

Another way to use fake food is to give the impression of abundance. A display with lots of fake food can signal prosperity in a consumer's subconscious. For example, keeping produce stacked high permits customers to hunt for the best pieces, and the confidence that their search will be rewarded. You can accomplish these kinds of experiences with simple props, like a piece of cardboard that fills up the bottom of a large crate so all your fruits can be displayed on top of the crate.

Common Fake Food Products:

Green Imitation Lime



Shop Now

Yellow Imitation Bell



Shop Now

Replica Kale Leaf



Shop Now

See More Fake Food

Using Props in Your Food Displays

Objects like small props, plants, or artwork can complete a display from the inside out. This is where your charm as a decorator can shine through.

You can use objects that are not related to the product but are still relevant in some other way. Any major holiday is ripe for this kind of decoration. Matching your décor to the festive moods of customers will create an unspoken human connection between you and your shoppers. Take advantage of any residual holiday cheer by associating your merchandise with the occasion.

Common Props for Food Merchandising:

Rustic Wood Crate Set



Shop Now

Natural Grass Basket



Shop Now

Silver Zinc Vase



Shop Now

See All Décor Items

Communication & Signage

The 5th Element of Food Merchandising



Communication & Signage

In the context of food merchandising, communication refers to signage, promotional materials, and verbal communication from staff members.

An excellent communication strategy will take advantage of these key pieces of information:

80%

Eighty

percent of consumers are actively hunting deals while they shop

69%

Sixty-Nine

percent of consumers will stop and browse a featured product

Signs should include things like sale offers, a popular recipe idea, or information on how it will add value above and beyond other options. For example, certain food items could impact in-store rewards. You could emphasize the unique health benefits of a certain food, its versatility when it comes to cooking, or how complementary it is to other nearby items.

How to Craft the Perfect Sign...

...did we get your attention?

When it comes to crafting the perfect sign, you should know that you need to communicate everything you want to tell the customer within 5 seconds. Signs should be simple, with clear fonts and minimal clutter. Ideally, your sign will grab the attention of the customer with a large graphic or text, then quickly explain the value on offer. For example, a large sign that says “SALE!” and beneath it, “2 for 1 on select produce” requires much less than 5 seconds to understand, but lets customers know about the free value. The less you make the consumer think or make decisions, the easier it will be for them to find value and commit to it.

Don’t forget to apply the same design principles to your sign as your displays. For example, if your display is making use of rustic-inspired wood pieces to display fresh produce, your sign could be made ofthe same material. Whether your sign is made of a unique material or not, it should make sense contextually with the display.

Finally, don’t neglect the most natural form of communication: speech. Your staff should be communicating verbally with every customer about the daily specials and sales. Make sure that your staff is taking note of the frequent customer questions and concerns so they can be addressed from the top down. There is no replacement for the human touch. Proper, friendly staff communication is your best tool for selling your merchandise outside of great displays.

Common Signs for Food Merchandising:

Chalkboard Sign with Easel



Shop Now

Black Sign with Wooden Base



Shop Now

Sidewalk Message Board



Shop Now

See All Signage

Cleanliness & Sanitation:

The 6th Element of Food Merchandising





Cleanliness & Sanitation

About **92% of shoppers** say a clean space increases their likelihood of buying a product.

Since the beginning of COVID, customers are demanding cleaner stores as well as visible proof that some pathogen-killing cleaning supply was used. According to a consumer survey by P&G, post-covid consumers are:

- More likely to rank overall cleanliness as the most important for hotels
- More likely to choose hotels and restaurants they trust are clean
- More likely to pay more at a restaurant or hotel they trusted was clean

Customers demand businesses be clean, safe, and trustworthy. A clean display is a bare minimum. However, knowing that customers demand cleanliness allows flexing your store's unique ability to meet this need.

The Importance of Cleanliness in Food Merchandising

Cleanliness isn't the only thing that matters, but for most customers, it's the first dealbreaker that will prevent them from ever returning to your store.

An unclean storefront can:

- Leave a lasting negative impression
- Encourage negative feedback and reviews
- Compromise customer or employee safety
- Negatively affect employee morale
- Potentially damage your display or shelves

To avoid this, we recommend first having a clean store and display (of course). However, you shouldn't stop there. After cleaning, work on ways of letting the customer know how seriously you take sanitation. Signage that makes note of your food safety practices, or even calls upon customers to make their voice heard when they see something unsanitary, can build trust in your customer base.

Keep Your Displays Clutter-Free and Spotless

They should be cleaned every night to avoid any cross-contamination, eliminate bad odors, and ensure that no food is ever left in the display overnight. This may mean remaking part of the display every day, so the rest of your design elements should take this into account. Though it may be satisfying to decorate your display with many small pieces, it will be difficult to clean at the end of the day and a few larger, easier-to-clean pieces may make more sense.

Cleaning products with strong odors like bleach or ammonia may be inappropriate in large quantities. If you do use them, it would be wise to air out the display for a while after cleaning it to ensure that customers don't associate your food merchandise with the smell of cleaning products.

Common Signs for Food Merchandising:

Green Microfiber Towel



Shop Now

Spray Bottles



Shop Now

Green Nitrile Cleaning Gloves



Shop Now

See All Cleaning Supplies

Additional Notes on the 6 Elements



1. Start Simple, Then Mix It Up

If you're just starting in food merchandising or are getting back into it since the beginning of COVID, it's best to keep your first few displays simple. Tackle the most pressing and time-consuming elements first, like the material of your display case and its position in your storefront. If you're lacking inspiration, try copying the displays from another store and adding a unique twist. This will help you get the feel of creating displays so you can eventually start from scratch on your own. If you're uncertain what to build a display around, consider crafting a new display once per week based on weekly deals or promotions that your business can hold. This will give you a great chance to practice all six elements on a regular basis. More experience with the process will open up new ways of utilizing these principles that you may not have previously considered.





2. Consider Every Element Holistically

Every element of food merchandising is interconnected with the rest. The same factor that leads to your choice of colors should affect your choice of texture, material, and décor. It's important to keep this global perspective, otherwise, your displays will quickly become disjointed and lack context, making it difficult or impossible for the customer to relate to the experience you're trying to sell them.

To find out if you've crafted a customer experience that is coherent and enjoyable from start to finish, try going through your customer's motions on your own. Start with your storefront and ask what experience it's promising to the customer. Then, you can see if the inside of your store (and the inside of your displays) matches this promised experience.

When every element of food merchandising comes together, you'll have created a great customer experience that stays with them long after they've left your store. This type of impression generates loyalty, good feedback, and higher ROI.

3. Select a Color Palette

We recommend choosing a simple color palette in advance and sticking to it, at least on a display-by-display basis. Just like with individual colors, there can be no right answer as to which palette is best. It will depend entirely on the items you're selling, where you're selling them, and to whom.

Colors are extremely important psychologically, so it's important you don't stack too many conflicting colors, and selecting a palette beforehand will prevent you from straying too far outside the box.

4. Aroma, Sounds, and Temperature

Not mentioned in the 6 elements, these factors are similar to color and should be thought of as ways to enhance your customers' ability to imagine eating your food. When it comes to food merchandising, there is no bridge too far for you to consider. The sound of a gentle sea breeze and some ocean mist filling the air may just make it impossible for your customer to resist the fresh fish offered.

Alternatively, foul-smelling cleaning products, loud noises from a kitchen, or an uncomfortable or disjointed temperature (hot in the frozen aisle, or cold near the baked goods) could all turn a customer away from your food.

These factors are also the reason that there is no replacement for in-person inspection of displays: pictures can tell a lot, but there are factors that can't be fully grasped except by just being there in person. Charge all employees by keeping displays clean, accessible, and intact throughout the day.

Additional Notes on the 6 Elements

5. Plan for Cleaning

Your displays should be cleaned and refreshed after the close of business every day. This means the more complicated and intricate a display is, the more time you will spend taking it down and recreating it.

This isn't a reason to avoid displays that take lots of time, as they can also be the most visually interesting and create a terrific ROI. Instead, make sure you have a plan for how to easily deconstruct and access the displays every night to make cleaning easier.

6. Minimize Clutter

No matter what step of the process you're on, it's important to remind yourself not to overdo it when it comes to decorations, color, texture, or simply the number of items on display. An overly crammed shelf is visually unappealing, could cause product damage and loss, and will make customers question the cleanliness and organization of your entire operation.

A simple, clean-looking display with just a few items will go further than a messy shelf with lots of designs, decorations, and colors. When in doubt, strip your display down to its bare essentials and build it back up from the bottom, keeping the rule of minimizing clutter in mind at all times.

Enjoy the Process

Food merchandising is an activity with the possibility to be creative and really wow customers with unique experiences. A truly unique display case will be one the customer may never see again, which is an opportunity for the best examples to shine through and stick with a customer. Consistently great displays across a wide range of products and time periods will build trust, encourage positive feedback, and generate positive buzz around your merchandise.

Don’t get too lost in the details when trying to create the perfect display. There are as many great ways to sell a product as there are unique people who walk into your store. Even the greatest display won’t work for every customer, so the goal of your display shouldn’t be a universal appeal. Rather, focus on offering an original and interesting experience to the customer focusing mainly on the product and how the customer will consume it.

Lastly, remember to try and enjoy the process of designing displays. The best works of art help convey the emotion of the artist to the viewer, and you should have a similar philosophy when crafting displays. Ask yourself the best, most entertaining way to associate your food merchandise with some positive external factor and have fun letting your creativity take over from there.

Hubert Can Help You Build Displays

For more than 75 years Hubert has been at the top of the food merchandising industry. We've helped thousands of businesses create food displays that turned passive shoppers into active buyers.

As part of our commitment to helping business owners, food directors, and leaders make a difference in their organizations, we publish deep dives like this to help you stay current and effective in a fast-paced and changing world.



To get started, visit: **https://www.hubert.com/content/contact** →

FAQs

We've compiled a list of the internet's most frequently asked questions regarding food merchandising to help address some common concerns.

1 Should I Offer Free Samples of Food Merchandise?

Free samples are a fantastic way to demonstrate the value of your product and build customer trust. Think of free samples as a shortcut to a great customer experience. Not only can the customer imagine how your product is going to meet their needs, but they can also experience the joy of tasting it while they do so.In other words, free samples are a way to prove to your customer that the product is worth buying. It signals good faith and confidence in your product, along with a respect for the consumer, which is more likely to bring customers back again and again. Free samples are also a great way to practice making displays that highlight cooked food that should be moving quickly off the shelves.

2 How Do You Display Food Merchandise in a Store?

Food is merchandise like any other and should be displayed in a way that enhances and accentuates its unique qualities while promising an excellent experience to the customer that buys it.

3 How Can I Make a Certain Food Item Stand Out?

The best way to emphasize a particular item is by drawing attention to it in unique ways. Consider colors, shapes, and forms to accomplish this. As mentioned earlier in the guide, a change in elevation is perhaps the most striking way to make a certain item pop. Placing a product literally above all the others is a powerful visual metaphor that customers won't be able to completely ignore.

FAQs continued

4 Should I Communicate Food Safety Information in My Display?

Food safety information should be clearly displayed within your facility and ideally near the food displays. Keep in mind that most customers won't spend a lot of time looking at a sign, let alone one that includes too much text and detail. Keep safety information brief and colorful so that people take note of what it actually says.

5 What's the Best Color for a Food Display?

White and red are the two most common colors for food displays.

Psychologically, white will evoke feelings of cleanliness, purity, and possibility. Red on the other hand will raise feelings of intensity, passion, and appetite. Creatively there are no limits to which color or colors you use in your display. For simplicity's sake, start with a color palette and consider deviations from it once you're more comfortable with constructing displays.

6 Should I Decorate My Food Display?

Your food display should include decorations that are relevant to the product you're selling and the context you're selling them in. Decorations are a great way to associate your food merchandise with positive things like holidays, events, or culturally specific references.

About Hubert

Hubert has helped foodservice providers for more than 75 years—big and small—create engaging experiences for customers while driving more food sales. Through our partnerships with major vendors, development of private label solutions, and strong inventory management in our 550,000+ sqft warehouse, Hubert has been able to provide customers with the best products and service in the food merchandising industry.

