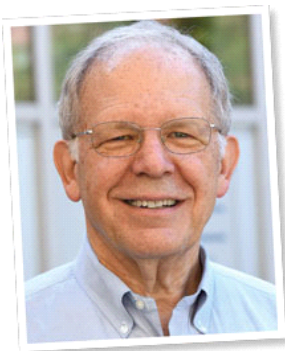


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Re-merchandise ... or Don't?

Bill McCurry



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Frequent product rearrangement isn't black or white among retailers. The best garden centers create an ambiance that encourages customers to slow down, wander and enjoy just being in among the plants. Smart retailers have found ways to catch the attention of these wandering customers, as well as the regular customers who dash in quickly for a specific item.

Jake Scott (2024 Young Retailer Finalist—Piedmont Feed & Garden Center, Chapel Hill, North Carolina) brought up the need for re-merchandising as trends change.

"We are starting a layout revamp to better meet customer needs and business flow.

"The left half of our store has been Gifts in the front, Lawn and Garden care items in the middle, and Pet section at the rear of the store. Many gardeners have pets, however, our pet sales have gone down the last few years. My staff said when they shop stores like TJ Maxx, they visit the pet area just because they want to bring home a new treat or toy to their furry friends. I realized I should move pet items to a higher impulse area.

"Entering from the garden center/greenhouse alongside our retail building, you come into the middle of the right wall with Poultry to the right in the back of the store and Equine to the left.

"We are moving Poultry to the back. Chicken folks will find what they need. Hopefully, putting Pets in that entranceway will generate impulse sales, thereby increasing pet revenue.

"A goal is to swap Equine and L&G so that all plant and pet-related items are by the entrance to the greenhouse.

"I wouldn't change the store/sales layout on a regular basis. Repeat customers like knowing where to find the products they're seeking.

"Endcaps, seasonal displays and areas within the store need to be changed often to catch the attention of regular customers. I see this happen frequently. We move a slow-moving item to a new space and people suddenly see it.

"Changing store layout is needed when you need to change the way customers shop your store or if you need to bring up a department's potential. It shouldn't be done frequently."

McKenzie Lain (2024 Young Retailer Winner—Watters Garden Center, Prescott, Arizona) represented another perspective.

I'm a big advocate for rearranging displays. We switch out our endcaps every two weeks and reorganize entire sections once a month," she said. "This keeps our customers engaged and interested. In my experience, if an item hasn't sold for two weeks, simply moving it will often cause it to sell almost instantly.

"Regular customers get excited when things change. It prevents our products from looking stale and boring. When a display stays the same for too long, customers stop noticing it. When we change things up, their brains register the new arrangement, sparking their interest and encouraging them to explore more."

Randy Soergel (Soergel Orchards, Wexford, Pennsylvania) reported, "We tend to keep a few of these staple items in a certain area. We keep moving the plants around to keep it fresh so every time customers come it's a new experience instead of the same old thing. We don't want customers saying, 'I've been here. I've seen this. I don't need to shop here again.' We make sure to ask customers what they're looking for. I've seen how easily retailers become boring by keeping things in the same place. You want customers to experience what else there is."

Haley Martin (2025 Young Retailer Finalist—B.B. Barns, Arden, North Carolina) said, "Store layouts should remain generally the same. Major changes should be reserved for the slow months. However, entrance displays should change frequently. I could see something highlighted up front, like bulbs when they first arrive, then moving to a back corner once they're mostly sold through. Or a big display when the spring seed order arrives with new varieties, seed-starting supplies and relevant tools would be nice.

"Large categories—like tools, chemicals, gifts, seeds and irrigation supplies—should stay in the same place for customer and staff familiarity. The consistency also helps the staff to direct customers more efficiently. There's a map at the front of our store showing people different areas, which complicates frequent layout changes.

"We made some big changes to the layout because of structural changes and better utilization of forgotten corners. While it was successful, it took a while for customers and staff to get used to the changes. I wouldn't want to do that all the time!"

Teri Smith (Smith's Acres, Niantic, Connecticut) said, "Our basic benches in the greenhouse are pretty much fixed. We do have some tables/benches that we use for attention-grabbers. There's an octagonal, multi-tiered table that we move around to change up displays. We do try to move things around, although in spring I always put geraniums in the back of the greenhouse. This makes folks walk past everything else, like milk in the back of the grocery store."

Teri's team members are called "Veggie Girls," indicating the importance of fresh vegetables to the store's success and traffic. Teri devised a labor-saving quick fix to facilitate the seasonal shifts in produce marketing.

"Certain things are static, on fixed shelves. Produce gets moved around as the season and inventory levels change. Most of our tables—and even the cash and wrap—are on tables with heavy duty rollers. We can move them as seasonal needs dictate. Just as important, we can move them to clean underneath. This is especially important with food items.

"My team is pretty good about switching up displays. Fresh displays sell older products every darn time."

As you evaluate your traffic flow and customers, consider which products are destination items that customers will seek out and which are more likely impulse buys. It's important to consider the gross margin dollars each space generates. Gross margin percentages can be important, but it's dollars we take to the bank.

Sometimes lower margin percentage, with a much higher sales velocity, is a better use of premium display space than a super-high margin product with minimal sales. It's the margin dollars that pay the bills. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.