LIGHTING IN RETAIL

The Importance of an Improved Lighting Package

Never underestimate the importance of lighting in any retail or rental showroom situation. It can make a big difference on the customers impression of the business and even have an effect on business. For a few dollars, anyone, in any situation can make improvements. In the long run it won’t cost, it will pay for itself many times over.

Lighting has an effect on not only the merchandise being displayed and the customer, but also your employees. Studies have proven that lighting not only brightened in general a store environment but makes persons feel more comfortable and even productive. Darker environments are not inviting and tend to make the inhabitants slow down, be less productive and desire to be elsewhere. Brighter environments, or properly lit, on the other hand always invite, captivate, entertain and motivate movement having an overall more productive pleasant experience.

The focus of this article is to offer an introduction to different lighting sources that can be applied to your specific store needs. For greater details, contact your local lighting supplier or salesman. It is important to note that not all resources carry all manufacturers lines but only specific brands. It pays to check and shop around to multiple resources and compare types and costs.

Let’s approach the subject from an overall perspective which includes the three main types of lighting categories; **Overall Ambient General Illumination**

- Focused Task Lighting
- Focused Accent Lighting
- Focal Art Pieces

It is extremely important for any retailer to fully understand that a combination of the three groups identified above is important for a successful environment. This allows for visual contrast between certain parts of the store with brighter areas and even shadows in others. This variance in lights levels actually guides the customer’s eyes through the store and quickly differentiates specific areas from others.

**Ambient General Illumination**

**Recessed fluorescent lighting**

In most situations this is referred to as the main lighting plan in a space. When new store or building plans are developed, they typically start with recessed fluorescent 24” x 48”, 3 lamp or four lamp fixtures, or even 24” x 24” units. This provides for adequate lighting but in most cases meeting minimal requirements of 30-50 foot-candles. Most times the fixtures specified and installed are the least expensive possible. Especially if you are dealing with leased spaces in which the landlord is responsible for providing the main lighting source. The lenses in the fixtures are opaque prismatic frosted which actually trap light within the fixture
never allowing it to reach the space. What is achieved is a dimmer light glow versus the full effect of the lamps.

To remedy this situation, allowing greater light contribution to a space, store owners should always install parabolic louvers. There are two basic types available on the market.

Injection molded polystyrene plastic, or often referred to as eggcrate, is readily available in white, silver and brass finishes. Most often they consist of 1/2” x 1/2” square cells. These may also receive a metalized specular finish.

The other is a deeper cell with a larger opening allowing increased light downward. The cells are a minimum of 3 ½” x 3 ½” x 1 ½” deep. Aluminum is the typical material and finish of choice. While this light fixture allows greater light outward, it tends to direct the light more downward with less width of light spread as compared to the basic prismatic. However, the light is brighter and not as diffused and dim.

With all recessed fluorescent light sources, the actual ceiling height has an effect on the end result. The higher the ceiling, the more the light spreads outward to the sides. The lower the ceiling to the floor, the more focused straight downward effect can be noticed.

**Recessed Downlighting**-

This category is also commonly referred to by many as “Can lights”. That is because their appearance is that of a round metallic cylinder recessed up into ceiling areas.

The beauty of these lights is that they provide a light source without occupying a lot of ceiling space. They produce a more focused downlight effect with either compact fluorescent, H.I.D. or incandescent lamp sources. They can be fixed to force light straight down or have adjustable sockets to direct the light on angles.

These lights are much more decorative and can be typically found in front display windows, over service counters, inside offices and main traffic aisles. At times you can find these lights in large rooms and meeting halls.

Variations of these light types have even been redesigned to suspend on stems as pendant light sources.

**Suspended Fluorescent Light Sources**-

A second light fixture of choice with higher ceiling areas is still a fluorescent, but suspended down from the ceiling surface. The main type is still a downward light source and may have a louver lens. It is not uncommon in many warehouse or open ceiling situations to actually suspend open industrial, or shop lights in the main space. This type of light can support many rental business with a rougher less business approach. At the same time, it lends itself
to a more industrial or mechanical image which isn’t necessarily objectionable. Just a different approach.

There are optional designs available within this lighting group that also reflect light upwards and a combination of both up and down lighting.

The obvious benefits of fluorescent lighting sources is energy efficiencies and long life lamps.

With regards to the actual ballast, magnetic are preferred over electronic since they are more energy efficient and quieter. The typical lamp of choice these days is the T-8.

**Suspended High Bay and Low Bay Lighting Types**

This lighting group is most commonly known as H.I.D., High Intensity Discharge, and can be viewed in warehouses, industrial installations, school gymnasiums and sporting arenas. They are designed to withstand vibration, are dust and corrosive free when used with shields.

In most retail or rental store locations, the simply offer a softer illumination at similar energy efficiencies as the standard fluorescents. These types of lights are quickly identified as those that take a bit longer to warm up and illuminate.

The standard lamp sources are Metal Halide, Ceramic Metal Halide, High Pressure Sodium and White Son.

Society has taken this lighting source and made some changes making it more acceptable in many other installations. The housing is not only available in spun or die-cast aluminum but also plastics and glass. Detailing can be added with cages, external wire supports and custom metal finishes.

Resources and manufacturers have responded to this type of effect and produced colored options for the housings or shields. The lamp sources can also be the more readily available compact fluorescents and standard A-lamps.

**Focused Task Lighting**

This group is that which is mainly intended for the sales associates to be able to perform their duties with sufficient levels of light. For example, over a work bench, service counter or desk. At the same time, this source of light can be decorative as well as functional.

What you will start to see is that between the three different groups of lighting, there are some sources or types that function in multiple categories. Recessed down lights can be used as Task Lighting when positioned over the areas of need.
Another way to achieve Task Lighting is with wall mounted lighting over counters against walls. It doesn’t always have to be directly down from the ceiling. Be creative with the applications.

**Focused Accent Lighting**

When we think about this category, we usually quickly align with surface mounted or suspended track lighting. To properly achieve its role in the lighting package it should be adjustable. And of course, track best meets the needs.

At the same time, track can be creatively used and a decorative message sent within a store or environment. It doesn’t have to look like everybody’s standard track that has been purchased at the local Home Center. In fact, retailers are urged to use the accent lighting as a statement. Make it stand out yet compliment the overall environment.

A couple of examples are track heads that have glass globes of various coloration’s. Or metal shields of a different shape and finish.

A wide variety or low voltage lamps fixtures are available versus the standard large halogen or par lamp units. There are even some wonderful fluorescent track heads that are designed for use as accent lights fitting into track. These fixtures assist with energy reduction yet still providing a very powerful and useful light source.

The most typical location of use is in front of wall focal areas, graphics or signage, back wall area of the service counter and even endcaps on main aisles. This allows for the brighter light source that was mentioned earlier in this article.

Track heads should be no less than 8'-0" – 9'-0" above the finished floor and 4'-0" – 5'-0" from the front surface that it is intended to illuminate. One of the most common installation mistakes that many electricians and general contractors make is to automatically install the track 4'-0" from the wall surface. You have to allow for the depth of the product or image that the light source is being installed for use with always. If not, the angle of the light doesn’t have any depth on the shelves or merchandise. Instead of properly washing the area, it effects less being less productive and dramatic is a basic installation.

In general, use some imagination when designing and laying out the stores lighting package. Yes, it will cost you additional dollars. Yes, it will add time to the schedule. Yes, you will definitely get credit for the expense and time from the customers and make a statement differentiating you from the norm in the rental store industry. Is that important? It’s a must! It takes the image to a higher level of credibility with the customer. It will initiate conversation and thus word of mouth marketing which is priceless.

As with any lighting type, it is imperative that the retailer or store owner use commercial quality products. Residential quality products will not perform as well, nor as long with the
demands of typical use. Ballasts will burn out quicker and the quality will not always last with simple lamp changes or adjustment.

Focal art Pieces –

This is likely the most fun you can add to a retail environment.

Lighting strategically located over the main entrance, in the middle of the store or over the cash wrap / service counter.

With today’s resources there are so many FUN chandeliers available. Yes they cost more than standard lighting, but you definitely get credit for them.

Another application is a grouping of same fixtures at varied heights, or different lighting types in a grouping.

YOU HAVE TO PLAN ON SPENDING SOME REAL MONEY TO HAVE A GREAT LIGHTING PACKAGE, BUT IT’S WORTH IT!