

The Perspective of a Local Business about the Design Management and Visual Merchandising: Analysis of *Café François*

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ABSTRACT

The design management presents a creative thinking and provides innovative solutions for the most various organizational levels. Thus, it is sought to demonstrate to managers and entrepreneurs the benefits of a effective plan of design management and, in this case, their relationship with the point of sale. The marketing competition allows the visual merchandising be a differentiation tool and consumer conquest. Therefore, this article seeks to identify the relationship between the design management and visual merchandising applied to a case analysis of a *boulangerie*¹ in the city of Florianópolis (Brazil) and what is the owner's understanding about these issues. Through a bibliographical research about the two key subjects, an interview with the entrepreneur and visits to the place, the proposed research is described. Through the organizational behavior under study and, as a secondary objective, it will be understood in which level is the concern with the point of sale while a design management tool and direct contact with the consumer and how the actions of the brand are reflected in this space.

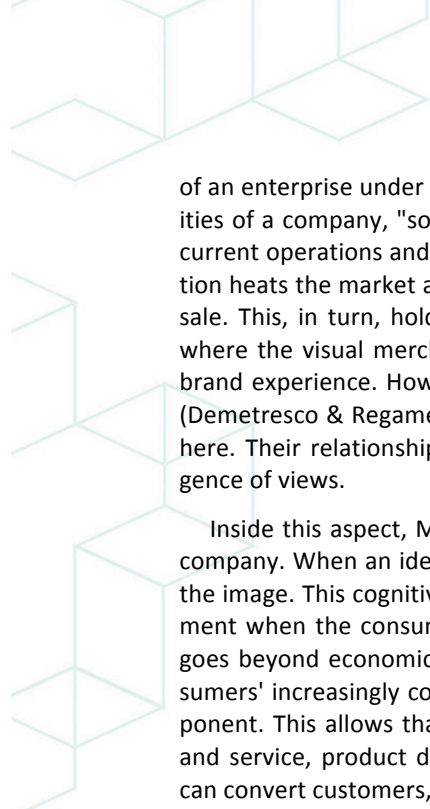
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INTRODUCTION

Casual bakeries, where traditionally were offered only items of daily morning needs to customers, have suffered changes and adjustments as this user demonstrates new needs. Through aspects that range from the brand design to the setting of the point of sale, they describe what kind of public that a business wants to achieve. These elements also give a sense of what you can find to eat. Based on this quest for differentiation and excellence in what is being proposed, some bakeries decide to change their focus adopting visual concepts brought from Europe, as also seek to meet the desires of their audience. (Rugai & Paula, 2007, p.2).

As with other types of retail business, "the design is a management tool that creates differentiation in the internal capacities of the company" (Mozota; Klöpsch & Costa, 2011, p.145). In this context, the management

¹ *Boulangerie*: French noun that means "bakery". But its context in retail refers to the commercialized products, aspects of the point of sale, the business model management, etc.



of an enterprise under the design guidelines provides an opportunity to renew it, becoming effective the activities of a company, "so as to generate a conflict between the management that should take into account the current operations and the need for renewal" (Centro Português de Design, 1997, p.23). The proposed innovation heats the market and creates new experiences to consumers, which can be explored through the point of sale. This, in turn, holds the power of applicability of the intrinsic concepts of a brand or company. This is where the visual merchandising meets the design management, and together, they can provide a complete brand experience. However, the activity of visual merchandising has been largely linked to window dressing³ (Demetresco & Regamey, 2012) than a component of the design management tool, as it is tried to emphasize here. Their relationship is not been studied yet, even though the basic concepts of each one show convergence of views.

Inside this aspect, Martins & Merino (2011, p.31) reflect on the benefits of using design in the image of a company. When an identity presents visual unity, the consumers realize the quality and associate the offer to the image. This cognitive sequence can be decisive when choosing one company over another. This is the moment when the consumer also realizes the value, where this is the determining factor of choice, because it goes beyond economic assumptions (Martins & Merino, 2011, p.29). The value is related to needs and consumers' increasingly complex desires and it is where the visual merchandising emerges as an additional component. This allows that such desires are met through factors that involve a point of sale, such as reception and service, product display, ambiance, sensorial stimuli, etc. An effective proposal of visual merchandising can convert customers, or otherwise, remove them.

In this context, the present study aims to find the knowledge of a small local business owner about the basics ideas of design management and visual merchandising, and if it is applied in his business and what the perceived benefits. It is a primary and punctual study, given the lack of research correlating the two areas. It is considered an early promoter of afterthoughts about the subject.

The *boulangerie* chosen is currently a gastronomic local reference. Because of this title its popularity has increased and, consequently, the number of clients attending the selling point and have contact with the brand. Here it is introduced the proposed concern about an effective design management combined with visual merchandising. Together they take advantage of this situation for the customer perceives the brand value and take with him a maximum shopping experience. Such behavior was analyzed through place visits and observation of the customers. The fact that the owner has French nationality also raised questions about the business model and visual treatment of the store that were asked.

The bibliographic basis of the article found limitations on the availability of works related to the visual merchandising theme. So, on this deficiency was found a contribution opportunity associating the theme to the design management.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

From the problem exposure and goals of the work, it is sought to characterize the nature of the research. Neves (1996) presents the qualitative research as something that does not seek to enumerate or measure events, and it is its nature to obtain descriptive data by direct contact between researcher and study object. According to the research guide, it fits on this condition. However, according to Gil (2002), the research has exploratory character, which is defined by providing familiarity with a particular topic by refining ideas. It is also classified by presenting a literature review of books or papers.

After reviewing the literature, the research is conducted by selecting a case for an analysis, which is rich in descriptive data and focuses the reality on a complex and contextualized way (Duarte, 2012). This phase includes the local visit and also the observation of customers. After direct observation, it is followed by a semi-open interview, as set by Duarte (2012), which also ranks as a qualitative technique of gathering information. Finally, the data is organized and written in the form of analysis and crossed with the bibliographic review of the two main themes (design management and visual merchandising).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESIGN MANAGEMENT AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Design can be commonly associated with a creative and beauty perspective, where goods and services are recognized as design being if presenting some differential within that scope. However, the design is also related to the management model adopted by a company. The management through design differs communicating the ways in which design can contribute to the strategic value of a company (Mozota et. al, 2011, p.95). Adjectives that concern to the design professional such as attention to details, initiative and creativity itself, strengthen the desired innovation through this management model.

The design, from the development, may be the key element of a business. The company's activities are effective when there is a constant concern of renewal. For this, one option is to make innovation becomes into something meaningful and answer the real needs of customers. The driving force of change is the design management, which becomes responsible for planning the actions and positioning a brand in order to better serve its customers and make success of its operations. "Make the design and the innovation something installed in the corporate culture is absolutely necessary for long-term profitability" (Centro Português de Design, 1997, p.23).

The task of managing brands suggests a search in consumers' minds about what they expect from the company as a promoter of sensations through the goods and services offered. Norman (2008) reflects on the importance of these objects in everyday human being. The author reports that they are no more than simple material possessions, not only for demonstrate superficiality by wealth and status, but for the meaning they bring to life. "A favorite object is a symbol, which induces a positive mental attitude, a reminder that brings good memories, or sometimes an expression of ourselves" (Norman, 2008, p.26). To these objects usually is attributed a story, a memory or some other thinking that connects the person to that particular object. From this behavior actions are removed which design management will take advantage. One of them is present at the point of sale, where this product or service is offered and where the contact with the consumer is consolidated. This is the visual merchandising, which is responsible for "works the point of sale environment by creating identity and personifying decoratively all the equipment that surrounds products" (Blessa, 2008, p.6). It is through this activity that the actions proposed by the design management for a particular brand are translated into sensory experiences in the retail space. The consumer, inserted there, is open to experiences and susceptible to experience them. Thus, a structured design management plan will have the visual merchandising as an ally in order to catch and conquer this individual.

The way this consumer express himself, through his behavior at the point of sale, helps to define the company playing fields in the future. He is the main focus of precursor studies of a management activity. Silva (2002) emphasizes the importance of demonstrating the concern that the company has with its audience. This ensures the satisfaction of their desires and expectations. It ends up becoming a continuous exchange between company and consumer, where the first will seek constantly to satisfy the audience in a way that innovation can be also present in the shopping experience. It is critical to the success of the project to establish the focus and the business personality in accordance with its public, since the visual result may induce or not a customer to walk into a store.

From the buying atmosphere to the visual system and all the feelings that involve the act of consumption, these are part of the steps for a successful visual merchandising. The management allows evaluate the actions and adapt them to the success of the brand, company, products and services. Thus, the visual merchandising emerges as an expressive constituent element of the design management plan. The mutual cooperation between the two areas allows the study of the maximum brand experience, where the point of sale may be the apex of this contact.

For this proposal it was sought, through an interview, to know what is the entrepreneur's understanding of both areas and/or if it is applied at his point of sale. It was considered important for the research, even in small businesses, that they know the benefits of design management and visual merchandising, separately, and boosted when united.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY AND POINT OF SALE *CAFÉ FRANÇOIS*

It is considered important briefly introduce the studied company, so during the exhibition of the obtained data and results, the understanding is facilitated. Thus, *Café François* is a *boulangerie* located in Florianópolis and it has been made salient year after year through awards, recognition of the quality of its products and differentiation in the exposure model of breads and pastries. The single owner, a native of France, has opted for the French bakery model in order to differentiate to the local competition. His business career involves, among others, many years of experience in bakeries located both in France and Brazil and so he has specialized in this branch of commerce. His functions in the company are focused, today, in the activities related to the administration and management of both the coffee itself and the people.

The *Café François*' point of sale is attached to a business group building that borders a state highway that runs through the city (figure 1). It has small parking in front and the area reserved for tables and for sales is all internal. In this same space it is also the kitchen, or production, which gives a peculiar smell to the entire *Café*. The sales hall is made up of tables and chairs that accommodate different sizes of groups of people (figure 2). The sales desk is located in opposite side of the front door, where are exposed the breads, ham, cheeses, pastries and other sweets (figures 3, 4 and 5). The walls have green color, different from the colors found in the brand's logo. There is a predominance of woody textures (floor, furniture, exhibitors).



Figure 1. Façade of *Café François*



Figure 2. Sales Hall



Figures 3, 4 and 5. Product exposure

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED WITH THE INTERVIEW AND LOCAL VISIT

This research has a practical step guided by a semi-open interview. The dialogue was held with the owner of *Café François*, on the spot. Interview's questions were based in design management and visual merchandising definitions, set previously, in order to expose them to the interviewee even though he already took knowledge.

Initially, when asked about design management, the owner quickly linked exclusively to packaging, which was the latest design intervention in his business. From the creation of the brand, passing through the point of sale and the management model, only the first was done by a team of designers. Therefore, some points as choosing the color palette of the sales environment, staff uniform, and others, present divergence when placed side-by-side with the visual identity of the *Café*. On the other hand, the entrepreneur recognizes that this adaptation to the customer profile contributes with their recognition and is also reflected in invoicing.

Already on the business management model and people, the owner says that all makes part of his career. What he applies in the *Café* is what he has learned over the years in the companies where he worked. He adds that one problem is the high turnover of staff and, as he values the standardization and quality of his products, this becomes an obstacle. Among many other times where the design management could be applied, it was considered here its best contribution. Through the involvement of employees in the company, making they note the result of their work, these may be the early enthusiastic of that brand, the first to have the purest experiences. This gives to the company a collaborative cycle, where the employees can propose innovations in various levels of the organizational sphere when they see the recognition of their work. The *Centro Português de Design* (1997) points out that the company that is engaged with the management and recognizes the importance of its presence acquires strategic and competitive advantage over their competitors. When user-centered, design management allows to monitor the market variables, the problems and solutions raised by the reflection on what the consumer seeks. Knowing the consumer and knowing meet his demand opens the way for new strategies. The employee can play this role, as he is the one with the larger direct contact with the customer. This is confirmed when the owner is asked about the knowledge of the *Café's* audience. He says that does not usually talk directly to consumers, but pass his knowledge and technique to employees. Thus, the feedbacks are focused on the employee again.

The priority for the *Café* is the product, followed by the service, but there again the recognition that the set of actions at the point of sale bring the expected result, even in a long term. Gurgel (2005) complements saying that consumers consider, first of all, the service, the image related to the product, quality, innovation, ethics of the company, the guarantee offered and access to information related to products and services offered. These questions contribute to a good retail experience attended by visual merchandising. Most of the time, a brand seeks to translate a lifestyle, a mindset, a social status. Even so the concern with the products' exposure can be unconscious, this ends by selecting the consumer profile, their status and the identification he has with the brand and space.

The translation of the visual identity of the *Café* to the point of sale finds divergences on the colors and

shapes. While the visual signature has the gold and dark red color (figure 6), the walls of the *Café* are green (figure 7), a color that is not seen at any time in the brand's applications and signature. When asked, the owner justifies based on the green color's signification. Gurgel (2007) also emphasizes the psychological influence of the colors in consumer behavior. They act in the subconscious making the person remember certain sensations through their experience, thus changing your mood. Opt for a color is not an intuitive task, it is part of the projective tools and not just a decorative element in the composition. From this, it is necessary to link brand and point of sale for one to be the complement of the other when the goal is to break into the consumer's mind and cause a shopping experience.



Figure 6. *Café François* visual signature



Figure 7. *Café François* green walls

CONCLUSION

The design management definitions pointed in this study allows a direct crossing with the visual merchandising ones, which it was concluded that the point of sale is another way of expression of the brand. Through direct contact with the consumer, the brand brings to him a shopping experience, breaking into your senses and resulting in brand memory. Therefore, visual merchandising can be considered as another element in the plan of design management.

The interview and case analysis of a local business enabled some initial research, punctual and objective about the two proposed topics. However briefly, it is expected that this study has a continuation with the application of the design management at *Café François* having visual merchandising as an ally. The objective is to propose the above-described improvements and visually tailor the space to the brand and its principles.

It was also expected to enrich the portfolio of publications in the field of design (as a manager of actions) that joins directly with the visual merchandising, given the common connection only with window dressing or with the fashion area.

Upon reflection on the interview with the owner, it was concluded that the design management is not present in the *Café*, while the visual merchandising shyly appears where its actions are made by intuition and knowledge of the business owner. The observation of the point of sale allowed to analyze the circulation, attention points and what was the "tour" chosen by the customers. It is known that there is a flow difference according to hours and days of the week, but at the moment of the interview it was possible to observe some clients and quickly point some spots where visual merchandising could be applied following the design management plan in order to cover such failures.

Between the limitations of the research was the request made by the owner to not made direct contact with the customers, becoming enable an expected step in the interviews that was to cross the conversation information with the entrepreneur.

In this study object, the point of sale was not considered an expression tool of the design management, since the latter is not in the knowledge of the manager. Some points previously pointed find their solution through a management plan. On the other hand, there is a constant concern about the visual aspect of the place. The way the products are exposed, the organization of the sales hall and the quality are recognized as a search for differentiation before the competition. Both the design management and the visual merchandising

work at the strategic level and business planning. They are related to buying behavior, brand image and the emotion that involves since the creation, marketing at point of sale to the return that allows constant maintenance of the brand, thus framing a cycle. This can be enriched by the experience that the *Café* employees acquire thanks to their proximity to the customer.

Finally, the research needs to continue for the design management plan is implemented and their results evaluated, as it is shown that its importance is only local. However, the bibliographic review and his theoretical contribution raise further studies to join design management and visual merchandising. It is needed, also, that other fields of study must be considered, as the purchase's atmosphere, interior design and maybe service design.

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