

Visual Merchandiser

Introduction

Visual merchandisers design and create displays for the windows and departments of retail outlets. Their aim is to promote sales by making the products on display look attractive.

Also known as

- Display Assistant, Retail
- Retail Display Assistant
- Window Dresser



Work Activities

As a Visual Merchandiser, you will design and create window and floor displays for retail outlets. Your displays are used to encourage and promote sales, and make stores attractive places in which to shop.

The work of a Visual Merchandiser usually starts a long time before the display is needed. Typical projects might include dressing the window of a clothes shop or re-creating a fully furnished room on the floor of a furniture shop or department. Visual merchandising is sometimes known as retail display.

Most large retail chain stores have central design teams who plan and co-ordinate displays for all their company's shops. Most of their time is spent in a drawing office/studio, usually based at company headquarters. They plan designs according to the image or 'look' they want to create for customers.

However, in some organisations, you may have the responsibility to design a display yourself. You'll begin by choosing an appropriate theme (usually a seasonal event, such as Christmas) and then measure the display area to be used. These measurements may be used to make scale drawings.

You will then decide what the overall colour scheme is going to be, which props you need, and how the display is to be arranged. You may also make any props that can't be hired or borrowed. You'll arrange lighting to make the displays stand out.

Putting up displays can be hard work. Display areas are often cramped and confined spaces. Props and merchandise have to be lifted and moved very carefully, as they may eventually be sold.

As a freelance Visual Merchandiser, you may have to travel in order to visit clients and carry out your work.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become a Visual Merchandiser, you need:

- creativity and imagination
- a good eye for colour, balance and arrangement
- communication and teamworking skills
- physical fitness and stamina (building a display can be hard, physical work)
- to work to deadlines
- an understanding of health and safety measures (working in confined spaces or with power tools can be dangerous)
- knowledge of design-related software

Business skills and a driving licence are also useful if you work as a freelancer.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £18,500 - £20,000
- With experience: £21,500 - £24,000
- Senior Visual Merchandisers earn £26,000

Earnings for self-employed, freelance Visual Merchandisers vary depending on the scale of the project you are working on.

Hours of work

Visual Merchandisers usually work a 39 hour week. However, late finishes and weekend work may be required from time to time, especially as deadlines approach. Part-time opportunities are also available.

Where could I work?

Employers include large retail chain stores and supermarkets. Independent retailers are more likely to use freelance Designers, who both design and put together displays.

There are also opportunities to work in:

- advertising
- films and TV
- airports
- museums
- galleries
- hotels
- theme-parks
- visitor attractions

Opportunities for Visual Merchandisers occur with employers in towns and cities throughout the UK, however many of the large retail chain stores and supermarket central design teams are based at company headquarters.

Large companies may offer training and development opportunities.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment and employers' websites, and on Find a Job (www.gov.uk/jobsearch).

Social media websites, such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, are a great way to network, find vacancies and get in contact with possible employers. Make sure that your profile presents you in a professional manner that will appeal to potential employers.

Take a look at our General Information Article 'Finding Work Online'.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

One way to enter this work is by doing a relevant course, such as a British Display Society (BDS) qualification.

Another way to enter this career is by taking a relevant design course, such as interior design or fashion. Skills gained in another area of retail, either in-store or at head office, may be useful.

An Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship is also a great place to start.

Some people enter this career after a visual merchandising foundation degree. There are two available in the UK:

- visual merchandising and promotional design from Hugh Baird College, Liverpool
- fashion retail branding and visual merchandising from the University of the Arts London

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.

Training

Training will mainly be on-the-job.

If you would like some training, the British Display Society offer an online course in display and visual merchandising. This course will let you learn all the basic of visual merchandising, where you could learn about:

- the definition of visual merchandising and its purpose
- how different businesses use visual merchandising
- words and phrases used in the industry
- basic guidelines for display
- common fabrics and structural materials
- dressing a mannequin
- selecting an outfit as well as its accessories
- how to create a theme for a presentation
- signs, graphics and ticketing
- basic colour theory

Check the website for dates and availability.

Other courses could be available in your area.

Work Experience

Having a portfolio of relevant design work is useful. However, in common with most jobs in design, entry is very competitive.

Progression

With training and experience, it may be possible to move into managerial positions.

Qualifications

Initial entry on to a British Display Society (BDS) course does not demand high academic qualifications. Basic entry requirements are a strong artistic flair, numeracy and literacy.

A portfolio of work is also required.

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'll usually need five GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, possibly including English and maths.

The entry requirements for the two visual merchandising foundation degrees are quite varied. For both, an A level in art would be useful, along with some GCSE passes at grade C/4 or above. You'll also need a portfolio of work.

Acceptable alternatives to A levels include:

- BTEC level 1, 2 or 3 qualification in retail knowledge or fine art
- the International Baccalaureate Diploma

- a design Advanced Level Apprenticeship

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Skills/experience

Having a portfolio of relevant design work is useful. However, in common with most jobs in design, entry is very competitive.

Courses

Colleges will usually consider applications from candidates who don't meet their usual entry requirements, especially those with skills gained in arts, crafts or design. You should check the admissions policy of individual colleges.

The British Display Society (BDS) offers a short course: Distance Learning Certificate in Display & Visual Merchandising.

Some people enter this career via a Retail Intermediate Level Apprenticeship.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Tel: 0800 015 0400
Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
Tel: 0800 9178000
Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships
- **ScreenSkills**
Skills for the creative industries
Email: info@creativeskillset.org
Website: www.creativeskillset.org
- **Creative Choices**
Publisher: Creative & Cultural Skills
Email: info@creative-choices.co.uk
Website: www.creative-choices.co.uk
- **Jobsite UK**
Retail, fashion and hospitality industries
Tel: 020 8340 3366
Email: help@jobsite.co.uk
Website: www.theappointment.co.uk
- **Creative & Cultural Skills**
Skills for craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts

Email: london@ccskills.org.uk

Website: ccskills.org.uk

- **A Career in Retail**

Email: jmarshall@pts.com

Website: www.acareerinretail.co.uk

- **InRetail**

Retail recruitment

Website: www.inretail.co.uk

- **People 1st**

Address: 4th Floor, 93 Newman Street, London W1T 3EZ

Tel: 020 7462 5060

Email: info@people1st.co.uk

Website: www.nsaforretail.com

- **London College of Fashion**

Address: 20 John Princes' Street, London W1G 0BJ

Tel: 020 7514 7400

Email: enquiries@fashion.arts.ac.uk

Website: www.fashion.arts.ac.uk

- **Fashion Retail Academy**

Address: 15 Gresse Street, London W1T 1QL

Tel: 020 7307 2345

Email: info@fra.ac.uk

Website: www.fashionretailacademy.ac.uk

- **British Display Society (BDS)**

Tel: 020 8856 2030

Email: enquiries@britishdisplaysociety.co.uk

Website: www.britishdisplaysociety.co.uk

- **University of the Arts London (UAL)**

Address: 272 High Holborn, London WC1V 7EY

Tel: 020 7514 6000

Email: admissions@arts.ac.uk

Website: www.arts.ac.uk

- **Hugh Baird College**

Address: Balliol Road, Bootle, Liverpool L20 7EW

Tel: 0151 3534444

Email: enquiries@hughbaird.ac.uk

Website: www.hughbaird.ac.uk

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**

Tel: 0800 028 4844

Website: ams.careerswales.com/

Related Careers

- Medical Illustrator
- Design Assistant
- Fashion Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Artworker
- Metal Engraver
- Commercial Illustrator
- Signmaker
- Ceramics Designer

- Footwear Designer
- Furniture Designer
- Product Designer
- Vehicle Designer
- Interior Designer
- Jewellery Designer
- Packaging Designer
- Textile Designer
- Costume Designer
- Theatre Designer
- Musical Instrument Technician
- Picture Researcher
- Technical/Scientific Illustrator
- Model Maker
- Picture Framer
- Designer
- Illustrator
- Artist
- CGI Artist
- VFX Artist
- Nostalgist