

First impressions mean everything, especially in the world of retail



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Throughout my years at FAME, one essential principle I've reiterated over and over again with clients is the need to make a strong first impression. When someone considers your shop, what do they see? Clean lines that invite them to venture further inside? Or clutter and chaos, which often has the opposite effect?

In this second year of joining Deluxe Corporation to help transform local businesses with the Small Business Revolution - Main Street, I've been humbled once again by seeing these remarkable entrepreneurs realize their

potential. They want to bring something better to the community they serve and as a result are so willing and eager to take our advice.

This year, we worked with two businesses, Miguel's Riverside Barber Shop and Polka Dot Parlor. We showed both how to more effectively leverage their store space. The barber shop was more straightforward, essentially just needing some assistance configuring a new buildout for retail products and promotional swag. However, Polka Dot Parlor called for more extensive consideration because it had a more eclectic and less defined concept.

Polka Dot Parlor is the only retail clothing store on Mill Street in downtown Bristol Borough, Pennsylvania. As such, owner Paulette Kasmer is uniquely positioned to really influence the future of this Main Street district. Her edgy assortment runs the gamut from \$90 dresses to \$2 bracelets and everything in between.

Open less than a year, Polka Dot Parlor has been struggling to find its footing. At first glance, her store was just as advertised: edgy and eclectic. But it was stuffed to the gills, to the point where there were no clear sightlines. That's an issue. Like many new shop owners, Paulette wanted to showcase all her fun finds, all at once. But as proud as you may be of your products, this is something that you just can't do. When everything is emphasized, nothing stands out.

Every retail shop is unique, and the layout should complement the dimensions of the space. So, while there are certainly guidelines, there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all rule. That said, here are a few basic insights we shared with Polka Dot Parlor:

Establish clear views

Don't place tall racks of clothes near the front of the store. If someone is looking through a window or your front door, they want to see multiple items to have a sense of what you offer. Tall racks stacked with too many items will turn people off, and they won't come in.

Arrange by category

Paulette was open to suggestions but didn't want her style to be edited. I can respect that. So we created little "parlor-ettes" — areas where she could showcase similarly themed items without having them spread across the store.

Maximize your windows

Paulette has great windows to display her finds, but she was cluttering her space with too many things. So we cleaned up the area, focused on seasons and gave her a calendar that explains how to adjust the space according to the time of year.

Adhere to limits

There's a propensity among new shop owners to chase revenue, even when it's not fully aligned with their store concept or space considerations. Along with clothing and accessories, Paulette offered aromatherapy and Reiki therapy. Her space, while suited to retail, isn't appropriate for the rest. Retailers need to stay true to their store's concept.

A breath of fresh retail in a quaint Main Street community, Polka Dot Parlor has a solid fan base and unlimited upside potential. With a few key pivots in the right direction, Paulette's shop can become an exciting destination. And if she sticks to the layout and merchandising plan, she'll be able to make an impactful first impression on every visit — and her loyal clientele will continue to spread the good word.