

# VISUAL MERCHANDISING GUIDELINES



## **CUSTOMERS FIRST**

Retailers have long known the importance of merchandising their products using attention-grabbing exhibits and displays. An eye-catching window display draws customers into a store, as will a prominent sign placed near the flow of traffic. End aisle displays used in many stores promote impulse purchasing. While the marketplace benefits from this type of advertising, librarians can utilize many of the same techniques to enhance the looks of their library, promote its activities and generate more browsing at little or no cost.

Anythink maintains beautiful environments for its libraries, renewing their vitality as public gathering places in our communities. Anythinkers have helped to define unique experience zones that encourage interactivity, education, discovery and play. Staff infuses our libraries with warm-hearted helpfulness, providing the highest-quality service to each and every customer in their quest for intellectual discovery and connectivity to the world around them. Anythink has always been a “service-forward” enterprise. Hospitality is our hallmark, inspired by putting our customers first in everything we do.

## **PASSION FOR OUR PRODUCTS**

We complement our great customer service by displaying passion for our products. We do this through the use of an energetic visual display program.

In order to merchandise our products in the most effective way, it is helpful to keep in mind the values associated with the mission of our library to *open doors for curious minds*:

*Compassion for our customers and for each other*

*Passion for our product*

*Eagerness to learn*

*Optimistic attitude*

Our library products, combined with top-notch customer service, superlative technology and inspiring physical surroundings, create the rich offering of free public library service that enhances our communities. But it is our collections of circulating books and materials that are our most visible attributes and most effective components in providing a rewarding experience to our visitors. It is essential that they be arranged in ways that make them easy to find and irresistible to browse.

Anythink uses the WordThink method for arranging library materials in simple subject categories (cooking, gardening, biographies, picture books, etc.). Our brand-inspired signage

and wayfinding graphics are installed in all libraries, helping to connect our customers with our materials.

Furniture and merchandising spaces in our libraries provide focal points in traffic areas and thematic zones in which we can develop high-profile product displays that appeal to customer browsing instincts.

## I. MERCHANDIZING AT ANYTHINK

### WORDTHINK ORGANIZATION OF MATERIALS

Our decision to switch from the traditional Dewey Decimal system to a word-based style of subject categories is a significant advancement in connecting our customers to our products. WordThink is based off of the Book Industry Standards and Communications system, a retail-based standard for organizing materials. Similar to what you might see in a bookstore, materials are arranged by simple categories like history, teen, home & garden, and arts & humanities rather than a numeric system.

This easy-to-understand, customer-focused product arrangement makes our everyday merchandising efforts come alive and creates topical “neighborhoods” that lend themselves to larger thematic displays.



Here are three main things to remember when arranging books using WordThink:

1. WordThink categories start and end on the same shelf whenever possible.
2. Keep categories all in the same shelving section; they never jump across aisles.
3. To make things easier for the customer, WordThink categories start on higher shelves for easy viewing, not on bottom shelves.

### STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MERCHANDISING

At Anythink, everyone has a hand in keeping our libraries clean, tidy and welcoming. Systematic merchandising of our library materials is an important component of our promotional activities. Every Anythink location is expected to actively merchandise their products both on-shelf and in special display areas. Specific merchandising duties are included in our job descriptions:

**Guides** coordinate the implementation of the system-wide merchandising displays at the branch level and add materials from the local collection. They also create any branch-specific promotional displays in the designated display areas and manage merchandising of our library materials on the shelves. They are also responsible for creating any signage to complement these displays.

**Concierges** ensure that display signage is in place and promotional literature is kept stocked. They also maintain video and other interactive display components.

Additionally, concierges keep all branch end-cap, range-top and table displays “fluffed” – tidy and well stocked throughout the day – with additional materials that relate to the display theme. They check all displays no less than once an hour and fill in any gaps as materials are being checked out.

**Wranglers** shelve our materials, keeping the shelves neatly arranged and our products looking attractive. They “front” the shelf contents, facing out titles where appropriate within the range and also on bookstands at the end of range runs where space allows. Wranglers keep all in-shelf displays fluffed throughout the day, filling in gaps and rearranging shelf contents.

**Communications liaisons** keep track of all the branch display equipment and coordinate the branch’s display equipment needs and promotional requests through the Communications Department and Dolores Sandoval (SS).

**Each staff member** is responsible for orienting themselves to the materials on display each day prior to opening or before their shift begins. It is important that all staff know what themes and materials are being promoted, and where the materials are located, especially if the materials are being pulled from their usual locations and displayed elsewhere in the library. Everyone pitches in to help fluff displays whenever they have a few free moments during the course of their shifts.

We all take great pride in our library environments and keeping our attractive books, magazines and media materials in tip-top shape and irresistible for our customers to pass by. This also includes straightening furniture, picking up trash, etc. Also, communicating any larger issues to the Anythink manager or PIC is key; is there a piece of furniture that’s broken? Is there a giant coffee spill on one of



the shelves or carpet? Communicating these issues is essential to keeping our spaces looking fabulous.

We also encourage everyone to share their ideas for displays. You may not be the person who puts the display together, but feel free to share your display ideas with guides and managers. You may think of something they hadn't thought of yet.

## OUR FOUR MERCHANDISING RUBRICS

Before we get down to business with the specific “how-tos” for implementing enterprise promotional displays or creating and maintaining branch-specific merchandising, let's take a look at four important and helpful rules of thumb to keep in mind when merchandising library materials.

### CONSISTENCY

Through the techniques described in this manual, we aim to create a consistent approach and level of quality in the construction of all displays at Anythink. The recommendations given in this document are to be followed consistently throughout our system. The effectiveness of our unique look and feel as it reflects the Anythink brand is lost if any branch diverges from our merchandising style or ceases to follow our collective guidelines. In many ways, branch individuality can be incorporated into its materials displays, but this should be done cautiously and always within our basic stylistic approach.

### FLEXIBILITY

In other words: the ability to refresh a display readily throughout the day or change out a display that doesn't seem to be working. *Experts generally suggest giving any display a time period of one day to prove its worth.* If few of the titles have moved by the end of the day, customers may not be interested in the theme or the materials. Be prepared with a back-up display theme that can be pulled together and installed quickly.

### TIMELINESS

Effective library merchandising takes advantage of global happenings to help raise awareness of related books and materials. Holidays, gardening and elections are typical and popular themes for displays that complement activities already promoted in the media. Good merchandising anticipates popular trends and interests, and makes the customer's quest for timely library materials a



convenient one-stop browse through a topically themed display.

## POSITIONING

Most of our product merchandising takes place in predefined areas through our library environments: display tables and fixtures in major focal areas, display shelves within book ranges, shelf ends, end caps, etc. Our libraries are also designed with subject neighborhoods that make positioning genre-themed displays easy and intuitive.



Display gardening books in or near the gardening neighborhood, either on end-caps or within available shelving space in the gardening section. Some stand-alone display tables and fixtures can be easily moved to allow for short-term materials displays in various areas and neighborhoods throughout the library. Take care that you do not impede customer traffic with movable tables and displays units.

We know that library customers can often be categorized as one of two separate types: (1) browsers who read signs and take time to learn layouts on their own, and (2) customers who rarely take notice of signs and prefer to request assistance directly.

Displays are typically meant to appeal to browsers. However, well-planned book displays can appeal to both customer types.

Customers who enter a store to browse typically head to the right after entering and circle the perimeter of the space to familiarize themselves with the layout and locations of products. Non-browsing customers typically head directly to the center of the store looking for a staff person or service point. Position merchandising displays along library perimeters and in category neighborhoods, as well as near main service points, to help catch the eye of both casual browsers and busy service-seekers.

## II. VISUAL MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

Retail product merchandising is the visual in-store component to some types of promotional activity – the introduction of a new line, a clearance sale, a seasonal celebration or special product highlighting. Likewise, library merchandising can highlight new books, encourage library card registrations or show off how-to DVDs during a weeklong DIY program series.

Product merchandising at Anythink can be categorized into three basic types:

- System-wide promotional merchandising
- Branch-specific promotional merchandising
- Everyday merchandise highlighting

## SYSTEM-WIDE PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISING

System-wide promotions at Anythink are created by the Communications Department. They work closely with managers, guides and directors to determine yearly projects and promotional events at all our libraries. System-wide promotions include Children’s Book Week, mySummer, Anythink Foundation appeals and Gifts from the Heart.

For many of our system-wide promotions, we may also design and send out to each branch layout instructions for assembling displays of materials from your own branch collections to complement the promotion. Also included in these packaged promotions is display collateral, such as bookmarks, buttons, banners or relevant display accessories.

## BRANCH-SPECIFIC PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISING

All branches are furnished with standard book and media display equipment, sign holders and templates with which they can work. Branches can create and change out these types of promotional displays as needed, making them as relevant and local for the customers they serve.



## EVERYDAY MERCHANDISE HIGHLIGHTING

Everyday merchandise highlighting consists of two parts:

1. Keeping our book and media products neatly arranged on the shelves
2. Keeping shelf “holes” or range tops stocked with faced-out display books and DVD/CDs

Everyday highlighting is the most basic version of merchandising. It keeps our library collection looking well-stocked, tidy, bright and visually interesting. In many ways, everyday merchandising is also the most time-consuming, as it may require hourly attention to keep shelves from looking empty or messy.

Remember: the more popular your merchandising = the more books are picked up and checked out. It also means that fluffing shelves and filling in empty display units becomes a

more frequent activity to keep the branch looking inviting and bursting with interesting inventory.

Everyday responsibilities also include paying attention to what's *not* flying off the shelves. If a book is on an easel for more than three days – or if no one's grabbing books off your display after the first couple of days – it's time to switch it out.

### III. OUR DISPLAY TYPES

All of our library facilities have a wide variety of product merchandising areas. Currently, some libraries have more than others with regard to usable shelving areas, display units and tables. No matter what version of the following is available in your branch, they should all be used and kept stocked throughout the day.

#### TABLE DISPLAYS

All libraries have tables devoted for use as display units, either alone or in nesting groups that can help vary the display heights and visual interest.

#### RANGE-TOP DISPLAYS

The shelving in all Anythink libraries includes lower 42"- and 66"-high, two-sided units. These units provide great opportunities for the display of books and other materials that are closer to eye heights for both children and adults.



Keep in mind that the use of range-top displays can vary depending on individual branches. If displays are blocking important sight lines, it's better to display minimally to reduce visual clutter and avoid blocking views. Use your best judgment when displaying in these areas, and feel free to contact Communications with any questions.

#### END-CAP DISPLAYS

End-cap display opportunities are available at all locations, mostly in the form of wood shelving. Because end-cap shelving does not lend itself to housing regular inventory, end-cap areas are perfect places to create smaller genre displays or complement current branch promotions designed to catch the attention of customers.

## IN-SHELF DISPLAYS

In libraries where collections have been weeded, there should be at least 1/3 of the space of each shelf unit available to display attractive faced-out titles. Our rule is that at least 3/4 of all shelf “holes” should be filled with displayed books from stock within the shelf or general subject area.

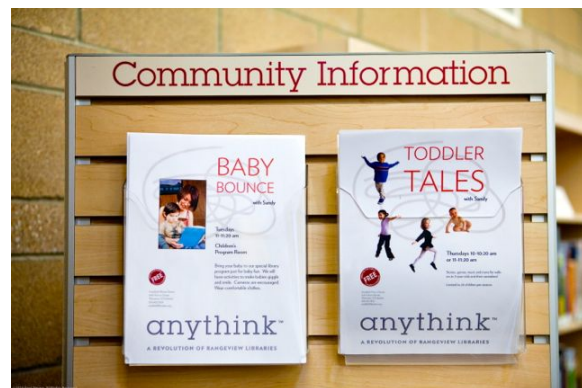
Some shelving units also have built-in display areas designed to break up the monotony of a long book range.

## POWER WALL AND CASE DISPLAYS

Some branches have dedicated power wall display areas and built-in display cases especially designed for massing collections of new materials or dramatically displaying thematic merchandise arrangements. These specialty focal points should never be empty, but always stocked with attractive and well-planned displays.

## KIOSKS

Each library has at least one freestanding kiosk used to display Anythink promotional materials. There are a variety of display equipment to accompany the kiosk that support multiple sizes and styles of materials, including brochures, fliers, bookmarks and more. Anythink materials always take priority in these spaces. Community information is limited to one side of the kiosk and is approved by the branch manager prior to display in this area. One good question to ask when reviewing these materials is: “Does this information have some benefit to our customers?” For questions about what is appropriate for display in these spaces, please contact the Communications Director.



*Okay to display:* Materials provided by local municipalities, regional senior guides, information about community programs and resources

*Not for display:* Materials with strong political or religious messaging, fliers with tear-off contact info, materials that may be deemed inappropriate or uncomfortable for our customers

**NOTE:** Anythink promotional materials always take priority and community info should be limited to only one side of the kiosk. If the individual requesting display has any questions about this procedure or is interested in displaying materials district-wide, please direct them to the Communications office.



## IV. OUR DISPLAY STANDARDS

### BASIC DISPLAY DESIGNS

Visual merchandising at Anythink should employ at least two of the following simple design principles in creating any product display, no matter what the theme may be.

**BALANCE** – Create arrangements that look balanced in their composition, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical.

**EMPHASIS** – Use sizes, repetition or contrast. Try contrasting jacket colors or pairing traditional and new versions of the same stories to make a visual point or mind challenge in your product displays.



**PROPORTION AND SCALE** – This may include such visually arresting techniques as massing many titles about a similar subject that can be noticed from far away or creating intimate display vignettes that browsers may discover by surprise.

**HARMONY** – Gather titles and product colors that harmonize to a theme, such as “Winter Reads” (all-white book jackets on poetry and cozy mysteries). Notice that harmony isn’t just about grabbing titles with similar-colored jackets, but going deeper with the content to tie it to a theme.

**RULE OF THREE** – Human beings tend to think of things in triplets. We remember things best in threes and scan visual elements better when grouped in three. Try using the rule of three in your book displays – three in a row, three in an asymmetrical grouping – or breaking the rule of three by grouping threes with paired groups of twos. Uneven numbers of things are always more interesting to the eye.

### SPATIAL RULES OF THUMB

#### KEY VISUAL ZONES

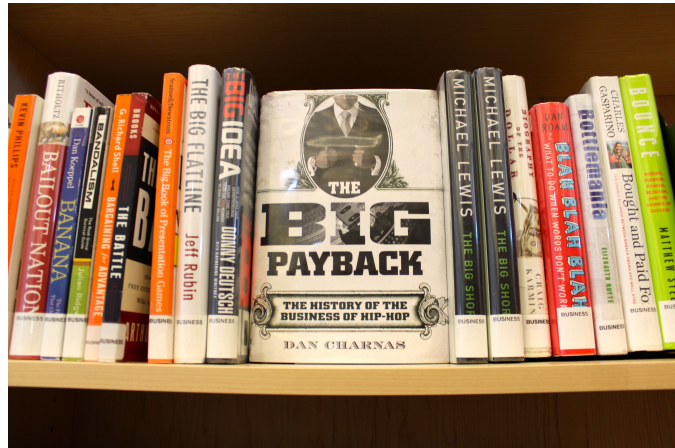
Whether you are creating a round (table top), horizontal (range-top or power-wall) or vertical (multiple shelf end displays stacked in a vertical row) merchandise display, always emphasize the areas right at eye level – higher in adult areas, lower in children’s areas – or the view most seen from traffic pathways. Merchandising very high or low shelves should be avoided.

## FRONTING UP

Wherever possible, pull books and other shelf-filled materials to the fronts of shelves. The effect helps make your bookshelves look well attended and freshly stocked.

## FACING OUT

Face out as much of your stock as is practical. The browser should be tantalized by the colorful and beautiful designs of your book and media covers – not bored by a row of solitary spine ends. Every shelf arrangement in the key visual zone (eye level) around your library should have at least one title, if not more, faced out. Remember to face out with no easel somewhere towards the middle of the shelf.



Select books in good shape with attractive, interesting covers; steer clear of those with the old Rangeview barcode on the front. The books around the title are meant to hold it up, so these in particular require a lot of maintenance, but they can really make your key visual zones pop.

## FILLING UP

Every dedicated display area and unit should be kept stocked throughout the day (see *Maintenance* below). Display areas that look picked over or depleted may make librarians feel great (“Hey, we checked out that entire table display today!”), but they also send the message that we might not have much to offer.

## ENHANCING DISPLAYS

### ACCESSORIES

System-wide and branch-specific merchandise displays can sometimes be accessorized with a natural element by adding a vase of fresh flowers or a dried seasonal arrangement (never silk, plastic or paper). Remember to *let the books sell themselves* in your merchandise arrangements, and refrain from other distracting decorations.

### STACKING

Series and multiple copies can help add visual interest to shelf and table merchandising groups by stacking them in groups and topping them with a single displayed copy.



## **KEEP ANYTHINK BEAUTIFUL**

We want to keep our beautiful Anythink libraries looking as neat, clean and professional as possible. In fact, we want our libraries to be known far and wide for being the most beautiful, welcoming community gathering places in the West. Please avoid the following to help keep our spaces clutter-free:

- Handmade signs
- Self-designed printer clipart signs. We have several templates available for use; if these do not meet your specific needs, please contact the Communications Department for assistance.
- Tape on walls, shelves, anywhere
- Signs or fliers affixed to windows, doors or walls
- Hanging materials from the ceiling
- Use of un-approved merchandising materials (sign holders, stands, etc.)

## **V. EQUIPMENT**

The Communications Department provides approved merchandising signage and display equipment on request. Please allow up to five days for delivery. They're also available to help source new materials for your merchandising needs. Email them at [communications@anythinklibraries.org](mailto:communications@anythinklibraries.org) with any suggestions you have.

- Signage and sign templates
- Sign holders – plexiglass and plexi/chrome
- Brochure holders
- Flier holders
- Kiosk fixtures
- Glass cubes/risers
- Feather duster