

# Anythink Libraries Visual Merchandising Guidelines

## *Customers first*

Retailers have long known the importance of merchandising their products through the use of attention-getting exhibits and displays. An eye-catching window display will draw customers into a store as will a prominent sign placed near the flow of traffic. End aisle displays used in many type of stores from hardware to high fashion boutiques promote impulse purchasing. While many dollars are spent on advertising and promotion in the marketplace, librarians can utilize many of the same techniques to enhance the looks of their library, promote its activities and generate more library 'business' of browsing and circulating materials at little or no cost.



Our architects, contractors and design teams are creating beautiful new and renovated environments for Anythink Libraries of the Rangeview Library District and renewing their vitality as public gathering places on our communities. Staff teams have helped to define unique experience zones that reflect the Colorado traits of playfulness, appreciation for our beautiful surroundings and eagerness to explore new ideas. Our 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. Rangeview Library District has always been a 'service-forward' enterprise. Good service is our hallmark and it is inspired by putting our customers first in everything we do.

## *Putting our products forward*

Now we intend to complement our great customer service by also putting our 'products forward' by way of an energetic visual display program.

In order to merchandise our wonderful products – library books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, and other materials – 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 like no other institution can. 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. So it is essential that they be arranged in ways that make them easy to find and also irresistible to browse.

To that end, Rangeview Library District has adopted the WordThink method for arranging our library materials in simple subject categories (cooking, gardening, biographies, picture books, etc.) that is being implemented systemwide in 2009-10. Also, a new library brand – Anythink, a Revolution of Rangeview Libraries -- was recently developed and brand-inspired signage and wayfinding graphics will be installed at all our libraries that will further help connect our customers with our materials.

New display furniture and merchandising spaces in our libraries are providing more focal points in traffic areas and thematic zones in which we can develop high profile product displays that appeal to customer browsing instincts.

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### ***Equipment***

Signage (no handmade, no tape, always use approved templates when need to create signs and fliers)

- Sign holders

- Fliers

- Risers

- Book and AV displayers

- Slat-wall units

- Decorative elements (less is more; nothing hanging from the ceiling, adhered to the windows, etc.)

### ***Resources***

- Ordering equipment

- Promotional collateral

  - Thematic idea starters

    - Stuck in the car (Auto University)

    - DIY

## I. Merchandising at Rangeview

### WordThink Organization of Materials

Our decision to switch from classifying and organizing our materials according to the traditional Dewey Decimal system of numerated divisions and sections to the word-based style of subject categories is a significant advancement in connecting our customers to our products. This new organization method is based off 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 instead of the old 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 that relate to the books around them.

Temporary WordThink style signage is already in use in some branches. Permanent versions of this signage system will be installed at all new and legacy branches by 2010.

### Staff Responsibilities for Merchandising

At Rangeview, everyone has a hand in helping to keep our new and renovated environments sparkling clean, tidy and welcoming. No matter who you are or what you do otherwise at Rangeview, the general expectation is that we all pitch in -- picking up the piece of trash off the carpet as you walk through the lobby, straightening a messy shelf of books, cleaning up clutter wherever you see it. Our library branch staffs have always done products displays and merchandised

book and materials promotions, as time and resources permitted. Now however, systematic merchandising of our library materials has become a very important component of our promotional activities. Every Rangeview Library location will be expected to actively merchandise their products both on-shelf and in special display areas created throughout the branch environments.

Specific merchandising duties are now included in our new job descriptions that each deal with different aspects of this operation:

**Designer(s)** create the periodic systemwide programs and promotions for which our design manager fabricates the specific complementary merchandising display materials and layout planograms that are delivered to the branches to implement. Designer(s) will be on staff by 2010.

**Guides** coordinate the implementation of the systemwide 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 the merchandising of our library materials on the shelves.

**Concierges** make sure that display signage is in place and promotional literature is kept stocked, and video, or other interactive display components are up and running properly. Concierges also keep track of all the branch display equipment and coordinate the branch's display equipment needs and promotional requests through the Communications Office.

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 to keep shelves looking

**All staff** orient 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 at all times, and where the materials are located, especially if the materials are being pulled from their usual locations and displayed elsewhere in the library.

All staff also pitch 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!

## **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 very important and helpful rules of thumb to keep in mind when we merchandise library materials.

### **Consistency**

It is our aim, through the techniques described in this manual to create a consistent approach and level of quality in the construction of all displays at Rangeview libraries. The recommendations given further on in this document are meant to be followed consistently throughout our system. The effectiveness of our unique ‘look and feel’ as it reflects our new brand will be 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 merchandising display that doesn’t seem to be working. Experts generally suggest giving any store or library display a time period of one day to prove its worth. If by the end of the day few of the titles have moved, meaning that customers don’t seem very 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 happenings in the wider world to help raise awareness of the books and materials in our collections that relate. Holidays, gardening, elections are typical and popular themes for displays that push forward materials that complement activities that are already being promoted in the media or on the calendar. 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. And our new libraries are designed with subject 'neighborhoods' that make positioning genre-themed displays within them a natural. 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 areas with movable tables and displays units.



We know that library customers can often be categorized as one of two separate types: browsers who read signs and take time to learn the layouts of our libraries and locations of materials on their own; and customers who rarely take notice of signs or navigational floor layouts and prefer to find a staff person as soon as they enter and request assistance directly.

Displays are usually meant to appeal to browsers. But well-planned, and attractively arranged and located book displays can appeal to both customer types – even those just passing by on their way to find a someone to help them.

Retail space planners know that 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-browser

people will usually head directly to the center of the store looking for a staff person or service point. Position merchandising displays along the perimeters of our libraries and in category neighborhoods, as well as near main service points to 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 type 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 Rangeview libraries can be categorized into three basic types that will require different responsibilities in the branch:

- **Systemwide promotional merchandising**
- **Branch-specific promotional merchandising**
- **Everyday merchandise highlighting**

### **Systemwide Promotional Merchandising**

Systemwide promotions at Rangeview are created by our Designers working with library directors and managers who determine what projects and promotional events all our libraries will participate in each year. Systemwide promotions include such things as the summer reading program, Active Minds series, library card registration drive, and our holiday Gifts from the Heart program series.

For many of our systemwide promotions, we will 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 are display collateral, such as t-shirts, buttons, banners or relevant display artifacts.

### **Branch-specific Promotional Merchandising**

When systemwide promotions are not currently in effect, Guides may design displays to help promote individual in-branch program and promotional activities, such as book club selections or branch events like a craft series or musical event. Individual end-cap and table-top displays can be utilized for branch-specific promotional displays, or the entire assortment of tables, end caps and in-shelf spaces can be devoted to help merchandise a single branch promotion.

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

### **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, clean and bright and visually interesting. But in many ways, everyday merchandising is also the most time-consuming as it may require hourly attention to keep the shelves from looking empty or our books and other materials from looking messy and shopworn.

Remember, the more popular your merchandising = the more books are picked up and checked out. It also means that 'fluffing' or straightening up shelves and filling in empty display units becomes a more frequent routine activity to keep the branch looking cared-for, inviting and bursting with interesting inventory.

### **III. Our Display Types**

All of our library facilities have an array of product merchandising areas. Currently, some libraries have more than others with regard to a usable shelving areas, display units and tables. As our new libraries are built and our legacy

branches are expanded and remodeled, we will have more consistency in the quality, quantity and type of merchandising units available for use. No matter what version of the following are available in your branch, they should all be used and kept stocked throughout the day.

### ***Table displays***

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

### ***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  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all shelf 'holes' should be filled with displayed books from stock within the shelf or general subject area.

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

### ***End cap displays***

Both old and new libraries in our system offer some type of end-cap display opportunities from short slat-wall displayers, to fully built shelves. 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 as they wend in and around the book stacks.

### ***Range top displays***

The shelving in all new Rangeview libraries and some legacy branches include the 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.

### ***Powerwall and case displays***

Some branches have dedicated slat-wall ("Powerwall") 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 and always stocked with attractive and well-planned displays.

## **IV. Our Display Standards**

### **Basic Display Designs**

Visual merchandising at Rangeview 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 + 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.

**Rhythm** – Including continuity, progression or alteration. Think displays of series titles, single-word titles that spell out a phrase when arranged together, etc.

**Harmony** – Gather titles and product colors that together harmonize to a theme, such as ‘Winter Reads’ (all white book jackets on poetry and cozy mysteries) or ‘Bad News Comes in Threes’ (groups of three title, shape or author-related true crime thrillers)

**Rule of three** – For whatever reason 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 slat-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 book shelves look well attended and freshly stocked.



- Facing Out

Face out as much of your stock as practical. The browser should be tantalized by the colorful and beautiful designs of your book and media covers – not bored by a row of spine ends only. Every shelf arrangement in the key visual zone around your library should have at least one title, if not more, faced out. Media and paperback shelves should always be arranged using the 'Zigzag' fixtures.

- 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 either don't have much to offer or don't really care about showing it off.

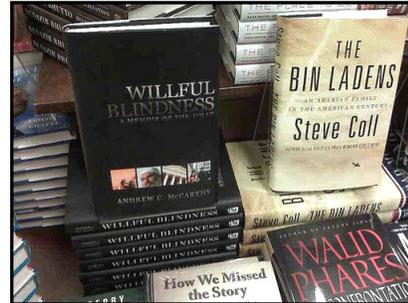
## Enhancing Displays

### *Accessories*

Systemwide 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). But refrain from other distracting decoration. Remember to ‘let the books sell themselves’ in your merchandise arrangements.

### *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.



### *Adding Media and Live Demos*

Enliven thematic merchandising with relevant videos (DIY, author talks, etc.) playing on laptops or large screens nearby. Invite subject experts to your branch to demonstrate crafts, flower arranging, model building, even engine repair and supplement the demonstration areas with books and media on the subject for attendees to check out.

### *Incorporating Staff Picks and Reader Recommendations*

Use ‘recommended by’ bookmarks to promote your staff’s or your customers’ picks in displayed titles. Create entire Reader Recommendation displays periodically and encourage customers to participate.

## Daily Orientation

As more and more of our library environments are given over to merchandising, it is important for staff to take a few minutes each day to browse the current displays before the library opens (or your shift begins). Libraries we consulted with about their successful merchandising practices insist that daily orienting in the display areas is one of the most important ways for staff to keep informed

about current promotions (“This is where we have relocated most of the French cooking materials today”) and where “not-on-shelf” items are likely to be found. Some libraries have ‘two-minute’ staff meetings in the display areas every day.

## **Maintenance**

As mentioned in Staff Responsibilities above, library staff are involved with merchandising at their branch in various ways as part of their official job duties. But all staff should share in the responsibility of keeping merchandise looking fresh and “fluffed” whenever they are on the floor. Fill in the gaps in popular table displays, keep books fronted-up on the shelves, tidy end-cap displays. Turn more books fronted out on shelves that become picked over during the day to make the shelves look filled out. Take pride in keeping your library environment and product displays looking neat, well-stocked and in tip-top shape.

## **Prohibited Uses**

We want to keep our made-over, new and renovated spaces looking as neat, clean and professional-looking as possible. In fact, we want to our libraries to become known far and wide for being the most beautiful, welcoming community gathering places in the West. Therefore, we must insist on the following prohibitions that respect our library spaces and keep them clutter-free:

- No handmade signs
- No cloth
- No self-designed printer clipart signs. Request signs from the Communications Office or use only official Anythink sign templates according to instructions.
- Use only approved sign holders
- No tape on anything, anywhere
- No signs or fliers affixed to windows, doors or walls
- Nothing hanging from the ceiling

## ***V. Equipment & Resources***

### ***Tools and Equipment***

The Communications Office provides approved merchandising signage and display equipment on request. Please allow up to five days delivery.

Signage and sign templates

Sign holders

Slat-wall fixtures

Risers

Book and AV displayers

Zigzags

Feather duster

### ***Fabricators/suppliers***

Plexiglass and chrome sign holders

KC Store Fixtures

816.842.8866

[www.kc-store-fixtures.com/index.php](http://www.kc-store-fixtures.com/index.php)

Slatwall triangular info kiosks and acrylic accessories

M F Blouin Co.

603.742.0104

[www.mfblouin.com](http://www.mfblouin.com)

Plexiglass perchtop displayers, floor standards, display cubes, etc.

Displays to Go

800.572.2194

[www.displays2go.com/](http://www.displays2go.com/)

Book display easels

Brodart

800.265.8470

E-mail: [supplies@brodart.ca](mailto:supplies@brodart.ca)

[www.brodart.ca](http://www.brodart.ca)

WordThink sign holders custom-designed for use at Anythink Libraries only.\*

(level 1 and 2 styles)

Santa Cruz Industries, Inc.

800.724.1954

[www.santacruzind.com](http://www.santacruzind.com)

Santa Cruz Industries, Inc., can custom design and fabricate category sign holders for in-shelf use tailored to your brand.

\*Please do not replicate our Anythink version sign holders.

## **Credits**

*Thank you to the following organizations for their willingness to share their experiences and expert advice on library merchandising:*

*Denver Public Library*

*Douglas County Libraries*

*May Department Stores*

*Richmond Public Library (British Columbia)*

*South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative*