

JOB PROFILE: VISUAL MERCHANDISER/ DISPLAY DESIGNER

THE WORK

As a visual merchandiser, display designer or window dresser it would be your job to create eye-catching product displays in shops and stores.

You would be responsible for presenting products in a way that attracts customers and maximises sales. This could mean anything from decorating a store in a seasonal theme – like Christmas or spring sales – to making sure your store's displays fit the company's brand image.

Your day-to-day tasks might include:

- designing ideas for displays or following pre-designed plans
- creating special displays to promote a specific product or promotion
- drawing designs and plans by hand or computer
- deciding how to use space and lighting creatively
- creating branded visual merchandising packs to send to each branch of a store
- giving feedback to head office and buying teams
- setting up displays, dressing dummies, and arranging screens, fabric and posters
- hiring, borrowing or making props
- making sure that prices and other necessary details are visible
- coaching sales staff on how goods should be displayed
- taking down old displays.

In a large retail company, you would work as part of a display team and follow design plans that were created at head office by a visual merchandising manager or senior display designer.

HOURS AND ENVIRONMENT

You would work 37 to 40 hours a week, often including late evenings to set up displays when stores are closed. When putting up displays you will spend a lot of time on your feet, lifting, carrying and climbing ladders. Working in shop windows can be very hot and cramped.

You could be based at head office or in store. As a display designer, you may need to travel to different branches to set up displays and brief sales staff.

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- a good sense of design, colour and style
- creativity and imagination
- good IT skills, for computer-aided design work
- a high level of attention to detail
- the ability to work to deadlines
- good communication skills
- practical skills, such as carpentry and needlework
- the ability to work well as part of a team and also alone
- stamina and fitness.

ENTRY

There are two main routes to becoming a visual merchandiser/display designer. You could come from a background in design, or you could work your way up through the retail industry.

If you choose to train in design, you may have an advantage if you take a

specialised qualification in display or merchandising, such as:

- a degree in Exhibition and Retail Design
- a Foundation Degree in Display Design or Visual Merchandising and Promotional Design.

Other useful courses include BTEC HNDs, foundation degrees and degrees in interior design, fashion marketing, retail management or visual communications. You should check exact entry requirements with colleges or universities.

Alternatively, you could take qualifications from the British Display Society (BDS) before you look for display work. Courses include:

- Certificates in Visual Merchandising and Merchandising Handling Skills (part-time short courses)
- General Certificate in Display (one year full-time)
- Advanced Diplomas in Point of Sale Design or Retail Display Design (two years full-time).

You may not need qualifications in display design if you have a strong retail background, or experience in related areas like interior design or photography.

You may be able to get into the retail industry through an Apprenticeship scheme. The range of Apprenticeships available in your area will depend on the local jobs market and the types of skills employers need from their workers. To find out more about Apprenticeships, visit www.apprenticeships.org.uk.

TRAINING

You will usually develop your skills on the job. Large retail companies often have in-house structured training programmes for their display staff.

If you are on a retail Apprenticeship, you may be able to work towards the ABC Level 3 Certificate in Visual Merchandising as part of your NVQ Level 3 in Retail.

You may also be able to study for British Display Society (BDS) qualifications whilst you are working. See the BDS website for more information.

OPPORTUNITIES

Most visual merchandising jobs are in fashion and homeware departments and stores. You can also find some opportunities for display work at museums and tourist attractions, airports and hotels.

Jobs may be advertised in the local and national press, design or retail trade magazines, and on retail jobs websites.

With experience, you could progress to supervisor or display team leader, and to visual merchandising manager. Alternatively you could move into retail merchandising, or into exhibition or interior design. You could also work as a freelance display designer, creating one-off displays for clients as needed.

You may find the following links useful for job vacancies and further reading:

<http://www.drapersonline.com>
<http://www.inretail.co.uk>
<http://www.jobsinretail.co.uk>
<http://www.retailcareers.co.uk>
<http://www.retailmoves.com>
<http://www.retail-week.com>

We do not accept responsibility for the content of external sites.

ANNUAL INCOME

- Starting salaries can be from £12,000 to £16,000 a year.

- With experience, earnings can rise to around £20,000 a year.
- Visual merchandising managers or designers can earn between £25,000 and £45,000 a year.

Figures are intended as a guideline only.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Skillsmart Retail

Fourth Floor
93 Newman Street
London
W1T 3EZ
Tel: 0800 093 5001
<http://www.skillsmartretail.com>

British Display Society

12 Cliff Avenue
Chalkwell
Leigh-on-Sea
Essex
SS9 1HF
Tel: 020 8856 2030
<http://www.britishdisplaysociety.co.uk>