

Retail Insights

Vendor Shop Design and Planning

The [Spring 2019 issue of Retail Insights](#) covered the importance of vendor shops in contemporary department store success. In this issue, we look at the design and planning aspects of vendor shop development.

Even though major department stores may use different terminology to describe them, there are three basic types of vendor shop requirements: “limited,” “moderate,” or “full.” These types are defined by the varying degrees of the scope of work performed by department store (versus the vendor) as well as the level of design responsibility given to the vendor. Through their negotiated agreements with the department store, vendors are provided with a defined space and location within the store, degree of finish, and connection to utilities:

- **Space and location:** Vendor shops can be small, as little as 80-100 square feet (SF), or large, as much as 2,000 SF or more. The location of a vendor space depends on the product offering such as fragrance, handbags, etc. but also the strength and name recognition of the “brand.”



“Limited” scope vendor shop spaces can be as simple as a location in an open area of the plan, often referred to as a “pad,” bounded by aisle-ways, other vendors, or framed by open decorative structures similar to a pergola.

“Moderate” scope spaces are often perimeter locations defined by three walls with open front, separated from other vendors by “neutral” piers. A uniform signage band bulkhead usually spans between the neutral piers.

“Full” scope vendors are typically the most prominent. Locations are selected based on maximum visibility and access, such as along major circulation aisles and adjacent to exterior or mall entrances. Placement is meant to create synergy with department store product areas.

Department store planners and designers must carefully balance the finishes surrounding vendor shops to provide individual brand identification while ensuring compatibility with the larger store design context.

- **Degree of finish:** Depending upon the type of vendor, the finishes provided by the department store can vary. “Limited” type vendors receive a greater amount of pre-designed and selected finishes such as flooring, walls, and ceilings. Finishes may include flooring and bases standard to the department store, gypsum board ceilings with standard store light fixtures, and air conditioning grilles. “Limited” vendors usually have the freedom to select wall paints or coverings and to provide and arrange their own proprietary display fixtures. Such vendors are often referred to as “soft shops” due to the fact that the vendor does little “hard” construction.

“Moderate” type vendors are usually provided with an unfinished, three-walled space in which they are free to select their own flooring and wall finishes, build their own ceilings, and install light fixtures and diffusers of their choosing. Sometimes, depending upon the size of the space, vendors choose to have a small back-of-house area walled-off from sales for stock, cash/wrap, or fitting. They, too, provide and arrange their own display fixtures.

In the case of both “limited” and “moderate” responsibility vendors, construction is included as part of the department store’s building general permit. While they provide their own “design,” they rely on the department store’s architectural and engineering team for documentation. Usually the shops are constructed by the department store contractor with the possible exception of specialty display fixtures.

“Full” type vendors, as the name implies, have the freedom and responsibility to design, select, and provide all of their construction and finishes. In addition to custom finishes, light fixtures, and HVAC design, these vendors often design their own interior storefronts. “Full” scope vendors use their own designers, architects and engineers, obtain their own building permits and may also use their own contractors.

- **Utilities:** Both “limited: and “moderate” responsibility vendors are provided cooling from the department store’s supply and return mechanical system. Air conditioning capacities, stated in Cubic Feet per Minute (CFM), are based on the size of the space and are balanced with the store. “Limited” responsibility vendors are provided with typical store air grilles and diffusers located to serve the shop layout. “Moderate” responsibility shops may have the option to provide their own type grilles and diffusers. “Full” responsibility vendors may use the department store’s system but sometimes are provided a dedicated system. In either case, “full” scope vendors are responsible to design distribution within their space.

Electrical power is provided to “limited” and “moderate” vendor shops based on a reasonable allotment of available circuits from the department store’s distribution system. Lighting density is also limited by power and prevailing energy code restrictions. In the case of a “full” design responsibility vendor shop, it is common for the department store to provide an electrical power source to the space with a single service feed, terminated at a fused disconnect. This arrangement allows the vendor the freedom to install their own electrical sub-panels and design distribution of circuits as desired.

Regardless of the degree of vendor responsibility, successful execution of design requires a large amount of coordination between the vendor, department store planners, design professionals, and the contractor. Since vendor shop success is vital to the health of the contemporary department store, the result must achieve high quality and be completed on schedule.



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To learn more, contact:
Scott Schroeder, Vice President/Manager of Client Development
sschroeder@hixson-inc.com
P: 513.241.1230
www.hixson-inc.com

