

Job Description

Job Title:	Category Specialist (Apparel and Technology)
Department:	Print + Retail Solutions
Reports To:	Manager, Purchasing & Merchandising Strategy
Jobs Reporting:	None
Salary Grade:	USG 6
Effective Date:	November 2020

Primary Purpose

The Category Specialist (Apparel and Technology) is accountable for purchasing and contributes to developing the overall retail strategy of their categories by making pricing decisions, evaluating product performance and managing the product lifecycle for the University of Waterloo's W Store locations and wstore.ca, with a focus on university-branded products. The incumbent will work with the Purchasing & Merchandising team and the Purchasing & Merchandising Working Group to develop merchandising strategies, and is expected to provide leadership in these settings with respect to their areas of expertise.

Key Accountabilities

Purchasing & Vendor Management

- Researches and analyzes market and product trends for categories that are relevant to Print + Retail Solutions' (P+RS) customers, and makes recommendations regarding new products and new lines that would help P+RS better meet customers' needs
- Makes purchasing decisions and evaluates product mix, pricing, selection and display to effectively plan product collections with cross-merchandising opportunities in mind and in conjunction with knowledge of customers' demographic and psychographic profiles
- Regularly monitors performance of both individual products and overall categories by utilizing data to determine the best and worst performing products, with the goal of meeting category goals and objectives, as well as financial targets
- When placing orders that include university branding, monitors and enforces the appropriate use of University of Waterloo registered trade-marks
- Researches, develops and maintains a database of vendors for product sourcing and for the development of University of Waterloo brand-specific merchandise, and ensures that all vendors comply with P+RS and University of Waterloo ethical business practices and guidelines
- Negotiates prices, delivery and purchasing terms with vendors, with the goal of maximizing benefits for both P+RS and customers
- Maintains a deep understanding of evolving vendor offerings, production timelines, turnaround times, product knowledge, limitations and abilities, and coordinates timely arrivals for time-sensitive goods
- Monitors vendor performance, manages conflicts and disagreements, addresses concerns and makes recommendations regarding how best to manage/penalize/stop working with vendors when there are ongoing issues
- Attends trade shows, conferences and vendor meetings as required

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Merchandising & Category Management

- Monitors and maintains inventory levels, sets competitive price points, adjusts prices to increase sales and gross margin and to clear out slow moving stock from inventory
- Works closely with Inventory Coordinator on new arrivals and advises on the movement/transfer of product between each of our store locations
- Assists with managing the product life cycle: research, forecasting, procurement, pricing and promotional strategies, display and discount/clearance strategies
- Develops and executes the overall retail strategy of their product categories by analyzing current trends, seasonality and market demands that could improve category performance and identify new product opportunities
- Places appropriate orders to ensure product availability that meets consumer demands and sales targets, and develops exit strategies for unsuccessful products
- Utilizes strong understanding of financial reporting and data analysis in decision making, and analyzes retail performance of SKUs from designated product categories, inventory levels, seasonal demands, market place trends, cost and retail pricing thresholds, financial budget, margins, and delivery timelines to maximize inventory turnover and meet open-to-buy goals
- Completes detailed planning documents highlighting prices, mark-ons, item numbers, PO numbers, vendor numbers, delivery dates, FOB costing, quantities, etc.
- Ensures that naming conventions for products in database are consistently applied to support effective reporting and analysis, and coordinates with the Marketing team, so that product names and descriptions are optimized for customers' understanding
- Works with e-Commerce and Marketing teams to ensure the optimal and timely flow of product information to the website
- Especially for their area of expertise but for any product category when needed, develops visual merchandising strategies (e.g., recommendations, planograms, sample displays) that the Store Operations team can implement in various retail locations, including providing hands-on support as needed
- Provides guidance and trains P+RS colleagues as needed on effective display strategies and leveraging cross-merchandising opportunities, with the goal of maximizing sales and inventory turns

Special Events

- Creatively supports the promotional planning process for P+RS special events (e.g., pop-up shops, in-store promotions, sales events, etc.) through recommendations related to product features, pricing, inventory availability and procurement constraints
- When required, assists with planning, implementation and supervision of special events

Collaboration

- Interacts regularly with all P+RS staff and supports cross-promotion of products and services
- Establishes and maintains strong partnerships and relationships throughout the university and the affiliated institutions, to help P+RS achieve its goals, while ensuring that P+RS is represented professionally
- Liaises with Marketing team to determine promotional activities and coordinate product photography and writing of product descriptions for their product categories
- Collaborates with P+RS e-Commerce team to select merchandise to be sold online, creates web identifiers and provides recommendations on online merchandising

- Collaborates with the Accounting & Financial Analysis team and IT to improve purchasing and inventory processes, determine gross margin targets and achieve performance goals
- Works with P+RS Shipping/Receiving and Central Stores to ensure shipment and invoice accuracy, timely delivery and effective management of overstock
- As part of the Joint Planning Working Group, provides input and direction on product launches, promotions and ways to increase customer engagement
- Assists as needed in other areas of the day-to-day operations including year-end inventory preparations and counts, supporting the development of marketing strategies, convocation services, and general customer service support

Customer Service & Leadership

- Commits to positive interactions with all customers and ensures that all customer inquiries are handled in a professional, timely manner; and in cases when customers should be redirected to other staff, the incumbent will ensure that the redirection is complete and that the customer is not left without service
- Provides customer service support to, and shares product knowledge with, customers and on- and off-campus partners in the W Store as needed
- Models the values of the P+RS department in interactions with internal and external partners
- Provides coaching, training and operational support, along with functional direction and oversight, to Store Operations staff as needed (e.g., visual merchandising, POS support, inventory management, customer service, supervision), including periodically during weekends, evenings and at pop-up shops
- Contributes to goal-setting and strategic planning for the department and implements those goals both independently and as part of various cross-functional teams

**All employees of the University are expected to follow University and departmental health and safety policy, procedures and work practices at all times. Employees are also responsible for the completion of all health and safety training, as assigned. Employees with staff supervision and/or management responsibilities will ensure that assigned staff abide by the above, and actively identify, assess and correct health and safety hazards, as required.*

Required Qualifications

Education

- College diploma or university degree in business, economics or administration, preferably with a concentration in strategic merchandising, visual merchandising, procurement, supply chain management and/or retail operations (equivalent combination of education and/or experience will be considered)
- Formal training in customer service, merchandising and open-to-buy are an asset

Experience

- Minimum three years of experience working in a retail setting, with accountability for achieving sales/margin goals and targets, gaining purchasing and/or merchandising experience and providing customer service
- Minimum one year of experience creating and executing visual merchandising plans in relevant product categories (e.g., apparel, gifts, stationery, technology)

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Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

- Business acumen, critical thinking and analytical skills
- Understanding of key retail metrics (e.g., gross margin dollars, gross margin percentage, inventory turns, GMROI and the relevant benchmarking) and how to influence them
- Excellent written and verbal communication, interpersonal and relationship-building skills
- Intermediate knowledge of MS Office
- Demonstrated ability to use and learn new database and scheduling software (e.g., Visual Ratemax, Point of Sale)
- Familiarity using Adobe Illustrator is preferred
- Demonstrated skill with product analysis, visual merchandising and inventory management
- Ability to work quickly and accurately, while remaining organized and paying close attention to detail, in a fast-paced environment
- Comfortable managing multiple simultaneous projects
- Knowledge and ability to manage duties, customs, brokerage, shipping and international exchange rates

Nature and Scope

- **Contacts:** Beyond connections with Print + Retail Solutions colleagues, the incumbent has regular contact with customers, students, campus groups, off-campus industry peers and suppliers, and is expected to develop and maintain positive, professional, constructive relationships and beneficial vendor relations.
- **Level of Responsibility:** Responsible for maintaining positive sales and inventory performance for specific product categories. Analyzes data in order to make good decisions, develops marketing and merchandising plans, develops and maintains relationships, sources new merchandise, and partners with new vendors.
- **Decision-Making Authority:** This position has decision-making authority for the items outlined above. Authorization with respect to the purchase of merchandise for resale to a maximum commitment to any single transaction up to \$40,000. Purchases exceeding this amount will be forwarded to the Manager, Purchasing & Merchandising Strategy or delegate (see *University of Waterloo Procedure 1, Contracts and Agreements*).
- **Physical and Sensory Demands:** This position requires exertion of physical sensory effort resulting in slight fatigue, strain or risk of injury. For example, some lifting, bending, twisting, stretching and repetitive motion are required from time to time, in order to move equipment and fixtures and to display products for sale. Attention to details, accuracy and verbal communication with customers, co-workers and management. Multi-task environment requires excellent organizational skills and ability to prioritize, to ensure timely, efficient completion of tasks.
- **Working Environment:** This position works in a typical retail store and office environment. There may be unusual hours or schedules, extended weekend hours, or weekday extended hours with varying volumes of work at different times of the year. Some travel may be required for trade shows and industry events.