

Job Description

Job Title:	Manager, Purchasing & Merchandising Strategy
Department:	Print + Retail Solutions
Reports To:	Director, Print + Retail Solutions
Jobs Reporting:	Buyer, Apparel and Custom Orders Buyer, Supplies and Gifts
Salary Grade:	USG 10
Effective Date:	June 2019

Primary Purpose

The Manager, Purchasing & Merchandising Strategy establishes the vision, strategy, and execution for Print + Retail Solutions' (P+RS) general merchandise products (i.e., all retail merchandise except text books and course materials).

Through effective analysis and planning, the incumbent is responsible for ensuring that P+RS offers products that appeal to customers, driving general merchandise sales and strengthening engagement with the campus community. This role also collaborates with internal departments on sales and merchandising strategies.

Key Accountabilities

Product Mix and Cycle Management

- Responsible for the full product life cycle – research and market identification, forecasting, cost analysis, promotions strategies, product display and merchandising
- Through consultation and collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders within the department, delivers the general merchandise operating plan: determining and achieving growth objectives including increasing market share, revenue, gross margin and return on investment within all channels/categories of business and for all key customer segments
- Gathers and analyzes industry data, business intelligence and customer research from a wide range of sources, both internal and external, to inform the future evolution of product offerings
- Establishes ordering criteria based on an analysis of past sales history, current markets and trends, competition, target customer needs and inventory budgets, and monitors inventory levels closely
- Prioritizes product selections based on budget considerations, market research, and requests from various campus departments
- Creates detailed planning documents, assortment and fashion plans, and planograms for each season that highlight prices, item numbers, purchase order numbers, vendor numbers, delivery dates, FOB costing, quantities, etc.
- Ensures that all P+RS vendors adhere to University, department, and ethical business practices guidelines
- In close collaboration with the Manager, Accounting & Financial Analysis, analyzes sales, inventory levels, seasonal demands, market place trends, cost and retail pricing thresholds, financial budget, margin targets and delivery timelines to maximize inventory turnover
- Develops a deep understanding of customers' wants, needs and experiences; identifies and fills product gaps; and generates new ideas that increase sales, improve the customer experience and strengthen P+RS' position as the supplier of choice for the campus community

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- Evaluates competitors and positions our product assortment to provide maximum convenience and appeal to consumers
- Translates high-level product strategies into detailed requirements, timelines and deliverables
- Provides input on visual display of products for the purpose of ensuring all channel marketing and in-store displays tell a consistent story
- Monitors metrics to measure retail performance (e.g., allocation algorithms and formulas, forecasts, trends, opportunity areas, high-density/high-turn stores, analysis of store sales and inventory turns)

Vendor Relations

- Identifies and approaches potential suppliers, and fosters strong relationships with vendors
- Oversees and supports buyers in the negotiation of prices and terms as needed, to ensure optimal benefit for P+RS through maximizing margins, obtaining favourable terms, and managing conflicts and disagreements
- Monitors product and vendor performance for optimal service expectations, working with the Accounting & Financial Analysis team to oversee a periodic vendor review process and acting on findings (e.g., terminating unproductive vendor relationships)

Collaboration and Communication

- Primary cross-functional collaboration touchpoints are within the Management Team, particularly the Marketing team, the Manager, Store Operations & Customer Experience and the Manager, Accounting & Financial Analysis:
 - Collaborates with the Marketing team to develop and implement compelling product launches to maximize product exposure and customer engagement
 - Collaborates with the Manager, Store Operations & Customer Experience to develop and implement product knowledge, retail space utilization and product display strategies
 - Collaborates with the Manager, Accounting & Financial Analysis to develop and implement cost negotiation, pricing, discounting, markdown, clearance and product positioning strategies
- Establishes and maintains strong relationships with all P+RS staff to ensure that departmental goals are achieved and create an environment where product and service cross-promotion is the norm
- Represents P+RS to other campus departments and external vendors and institutions
- Consistently communicates a compelling vision for P+RS, integrating our vision and values into all plans and actions

Technical Skill

- Intermediate knowledge of MS Office; advanced knowledge of MS Excel is an asset
- Demonstrated ability to use and learn new database and scheduling software (e.g., Visual Ratex, Point of Sale, or similar program)

Leadership

- Contributes to goal-setting and strategic planning for the department as a member of the P+RS Management Team, and implements those plans and goals within the Purchasing & Merchandising team
- Ensures effective communication of departmental direction and initiatives to direct reports by establishing transparency through shared P+RS goal-setting
- Models the values of the P+RS department and the priorities of the Management Team in interactions with internal and external partners
- Provides coaching, mentoring and motivation to direct reports, with a view to improving processes, meeting performance goals and achieving sales and gross margin targets
- Drives the development and execution of superior business strategies, instilling in staff a sense of ownership, empowerment, accountability and alignment with organization-wide priorities and values
- Demonstrates commitment to creating and sustaining strong team cohesiveness and morale

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- Guides the Purchasing & Merchandising team in taking ownership for gross margin goals and product pricing decisions, including managing promotions and discounts in ways that align with P+RS brand and operating principles

Customer Service

- Commits to positive interactions with all customers and provides an appropriate level of assistance regardless of situation or location
- 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
- Assists in the creation of and adherence to P+RS standards of excellent customer service

Required Qualifications

Education

- A bachelor's degree or college diploma in merchandising, business administration, commerce or economics, or equivalent combination of relevant education and experience
- Formal training in MS Excel and/or statistical analysis is an asset

Experience

- Proven success in product management, purchasing, merchandising and leadership
- A minimum of five years' experience in retail purchasing, merchandising and/or product management is required, preferably in relevant product categories such as apparel, stationery and gifts (an equivalent combination of education, training and/or experience may be considered)
- Experience providing formal supervision is an asset
- Proven track record of managing a product assortment successfully throughout its lifecycle
- Proven ability to understand and develop product and merchandising strategies

Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Strong understanding of financial reports and data analysis in a retail environment
- Strong problem solving skills
- Strong knowledge of relevant customer demographics and an innovative perspective on product design and development
- A demonstrated understanding of the higher education retail business, including creativity in buying and managing inventory, with a view to meeting the expectations of customers in this unique environment
- Broad knowledge of vendor relationship management, including the ability to find and build strong relationships with new vendors, and resolve conflicts and disputes with existing vendors
- Knowledge of the broad range of issues (duty, customs, brokerage, shipping, international exchange rates, sweatshop issues, environmental concerns) involved in cross-border and international trade is an asset
- Familiarity with relevant University of Waterloo policies, procedures, and guidelines including Health and Safety, Staff Employment, Conflict Management and Human Rights, and AODA requirements

Nature and Scope

- **Contacts:** Beyond connections with Print + Retail Solutions colleagues, the incumbent has regular contact with campus groups, off-campus industry peers, and suppliers, and is expected to develop and maintain positive, professional, constructive relationships and beneficial vendor relations. In particular, the incumbent is required to maintain excellent relationships with colleagues from other North American campus retailers in order to gather and share information related to providing the best retail experience possible.
- **Level of Responsibility:** The incumbent is responsible for setting strategic direction for the continuous improvement of the general merchandise product assortment, and for achieving inventory management, sales and profitability targets. Through their leadership, they will strive to continuously improve the cohesiveness, accuracy and efficiency of the teams under their supervision.
- **Decision-Making Authority:** This position has decision-making authority for the items outlined above.
- **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 and stretching is required from time to time, in order to move/display products for sale.
- **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.