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How Lighting Sets the Right Mood for Shoppers

The right lighting is key in making customers feel welcome — and safe — at your small business.

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The right lighting will optimize your space and the items you're selling.

Lighting design is a key component of any commercial space. Beyond illuminating your store or restaurant, strategic lighting can guide the customer's experience at your small business and impact sales.

"Lighting determines whether or not your customers will be drawn to visiting your restaurant, retail space or business," explained Leslie Markman-Stern, interior designer and owner of [Leslie M. Stern Design](#). "It not only allows the employee and customer to see the interior of a business, it also highlights the products and creates the atmosphere of the space."



"It's all about creating your own brand to attract more business as well as create a safe and attractive environment." – Leslie Markman-Stern of Leslie M. Stern Design
(Photo: Leslie Markman-Stern)

Here are a few tips and best practices from Markman-Stern to help you optimize the lighting in your space so customers feel welcome and in the mood to buy.

Ambient lighting

According to Markman-Stern, there are three types of lighting of which small business owners should be aware. The first layer is ambient — or general — lighting, which sets the overall atmosphere and provides the necessary visibility needed to access a space.

"In 30 seconds, a customer opens the door to your business and determines if they want to do business with you — which is generated by the [curb appeal](#) as well as the interior space of your store or restaurant,"

she said. "If the space is welcoming and highlights the mood, products and services [offered], you as the business owner have a chance of attracting your clientele to your business."

Inadequate ambient lighting will not only make it difficult for customers to see your small business's offerings, but can also be dangerous if potential hazards are not easily visible.

"It's all about creating your own brand to attract more business as well as create a safe and attractive environment," she said.

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Task lighting



Stern's commercial lighting work in a jewelry store. (Photo: Leslie Markman-Stern/Paul Schlismann Photography)

The next layer to consider is task lighting, which ensures both your employees and customers have sufficient lighting to get specific things accomplished, said Markman-Stern.

For example, a [romantic restaurant](#) may turn the ambient lights low to set the mood, but would want to make sure the table is lit well enough for patrons to read their menus, or that the waitstaff station has enough light for employees to enter orders and process payments. Similarly, a [fashion boutique](#) would want changing rooms to have extra-flattering lighting for when shoppers are trying on clothes.

Accent lighting

The final layer — accent lighting — is used to add flair and highlight certain features around your small business, such as important [signage](#), sale items and unique details that set your store apart from the competition.

Markman-Stern said many business owners forget to employ accent lighting, which can make a space feel visually dull.

“Using all three types of lighting creates a more interesting space, so the space doesn’t look like an office and all has the same lighting level,” she said. “A customer cannot always discern which services or products are on sale or new, for example. You need to highlight those items you want them to focus on.”

Related: [The Psychology Behind How Your Store’s Aesthetics Impact Sales](#)

Consider your clientele

When designing your small business’ lighting strategy, Markman-Stern said it’s important to remember the demographics of your primary audience in addition to the specific mood you’re wanting to present.

“A customer who might be [elderly](#) or have vision issues may never return to your business because of the lack of lighting. It not only affects them but who they might converse with. The elderly needs three times the amount of light as a 20-year-old.”

Consult a professional

While these tips will get you started on creating a lighting strategy that works for your small business, it’s always best to get input from a commercial lighting [consultant](#). Designers can help ensure you’ve picked the optimal placement for fixtures, selected the proper types of bulbs and are compliant with city codes.

“A business owner can make a list of their lighting ideas and thoughts, but they should then present that plan to a professional,” she advised. “It would be in their best interest

as lighting mistakes can be very costly. It can not only affect their business, but could cause someone to fall or injure themselves if not done correctly."

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Taking the time to strategically plan out your store lighting can set you apart from the competition and provide a safe, attractive and functional space for your employees and patrons.

"Lighting is like the icing on the cake," Markman-Stern said. "It what sets you apart and tells the story about your business. Make it interesting, attractive and comfortable for your customers."

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