



How To Set Up Your Retail Store Lighting

By [Jason Rueger](#) On November 17, 2014 · [Add Comment](#) · In [How To](#)

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If you are a small business owner who wants to select and purchase lighting for your retail store, then this article is for you. We'll start by giving a general overview of the basic bulb types and kinds of retail store lighting. Once we have gotten that out of the way, we will go over how to actually select lighting for your store (using a jewelry store as a concrete example), show you how much it will cost, and tell you where to buy it.



To ensure that we have the best and most practical information for you, I spoke with Leslie Stern, retail design/lighting specialist and owner of [Leslie M Stern Design](#), who provided some helpful information, counsel, and feedback on the article.

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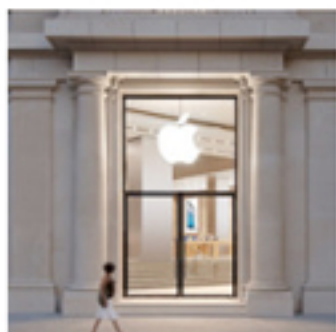
The 4 Primary Types of Lighting

1. General/Ambient Lighting



General/Ambient lighting is the main light source for your store. These lights should ensure that your store is not gloomy and that customers feel comfortable and have enough general light to make their way around.

2. Task Lighting

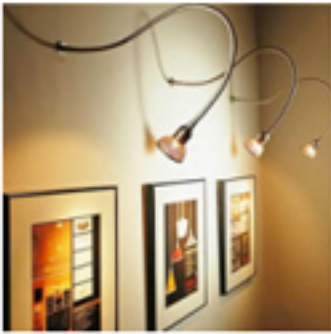


Task lighting is lighting that is a more focused lighting, used to better illuminate areas in your store where more light is needed to perform certain tasks.

Here are some examples:

- Store entrance
- Checkout area
- Dressing Rooms
- Customer service desk

3. Accent Lighting



Accent lighting is lighting that is used to highlight specific areas, displays, and decor in your store, in order to make products pop and add a sense of importance.

Here are some examples of where and why accent lighting might be used:

- Near the front of the store to highlight new products/seasonal item displays
 - Any area to add emphasis to a piece of art or decor
 - In shelving/display nooks to highlight each specific product
 - Above window displays add visual emphasis and draw people into your store
 - Lighting actually in your displays/cases (bars, rope lighting, etc). In some cases, displays will already have pre-installed lighting
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4. Decorative Lighting



Decorative lighting is lighting that functions specifically for the purpose of adding sophistication and beauty to your store. In some ways, this is as much about the light fixture as it is about the specific light, although that is important as well. Decorative lighting would include things such as [chandeliers](#), [intricate wall fixtures](#), and [custom designed fixtures](#).

The 4 Primary Types of Light Bulbs

There are three main kinds of light bulbs used for interior spaces: Incandescent, Fluorescent, and LED. Here is a brief overview of each:

1. Incandescent – Incandescent lights produce light when an electric current passes through a filament, causing it to glow. Incandescent lights are generally the cheapest but also the most inefficient kind of lighting. Their short lifespan and high energy usage have pretty much made them obsolete for general retail lighting applications.



2. Halogen – Halogen light bulbs are a more modern version of the incandescent light, often used for focused lighting needs (checkout area, display lighting, etc). Although they are less efficient than fluorescent and LED lighting, Halogen's can be a viable option for some specific applications.



3. Fluorescent /CFL- Medium cost and fairly good efficiency (Around \$5-\$12/bulb – flood light bulb as reference example)

Fluorescent lighting is a pretty standard choice for general lighting, because they are cost effective, last longer than incandescents, and are more energy efficient. Tube bulbs are the most common. CFL's are an updated version of the fluorescent light that are even more energy efficient and longer lasting.



4. LED – Most expensive, longest lasting, most efficient (Around \$15-\$30/bulb, flood light bulb as reference)
LED bulbs are the most efficient and longest lasting light source, which is why more and more retail stores are moving to LED's for the majority of their lighting applications. For some applications, like spot specific lighting, halogen bulbs may still provide a little truer light. But, LED technology has made leaps in bounds in the last several years, and is becoming a viable option for nearly all lighting needs. For this reason, we recommend LED's for most applications, except for general lighting.



Setting Up Your Retail Store Lighting

For the rest of this article we are going to show you how to set up the 4 primary types of lighting. Before we get into the specifics of each type, here are some general tips that apply to all types of lighting:

1. Buy LED's by the Batch

Technology is still being developed and bulbs are not perfectly consistent in color temperature and tone. Buy them all at once to ensure consistency of lighting

2. Don't Burn Your Customers

Okay, maybe that is a bit extreme. But, it is very important to make sure that the heat from your lights will not make customers uncomfortable and/or fade products, especially where your ceilings are lower (soffits, nooks, etc). Incandescent lights are warmest, LED's coolest, and fluorescent in-between.

3. Be Sensitive to Color Temperature and the Color Rendering Index Rating (CRI)

Each bulb/light source has a natural color tone to its light. In general, to produce warmer tones and a more comfortable/soothing light (often used for general lighting), purchase bulbs that have a 2700-3200 k (kelvin) rating. To produce truer colors and a more natural light (Dressing Rooms, over fruit and veggies, areas where you want the truest color without glare), 4000 – 4500 K. For day white or bright light (task-spaces, offices), 5500-6000 K. Check out this [handy guide to color temperature](#) and this [store/business specific guide](#) (page 4). The Color Rating Index (CRI) is basically a measurement of how a light shows a product's true color. The higher the index number of a bulb, the truer your item color will be under that light.

4. Factor in Replacement and Energy Cost

Upfront cost is certainly an important consideration, but it is not the only one.

When factoring cost, you also need to include and calculate energy cost (cost of electrical usage/yr) and replacement cost ([annual hours of use divided by hours of bulb life] x cost per bulb). This will help you to determine how much you will actually spend per year on lighting. Check out this [great cost-comparison of the three light sources](#).

5. Use Mirrors to Reflect Light and Brighten Up Your Store

Although not technically a lighting fixture, mirrors can be a great and cheap way to reflect light and brighten up your store. This is especially true if mirrors fit into your decor, as they often do in high-end stores. Also, if you set up your lighting and still have a spot or two that needs more light, a mirror can be a great low cost alternative to installing new fixtures/lights.

6. Use Dimmer Switches

Dimmer switches allow you to control the level of light usage in your store. This can save a significant amount on your energy bills, and also gives you the ability to influence the atmosphere with much greater control. Dimmer switches are especially helpful in higher-end stores, where a softer and less bright setting enhances the feel of luxury. You can find some dimmer switches at [destinationlighting.com](https://www.destinationlighting.com) and most other local and online lighting stores.

7. Spend your money on your accent and task lighting

Many small business owners will have to sacrifice some level of quality to stay within their lighting budget. If you are going to sacrifice, sacrifice it on the general and decorative lighting, Leslie advised. Your accent and task lighting are the most important, because they highlight your product and keep the task-areas of your store up and running smoothly. Fluorescent lighting is actually not a bad option for general lighting, and it is cost effective and much more efficient than it used to be.

Walking Through The 4 Types of Lighting

In order to effectively pick out your lighting, you are going to need your floor plan/display layout in front of you. Without your layout, you will have no idea where to put your lighting, especially your task and accent lighting.

Do Your General Lighting Last

Think of each of the lighting types above as different layers. It would seem standard practice to start with your general lighting first. However, when talking with interior designer [Leslie Stern](#), she explained that she actually does the opposite. She explained that if you start with your decorative, accent and task lighting first, then you know exactly what areas still need to be filled in with your general/ambient lighting.

Jewelry Store Example

To give a better idea of how this process works, we will be walking you through an example of selecting lighting for a jewelry store with a sales floor of approximately 1000 sq. ft. Since LED's are the most efficient and long-lasting, we decided to use them for everything except general lighting.

In each of the below sections we break out the lighting we would choose and how much it costs.

Decorative Lighting

Picking out your decorative lighting is all about creating an atmosphere in your store. Some stores may not even have decorative lighting, if it does not fit their vibe (hardware, grocery, sporting goods) However, higher end stores (boutiques, jewelry, furniture) often need decorative lighting to help emphasize their brand and influence customer mood.

Decorative lights need to be seen. They are statement pieces, saying "our store is luxurious and elegant." If you have a small enough store, your decorative lighting may even be able to serve as your general lighting.



As you choose your decorative lighting, keep two things in mind:

1. Where am I going to put my decorative lighting?

Again, decorative lighting is meant to be seen. So, put your decorative lights in prominent places.

Here are some good locations:

- Window Display – Catches the eye from afar and prompts a closer look
- Front Entrance – Makes a statement and invites people in
- High on Your walls – Draws the eye and provides uplight (reduces glare and provides atmosphere)

2. Will it match my brand?

The whole point of decorative lighting is to emphasize your brand. If you have a furniture/home design store that emphasizes clean lines and modern decor, a traditional chandelier is probably not a great choice.

Jewelry Store Example:

Since the actual sales floor of the jewelry store is only 33' x 30," we decided to put one main statement piece, a chandelier hanging near the entrance to greet the customers and set the luxuriant tone. Also, we put some nice wall sconce lighting higher on the walls, every 8 feet or so. Jewelry stores, in general, work better with warmer and dimmer light, in order to promote a reflective and inviting atmosphere. This is why we chose a warm white bulb with around 2700 K, warm and soothing, for the decorative lighting bulbs.

1. \$295.10 – [Decorative Chandelier](#)
2. \$494.45 – [11 Decorative Wall Sconces](#)
3. \$95.88 – [12 8 Watt LED Dimmable Bulbs \(2700 K\)](#)
4. \$885.43 - Total cost so far

Accent Lighting

Picking out your accent lighting is very important. Your accent lighting will highlight certain displays and emphasize products. This is why having your floor plan is so necessary.

Step 1: Decide where you need accent lighting

Where do you need accent lighting? Answering this question is the first step to picking out your accent lights.



Here is what you need to do:

- Pick out which displays you want to highlight (perhaps 3-4 main ones or maybe all of them if you have a smaller store). Definitely highlight larger displays and those with seasonal/new items.
- Determine whether any or all of your walls need accent lighting. What is going to go on them. Will that product need extra light for emphasis? Think paintings, wine racks, shelves with 1 featured item.
- Figure out how many lights you need for your window displays. Window displays are crucial, and lighting is definitely needed to highlight product and draw in customers.

Step 2: Decide on your Accent Lighting Fixtures

There are two main kind of accent lighting fixtures.



Recessed Can Lighting - Recessed Can lighting is lighting that is recessed into a ceiling and is used to provide specific illumination onto a display or piece of art. Can lights work great for when you need downward accent lighting and are generally installed right above a specific display or item, although they can at times be angled to some degree.



Track Lighting - Track lighting is lighting that extends down from the ceiling, is on some kind of track/bar, and has fixtures that are adjustable to various angles. Track lighting is very versatile, able to provide both downward and angled lighting.

In areas where you have semi-permanent/permanent displays and need downward lighting to accent a product, then can lighting is probably your best choice. It blends right in with your ceiling and provides focused light. Also, you do not have to worry nearly as much about whether the light fits in with your decor, as you do with track lighting, because it has very little visual surface area.

However, if you have an area where you are often moving displays and need to adjust your lighting to match, track lighting is your best choice. It is also a good choice when you have an area featuring several individual products in a line/row (small wall paintings, a row of jewelry displays, etc) To adjust a focal point with track lights, you simply climb a ladder and adjust the angle/position of the light to match your new display location or row of product.

Step 3: Determine quantity of lights and type of bulbs needed

Once you know where you are going to put your lights and which fixtures you are going to use, you need to decide how many you need and what kind of bulbs are best.

Here are some general tips:

1. Main displays often need 2-4 fixtures (can lights) for maximum exposure (1-2 tracks if using track lighting)
2. Single product/small display accent lighting generally requires only one light
3. Match the color quality and brightness of your bulb to your product/type of store ([handy guide to selecting bulbs compatible with your store type](#) page 4)

Jewelry Store Example

- **Where accent lighting is needed:** In the jewelry store, we have 3 large/main displays, one near the center of the store and one in each of the back corners. Also, there are 10 smaller displays that we would like to add accent lighting to as well.
- **Picking Fixtures:** In a jewelry store, subtlety in lighting is important, which is why we decided to use can lighting instead of track lighting, due to its low-profile design. That way, the focal point is on the jewelry, not the light fixtures.
- **Deciding on quantity of lights and types of bulbs:** We decided to put 3 can lights over each main display, to ensure adequate lighting. The bulbs we went with are around 3000 K in color quality, a warm light that shows natural color well and is dim enough to promote atmosphere. They are also bulbs with a narrow flood, which means they have a more focused light than an average can flood light would. Focused light is what you are looking for when accent lighting.

Here is the cost estimate:

1. **\$412.85** – 23 [recessed can light fixtures](#)
2. **\$414** – 23 [recessed trim pieces](#)
3. **\$775.79** – 23 [LED bulbs \(MR-16 equivalent, dimmable, 3000 K\)](#)
4. **\$2488.07** – Total Cost So Far

Task Lighting

Task lighting is used to provide enough light for task areas of your store, like your entrance, cash register, and store signage. Much like accent lighting, either can lighting or track lighting is the fixture of choice for task lighting. Task lighting often uses a brighter light than accent lighting, to ensure enough light for task performance.

The process for picking your task lighting is similar to accent lighting

Step 1: Decide where you need your task lighting

Here are the main areas where task lighting is needed:

- Signage – So customers do not have to struggle to read your store name
- Entrance – To invite customers in
- Checkout area – To ensure money is handled well and cashiers aren't squinting
- Customer service desk – To ensure returns and customer service needs are processed correctly
- Dressing rooms – To ensure adequate lighting for trying on clothes
- Other task-oriented spaces – Any place where extra lighting makes sense



Step 2: Decide on Your task lighting fixtures

The process for deciding on which type of task lighting fixture is best for your store is similar to deciding on accent lighting fixtures. So check out that section again. The most notable exception is that task oriented spaces are rarely as mobile as displays, making more permanent and less movable can lights a more viable option.

Step 3: Decide on your quantity of lights and type of bulbs needed

Here are some general tips:

- **Better to have too much task lighting than too little** – task lighting is all about having enough lighting to do the job. Better to have too much than not enough.
- **Use a bulb with higher lumens and brighter color quality** – Task oriented spaces are more about function than atmosphere, so go with around 3500-5000 K for maximum task lighting.

Jewelry Store Example

- **Where task lighting is needed** – For the jewelry store, you need task lights on the sign, at the entrance, at the checkout area, and at the jewelry services desk (re-sizing, polishing, etc)
- **Deciding on Fixtures** – We are using can lights for our task lighting fixtures, for the same reasons as mentioned in accent lighting section, with the exception of the signage lighting.
- **Deciding on quantity of lights and type of bulbs needed** - Signage lighting, row of 5 cans at entrance, 4 cans over jewelry services desk, and 4 over checkout area. Buying LED bulbs with 4000 K for brightness.

Here is the cost estimate:

1. \$330 – 3 [Gooseneck LED Sign Lights \(bulbs included\)](#)
2. \$103.35 – 13 [Can light fixtures](#)
3. \$77.35 – 13 [White Baffle Can Trim](#) pieces
4. \$1092 – 13 [LED Bulbs \(Par 30, 770 lumens, 4000K dimmable\)](#)

\$4090.77 – Total Cost So Far

General Lighting

Now that you have picked your lighting for all the other areas of your store, it is time to make sure your general lighting fills in the rest of your space. Just be aware, your overall lighting should not exceed 2.5 watts/sq. ft in order to meet latest energy code requirements.

Step 1: Decide what areas still need more lighting

After you have determined where all of your other lighting will go, you need to decide what areas still need some extra illumination. This can be tough, because you are generally working off of a diagram and not actually seeing how the light looks in your store.

More than 6 feet of space?

One rule-of-thumb, is if there is any portion of your store that has more than 6 feet of space in-between lights, it is probably a good idea to add some general lighting. This is especially important if you are using recessed can or track lighting. If you are using big panel lights, you might get away with more space in-between.

1.5 – 2.5 Lumens per cubic ft (based on data and recommendations from the [Lighting Research Center](#))



Once you have eliminated any holes, check and see approximately how many lumens your store has per cubic foot. On average, it should be between 1.5-2.5 lumens/cubic foot, a bit higher in display areas. If you have less than that, you may want to add some general lighting evenly throughout the store.

To calculate lumens lumens still needed

Determine the cubic feet of your space by multiplying width of sales floor x length of sales floor x height of sales floor walls. Take that number and multiply it by 2.5 to get your general estimate of appropriate lumens. Next, add up your total lumens for decorative, accent, and task lighting. Subtract your total lumen number of decorative, accent, and task lighting from total lumens for your whole space. The number that's left is how many lumens you still need.

Step 2: Decide on your type of general lighting

General lighting has many more options than accent and task. The kind of lighting type you use will depend a lot on your store.

Here are some general recommendations:

1. Use Recessed Cans/Track lighting in high-end, fashion, or boutique stores
2. Use [recessed panel](#) or [pendant panel lights](#) in grocery stores, convenience stores, hardware stores, and office spaces

Step 3: Decide on quantity of lights and bulb type needed

In this situation, it can actually be helpful to determine bulb type first, since that will help you to know how many lumens you are gaining per light. See calculation above under lumens/sq. foot.

If you are going to cut lighting cost somewhere, this is the place to do it, especially if your store is not in a high-end niche. Incandescent or fluorescent tube lights are adequate for most general lighting applications (not including high-end and boutique stores).

Jewelry Store Example

In this case, the lumen count for the store up to this point (decorative, accent, task) is already at around 25,000, which is right about where it needs to be. So, for general lighting, we are just factoring in several sets of track lighting, in-case of dead spots.

\$239.90 – 2 Sets of [Track Light Rails](#) (bulbs included)

\$4330.67 – Total Cost of Jewelry Store Lighting

Where to Buy

Local Lighting Provider/Interior Designer

The easiest way to find a local lighting designer is to search "retail lighting contractor" on google with your zipcode or the zipcode of the big city nearest you. You can also search google for interior designers, or better yet, check out the [American Society of Interior Designers member list](#).

Online Lighting Provider

I did almost all of my lighting estimates for this article on [Destinationlighting.com](#), [Lampsplus.com](#) and [Direct-lighting.com](#) are several other popular options. Most of these providers ship out in 1-2 days and have shipping discounts for large orders. Destinationlighting.com offers free shipping on orders over \$49.95.

Conclusion

This article has all of the main information you need to begin selecting your lighting and some helpful tips for doing so. With that being said, each store's lighting setup needs to be custom tailored to the space and store type, which is why we generally recommend hiring an interior designer (check out the [American Society of Interior Designers \(ASID\)](#) and expect to spend around \$75-\$250/hour). Regardless of whether you choose to DIY or hire a designer, this resource has a lot of helpful tips and will aid you throughout your light selection process.

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