

Planning Your Store Layout – Step-by-Step Instructions

By [Jason Rueger](#) On November 13, 2014 · [Add Comment](#) · In [How To](#)

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If you are a small-business owner who wants some help planning your store layout, then this article is for you. We'll help you choose your floor plan, decide on your size and placement of aisles, and explain how to map out your products, displays, and registers. After reading this article, you will have all the tools you need to begin planning your store layout.

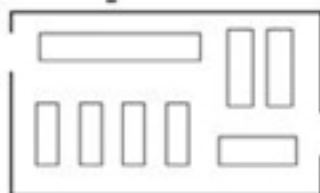


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Choose Your Floor Plan

Choosing your floor plan is important. Think of your floor plan as the foundation of your store layout. It gives you a structure through which to understand and organize everything else. We explain our recommendation and break down the other primary and secondary floor plan options for you below.

The Straight Floor Plan is Our Recommendation for the Average Small Business



There are two main reasons we endorse the straight floor plan:

1. It is one of the most efficient and economical options

With all the fixtures/displays at right angles, a straight floor plan makes the most efficient use of both floor and wall space. Even commonly unused areas, like corners, can be used for displays/shelving.

Many small businesses only have a small amount of actual floor space, This is why wall fixtures/displays can be so important, especially considering that they are one of the most affordable display options.

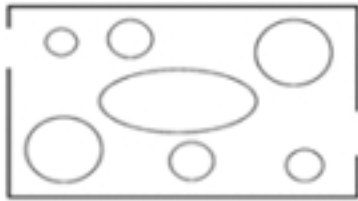
2. It is highly customizable and can accommodate a wide variety of store types and aisle layouts

Straight floor plans are also extremely versatile. They accommodate all of the major display styles (gondola, wire, slatwall) and can be used in a wide variety of stores, from convenience stores to high-end retailers. You can also incorporate many aisle layouts into your straight floor plan (more on this later).

My local gas station, worried only about efficiency and organization, uses a straight floor plan. But, so does [Apple](#), and their stores are the epitome of sophistication and class. You can basically create any kind of feel with a straight floor plan, as long as you take the time to plan it out.

Other Primary Floor Plans

Angle



The term “angle” is a bit confusing, considering this floor plan actually uses a lot of curves, creating visual diversity and a sophisticated feel. Angle floor plans have less actual room for products, meaning that those products which are displayed receive an extra emphasis. This is why high-end stores with

fewer products, like jewelry stores, often go with angular plan.

Mixed



The mixed floor plan is the most customizable option, using straight, diagonal, and angular options to create the most functional store. If you offer a wide-variety of products and want to customize certain areas of your store to communicate a different vibe or highlight a different product, this floor plan gives you the versatility to do so.

Secondary Floor Plans

There are other floor plans that are occasionally used as well, such as the diagonal and geometric floor plans. Diagonal floor plans are used most often in self-service stores and geometric floor plans in apparel and clothing stores.

Decide on Your Size and Placement of Aisles

The size and placement of your store aisles, although easy to overlook, are very important. Where you put your aisles will dictate the flow of customer traffic throughout your store. If your aisles are not wide enough, you also may be subject to lawsuits related to the American Disabilities Act.

Make Your Aisles at least 4 FT Wide and Without Obstructions

Having spacious aisles is one of the key aspects of store planning. When talking to various retail design specialists about the features of a successful store, making sure you have wide enough aisles was near the top of all their lists. When talking with Heshy Lovi, Sales and Marketing Director for [M Fried Fixtures](#), he recommended 4 feet or more. This ensures that your aisles will be comfortable for all customers, including those with strollers or those in wheelchairs.

The American Disabilities Act (ADA), requires you to have aisles that are at least 3 feet wide.

If you are found to be non-compliant, then you will have to spend time and money widening your aisles/removing obstructions or risk a costly lawsuit.

Having aisles that are at least 4 ft wide will keep traffic flowing. It also ensures that customers will not bump into each other and that aisles conform to ADA aisle-width standards.

Plan Aisles to Promote Maximum Movement and Product Exposure

If your aisles cause congestion, then customers will feel uncomfortable and sales will decrease. Also, your aisles need to be structured so as to expose your customers to the most product. This is why aisle placement is so important.

Here's what you need to do:

1. Decide how you want your traffic to flow

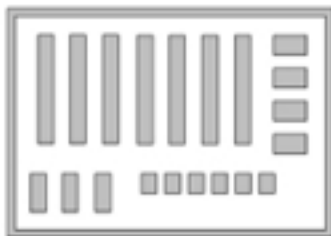
As you plan your store layout, your general goals are to expose shoppers to product and keep customer traffic flowing smoothly.

With these two goals in mind, look at your floor plan and ask yourself, "where do I want my customers to go and what do I want them to see?" Do you want to funnel customers to the back of your store? Are you hoping to direct traffic to your wall fixtures? Do you want customers to concentrate in the center of your store?

2. Pick the aisle layout that leads customers where you want them to go

Once you know where you want your customers to go, pick the aisle layout that gets them there. In some cases, the type of layout you choose may be dictated by your space. You have many different layout options within a single floorplan, each directing customer traffic and highlighting products in a different way.

If you have a large sales floor, you have quite a few options. But if you have a really small space that does not allow for dedicated aisles, you might be forced to use a free-flow layout.



In a grid layout, often paired with a straight floorplan, aisles generally run parallel and perpendicular to walls, promoting movement up and down aisles. This layout can be a great option for grocery stores and convenience stores, because it is efficient and allows customers to get what they want and keep moving.



A loop layout, which can also be paired with a straight floorplan, has one defined main aisle that loops around your store like a racetrack. Loop layouts are great for stores that have lots of products, especially if there are different sections for each type/genre of product. This would be a great layout for something like a sporting goods store. Each section (tennis, archery, golf, etc) can have its own distinct place and the looped aisle makes sure your customers see as many sections as possible before they leave.



A free-flow layout, most often used with an angle floor plan, allows shoppers the most creativity of movement and encourages browsing. Instead of using defined aisles, the angles and corners of fixtures/displays guide customers around the store. This is a great option for stores with less inventory and higher-end merchandise, like jewelry stores and custom boutiques of any kind.

Map out your product, displays, and registers

Now that you have picked your floor plan and decided where your aisles will go, it is time to figure out where you will put your product, displays, and registers. It can be helpful to put yourself in your customers' shoes. Walk through the store with some trusted employees and visualize your space. See what input they have concerning where things should go.

After that, here is what you need to do:

Grab an inventory list and decide where in your store you want various products

Deciding where your product will go can be a big task, which is why we have included some inventory management tips below. See our article on [inventory management](#) for extra help.

Here are a couple of tips to make the task more manageable:

1. Put necessities near the back

Dan Jablons, an expert retail consultant with [Retail Smart Guys](#), highlighted the importance of putting necessary items near the back of your store. He explained that doing so increases your customer's exposure to other products and motivates impulse buys.

Whether it is underwear in a clothing store or milk in a grocery store, put the items that customers need most near the back. As customers walk to the back of the store to get milk, there is a good chance they might decide to buy cream cheese or yogurt as well, because they have to pass by the rest of the dairy section on their way.

2. Put seasonal items and new products in prime locations

Put some of your snappiest and most exciting items near the front right of your store. This area is one of your prime locations, and is known as a "power wall." Power walls are those areas of your stores that stand out and naturally attract attention. You want to be sure to put interesting and compelling items in these areas. If you are trying to push a specific item, highlight it on one of your power walls.

3. Stock small impulse items near your registers

Items like little toy balls, candy bars, hand sanitizer, and breath mints are great items to have upfront near your register. Although the shopper is coming to the register to pay and leave, you do not want them to stop shopping. Putting items that are appetizing and easy to grab near the register encourages your customers to add one or two more items to their cart before they leave.

Map out where you are going to put your displays and other necessities

Once you have a general idea of where your product is going to go, it is time to decide where to put your displays and other accessories.

Here are some things to consider:

1. Your fixtures and displays need to work with your product

It is vitally important that your fixtures and displays work with your product, because they are one of the main things customers will see. Fixtures are parts of your store that are meant to be permanent, like cash registers, dressing rooms, and salad bar stations. Displays hold the majority of your product and are generally more versatile and customizable, like shelving and clothes racks.

We have a full article on how to select the right displays for your your store. Here are two of the most important factors to consider when matching product and shelving:

- **Make sure your displays/fixtures are a physical match for your product**

Be sure your shelving can hold the weight of your product and that it is the right size(or can be adjusted) to fit your product dimensions.

A long glass shelf is probably not the best option if you need something to hold 50 pounds of canned goods. Conversely, you probably do not want unadjustable gondola displays with 3 feet in-between shelves to hold your shaving cream.

- **Make sure your displays/fixtures highlight your products and emphasize your brand**

1. Do not forget that the main purpose of your displays/fixtures is to highlight your product. A unique display might be great in highlighting a specific product, but can also be detrimental if it is so unique that it overshadows the product itself and takes center stage.

2. Pick displays that emphasize your brand. If you are opening an art gallery, than industrial shelving is probably not a good choice. Conversely, if you are starting a hardware store, custom wood displays might be a bit much. Know our product, know your brand, and then pick displays/fixtures that appropriately emphasize who you are as a store.

For more on product displays see our article "How To Choose And Buy Displays For Your Store".

- 2. Fixtures/displays need to be at least 3' 6" apart to meet ADA specifications**

3 feet 6 inches is the minimum distance required by the ADA between store fixtures/displays. In reality, even if there weren't ADA standards, you would want to allow at least this much space for your customers in-between displays. You want to make sure you have enough room that two customers can stand side-by-side without feeling crowded. Also, you want to leave enough space for mothers with strollers to maneuver easily.

- 3. Account for the transition/decompression zone**

As you enter your store, the first 5-15 feet are known as the transition/decompression zone. In most cases, customers are not going to pay attention to displays or fixtures in this area. As they enter your store, they have lots of things on their mind and have often not transitioned into "shopping mode" yet. Leave this area open and inviting, free from merchandise and displays.

4. Incorporate some speed bumps/break points

As customers leave the transition zone, you want to slow them down. Most of the time, customers will walk right as they enter your store, so take that into account.

Fixtures/displays in these areas are known as speed bumps or break points, because they act in much the same way as a speed bump in a parking lot, slowing customers down and getting them to begin looking at items.

Specialty fixtures that feature hot, new, or seasonal items work great as speed bumps. Customers are drawn to the unique display and slow down to see what has grabbed their attention.

5. Add some Merchandise Outposts

Merchandise outposts are displays/fixtures throughout your store that are near or in an aisle. These fixtures are all about impulse buying. This is where you put things like singing alarm clocks, back massagers, and other similar novelty items. The point is to get your customer to notice something and then decide they cannot live without it. If you ever walk through a Kohls, you will see merchandise outposts everywhere.

Placing Your Registers

Placing your registers is not rocket science. Here are a few tips to point you in the right direction.

1. Avoid putting your registers in the front right of your store

Many stores put their registers near the front right of their store. This is a mistake. The front right of your store is your lakefront property, one of the prime sales locations in the store. Keep it available for product.

2. Place your registers at natural stopping points

When talking with [DeAnna Radaj](#), interior designer and expert on retail design, she identified misplacement of registers as one of the biggest retail mistakes she sees.

You want to put your registers where they will not distract shoppers but still be easy to find when needed. Take a walk through your store with your layout diagram. Where could you see yourself stopping? Once you have identified those areas, you have a good idea where to put your registers.

DeAnna identified the front left of your store as a pretty good location for a register. Shoppers naturally go right when they enter a store and generally loop around the store, leaving on the left side. So, by placing your register(s) at the front left of your store, you catch shoppers when they are ready to pay without distracting them from their shopping as they make their way around the store.

Leave Room for Other Necessities

When talking with Leslie Stern of [Leslie M Stern Designs](#), retail design expert, she mentioned how important it is not to overlook other necessities that take up floor space. She gave several examples.

First, she explained how it can be a great idea to have some seating available for when people get tired. Shoppers do get tired and so do friends and relatives who get dragged along to the store. This needs to be factored into your store layout.

She also mentioned dressing rooms. If you run a clothing store, you probably need to factor-in space for dressing rooms. People want to try clothes on, and in most cases you should try to accommodate them.

It could also be important to save space for customer service desks. Keep in mind store-specific necessities as you map out your layout and plan accordingly.

Store Planning Resources

There are many resources out there to help you with your store layout. You may not feel comfortable doing everything yourself. If so, hiring professional help could be a good option for you. Even if you choose to do it yourself, certain resources such as store planning software can make your job much easier.

Independent Store Designers

If you feel overwhelmed with the idea of planning your store layout yourself, the easiest option is probably to hire an interior designer with retail experience. It may cost more upfront than DIY, but your interior designer could actually save you money in the long run by making sure everything is done right the first time.

If you are interested in hiring an interior designer, check out the [American Society of Interior Designers \(ASID\)](#). Expect to spend around \$75-\$250/hour.

Display Company Designers

Many of the companies that specialize in display/fixture sales have design staff as well. Although rarely free, these services can be invaluable, especially for streamlining the process from layout planning to actual purchasing of your displays.

Also, using the services of a display company designer ensures that the designer has had actual commercial designing experience, which is not necessarily true of all designers.

Store Planning Software

If you do plan to do the bulk of store planning yourself, store planning software could be a great option for you. With both free and paid versions, from basic to complex in sophistication and features, you have lots of options to choose from.

Conclusion

Planning your store layout is not necessarily an easy task. If you need some extra inspiration, take a tablet, walk some stores, and note what you like and don't like. But, with this guide and the help from some of the resources mentioned, you will be well on your way to mapping out a layout that is right for your small business.

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Jason Rueger is an analyst and staff writer for Fit Small Business currently specializing in online and offline storefronts and product reviews. When not helping other small business owners Jason is busy running his own small business, Rueger Pottery, where he specializes in handmade, functional ware that he hopes will lead those who use it to find some meaning and beauty in the everyday moments of life. You can see Jason's pottery at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/RuegerPottery> and reach him at

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