

MAY 2011

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New Mannequin Trends

# The New Figures

How the latest mannequin trends can help your sales soar

BY CHARLOTTE BARNARD

**M**annequins are your silent selling partners. But, like so much else in your business, they need to be regularly evaluated to remain effective. "You have a moment to capture your customer's attention, and the customer has a moment to decide what you are offering," says David Terveen, president of DK Display in New York City. "Get proportions and draping right, and from there it all moves forward." In short, mannequins are a key branding and marketing tool for your store.

Look carefully at how mannequins interact with your decor as well as the apparel. Start with material. Mannequins are most commonly available in two types: plastic and fiberglass. Plastic is less expensive, selling for as little as \$100 a form. Plastic forms can be made from recycled material and won't break; over time there is a less risk of a piece being knocked off or the surface getting chipped. Fiberglass represents the higher end, with more finish options and prices ranging from \$100 to \$4,000. Styles include full-body, with or without head, and individual body parts, such as torsos, legs or feet. If your store has room, a combination of full and partial bodies will give you the most display options year-round.

## FIT YOUR MARKET

Like every other feature of your store, the mannequin has to fit into the environment but also make a statement on its own. It's critical that your mannequins mirror your market. The mannequin type will communicate whether your store is young and urban, traditional or fashion-forward. Stylish displays inspire customers and create excitement, so it's extremely important that the clothing drapes well on them. "If the garment doesn't fit," says Don McKnight, vice president, creative development and marketing, for Bernstein Display in New York City, "the customer picks up on that, and it's perceived as badly made."

Many manufacturers offer athletic-looking forms that are distinct from mannequins typically found in fashion retail. These will show dancewear better.

## RESOURCES

**Bernstein Display**  
212-337-9578  
www.bernsteindisplay.com

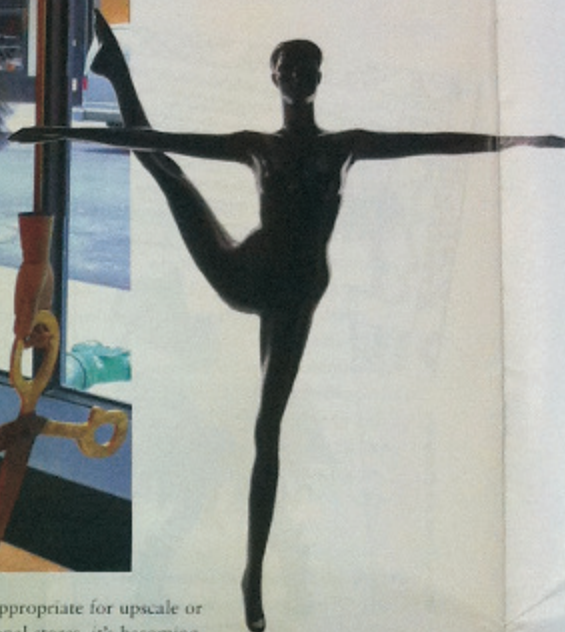
**Las Vegas Mannequins**  
702-987-5830  
www.lvmannequins.com

**DK Display Corp.**  
212-807-0499  
www.dkdisplaycorp.com

**Robert H. Ham**  
800-334-6965  
www.robertham.com



Form and function: Bernstein Display in New York (left) offers fiberglass mannequins in a range of finishes and styles. Las Vegas Mannequin (below) has models, like this \$250 dancer, designed for athletic gear and dancewear.



"The pose is important, and so is the stance," says Alison Wainwright, founder and CEO of Las Vegas Mannequins in Las Vegas, NV. "For dance you want more of an action pose." If you don't have a large budget, suggests Wainwright, you can buy a group of five in different poses. There also are bendable models—with wire on the inside and jersey on the outside—so they can be adjusted into dance positions.

## NEW LOOKS

While mannequins can still be ordered with highly articulated facial features and add-on wigs, the trend now is for abstract heads or no head at all. White and black finishes in high gloss remain in demand. "White is a stronger seller than black," says Joyce. "It's more light-reflective and goes in more environments without competing." Adds McKnight, "Dance has a modern feel, and high gloss reinforces that; its reflective quality conveys a livelier feeling."

While every mannequin in your store doesn't need to match, continuity does create a clear brand message and bumps up customers' perception of value. Don't mix realistic with abstract; the effect will be confusing and cluttered. But you can mix finishes; just keep within the same finish in individual groupings, like in a window or on a pedestal or shelf.

If you're feeling daring, says Wainwright, "do something with a mannequin that has nothing to do with what you are selling," such as topping a figure with flowers instead of a wigged head to make a strong spring statement. "It's almost as if you are creating an art piece," she adds. "It tells people your store has style and is interesting, and it motivates them to enter and spend time inside."

Another trend just coming up seems to take a look back: the dress form. Covered in muslin, it takes the body shape from neck to thigh. While this type of mannequin can be dressed with an outfit and seems

most appropriate for upscale or traditional stores, it's becoming popular for accessory displays, particularly jewelry, which can be pinned in multiples on the form to very pretty effect.

## DIFFERENT DISPLAY TECHNIQUES

A mannequin's pose, as well as its apparel, should spark interest and excitement in the customer. "Be consistent and clean," says Terveen. "And refresh the look as often as every week!"

When it comes to displays, mannequins not only attract a customer's attention, they also direct her around the store. Treat your front window differently from the store interior. While full- or partial-body mannequins are suitable for either location, the window is your first opportunity to hook customers, so you can afford to be the most dramatic here. Dress the mannequins to tell a seasonal or fashion story, and prop them accordingly using all the tricks in your arsenal, including color and lighting.

"Windows need to be the fashion statement, show new arrivals and set you apart from everyone else," says McKnight. "Inside the store, you break it down into commodity buys." There, mannequins work to communicate silently to customers the full range of your merchandise or seasonality (holidays, back-to-school), as well as to upsell. Take a tiered approach, advises McKnight. "Smaller stores are packed with product, so you want to make navigation easy but also encourage pauses," he says. To steer shoppers, try to keep a mannequin near the rack that stocks the garment the mannequin is wearing. "Think about staging partial body mannequins atop a rack of leotards," says Christy Joyce, vice president of marketing at Robert H. Ham, in Greensboro, NC. They will signal to your customer the location of that item.

When you want to tell a color, pattern or fabric

story, multiples—four sets of legs in wildly colored tights, or a series of torsos in the latest leotards—maximize the effect. Think strength in numbers. “Some things, like a tank top, are just so small. But when you combine several of them, you show you are standing behind this item with conviction,” says McKnight.

Full-body mannequins come with a steel post in the leg that keeps the form upright and stable. Leg or foot mannequins let you show tights and shoes without a post cutting a hole through them. For feet, note that the average mannequin size is 7 1/2 or 8. You will probably need to fit the mannequin with a shoe that’s one size larger because, unlike a real foot, the form does not bend. To show an entire outfit, try placing a shoe display next to a full-body mannequin.

#### THE CHILDREN’S CORNER

Mannequins perform an important role in a chil-

dren’s department, too. The scale and body shape of the forms are more literal—to give customers a realistic idea of what garments will look like on children. Use risers or columns to elevate the display at least to a child’s eye-level. This also creates a boundary around displays. Anything you can do to offer more levels will make your display more interesting. Even with a small budget, something as simple as placing child mannequins on decorated crates can help. Props remain important here; you can have some fun with toys or even wrapped packages at holiday time, to prompt gift buying.

An integral aspect of the retail experience, mannequins help to create an emotional connection between a customer and the store. “That spark people feel when they see a look they like makes them feel good about spending their money in your store,” says McKnight. “And that’s just what you want to happen.” **E**

## AskLeslie

### Product Placement

This clean-lined and beautiful slat wall from the Freed showroom in New York City illustrates how to achieve an effective display of basics, while enhancing the perceived value of the merchandise in the bargain.

**Incorporate a few simple techniques,** such as stacking product, displaying on several levels and suspending product on forms to show the contour of the merchandise, and you’ll see how easy it is to create a successful selling wall with just a small investment.

- **Order:** Use acrylic risers to set the levels in place on the slat wall; this is a clean look that draws all the attention to the product.
- **Organization:** Group product by color and/or pattern to make it easy to shop.
- **Pattern:** In this case, alternating the narrow-striped legwarmers and the solid-color and wide-striped shorts keeps a well-stocked display looking uncluttered.
- **Balance:** Position the product from knee height to eye level, leaving plenty of space between items. This allows you to show lots of product without diminishing its perceived



Any Kerkberg

value. The Freed showroom’s slat wall uses clear acrylic risers to set off the products.

- **Scale:** Separate larger items from smaller ones. In the Freed display, all the larger items are arranged in a single top row, taking up approximately the same amount of wall space as two rows of smaller items below.



**Have a question for Leslie?** E-mail: [ldowd@dancemedia.com](mailto:ldowd@dancemedia.com)

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