

COVER STORY: RETAIL LIGHTING

# Retail's 3A's

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By Vinayak Diwan

If retailers include attraction, appraisal and atmosphere as an intrinsic part of their stores, they are bound to see a definite spurt in their sales and profits



The retail sector of India is on a high and global brands are coming to India with deep rooted marketing and brand building strategies for attracting customers. They treat lighting as one of the top three elements to attract customers to their stores and improve sales on an international level. But lighting design in India's retail sector is quiet fragmented and doesn't get the same importance as it gets in Western or South East Asian countries. In India, retail giants and independent retailers consider lighting as the last element on their store construction list, in fact, lighting is installed just before handover of the project to the owner.





Energy consumption is the biggest expense in a retail outlet, and if retailers upgrade their lighting system to the latest high-tech products they can save a substantial amount of money every year in energy costs. Lighting is still not being given its due importance, which is a cause for concern. Retailers are not allocating the right budgets towards use of good quality fixtures; in fact, this is seen as an area to cut costs! So, though the attention is there, it needs a lot more progress.

– **Sandeep Rohra**  
Artlite, Gurgaon

While appropriate light levels will ensure that showrooms function optimally, retailers should also consider lighting control systems for energy savings.

– **Moses Phillip**  
Lutron GL Sales & Services,  
Gurgaon

Retail project heads insist on high quality products, but they want low prices as well and the best of service. Europeans believe more on brands, whereas in India cost concerns are important. But trends are changing, awareness is increasing, and companies are investing a lot of time and effort in understanding what they are buying. But we need to address concerns such as having a strong regulation in place like they have in Europe and in the USA to upgrade the quality and safety standards in this country.

– **Amit Sheth**  
Plus Light Tech, Mumbai

In European countries, the government is very serious about CO2 reduction, which is making all equipment manufacturers to adapt new technologies to work towards this goal. In India, this will happen in the medium term so that we embrace new technologies for a better and clean living.

– **R Nagendra**  
LTS Licht & Leuchten GmbH

Lighting industry is still in its nascent stage in India, making it a little difficult for designers to educate people about good lighting concepts and designs. The advantages that international lighting fixtures have over locally procured stuff is lost on most people - which is a challenge we need to take and overcome.

– **Amit Gupta**  
vis-à-vis India

Metal halides are very energy efficient as compared to CFL/ T5/halogens. But they are costly, so maintenance is heavy on store operations. They take 2-3 minutes to light up - which in case of a power cut is a disadvantage. LEDs have a very high Capex (although one can source cheap LEDs) and due to their susceptibility to heat up very fast, we feel that they are still not a viable option for retail. A highlighter or a minispot is the only application we have done till date.

– **Amitabh Bendre**  
Design Head at EVOK

The Indian retail industry is also getting educated and becoming more aware of the latest developments. Earlier, retailers wanted high brightness in their showrooms, but now lighting is all about the concept, the right application and creating the desired ambiance. Cost is the prime concern but once the requirement will increase then price will start coming down. Modern retailers are travelling around the world and they can see the changes happening in the retail sector, and they do not hesitate in adopting these changes in their stores. This is a positive sign for us. It makes our job easier as our clients are knowledgeable about the latest lighting trends, and we only have to provide them the solutions.

– **Balvant Sharma**  
Marc Signage, Kolkata

### What's missing, what needs to be done

Our experience in the retail sector shows that there is a visible lack of lighting design intent in the whole sector whether it's retail store of basic merchandising, mid-end stores or the high-end sector. The aesthetic effect that can be achieved through lighting mostly goes unnoticed by the end-user.

The budget for lighting design should be prioritised at the onset of the project. The main problem is seen in the stores that follow a franchise model whereby the owner/investor doesn't feel the need to spend on well engineered lighting fixtures, with the result that the aesthetics of retail design get compromised. Poor or badly designed lighting results in poor sales, confused customers, less footfalls, higher maintenance and operation costs.

### Understanding lighting and design

For retailers, lighting can create differentiation and emotionalisation of their retail space.

Good lighting can create a brand image, attract attention of potential customers, guide customers to the specific products, and enhance the shopping experience. Lighting creates value by adding beauty and functionality to the illumination that is an inevitable part of any retail environment. The selection of right lighting can be a major contribution to retail sales.

The approach to finding the right lighting solution for a store always begins with viewing lighting as a design concept, and in relation to a specific space. Retail brands like Zara and Vero Moda follow a brand image and execute the same specifications as in their European stores. Hence, all their stores have the same plush look thanks to a great lighting environment. There is a chain of European clothing store in India which started as a great chain with immense clientele and design language, but now the fear of competition and



idea of opening stores all over India has taken the feel away from the products and the brand's great value. This kind of fear is lurking in all leading brands in India, and is disabling them from experimenting with innovative designs and new lighting solutions.

The only mantra which international brands follow is the retail design model which is based on years of marketing and branding experience. Since global brands have lighting standards laid out in their strategy manual, therefore, the project aesthetic doesn't get diluted in any manner even if the project is in East Africa. These standards are their tools for future success.

### Nuances of lighting

When used intelligently, store lighting has the potential to boost sales. Light can create additional value, especially if the lighting concept and lighting control can be identified and handled as a single unit. This will lend the retail store a lighting image of its own, which in turn will have the flexibility to change the lighting scenario depending upon the product.





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Creating accents using sophisticated optical systems featuring high luminous efficiency, directing the customer's attention towards the peripheral areas, and lighting the back walls with branding messages with different beam angles will create the desired impact.

### IN INDIA, RETAIL GIANTS AND RETAIL STORES CONSIDER LIGHTING AS THE LAST ITEM ON THE STORE CONSTRUCTION LIST

Emphasizing freshness of the product through high colour rendition, the right level of illuminance, using the right light colours, setting the right colour temperature that matches the product and making the surface look more natural are important criteria for lighting.

The interplay of variable colour temperatures across the store creates different atmospheres

within the store, and enhances the emotional connect with the brand.

Media facades is a trend which is used extensively in South East Asian countries like Singapore and Hong Kong where attracting a retail client is very crucial in the midst of other retail advertisements. Media facades add another dimension to the whole experience of lighting design in retail sector. The term is often associated with over-dimensional screens

and animated, illuminated advertising in places like Times Square, the Strip in

Las Vegas and Hong Kong. The façade itself is de-materialized and turned into one huge advertising medium for sending messages. At the onset of dusk the building moves into the background and serves only as a backdrop for the light show which then becomes the main attraction. Media architecture tends to use media facades more and more as a stylistic feature.





### Good lighting spurs sales

Retail brands or individual franchisees need to understand the importance of lighting design in their respective areas. Good lighting means good business and this fact is well accepted. In fact, the hospitality industry began to focus on lighting in the early 70s in western countries, so much so that illumination experts from theaters were called to do lighting design projects.

Retailers erroneously believe that the capital cost of buying good quality fixtures is very high, but the fact is that running cost, maintenance and energy costs are much higher on an annual basis. By investing in good quality lighting fixtures and energy-efficient lighting systems they will save money in the long term retail operations.

The Indian market is the centre of global attention with all retail giants eyeing developments and government decisions, discussions and policy debates on issues such as FDI. FDI in modern retail would help greater cash flow for store owners, which would give a boost to the design fraternity to be more innovative and creative at the concept stage. Store designers would also be encouraged to experiment with new design concepts, technology upgradation, and finding unique lighting solutions for an evolving market. ■

**Vinayak Diwan** is Principal at architecture lighting company *Lightbook*

