

# Emotional Appeal in



“Emotional involvement is hitting the interior design scene right now,” says Jefferey Liew, Director of VSMS Sdn Bhd. *Malaysia Retailer* finds out more via an exclusive chat with Liew at his office in Seri Kembangan.

By Lim Su Yee

“Quality is  
it is always  
intelligent

s never an accident;  
s the result of  
t effort."

John Ruskin (1819-1903),  
Poet, Editor, Art Critic





Jefferey Liew

When it comes to interior design, VSMS is no stranger as it is one of the top players in the market with notable clients such as Sunway, Toshiba, KDU, Focus Point, Poh Kong and many others. Besides offering contemporary and futuristic designs to its clients for the past 10 years, the company also believes in caring for the environment by building responsibly. In this exclusive interview, Liew reveals more about the latest in interior design (ID) trends.

### Emotional Involvement

According to Liew, the current trend for interior design is happening already where retailers rely heavily on the senses, in the form of hearing, sight and smell. "The trend now is in the form of emotional involvement. You may be wondering what that is. Basically, emotional involvement is drawn by the impulses. Let's say, you are in a restaurant and you are attracted to the pleasant aroma, ambience and comfortable surroundings. Therefore, you are drawn by the impulses, making you immediately patronise that restaurant. In short, that is called emotional involvement," he explains.

### A Stodgy Past

It was different in the past, as back in the old days, retailers were too formal and too conservative. There were also no proper spacing and display for their items. "Currently, interior design trends lean more towards the home trend thing. Retailers are making their designs feel more like home and welcoming to buyers as now, the younger generation is the target market since they have more buying power. You must be aware that young people today keep up with the trends and retailers try to use components such as the iPad and the latest technology to attract them," he says.

### Acting on Impulse

According to Liew, in terms of style, modern is not really fashionable right now. The Malaysian market tends to follow the Australian and British styles in comparison to others and basically, it is a blend between the old and new. "Now in 2015, it's all about emotions. People tend to be impulsive at times. For example, when one is on a shopping spree and buying things that one do not need. The same goes for the trend in the interior



design scene right now. People have more knowledge on things surrounding them and they know what they want. Therefore, retailers have no choice but to give in to the demands of the clients to adapt to the current situation. Or else, they be out of business,” Liew adds, with a smile.

### Space Planning

Just like fine wine that gets better with age, ID trends have evolved and changed throughout the years. Liew opines that for now, it is all about space planning. “Previously, the trend was to show everything but now, that doesn’t work as well as it used to. However, space planning has changed a lot. This concept used to be very hard sell. For example, shop owners used to feel that they needed to display all their products and profits were their main concern. But now, it is more of a lifestyle thing. Let’s say, you go to the coffee shop to buy coffee, you can expect to be shown the menu, but you do not expect the owner to display all 100 types of coffee beans to you. It is impossible. Retailers try to reduce the busyness of the eyes,” he elaborates.

### The Role of Colours & Lighting

According to Liew, colours and lighting play a very important role too. For example, if you want to buy a diamond which is considered something secretive, you do not want the room to be too bright. If not, it will definitely overshadow the diamond. At the same time, you would also want to make the person feel confident when coming into your jewellery shop to purchase the diamond. Other notable examples are that, if you want to buy lingerie for your partner, you would want an intimate setting and not too much of unwanted attention. Therefore, the colours need to be right and suit the brand or type of product that the shop is selling.

### Pride & Joy Projects

Throughout the years, VSMS has worked on a variety of retail ID projects that are all the pride and joy of the creative Liew and his team. However, the director of VSMS revealed that one of their most outstanding work is a commercial showroom for Sunway Property. Liew excitedly shows the *Malaysia Retailer* team various pictures of his masterpiece from different angles and reveals that the concept of this project is called Diamond Element.

“The reason why it is called Diamond Element as you can see, diamonds which are fine gemstones, can be very enticing. We intentionally used the diamond shape to trigger emotions so that people will keep on coming to look at it. It is like an art and sculpture form. By accentuating the diamonds, the posters were reduced to a secondary role as you can see from the picture. We also used a special lightning effect to create shining diamonds,” he recalls.

*“People have more knowledge on things surrounding them and they know what they want. Therefore, retailers have no choice but to give in to the demands of the clients to adapt to the current situation. Or else, they will be out of business”*

---

### Good Aesthetics Come with a Price

An attractive ID makeover does not come cheap. Liew points out that even a basic one can cost anything from RM150,000 to RM1.5 million. Although most retail businesses can benefit from superior interior design, not everyone is willing to pay the price for a good interior designer. Liew explains that this problem could be overcome as there are many things that retailers can do to improve their outlets’ ID if they want to attract more customers. “However, there is a slight challenge as retailers can change gradually, but not overnight. The crucial aspect is that they must learn to display only the critical parts and not everything. For example, the correct display, size, area and others be balanced. Other than that, retailers are advised not to put too many words in their posters as we want customers to use their minds and figure out for themselves the meaning behind them. Anyway, nobody will read if the posters are too wordy. The emotional aspect plays a very important part in a retail shop,” he says.



The VSMS Team

## Scent of a Retailer

Liew also further shares that televisions (as shop displays) are also on the wane as they tend to be confusing. Therefore, posters are actually more important than TV. But, not many people know that. However, most businesses out there are aware of the effectiveness of a good retail ID concept in retaining and increasing customer traffic and sales. Liew opines that an outlet with good retail ID concept is the famed Big Ben's at Publika in Jalan Dutamas 1. "Big Ben's is totally different from others. There, you can not only smell the delightful aroma of delicious food, but also a blend of other pleasant smells that will tantalise your mood. The shop has that something extra to maintain its customers and attract more of them to patronise the shop," he says.

"The concept of Big Ben's is similar with the popular Kentucky Fried Chicken chain of fast food restaurants back in the 80s and 90s. In the old days, KFC used to have their signature fried chicken scent to attract customers to come to their restaurant. Sadly, now if you go to KFC, you can't even get that distinct scent anymore. Nowadays, it's all about lifestyle. People go to a restaurant not just to dine but also to do other things too. For example, people go to a lifestyle cafe to take fun selfies or also bring their

laptops to surf the internet. All in all, it's about playing with emotions," Liew remarks.

## Design Benchmarks

Retail outlets with excellent ID concepts that have stood the test of time are aplenty and Liew names American coffee chain Starbucks as one of his inspirations. "I feel that they have a long lasting design from the past to the present. Nothing much has changed and the ID concept remains excellent. When you go into Starbucks, you can smell the aroma of coffee and admire the brick walls surrounding you. The entire experience gives you a very comfy and plushy home feel that makes you feel that you're drinking a hot cup of coffee in your own house. Interior design does play a very important part as even though the Taiwanese global franchise teahouse chain Chatime and the American-oriented Starbucks are both F&B outlets, both have very different ID. For example, Chatime's concept is "come-and-go" which means that people do not usually hang out there for a long time, unlike how they do in Starbucks," he explains.

Liew further reveals that he also admires the Michelin star-awarded Din Tai Fung chain of restaurants. "As fans of Din Tai Fung know, the restaurant is famous for its famed Xiao Long Bao. At Din Tai Fung, everything





is exposed as you can see the chefs making by hand, kneading, folding and putting the final touches to the award-winning Xiao Long Bao. This concept not only attracts people to taste the food there but the novelty also immediately draws people into the shop. In Malaysia, I think that Madam Kwan's restaurant ID is original. But basically, I feel that most Malaysian ID concepts lack originality, as the decorations do not symbolise Malaysia. Many people tend to overlook ID. They think that it is already sufficient if their food is good," he laments.

Liew warns that retailers have to select the right ID, and if they select the wrong one, it could do more harm than good. "The Old Town kopitiam chain is very popular with Malaysians even though there are many other local old school coffee shops around. As a consumer, why is one willing to go to Old Town when there are many other small coffee shops? It is because the owners of Old Town used the right ID for their business. Even though there have been other similar coffee chains mushrooming up in Malaysia, I will still go to the pioneer, that is Old Town. Retailers need to find ways to create an original concept for their shops so that they can stand out and compete with their competitors," he elaborates.

### ID Tips for New Retailers

For retailers who are just about to set up their outlets, Liew has some starting advice when it comes to ID. First of all, you will need to have a balance in the sense of budget. "For example, how much are you willing to spend? If you don't have a proper budget, there is a possibility that you might overspend. Thus, it is very important to set your budget and once that is done, you can come up with lots of ideas and ways to suit your budget. For the second step, you'll need to identify your targeted audience and age group to suit their tastes and preferences. The reason for it is because, if you fail to do the right analysis, you might create the wrong thing," he says.

Liew points out that in terms of ID, Malaysia is still playing catch-up with other ASEAN countries. "We have our own originality, but it's just that we haven't discovered it yet. Don't you think so?" he asks, with a twinkle in his eyes. 🍵

