

PRODUCT RANGES

What to look for. How to plan one.

ARTICLE 1/4 WHAT IS A PRODUCT RANGE?

Range (noun) [raynj] all the products produced or sold by somebody, considered as a set (Encarta Dictionary: English U.K.)

I checked the meaning of the word “range” when planning this article and I think the definition illustrates the essential simplicity of the concept.

I would expand on it a little, though and add that a “range” is a group of products linked together through a combination of features, such as decoration, form, function, colour or – even – price point.

A mix of products that ‘work’

For example, décor and lifestyle ranges developed by retail chains, such as Woolworths, @home or Mr. Price typically consist of a mix of products made from different materials. Frequently displayed in the same limited space, each range can be identified easily, thanks to an overall design theme and colour palette which unites the items visually.

Fig. 1 Originally inspired by a field of wildflowers, this range by Veldt illustrates how a traditional motif can be given a modern ‘twist’ and then applied across a variety of products, available in different colourways. When grouped together, they make for a strong in-store display



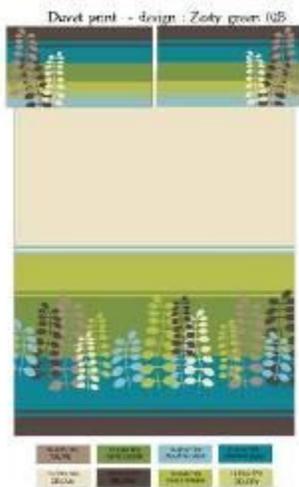
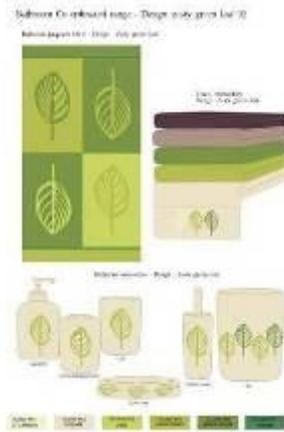
Photograph courtesy of Veldt

The importance of storyboards

When planning a range, most designers put together a concept 'storyboard'. This usually consists of a selection of colours, design motifs and textures, from a variety of sources, which together convey the look and feel of the new range. This then forms the basis from which specific elements are drawn and applied to a collection of products.



Fig. 2 This is a strong example of a concept storyboard with the proposed colour palette at bottom. Note there are 4 additional concept boards where the central design theme and palette are applied across a variety of product lines. Everything pulls together visually and the customer has the option of buying items individually or with a mix and match approach



Storyboards courtesy of Chantal de la Hogue (2008)

Craft producers generally work with only one type of material, but understanding how to put a range together is just as important for them as it is for Woolworths, or any of the other big retail chains.

Too often, I interact with producers who may be highly skilled technically and have wonderful design ideas, but very little concept of how to translate these into a viable commercial range.

The next article unpacks how to go about conceptualizing and planning a range. Global events, the environment, cultural traditions, politics, technological advances, nostalgia: they all have a role to play when designers and buyers get together to consider what influences and informs the major new trends. These then translate into patterns, shapes, colour choices, decorative motifs and textural effects for everything from clothing to light fittings.

Feeling overwhelmed? Don't be. Chantal de la Hogue, trend analyst for the Ackermans Group, brings it all closer to home and gives us some pointers about doing it by ourselves.