

A Retail Video Fashion Network

Lord and Taylor adopts color videocassette system

Howard Geltzer

Lord and Taylor, a leading New York fashion center, has a new videocassette communications program that extends the realm of Fifth Avenue fashion exclusivity to encompass a network of 14 cities.

The major fashion retailer selected Sony U-Matic^R videocassette equipment to present new merchandise, fashion trends and better selling ideas to both full-time and part-time sales people in all 14 branch stores.

Capitalizing on the high impact of color television, the videocassette programs are designed to bring immediacy and impact to the latest news in fashion. Instead of being relegated to a memo or picture on a bulletin board, the newest merchandise offerings are dramatized in this lively format that both interests and motivates Lord and Taylor employees.

Need For Latest Information

For two decades, the nation's retailers have been following the population shift to the suburbs. Shopping centers and malls rang up 33 per cent of all retail sales last year. And that figure is increasing!

Many retailing executives, including Ted Bruce, Lord and Taylor's senior vice president, believe that one route to more effective sales personnel and higher profits is better communications and control. "Our customers hear immediately, through newspapers, radio and television, about latest fashion and styles. They come to any of our branches to *see* and *buy* this new merchandise. We want our sales people to be authorities on all merchandise from the time it is introduced. Videocassette programs do the job!

"Because today's fashion-conscious shoppers are interested in the total look" Mr. Bruce

continued, "we must make sure that all our sales people not only sell, but act as fashion counselors. They have to know everything about the merchandise they are selling, and must be ready to suggest new styles, accessories, color combinations, ideas for 'putting it all together' and much more. This 'suggestive selling' technique actually serves the customers' fashion needs as well as stimulating sales.

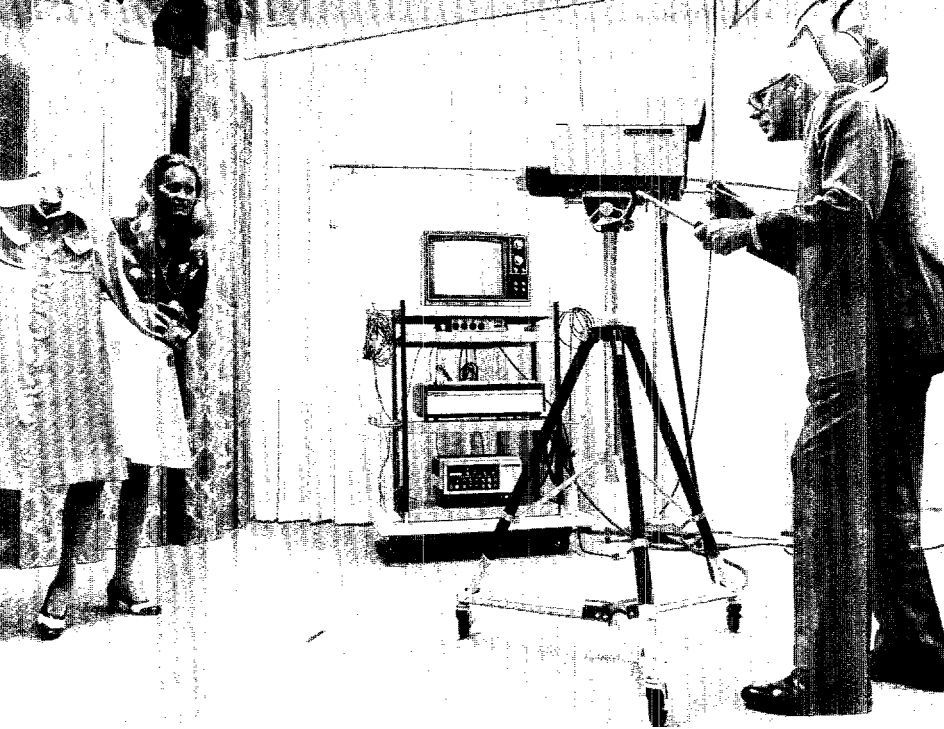
"Since we began supplying our branches with the videocassette systems, the department managers and sales people are much more informed and better prepared than before," Mr. Bruce pointed out.

Utilizing In-House Talent

The actors and actresses on the Lord and Taylor videocassette programs are the store's buyers, assistant buyers, manufacturer's representatives and merchandise managers. In the past, Fifth Avenue people made personal visits to the branch stores to present new fashion trends and lines. Or, they spoke to groups on Lord and Taylor's own device which is merely an amplification of a one-way telephone conversation. These methods tended to be impersonal, slightly dull and usually missed the part-time personnel. Furthermore, when people are in front of the camera, they are much better prepared, according to Mary Kernan, director of training.

"They know they're going to be seen on color television and seem to try harder. In fact," she said, "now, whenever one of the buyers or merchandisers who appeared on a cassette visits one of the branches, he or she is greeted like a celebrity."

When the equipment was first installed, Ted Bruce brought all the store's executives and managers together to illustrate the



Ted Bruce, Lord and Taylor senior vice president, played the key role in the company's innovative communications program. Above, he checks out the

color camera before turning it over to a training instructor to record a program on videocassette.

simplicity of operating the videocassette system and its innumerable applications. Possible camera shyness or stage fright was quickly overcome when Bruce assured potential actors that they would have a second chance if they fluffed their lines. Actually, he has retained minor mistakes in the programs to avoid a staged or over-rehearsed presentation.

One of the store's merchandise managers determines which products to feature on cassettes, a critical marketing as well as communications responsibility. Two cassette programs are prepared each week.

Before taping begins, a pilot cassette is prepared to show the person what he or she looks like on television, always a fascinating experience. Mary Kernan works very closely with the people presenting the programs, instructing them in how to emphasize subjects and to speak in an animated and interesting manner. Her department serves as producers, directors, editors and distributors of Lord and Taylor's growing videocassette operation.

All production is done in a brand new studio tucked away behind the scenes on the fourth floor. "We do it all with one color camera," Mr. Bruce stated. "Our dealer taught us some of the basic techniques of camera operation, and, although we do not have the capability to edit, we find we can produce the 10 to 12 minute programs quite satisfactorily."

TV Day At Branch Stores

Each branch store receives two new cassettes each week. A special "TV Day" is scheduled and announced through signs in employee areas. There are usually two group showings - an early one for regular employees and the late show for part-time people. The videocassette players and monitor/receivers are on rolling carts so programs can be shown in any area of the store, a key factor, since presentations sometimes take place during hours that the store is open to shoppers.

The videocassette equipment is virtually trouble-free and simple to operate. The cassette is inserted in the player, ON button pressed,

and the picture appears on a non-operating channel. At any point, the program may be stopped for discussion, then continued from the same point, or rewound for review. And, since the tape can be erased, complete programs can be changed and updated economically.

All the merchandise presented on each videocassette program is displayed by department managers, so sales personnel can see the actual items. They can touch and observe - and ask questions of the manager who is prepared with detailed information for effective two-way communication.

Bridging the Gap Permanently

"Lord and Taylor recognizes the success of the videocassette system. It works like magic, carrying the fascination of television and the impact of today's business needs," Mr. Bruce concluded.

The system has been tested for customer reactions. A program was presented to a group of Christmas shoppers waiting in the lobby for the doors to open. The response was tremendous, and sales increased in the areas featured on the videocassette programs. In addition, the system was utilized for a holiday message for employees from Board Chairman Bill Lippincott.

Management believes that the Lord and Taylor videocassette system will result in higher motivation, more professional selling and increased sales. Most important, the "Fashion information gap" between Fifth Avenue and the branch stores is permanently bridged.

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