

## Is this What You Mean When You Say “Blue?”

As a wallcovering retailer, you have a distinct advantage over retailers in other industries. Many must go to great lengths to communicate the value of their products and convince customers to buy. Since most people select wallpaper almost exclusively based on how it looks, all you have to do is show customers something they like. The design does the rest of the selling. The trick is, of course, is finding something that appeals to the customer’s sense of taste. While there are always outliers and anomalies, you can use some tricks to help quickly identify what your customer is looking for.

One easy way to narrow the playing field is to ask where and how the customer will be using the wallpaper. Depending on the room’s function, such as a bedroom, kitchen, formal dining room, a retail store, or something else, you should be able to pull out some selections that are designed specifically for that purpose. Then find out if they are looking for something more formal or playful, trendy or timeless.

It also helps to know what customers don’t like. Find out if there are any specific colors, designs, or textures that turn them off. This may help eliminate entire categories for you.

As you’re learning what they are and aren’t looking for, listen to the words they use. You’ll need to know what they’re picturing when they say things like, “trendy,” “fun,” or any other adjective describing what they want. What’s in their head may not match your idea of the same word, or even a generally accepted definition. You’ll need to calibrate your concept of what different words mean to align with theirs. Remember, you’re immersed in wallpaper designs all day, so your idea of “new,” “formal,” or even a specific color may be very different from theirs. As you start showing samples, ask if they fit the customer’s idea. It’s as easy as saying, “Is this what you mean by *[insert adjective they used]*?”

If they answer “Yes,” you’re on the right track. If not, ask how what they have in mind compares to what you’re showing them. Are they looking for something lighter or darker? A larger or smaller pattern? Designs that are more floral, linear, angular, round, wavy, or that have a specific theme? It also helps to ask customers if they have seen what they have in mind in a room or a picture. If so, ask them to describe that setting.

Keeping up with the latest trends is one of the best ways to help you quickly find what appeals to a customer. New designs are often slight variations of what is already out there. The minor changes of new designs allow you to present something that the customer can recognize and know they like, while giving them something new and original. You’ll also want to keep up with the latest trends for the people who have done a bit of research on designs. Those people have likely been looking through magazines and Websites, and may even have a picture of what they’re looking for. This can be helpful, but only if you have and know where to find what they’re looking for!



Many different industry publications can keep you up to speed with new trends and the latest products (and they are likely somewhere in your store). In addition to the Paint and Decorator Retailer's Association, one of your best resources for design trends is the Wallcoverings Association. Its monthly "On a Roll – *Highlights of Wallcoverings' Latest and Greatest Consumer Press*" newsletter pulls some of the newest ideas and designs from a wide variety of publications and rolls them into one email message. It's free to subscribe, by emailing **info@wallcoverings.org**. There is a good chance that you'll hear a customer asking for a design he or she saw in this or other design publications you read. The sooner you can identify with what they're looking for, the sooner you'll develop a relationship that is valuable to both of you.

For quick ideas on how to sell more wallpaper, check out the Wallcoverings Association's retailer Web page, at **<http://retailercentral.wallcoverings.org/>**. While you're online, visit the Wallcoverings Association's Web site, at **<http://www.wallcoverings.org>**, where you'll find even more resources.

WA's column in the August 2010 Paint & Decorating Retailer Magazine  
**[http://www.pdra.org/magazines/pdr\\_magazine](http://www.pdra.org/magazines/pdr_magazine)**