

The Difference Between Merchandising and Assortment Management

Assortment management and merchandising are often treated as if they are the same discipline.

They are not.

Assortment management focuses on maintaining the products that occupy shelf space. It is concerned with item selection, planograms, inventory productivity, and category maintenance.

Merchandising is broader.

Merchants study customers, understand trends, evaluate emerging opportunities, and make deliberate decisions about what should be offered, why it matters, and how it contributes to the performance of the business.

A merchant is not simply managing the assortment that exists today.

A merchant is shaping the assortment that should exist tomorrow.

Over time, many organizations have gradually shifted merchants into broader operating roles. They are responsible for sales, margins, reporting, forecasts, promotions, meetings, vendor discussions, and executive updates. The work is important, but it often leaves less time for the work of merchandising itself.

As a result, organizations can become managers of assortments rather than merchants of businesses.

The distinction matters.

Assortment management helps maintain performance.

Merchandising helps create it.

The strongest organizations create space for both.