

From Classroom Concepts to Retail Experiences

My Journey from FDDI to H&M and Reliance Brands Limited

Every Thoughtfully Arranged Display Is a Conversation Between a Brand and Its Customer

Every store begins speaking long before a customer steps inside. The language may be visual windows, lighting, layout, material choices—but the intent is strategic. Behind every effective retail display lies a careful balance of creativity, consumer psychology, brand strategy, and design discipline.

My journey into Visual Merchandising did not begin on a retail floor; it began at Footwear Design and Development Institute (FDDI). As the institute marks forty years of excellence, I look back with gratitude at an environment that taught me not just how to design, but why design matters in shaping customer experience.

The FDDI Years: Learning to Think Beyond Products

My time at FDDI was defined by exploration and critical thinking. Classrooms, studios, workshops, and industry interactions consistently pushed us to look beyond the product and focus on the end user. Every assignment demanded observation, intent, and clarity of communication. One of the most enduring lessons from FDDI was this: design is never only about aesthetics—it is about meaning and message. This principle became the foundation of my career in Visual Merchandising. A successful retail display is not accidental; it is designed to guide movement, influence perception, evoke emotion, and strengthen the relationship between a brand and its customer. What appears effortless on the shop floor is the result of research, planning, collaboration, and precise execution.

A Decade Witnessing Retail Transformation

Over the past decade, India's retail ecosystem has undergone a fundamental shift. Consumers today expect engagement, not just transactions. Physical stores have evolved into experiential spaces where storytelling, sustainability, technology, and brand identity converge.

Working with organisations such as Reliance Brands Limited and H&M, I have experienced firsthand how global retail practices adapt to changing consumer behaviour, digital integration, and omnichannel strategies. While online retail has redefined convenience, physical retail continues to offer something irreplaceable—the sensory, human connection with products and spaces. The future of retail lies in seamlessly integrating digital innovation with immersive in-store experiences.

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 "FDDI taught me that great retail is not simply about displaying products—it is about creating experiences that connect people with brands."

Beyond Technical Expertise

With experience comes a clear realization: technical skill alone is not enough. Visual Merchandising demands curiosity, adaptability, teamwork, commercial awareness, and continuous learning. Retail is among the fastest-evolving industries, and professionals who remain observant and open to change are best positioned to grow.

A Message to the Next Generation

To current FDDI students, my advice is simple—observe relentlessly. Every store visit, display, customer interaction, and spatial decision carries insight. Learn design principles, but also study human behaviour, sustainability, technology, and business. It is the integration of these perspectives that shapes confident, future-ready design professionals.

Forty Years: A Living Legacy

As FDDI completes forty years, it stands not merely as an institution but as a legacy—of education, innovation, industry relevance, and alumni impact. Thousands of graduates today contribute across design, retail, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship in India and globally. I am proud to be one among them.

My journey from FDDI classrooms to the retail floors of Reliance Brands Limited and H&M—reflects the institute's enduring vision: nurturing professionals who combine creativity with purpose. The lessons learned at FDDI continue to inform every project, every display, and every customer experience I create.

Forty years is not just a milestone. It is a legacy in motion.



Mr. Harsh Manash
Visual Merchandising Manager
H&M

Harsh Manash is a Visual Merchandising Manager at H&M and an alumnus of Footwear Design and Development Institute. With over a decade of experience across Reliance Brands Limited and H&M, he has played a key role in shaping contemporary retail and visual merchandising practices in India.

From FDDI to Industry Leadership: The Entrepreneurial Journey of Mohammad Yunus

Mr. Mohammad Yunus, Promoter, EastWest Group, Owner, East West Tanners and Proprietor, Lee Craft India, represents a compelling example of how technical education, entrepreneurial vision and industry expertise can contribute to enterprise growth and sectoral development.

An alumnus of FDDI (Diploma in Footwear Technology, 2009–2012, with specialization in Merchandising), he has established a strong presence in India's footwear and allied manufacturing ecosystem.

After completing his Diploma in Footwear Technology from FDDI and graduating in Commerce from Kanpur University, Mr. Yunus began his professional journey with Tata Group and later worked with JJ Tradelink Pvt. Ltd. as a Merchandiser.

In 2013, he joined the family enterprise, East West Tanners, at a stage when the business operated with modest production capacity and a limited product portfolio.



Leveraging his technical knowledge and industry understanding, he contributed significantly towards expanding the footwear division through product innovation, manufacturing excellence and strategic market outreach. His efforts led to the development of more than 200 products across fashion and safety footwear categories and strengthened the company's presence across institutional and government sectors.

Over time, the enterprise substantially enhanced its production capabilities, diversified its product range and expanded into footwear, leather goods, textile garments and allied manufacturing segments while generating employment opportunities.

A defining feature of this journey has been the emphasis on quality, customer satisfaction, innovation and timely delivery. Exposure to international markets and continuous engagement with evolving industry practices further contributed to strengthening the organization's growth and business outlook.

Beyond business achievements, Mr. Yunus has remained committed to social contribution and community development. Through initiatives focused on employment generation, skill development and social welfare, he has supported livelihood creation and capacity building. In collaboration with FDDI, workforce skill development programmes were undertaken to strengthen employment opportunities in the footwear sector.



Major Achievements

2020 Uttar Pradesh Mahotsav - Award for Blood Donation & Management in Uttar Pradesh.

2017 Recognition by FDDI as Guest of Honour

2017 Council for Leather Exports - Participation Recognition at Russia Expo

2015 NSIC Award for Excellence: Best Manufacturing Unit

2014 MSME Award for Best Five Very Fast-Growing Industries

He has also contributed towards charitable and community initiatives aimed at supporting underserved sections of society and promoting inclusive growth.

His journey reflects the values of innovation, perseverance and inclusive development, demonstrating how technical education and entrepreneurial leadership can contribute to strengthening India's footwear and manufacturing landscape.

