

Features

6/27/2014

Exploring the Senses: Olfactory Options

Jennifer Polanz

Smell

It's no secret that scent is a powerful thing. Everyone has had a moment where a particular smell has hit their nose and immediately transported them back to a specific memory. For me, the right artificial rose fragrance takes me back to my grandmother's house.

You may not realize, however, just how powerful our olfactory sense really is. In 2005, the international research institute Millward Brown found via an 18-month, 13-country study that 75% of emotions are generated by what we smell. However, it also found that 99% of all brand communication at the time focused on two senses: sight and hearing.

Today that's changing with scent marketing becoming a (slowly) growing business. All told, it's a \$14 billion global market and the options as to what can be accomplished with scent are increasing. For example, it's not just piping scent into an area, although that's a big part of it. Companies—like Aromatech in Vancouver, British Columbia—also can embed scent into marketing materials so that when rubbed, they emit a particular smell.

"It's imprinting and embedding that experience and your signature scent into the customer's mind," says Dimitri Gailit, director of sales at Aromatech. "If they're a repeat customer, they will feel at ease and comfortable returning to your store."

That's because Dimitri and others at Aromatech stress the importance of creating scent as part of your brand. You have a logo and a particular style and feel to your store, right? That appeals to the eyes. Aromatech helps you pick a scent that matches the feel of your store to create an experience that's continually reinforced through scent.

He adds that there are many ways to incorporate your signature scent, too. Jewelry stores have been known to spray their scent underneath the little pillow in the jewelry box and let customers take that away with them.

However, Dimitri says you can't just pick any scent. "You need a fragrance that will match and enhance your brand. At the end of the day, the sense of smell needs to be a part of this big puzzle and it needs to be the main pieces."

Why Me?

Right about now you're saying, well, it's a good thing I work with plants that have their own scent. Right? Which can be true, for sure. Nothing beats the smell of hyacinth in bloom. However, many times there are other scents, less, well, appealing, wafting through the air in a garden shop. These are the necessary requirements of a garden store—fertilizers, pest controls, etc.

It pays to take a sniff around to see how many scents are competing for your customers' attention and how many are less than desirable. According to research conducted by Dr. Eric Spangenberg, complex scents and scents that are incongruent to your shoppers can have a negative result on buying (for example, his research showed some feminine scents weren't appealing to men and vice versa).

Another positive in scent marketing comes from a study done at the Australian version of the DMV. Researchers took a look at how scent impacted how customers viewed their wait time—and they only asked those who stood in line more than 10 minutes. Those who had lavender scent emitting from a commercial-sized device viewed their service after the long wait more favorably than those who waited without the scent. However, though there was a decrease in the scent group's anger over the wait, it wasn't statistically significant. So, unfortunately, it doesn't calm the rage felt from standing in line.

A Powerful Suggestion

A 1995 study published in *Psychology and Marketing* by Dr. Alan Hirsch (founder of the Smell & Taste Treatment & Research Foundation) shows scent also may play a role in lowering inhibitions when it comes to spending money. A trial in a U.S. casino showed that gambling revenue increased by 48% with the introduction of a pleasant aroma into the test area. The reason being, according to the study, is a noticeable scent in the air “acts to enhance the mood and intention of patrons, without affecting judgment or exacerbating obsessive gambling behavior.” So essentially, it's not as powerful as a drug, but enhances a good mood.

Another study found similar results in the supermarket. We all know the smell of baked bread is delightful. This study, conducted in 1995 by Dr. Hirsch and published in the *International Journal of Aromatherapy*, found when the aroma of baked bread was released into the supermarket, sales in the bakery section increased threefold.

To the Next Level

So how do you use scent in the retail setting? Creativity is important here. For example, car companies are creating their own “brand aromas” that they use in their showrooms. For example, “Cadillac's new car smell, that ethereal scent of factory freshness, is a result of custom engineering. In 2003, they introduced a special scent, which is processed into their leather seats,” according to a paper on Broad Sensory Branding published in the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. That scent used by Cadillac is called Nuance.

Samsung, the electronics giant, is using the scent of honeydew melons at its flagship store in New York, while Victoria's Secret pumps its branded perfume into the air at its stores. This—to no one's surprise who's ever walked by it at the mall—is standard practice at Abercrombie & Fitch stores, as well.

Today's scent marketing companies offer lots of options, too. Scents can be hooked into the HVAC system or they can use a centralized dispenser that pumps out a mist so fine it doesn't show any residue. All the scent without the mess. GP