

Retailers, CPG Partners Making Sense Out Of Sensory Marketing



Written by Amanda Ferrante
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One of the challenges retailers and consumer product marketers face is how to keep campaigns fresh and different, while compelling consumers to take interest in products. Recently, the buzz is all about making sense out of marketing—with sensory marketing. Hershey's Chocolate significantly spurred sales at point of purchase with Scent Air Technology installed in vending machines in California tourist locations. Hersey's reigned supreme over the other three brand choices as the company sold 300 percent more chocolate than the others.

In the Hard Rock Café Casino in Florida, an ice cream parlor was suffering from a lack of traffic due to its location. The parlor made moves to strategically fill the air of the entrance to the casino with the scent of ice cream cones, and the parlor immediately saw an increase in traffic and sales.

Welch's lickable ad campaign

Welch's made waves with its recent lickable ad campaign released February in issues of People Magazine. Readers were told, "For a tasty fact, remove & lick." First Flavor, the company behind the lickable strip, is the proponent of Peel 'n Taste, which provides consumers with information about a product's taste without the expense required to mount a traditional sampling campaign.

While some may be skeptical, sensory marketing is not an entirely new concept. Retailers like Cinnabon certainly blow that sugary, buttery smell into the air in malls (whether they admit it or not!)



Marketing That Makes Scents

Traditional and historical marketing and advertising have focused primarily on visual impact, but a new-found focus on the sense of smell is definitely having an impact in the retail arena.

The sense of smell is a goldmine for marketers, says Harald Vogt, Founder & Chief Marketer of Scent Marketing. "The frontal part of the brain is responsible for decision making — and our sense of smell goes right into it," says Vogt. "You can really generate feelings in people that other advertising approaches can't. That's why scent is the next key in advertising."

With items that elicit strong brand loyalty — like toothpaste, for example — Vogt says scent marketing is ideal for sales as well as damage control. "Retailers can avoid spillage and product damage if consumers can smell the product without opening it." Products offering scent-appeal also draw consumers away from competitive products, while catering to the customers' attraction to entertainment and playfulness when they come into the store.

Before jumping on the scent marketing bandwagon, Vogt says there are limitations and barriers that retailers need to be mindful of:

- Electrical limitations. Scent marketing devices typically run on a battery because outlets aren't readily available on shelves in retail stores.
- Adequate ventilation. Retailers need to be sure that the environment doesn't smell

- of multiple aromas, rendering the anticipated positive effect as negative.
- Sensitivity to individual consumers: Consumers with allergies and hypersensitivity to smells could bring lawsuits, so the technology must be offered for voluntary participation from consumers, not as a push-out to the entire consumer population.

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Multi-Sensory Marketing in Cross-Cultural Perspective (part I): From Synergy to Synaesthesia

[Marketing multisensorial desde una perspectiva transcultural (1ª parte): De la sinergia a la sinestesia] [[>>>](#)]

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The management of sensation has become somewhat of an obsession in contemporary consumer capitalism. This is apparent from the growing sense appeal of commodities. It is increasingly essential for products to have the right scent, the right sound and the right touch—as well as the right look—to elicit the desired response from the consumer. Automobile manufacturers thus compete with each other not simply to perfect the performance of their vehicles (i.e. functionality) or their contours, but also to devise sprays that will give their product that distinctive «new car smell», to design doors that will give a satisfying thud (and not a thunk) when closed, and to position seats and controls in such a way that the driver will experience the car as fitted to his or her own body. Some cars even come with a sixth sense, blurring the distinction as to who is doing the driving.

Just as product design (functionality) has been subsumed within sensory design (aesthetics), so the idea of brand image has been superseded by that of brand sense. Whereas brands used to be distinguished by their name and visual logo, now the idea is that they should ideally register in as many senses as possible. According to Martin Lindstrom (2005: 11), «Events, moods, feelings, and even products in our lives are continuously imprinted on our five-track sensory recorder from the second we wake to the moment we sleep», and the most effective brand-building strategies recognize this fact, «leveraging» each of the senses to establish «a true sensory brand experience». He points to the example of Singapore Airlines, personified by the Singapore Girl, who not only looks and acts the brand but is also adorned with the (patented) aroma of Stefan Floridian Waters, selected for its potential to «kick-start a kaleidoscope of smooth-comfortable memories—all reflecting the Singapore Airlines brand» (Lindstrom 2005: 15).

The multisensory revolution in contemporary marketing is sweeping not only product design, and branding, but also the «atmosphere» of retail establishments. Whereas retailers used to rely on ads placed in diverse media, billboards, window displays and in-store lighting to highlight their goods, now they seek to enlist as many senses as possible for purposes of moving merchandise. The «Unique Selling Proposition» (USP) has given way to the «Multisensory Stimulation Proposition»

(MSP). The Pier 1 Imports chain of emporia, with its checklist approach to the senses, is a case in point. A recent catalogue with the slogan «Get in touch with your senses™» and a list of the five senses (each bordered in a different colour) gives the shopper a foretaste of what's in store (see fig. 1). Pier 1 Imports is filled with wood and wicker furniture, black metal candlesticks, plush pillows, corduroy and velvet draperies, faux tribal art, a grand miscellany of decorative items, and a profusion of scented candles. The spicy sweet scent of the candles immediately envelopes one upon entry, while the colour scheme is as soothing to the eye as the easy listening music that plays on the store sound system is pleasing to the ear. Pier 1 Imports offers a total sensory experience.

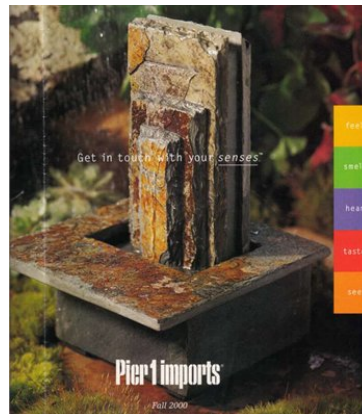


Figure 1

The rationale behind the sensory design of retail establishments like Pier 1 Imports, and many other venues in today's «experience economy», has been theorized in a landmark article by Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore in the *Harvard Business Review*. Pine and Gilmore assert that forward-thinking companies no longer produce goods or supply services, but instead use services as the stage and goods as props for creating «experiences» that are as stimulating for the consumer as they are memorable. The authors identify a series of «experience-design principles» which include: Theme the experience (e.g. «entertainment» restaurants such as Planet Hollywood or the Rainforest Café); Mix in memorabilia (e.g. an official T-shirt for a rock concert); and, above all, Engage all five senses:

The more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be. Smart shoeshine operators augment the smell of polish with crisp snaps of the cloth, scents and sounds that don't make the shoes any shinier but do make the experience more engaging. (...)

The mist at the Rainforest Cafe appeals serially to all five senses. It is first apparent as a sound: Sss-sss-zzz. Then you see the mist arising from the rocks and feel it soft and cool against your skin. Finally, you smell its tropical essence, and you taste (or imagine that you do) its freshness. What you can't be is unaffected by the mist (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 104).

Pine and Gilmore, like Martin Lindstrom, and other theorists of the new multisensory approach to marketing, such as Virginia Postrel in *The Substance of Style*, and Schmitt and Simonson in *Marketing Aesthetics*, all take the five-sense checklist as their point of departure. The underlying notion is that the greater the number of senses engaged, the greater the memorability and the greater the synergy of the experience so produced. There are, however, at least four problems with this «checklist» approach to sensory marketing.

The first is that the greater the accent on memorability the less space there is for product innovation or consumer agency because the emphasis is on the past (i.e. triggering memories)

rather than the present or future.

The second is that many of the most stimulating colours, and scents, and sounds, etc., have already been privatized—that is, trademarked or patented by first comers or major players—and so the total range of sensations marketers have to work with has been, and will be progressively, depleted (Howes 2004).

The third is that the overwhelming emphasis of these approaches is on hedonics (i.e. pleasurability or stimulus intensity) at the expense of any serious consideration being paid to the semantics and syntactics of sense perception. The perils of ignoring the semantic or associative dimensions of sensory compounding are nicely illustrated by the results of an experiment involving pine-scented facial tissues. In this test, a pine fragrance evaluated as «fresh» and «clean» was added to facial tissues. When the tissues were then tested, however, they were considered harsh and rough. This was because the pine fragrance also carried associations of «rough» and «hard» (like pine bark or needles), which are not desirable qualities for facial tissues (Classen, Howes and Synnott 1994: 194).

The elementary truth, which this experiment brings out, should already have been apparent to the investigators, since it is given in the double meaning of the word «sense». «Sense» refers to sensation and signification, feeling and meaning, at once. Failing to anticipate and control for such cross-sensory transfers of meaning can spell disaster. Furthermore, perception in one modality is always modulated by what is going on in the other modalities (Howes 2006). The senses are reactive and interactive, unlike the tracks of a simple recording device.

The fourth problem with the checklist strategy is that it cannot of itself overcome «advertising wear-out» when, as is increasingly the case, all of a given brand's competitors are seeking to dress up their products with something for each of the senses too. This has led to the emergence of an alternative technique, which involves tapping the sensorial subconscious, instead of simply blanketing all of the consumer's external receptors. This alternative stratagem is best exemplified by ZMET (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique) invented by Gerald Zaltman of Harvard University, author of *How Customers Think*. ZMET is predicated on the notion of synaesthesia rather than synergy. Synaesthesia involves short-circuiting the conventional five senses model and experience of perception. It establishes cross-linkages between the modalities at a subconscious level, and so opens up a whole new terrain—the terrain of the inter-sensory—for marketers and designers to work their magic.

The interest of ZMET consists in the way it maps—or better, excavates—these cross-linkages, and models them in «actionable ways» (e.g. to guide the development of ad copy or to divine the best product design and packaging). This ten-step research tool involves image-collecting, sorting, storytelling, digital imaging, and creating videos on the part of the research subjects, who are then invited to participate in a focus-group discussion. (The videos are used because: «People think differently when they think "in motion" than when they think in still images or pictures», argue Zaltman and Coulter (1995: 42)). ZMET also involves subjects being asked to say «what is and is not the taste, touch, smell, color, sound and emotional feeling» related to the particular research topic (e.g. a brand name or a product design) being investigated. For example, one subject's «nonvisual sensory images» of a certain brand of intimate apparel included:

the taste of medicine, but not dessert; the feel of sandpaper and silk, but not of cream; the sound of static, but not that of a waterfall; the smell of sulfur, but not of roses; the color brown, but not red; the feeling of anxiety, but not of peacefulness.

Through tapping the sensorial subconscious in this way, a wide range of synaesthetic equations is

uncovered. These equations are then worked (along with the visual and verbal material elicited by other means) into «consensus maps» by ZMET researchers. Marketers and designers in turn use these «consensus maps» to identify those sensory transfers that best «focus our attention, capture our imagination, please us, and enhance persuasion» (Nelson and Hitchon 1999: 355).

The inter-sensory logic behind this latest revolution in marketing can be discerned behind such advertising headlines as «Taste the Rainbow» for Skittles candy, or «Hear the Big Picture» for CBC Radio. An ad which nicely exemplifies this new emphasis on crossing the senses (instead of simply compounding them) is presented in figure 2. A splash of rum on a shot of snow-covered mountains uncovers a vision of a tropical island paradise. The accompanying slogan reads: «Taste the feeling». The unexpected juxtaposition of images, coupled with the crossing of the senses of taste and touch, arrests the viewer's attention and sets off a cascade of associations. Instead of blanketing the viewer's senses this ad mobilizes them and forges new cross-linkages which lead in multiple directions.

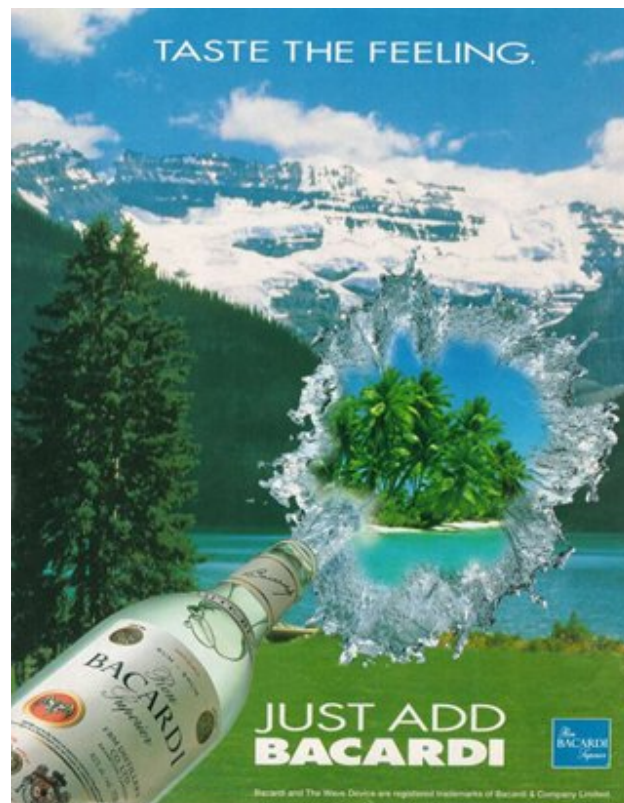


Figure 2

As for product design, synaesthesia is the idea behind all the new computer programs which enable users to transform music into color graphics. But this is obvious. Other design applications of synaesthesia (using other sensory combinations besides sight and sound) are being developed all the time. For example, the cleaner Vim Oxy-Gel (with «active oxygen») offers «Pure cleanliness you can see and feel!» The accompanying TV ad shows a female jogger slipping out of her runners upon stepping into her kitchen and gliding her bare feet over the floor.

This review of recent developments in the fields of sensory design, branding and multisensory marketing has revealed how the concept of synaesthesia is outflanking that of synergy, and the accent is now on crossing the senses instead of simply compounding them. But even as intersensory

marketing strategies have begun to supplant the classic multisensory ones, there remains a deeper problem which has yet to be addressed by market researchers. This deeper problem has to do with the fact that we live in a world that is multicultural as well as multisensory. Culture inflects perception in all sorts of profound ways, as recent research in the anthropology of the senses has revealed (Classen 1993; Howes 2004). The next part of this essay, to be published in a future issue of *Perceptnet*, will explore the many new lines of investigation which are opened up when cultural variations in the meaning and use of the senses are factored into the study of consumer behaviour.

Acknowledgments

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