

Senses Cue Brand Recognition

by [Alicia Clegg](#)

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Orgasmic Chocolates, the brain (or perhaps love) child of two budding UK entrepreneurs, is a new luxury chocolate infused with “wildcrafted” Chinese herbs, which its owners hope will be the next big thing in chocolate indulgence. Leaving to one side what must surely be the rashest brand promise ever made, Orgasmic Chocolates—which claims to induce feelings of “well being, relaxation, and euphoria” in those who indulge—stretches to the extreme the fashion for enveloping consumers in “a sensory experience.” But strip away the mystique and what does sensory marketing amount to: another faddish craze or the essence of brand appeal?

Attempting to lodge brands in people’s minds through sensory associations has plenty of precedents. Old hands at the game include Kellogg’s Rice Krispies, with its signature “Snap, Crackle, and Pop,” and Schweppes, which, in its long-running “Sch you know who” campaign, linked the “Sch” in its name to the tell-tale rush of gas emitted by a soda bottle that is being opened.

Drinks companies (perhaps with an eye to the day when alcohol advertising might eventually be banned) are also adept at building sensory cues into brand communications. For an example look no further than Smirnoff Ice, which builds TV, web-based, and experiential marketing campaigns (featuring public snowball fights) around Uri—a fictitious Smirnoff Ice drinker who lives in the frozen wastes of Eastern Europe—aimed, one might guess, at forging a mental link between Smirnoff’s fantasy world of ice and the generic pleasure of drinking ice-cold spirits.

Whether such tactics give brands the advantage that their architects hope for is difficult to demonstrate. What is certainly the case, however, is that sensory cues repeated over and over again breed brand recognition—think Microsoft Windows and its trademark start-up tune. But such devices are nothing compared to the sensory games that marketers have planned for the future.

In [Brand Sense](#), author Martin Lindstrom predicts that the world of marketing is about to witness “seismic shifts” in the way in which consumers perceive brands, analogous to “moving from black and white television...with mono sound to high-definition color screens installed with surround sound.” The revolution will come about, he argues in the book,



as businesses look beyond their traditional palette to include as many sensory cues as possible in their marketing and product development.

In some sectors the revolution is already underway. Drinks companies have become expert at using color to revitalize aging brands and catch the interest of younger consumers. Gordon's Gin is a classic example. In 2004, the company took its Sloe Gin out of its trademark emerald green bottle (still used for the Original Gin) and repackaged it in clear glass to reveal the rich sloe purple of its ingredients. The move was followed by high-profile advertising, focusing on the "colorful flavors" and aromas imparted by the herbs in Gordon's three different formulations (Original, Distiller's Cut, and Sloe), and positioning the brand as the "Colorful Gin."

It's not just alcohol brands that are working the power of the senses. Adding herbal and aromatic plant extracts to products gives a boost to personal care, with the appearance in the high street of skin care ranges such as Boots Botanics, which contain natural ingredients and hint at therapeutic effects. More striking still is the way in which manufacturers of household cleaning agents are giving a sensory twist to heritage brands, such as P&G's Fairy dishwashing liquid, by mixing natural extracts (tea tree, lemon grass, orange, and lime) into their products.

When washing the dishes is transformed from a chore into a sensuous indulgence, it seems clear that sensory branding is heading for the mainstream. Brent Richards, a director of the Design Laboratory, part of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design at the University of the Arts London, advised on the launch of Orgasmic Chocolates. He links the popularity of sensory communication with the feminization of consumer culture and what he calls "the impact of sexuality" on product design.

"The appearance on the high street of shops selling sex toys to women from a female perspective (such as Ann Summers) has been important," he argues. "It has widened the palette of what is acceptable."

Giles Hedger, joint head of planning at ad agency Miles Calcraft Briginshaw Duffy, sees the trend as society's rejection of the more austere values of an earlier age. "Sensory pleasure used to be considered a luxury," he says. "Today there's much more of a willingness to acknowledge that this stuff (sensory stimulation) can really make a difference to our well being."



One brand that epitomizes sensory stimulation is Lush, the handmade cosmetics company. Pass the entrance of a Lush store and you are hit by a rush of fragrance. Step inside and it's like entering the most exuberant market stall: wooden tables laden with huge slabs of soap, like giant cheeses ready for slicing; solid lumps of multi-colored shampoos; butterballs and bath bombs; wobbling shower jellies and creamy pats of butter cream with silly sexy names; chocolate massage bars that tickle the taste buds, as well as the skin, with toothsome aromas. Says Lush co-founder Mark Constantine of his company's approach: "Packaging is so boring. Smelling and touching is just more fun for the senses." What is more, he adds, "If you don't use packaging you can use higher quality ingredients."

Lush is a business which is already profiting by toying with our senses, using techniques that are light-hearted and fairly basic: vibrant color (sometimes synthetic), manipulation of product shape and texture, mood-enhancing perfumes that draw mainly (though not exclusively) on natural ingredients (fresh fruit, real chocolate, essential oils, and what Lush terms "safe synthetics"). But what if the sensory effects of the intuitive marketer could be amplified through smart technology?

In Brand Sense, Lindstrom describes companies that are turning sensory pleasure into an exact science. In the automotive industry, advances in acoustic design enable manufacturers to engineer, with great precision, how a door will sound as it closes. Consider that 36 percent of Japanese consumers claim to be able to distinguish one brand from another, solely from its sound. In the white goods industry, dishwashers and washing machines that once spluttered and thudded now purr, swish, and hum their brand values.

Fine-tuning the acoustic properties of products is a legitimate tack for companies to engage in—something that gives satisfaction to the consumer while subtly informing him of the brand's intrinsic quality. But sound isn't the only sensory effect that brands are manipulating.

One of the most intriguing developments predicted by Brand Sense is the incorporation of aroma into the brand builder's toolkit. Some brands are doing this already, the book claims: automotive manufacturers spraying cars from the production line with a concocted smell of "new car"; brands adopting signature scents to differentiate themselves from competitors; retailers that release the olfactory equivalent of mood music into the air to deepen the consumer's experience of the brand and

The logo for Thomas Pink, featuring the word "PINK" in a large, bold, serif font. Below it, in a smaller, all-caps sans-serif font, are the words "THOMAS PINK" and "JERMYN STREET LONDON". The logo is set against a solid orange background.

PINK
THOMAS PINK
JERMYN STREET LONDON

encourage more spending (Hershey's retail outlets). How much value do such devices, which consumers can do little to avoid, create for the brands that employ them?

According to Brand Sense, Thomas Pink, an up-market shirt-maker, operates sensors in its stores that "emit a smell of freshly laundered cotton" as customers walk by. "It's just such a non-story for us," says an obviously uncomfortable manager, who didn't wish to be identified or even quoted, when reached at a store. "It's not something we're really doing, we did some trials but..."

Powerful branding is first and foremost about having an idea, which is communicated to customers with absolute consistency. In a literal respect, businesses that use sensory effects are simply engaging in another form of communication, which like loud music or overpowering smell can sometimes be invasive and unwelcome. As brand owners ponder the possibilities and the pitfalls of sensory marketing, businesses should remember that in branding it's not sense, but rather common sense, that matters most of all.