



What Does Your Brand Smell Like?

Have you ever wondered what kind of aromas brands have? Why does the scent of a sunscreen remind you of vacation time? Why does the aroma of firewood remind you of winter time spent with your family? Until recently, no one spent time thinking about such questions. Companies have not realized the effect that an agreeable scent can have on customers' experience. Most companies base their corporate identity on experience conveyed by the sense of

sight (their logo, advertising sponsorships and furnishings) or sound (background music in shops or television advertising jingles). Yet the emotions evoked by an aroma can be decisive when it comes time to make a purchase. Companies have learned that they can associate a specific aroma with the values that their brand tries to project. An aroma can even improve productivity and working conditions within a company.

"There has been an extremely important change in the way consumers are making choices," notes Roberto Alvarez del Blanco, professor of marketing at the Instituto de Empresa (IE) business school in Spain. This change, he says, is due to "neuro-economics," which he defines as "the combination of neuroscience, economics and psychology to study how individuals make choices. This science analyzes the role of the brain when individuals make decisions or categorize risks and rewards, and how these factors interact with one another." Such knowledge enables us, for example, "to understand with certainty how human beings respond to colors, light and aromas." At the same time, Gerard Costa, marketing professor at the Esade business school, argues that this trend doesn't mean companies will immediately need to change. "Experimenting with the use of corporate scents is still a technique that is at a very early stage," he says.

Olfactory Marketing

The technique of "olfactory marketing" is yet another component in the toolbox of emotional marketing. Digging deep into the brains of spectators is in style, and the

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 **Santander**

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technique has been developing for years. "It arises from the conviction that objects have their own aromas. Starting from there, you can discover that people, houses, communities, cities and even countries all have their own aromas," notes Alvarez del Blanco.



According to Costa, the term "olfactory marketing" began to be used about 15 years ago when the term "neuro-marketing" appeared. "The term emerged through subliminal advertising. Starting from that point, people found out that various stimuli have a positive effect on the brain." In addition, recent scientific research makes a distinction between "using aromas in a retail environment and designing a corporate aroma."

The U.S. and Japan are the two countries that have the most "olfactory" retailers -- those that invest in ways to deliver their essence through means of perfume dispensers in each shop. Muzak, which provides personalized background music, also produces air fresheners for companies. Singapore Airlines uses all five senses to win over a select public. Disney has used this tool for 15 years in its theme parks. It began by giving a touch of realism to its action rides by adding the aromas of dust and burnt rubber. Later on, Disney filled the streets of its theme parks with the aroma of popcorn to stimulate the appetite of its customers. The success of these measures at Disney inspired the Hilton and Sheraton hotel chains, the Hard Rock restaurant chain, Lexus automobiles and Paramount.

Why Do All New Cars Smell the Same?

Consider, for example, what happens when someone shows you a new car. In addition to noting how attractive, spacious and modern that car is, you also notice that the new car smells new, right? It is no accident that all new cars "smell new." That aroma is the product of many hours spent by a team of material specialists. "Some aromas are specific [to one product], and others are universal," says Alvarez del Blanco. "You have to realize that the olfactory sense is the most primitive of all our senses. In human beings, a thousand genes are dedicated to it. Approximately 60% of those genes are inactive today. Human beings can distinguish between 10,000 different odors. But this is nothing compared with dogs, who manage to identify as many as 100,000 odors, and rats, who can differentiate 200,000 odors."

Nevertheless, it isn't easy to create the right brand aroma. As Costa notes, "It should be a process based on the positioning you want to give your brand, and it must be integrated with your company's marketing mix." One example of this is

Singapore Airlines, which has enjoyed success on a global level. "It figured out how to create a specific aroma for its brand that fit into the rest of its marketing strategy and was based on the positioning that it wanted to create, which it called 'Oriental quality.'"

In 2003, about \$30 million was spent on aroma marketing around the world; by 2010, that figure is expected to reach \$220 million. In Spain, olfactory marketing is a technique that is just getting started despite the fact that the sales of air fresheners for the home and car have grown by 74% over the past four years. Costa and Alvarez del Blanco agree that much remains to be done in Spain. "The United States is the leading country when it comes to olfactory marketing. In Spain, it is still too early to make an evaluation. Vehicles are the sector that invests the most in this type of marketing," says Alvarez del Blanco.

A new company called A de Aroma has designed the olfactory identity of such fast food companies as Pans & Company, Rodilla, and Dunkin' Donuts. A de Aroma is also active in such other sectors as telecommunications (Telefónica), films (Cinesa), hotels (AC Hoteles) and fashion (Mango). A de Aroma creates personalized fragrances for each company based on the values that the brand wants to strengthen. It provides perfume dispensers for their outlets with cartridges that must be changed once a month.

The Human Nose

A 1999 study by Rockefeller University in New York revealed that human beings can recall 35% of what they smell, compared with only 5% of what they see, 2% of what they hear, and 1% of what they touch. Human memory can retain up to 10,000 different aromas but it can only recognize 200 different colors, according to Richard Axel and Linda Buck, co-winners of the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2004.

Research has also revealed that when a company has an aroma that suits its brand, its products sell more than those of another company that has not created a fragrance of its own. "That's because it provides the brand with distinctiveness. This remarkable uniqueness affects the perfection of the brand. The associations are typically strong. They build customer loyalty and, above all, strengthen the image of quality, which is the key to any brand," says Alvarez del Blanco. Adds Costa: "Normally, strong aromas sell more [than weak ones]. For example, leaving open a bakery oven where bread has recently been made is a good way to attract customers along a street; people are guided [to the bakery] by the agreeable scent

of freshly baked bread.”

Much the same way, the aroma of sunscreen makes people recall their vacations; hot apple pie evokes family reunions and the fragrance of sea breeze is associated with freedom. Nevertheless, 83% of advertising investment is focused on messages involving sight and sound. Most advertisers forget about the other senses. Alvarez del Blanco advises aroma marketers that “they must provide an odor that fits well with the activity of their brand so that the impact is agreeable.” When that goal is achieved, customers have a sensation of “satisfaction, order and professionalism.”

Still, marketers have to take into account that “only those aromas that exist in nature are universal aromas,” says Costa. Moreover, most aromas are perceived differently by people who come from different places. Experts agree that what customers decide to purchase is really a question of what they have experienced, not merely the products themselves. “You associate the aroma with the moment when you acquire a product or service, not with the brand in itself. Your experience with a product when you bring it home goes much deeper,” notes Costa.

Looking for a Difference

Success is rooted in creating an aroma that fits your brand. Experts agree that it takes months of work to create an effective scent. “You have to consider where you are exposing it. You have to look into the context where the brand is consumed and the conditions in which customers have a relationship with the brand,” says Costa, adding that “a company must define what it wants to differentiate. It is very important to think about where you are going to send that aroma; where you want it to remain and where you don’t.”

Both professors agree that the process of creating a universally pleasing aroma is very complicated. Costa notes that we experience aromas quite differently if we are a man or a woman and as a result of our country of origin, age, and experience. That means it is impossible for the same fragrance to communicate precisely the same message to everyone. For Costa, the strongest brand in the history of the world would be one that everyone associates with the same aroma. After all, he concludes, “Who doesn’t associate the odor of incense with the Catholic Church?”
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