

Selling with Smells

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One of my favorite smells is the scent of real leather when I walk into a shoe store. It communicates authenticity, the real McCoy. I also love the smell of bookstores. There's something about the smell of paper and ink pressed together inside thousands of book covers that tells me I will soon find a book that will educate or entertain me. And of course, there is the comforting smell of a coffee shop and/or bakery. The aromas remind me of good times with family and friends, or of just giving myself a break.

Then there is odor. Some stores have odors that I'd just as soon forget – and can't, like the one whose owner who loved her elderly dog so much that he had a smelly spot on the selling floor to call his own. Or import stores that emit unnatural and strange odors of packing materials and pesticides. Ever been in a store that smells of an employee's warmed up leftovers, because the microwave was just around a wall off the selling floor? And, of course, there are candle and home décor stores that go overboard with synthetic fragrances, sometimes so strong they trigger asthma and migraine attacks in would-be customers.

The Power of Aroma

Don't ever underestimate the power of aroma/odor. Why is it so powerful? Because our olfactory lobe is located in the limbic system of our brain, and that area controls our emotions and triggers memory. In fact, some people call our

sense of smell "involuntary memory." This direct connection to the limbic system means we initially bypass logical reasoning. Only *after* we respond emotionally, does our intellect kick in. That is why, when we smell a cologne or perfume worn long ago by someone we loved or disliked, smelling it again quickly triggers the old emotion. Our sense of smell was our first sense to develop, and whether we know it or not, is a huge part of how we process the environment around us.

We also have biological reactions to certain scents. For instance, lavender has been shown to relax us, while jasmine is known to stimulate. Peppermint works to sustain one's attention. Researchers continue to study how specific scents can help our immune systems or balance circadian rhythms. They're finding that children remember tasks better when the task is associated with a pleasant aroma.

Research Sold Sneakers – and More

Dr. Alan R. Hirsch, director of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research

Foundation in Chicago, conducted an experiment years ago that is still quite pertinent to the shoe retailing industry. He recruited 31 shoppers and asked them to assess a Nike sneaker in a room with a light mixed floral scent, and then in an unscented room. Eighty-four percent of the shoppers said they were more likely to buy the shoe in the scented room – and they were willing to pay \$10.33 higher.

Other studies have shown that men lingered longer in a jewelry store with a spicy fragrance in the air. Customers shopping in a home décor store with a simple orange scent spent 20% more. Signature scents are now being developed and dispersed through the HVAC (heating ventilating air conditioning) systems in hotels, department stores, and casinos, positively affecting the bottom lines of these businesses. It's known as "olfactory branding." Of course, if the *wrong* aroma is used and/or an aroma is perceived as "too strong," the opposite will occur: Customers will cut their shopping trip short, or not enter the store in the first place.

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The scent of real leather is appealing.



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Run a Nose Check

The next time you walk into your store, open your nose and pay attention to what you smell. Are there any odors that need to be neutralized? Always get rid of odors before you disperse an aroma. If it's a recurring odor – such as mildew, exhaust fumes from the loading dock, or something that comes from the business that shares your wall – and you can't remove the source of it, best to get an ionic air cleaner to run continuously in the space, and place it as close to the source of the problem as possible. If it's a chemical-based odor, use a machine that has a charcoal filter. For smaller problem areas, put out a bowl of Fresh Wave odor-eliminating crystals. They do an amazing job of absorbing odors in small spaces.

What Moves Your Customers?

When determining what aroma is right for your space, think about your target market, the product lines you are selling, and the time of year. It can be tricky to find the right blend for your store. If your store is small (under 1,000 square feet), then determine whether you want to create one signature scent for your store that is used year-round, or change the scent seasonally. Just remember, a little goes a long way. Customers should be able to barely smell the scent, but if asked, say they are aware of a subtle aroma. There's nothing worse than *too much* scent. If your



clothes smell of it at the end of the day, you probably have too much in the air.

If your store is larger (over 3,000 sq.ft.), then you could disperse two or more scents, one in each department you want to enhance. For instance, consider evergreen/pine needles for outdoor shoes; leather smell for men's high end dress shoes, and light floral for women's shoes or purses/accessories. Need to calm kids down? Dispense lavender in the kid's department. Just keep any and all aromas subtle, and don't disperse them too close to each other.

Use essential oils or natural sources whenever possible. Avoid synthetic chemicals, i.e.: plug-in air fresheners. A good way to get natural aromas into the air is by using a small crockpot. Put your natural ingredients in with as much water as the small pot will hold, turn it on in the morning on low and let it simmer for 30 minutes. Then turn it off. Repeat throughout the day. In a 1,500-sq.ft. store, this would probably be every few hours. Apples, cinnamon sticks, and a couple of cloves are a good combination during cooler weather and holidays. Evergreen oils are also good for the winter months. For

warmer weather, lemon/citrus is refreshing, as are some of the lighter floral essences. Essential oils can be used in the crockpot as well.

If there is dry air in your store, find a small humidifier in which you can place a few drops of essential oils in the water that will disperse via steam. And, of course, there are the old-fashioned bowls of potpourri – easy to make and put out in nice dishes/vases around the store or a department. (Just keep them out of the kids' area!)

Shop with Your Nose

So, start shopping with your nose. Smell other retail stores. Smell your product lines. What would your customers like to smell? What scents or fragrances will keep them in your store longer? How can smells enhance the perceived value of your products?

Finding the right aroma, and dispensing it at the right level, can both enhance your brand and increase your bottom line. Experiment, remain subtle, and employ olfactory branding for positive results. ■

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