

LYN M. FALK ON STORE DESIGN

SMELLS & SOUNDS



Consider how olfactory and auditory senses play a role in the way customers experience your pet business, then make changes to improve their experience and your sales.

Smelles and sounds can make or break a shopping experience. Let's talk about how customers use their senses in your business and ways to make them part of your brand.

THE NOSE KNOWS

Our olfactory lobe sits in the limbic system of our brain, and that area controls emotion. We respond emotionally, in fact, before we respond intellectually. With that in mind, imagine how customers would react if unpleasant odors permeated parts or even the entirety of your business — the immediate negative emotions would likely have them wanting to spend as little time and money as possible with you, no matter how great their needs.

Give your business a good sniff. To address unpleasant smells, choose the products appropriate for the source, from pet-safe cleaners for in-the-moment messes to odor-absorbing gel crystals for stinky new product arrivals to air purifiers and HVAC systems that work for your entire space.

Now add an aroma that will positively affect your customers and improve their experience — and your sales. First, be sure it's natural. Not only can artificial scents negatively impact pets who come into your business, but also people with sensitivities. Second, keep it subtle. A scent should never smack someone in the nose.

The smells of lavender and spiced apples are known to calm, while citrus and jasmine can stimulate. Try out different scents throughout the year and see if customers notice. Many department stores and hotels have signature scents. This is known as "olfactory branding." Find a scent that works for your business!

LISTEN UP!

Now that you've considered how your store smells to customers, close your eyes and listen to it. Without the sense of sight to distract you, it's amazing what you can actually hear. There may be dogs barking, cats meowing or birds chirping, but listen beyond these noises. Are there annoying hums from freezers or HVAC system? Is

there unwanted reverberation from speakers? Are the animals a bit too loud? If any of these sounds are present, they may also negatively impact your customers, leading to heightened stress levels that make them not want to linger.

When eliminating unwanted noise, it helps to know that sound waves travel up and down, so high ceilings with exposed ductwork and hard underdeck will bounce the waves back down to the selling floor. And with a hard floor, which most pet businesses have, the sounds will continue to increase as more people and pets enter. Acoustic ceiling tiles absorb the bouncing sound waves, but when possible opt for the more visually appealing ceiling clouds made of similar materials. These clouds can be fun, decorative design elements. Placing easy-to-clean area rugs in certain departments or hanging fabric banners are other ways to absorb unwanted sounds.

Once you get the noise under control, bring in music. Studies show that upbeat music puts shoppers in a good mood and that the majority enjoy listening to music while they shop, saying it keeps them in a store longer — exactly what you want. When choosing music for your business, make sure it's geared toward your target market, reflects your brand and remains the only music played during open hours.

Once you've experienced the smells and sounds of your business from a customer's perspective and made any necessary improvements, track their impact on sales. Your customers' noses and ears will thank you, as will your bottom line.



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ask the **pets+** facebook community

How are you handling fitting harnesses? We've had an influx of customers with very unruly dogs, and they are wanting us to fit harnesses. I'm afraid one of my employees is going to get bit. **Paula Gorman, Pet Supplies N More, Muskego, WI**

+ We only fit dogs who are participating in our training programs. Everyone else touches their own dogs — they

can put it on, we assess it, they take it off and hand it to us, we make adjustments, pass it back, they put it back

on ... Many people want a harness for a dog they just acquired. Do they have an up-to-date rabies vaccination? Maybe not. If an employee is bitten, and the owner disappears or doesn't have a rabies certificate, your employee may have to get treated. That's really unpleasant and a substantial worker's compensation claim. Best to avoid! **Katherine Ostiguy, Crossbones, Providence, RI**

+ I have been bit, and I don't want that to happen to my employees. We advise customers how to correctly measure and test for correct fitting. I will adjust the harness off of the dog, but I learned my lesson the hard way. **Lisa Degloria, Good Dog Gallery, Portsmouth, NH**

+ We always do fittings. Yes, it can be difficult. More independents offering full customer service

may encourage customers to shop in store vs. online. I have many people come in and say, "I bought it online, and it doesn't fit." And I tell them that's the advantage of shopping in store! **Denise Strong, Pawz on Main, Cottonwood, AZ**

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