

How sensory marketing entices the senses



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Sight. Smell. Sound. Taste. Touch. Marketers have reached out to consumers through the five senses for decades -- it's nothing new or revelatory. Commonly known as sensory marketing, it has become very popular over the past couple of years as a way to build existing brands and for new product launches.

A key reason for sensory marketing's success -- consumers seem to love stuff that's new, different, exciting, and innovative. In fact, a Technomic Consumer Flavor Report indicated that 53 percent of consumers say "new and unique flavors" effect their decision on where to eat.

Businesses from all walks of life are rolling out innovative sensory marketing campaigns/ programs to lure customers.

The hotel industry is just one example.

InterContinental Hotels Group instituted on-property scents geared to its guests' expectations. At Hotel Indigo locations, for instance, recent winter scents included Cranberry Apple Marmalade and Noel (balsam fir and warm spices). Holiday Inn Hotels use a worldwide scent of white tea and citrus. Doubletree by Hilton still provides a warm chocolate chip cookie to all guests when they check in -- and that campaign dates back to the early 1980s.

Two years ago, Marriott Hotels introduced the first-ever immersive 4-D virtual reality travel experience with its Marriott Teleporter. Last year Marriott rolled out its VRoom Service that allows guests to order virtual reality experiences to their rooms. The company also launched VR Postcards, engaging travel stories that users watch with a virtual reality headset. Marriott says each story follows a real traveler on a journey to a destination; viewers are immersed in the destination and hear the travelers' personal stories about why travel is important to them.

Using sound with food and drink is also a proven winner. An Oxford University study by Professor Charles Spence showed that low sounds encourage bitterness while high-frequency sounds enhance sweetness in food.

"We are going to see far more interest in matching music and soundscape to what eat and drink," said Spence.

Based on that study, British Airways came up with Sound Bite -- soundtracks used for long-haul flights that are paired with meals.

A few examples of pairings:

- Lily Allen, "Somewhere Only We Know" -- served with a classic fish and chips main meal. British Airways says the piano notes enhance the sensation of sweet and bitter tastes.
- Placido Domingo, "Nessun dorma" from "Turandot" -- served with coffee as tenors low tones are suited to the bitterness of coffee
- Madonna, "Ray of Light" -- served with dessert; high-tones bolster sweet flavors.

Brands that incorporate multi-sensory elements into their marketing tools, noted Kevin Huang, a consultant with Areteon, a marketing consulting firm, send signals that the brain converts into buying impulses.

"The more senses you can engage, the more you can get people to 'recall' or 'purchase' your product... new technology is also helping brands provide sensory experiences that are more immersive and often, wouldn't look out of place in a science fiction novel," noted Huang.

And Aradhna Krishna, who heads up the Sensory Marketing Laboratory at the University of Michigan added that in the past, customer communications were primarily monologues -- companies talked at consumers.

"Then they evolved into dialogues, with customers providing feedback. Now they're becoming multidimensional devices, with products finding their own voices and consumers responding viscerally and subconsciously to them," said Krishna.



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