

The Sensory Potential

BY DORI MOLITOR

WOMANWISE

When I think of wine, it's all very sensory. Close friends, lights turned low, the flicker of candles reflecting warmth off stemmed crystal... waiting with anticipation for that gentle "pop" which follows the squeak, squeak, squeak of my pewter corkscrew... the wine flooding into the crystal glass...

Wait a minute! Turn the lights up! My cork has turned into a metal twist-off cap! Suddenly, I lose my motivation to have a glass of wine. I don't even have to think about it. My intuition instantly tells me that the joy is lacking, even though it is an expensive bottle of wine.

I don't even need to open it to know that the experience will disappoint. The thrill is gone.

And so, too, is the wine maker's soul. Once again, the "rational" has trumped the "emotional."

It seems that corks taint up to five percent of all bottles of wine, a track record deemed unacceptable by the sober-minded business people who dominate today's numbers-driven marketplace. That's why those metal twist-caps are rapidly replacing corks all over the world.

It's not that I drink wine that often, which is part of the reason why the experience is so meaningful to me. For me, wine is totally associated with special friends and memorable moments. Those memories are filled with love, nurturing and caring friendships.

**How the
five senses
create intuition...
and build trust
and loyalty.**

BEYOND SIGHT & SOUND

More often than not, marketers short-change themselves when it comes to the sensory potential of their brands. Martin Lindstrom wrote a best-selling book about it back in 2005. In *Brand Sense*, he pointed out that most of marketing is limited to the senses of sight and sound. In fact, he estimated that 83 percent of all marketing communication is limited to sight alone.

That's because the overwhelming majority of marketing activity is "invested" in one- or two-sense media-driven messages. That's like plugging a low-sense analog line into a high-definition multi-sensory source—and then expecting your brand message to dazzle consumers' senses, touch their hearts and stimulate their minds.

As Martin Lindstrom notes: "As human beings, we're at our most effective and receptive when we're operating on all five senses." How much of your media budget are you investing in the other three senses of touch, smell and taste?

The fact is, using the senses as media can provide sustainable opportunities to boost consumer brand memory, intensify consumer relationships and motivate the immediate purchase of your products.

EMOTIONS AS MEDIA

A more sensory marketing approach can dramatically heighten your brand's influence on purchase behavior and build sustained consumer loyalty. The more their senses are in play, the stronger the chance that your brand will earn their trust.

Why? Because those senses trigger a more intense emotional response, which results in a stronger memory of what your brand means in their lives. That

memory creates a stronger bond between the brand and the consumer. Together, memory and emotions affect behavior — for good or ill — for your brand.

Marketing through the senses triggers human emotion without going through the consumer's self-protecting "spam filters." Those filters pick the relevant information from the onslaught of irrelevant information and then pass it on to their conscious minds. The senses pass through because consumers instinctively trust their senses.

Many of today's most admired and successful brands understand this in various ways. Nike, for example, is investing more than ever before in marketing activities centered on the actual experience of using its products, as opposed to just doing ads. Among other things, Nike sponsors organized runs through Central Park, which connect its consumers to its products through both the pain and the pleasure of their everyday experiences as athletes.

You may think that your brand doesn't have the same sensory potential as Nike, but you are wrong. It is well worth your while to explore how your brand can engage your consumers on a level other than through sight and sound alone.

It's worth your while because ultimately your brand's ability to reach consumers on a sensory level will determine its ability to build and sustain their loyalty. I can sum up the reason why in a single word: *Intuition*.

WHAT IS INTUITION?

Intuition is a *felt* understanding that's capable of sizing up a brand and judging whether it's authentic, credible and worthy of our trust — all in the same millisecond. Many times, intuitive feelings seem contrary to reasoned logic, but more often than not they prove to be right. Intuition is strongly influenced

by the interplay of our five senses. Our intuition tells us, right away, whether we should trust a brand or not. *And if you don't earn your consumers' trust, you have nothing!*

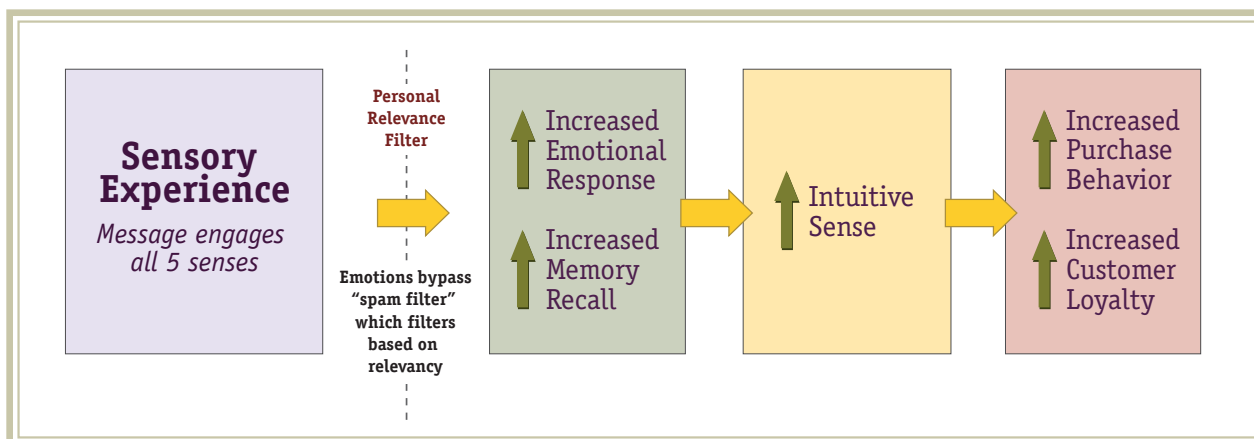
I got to thinking about this the other day when I received a phone call from a reporter at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. She was calling because Home Depot was about to open a new store format intended to appeal to women. She wanted my perspective on whether the new format was likely to be a success.

It's an interesting question. Even though Home Depot is a big-box format — and this new "Design Center" for women will carry on the same big-box footprints — there is an opportunity to create more of a sensory experience. Many big-box stores tend to be sterile, cold and impersonal. The dominant sight is canyons of anonymous products, and the only memorable sound is that of a forklift beeping.

That kind of sensory experience tends to make people feel alienated and insignificant. Part of it is the whole magnitude of the experience. Then there are the cement floors, the high ceilings, the echoes and the buzzing of the fluorescent lights. It can be disorienting and hard to get your bearings without a compass. I know that I become tense and stressed when I'm in a big-box store. The effect works completely against our natural senses and a positive sensory experience.

While I haven't seen Home Depot's new format, it sounds like they are on the right track. The ceilings will be lower and the colors will be softer. The huge "canyons" will give way to smaller "valleys" where shoppers will be able to cozy up to more intimate stores-within-stores for furniture and appliances, for example.

The outdoor garden center might be a bit more along the lines of Smith & Hawkins, featuring pottery and upscale goods rather than bags of mulch and



stacks of cinder blocks. Overall, the sensory effect of a Home Depot Design Center could be something like William Sonoma, Pottery Barn and Magnolia—all rolled into one.

All of that sounds promising, but it will be for naught unless Home Depot touches women's intuition in the right way. That means stimulating as many of the five senses as quickly as it can, from the moment the shopper sets foot inside the front door.

Home Depot's success or failure may well hinge on how well it orchestrates the cumulative effect of the five senses to trigger the shopper's intuition that they've made the right choice. Any later and it may be too late.

HERSHEY'S GETS IT

The powers-that-be at Home Depot might want to take a field trip to New York's Times Square for a useful case study in contrasts.

Times Square has always been famous for its billboards. More recently, it's become just as well known for its "billboard stores." Virgin Megastores, Toys R Us, and others have built fantastic retail environments intended to create an experience for their brands as much as to sell merchandise.

Directly across the street from each other are two such "billboard stores"—one for Hershey's and the other for M&M's. Hershey's has been there for a number of years, while the M&M's store opened only about a year ago.

When you walk into the M&M's store, the first thing you hear is a jaunty pop song—on one recent October morning it was Stevie Wonder's *Higher Ground*. The first thing you see are racks and shelves of every manner of M&M's merchandise—T-shirts, backpacks, key chains and snow globes.

It's all very bright and colorful and very M&M-like. However, you have to walk upstairs to find any actual M&M candy. Even then, the tall canisters of wildly colored M&M's are off to the side; the area is, once again, dominated by M&M memorabilia. No smell, no taste, no touch. Unfortunately, no memory, no emotion—and no compelling basis for the kind of positive intuition that leads to trust or loyalty.

It's a whole different situation on the opposite side of Broadway at the Hershey's store. First of all, inside and out, the store is designed to look like an old-fashioned chocolate factory—complete with an antique-style brick façade.

The first sensation, right inside the front door, is the smell of chocolate, followed by sight of every

kind of Hershey's candy you could imagine. The sound is that of a button pushed, a buzzer sounding, and a cascade of brightly wrapped Hershey's candies tumbling down from the ceiling in a pair of spiral chutes, clanking into a metal pail.

A cheerful worker then passes the pail around the store and everybody gets to enjoy a little taste of Hershey's. It's all theater, of course. The chocolate aroma is pumped in and the candy is not really made upstairs or freshly delivered down those Willy Wonka chutes.

But Hershey's succeeds by touching all five senses in a way that M&M's doesn't—and in a way that even the most creative television commercial never could. A trip to the Hershey's store in Times Square is more sensory, more emotional and more memorable—and therefore more likely to build loyalty to the Hershey's brand.

PUT A CORK IN IT

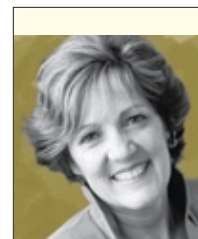
How many years have we been searching for a way to break-through the clutter, deepen the intensity of our relationships with consumers, differentiate our brands, and discover ways to make our media and message strategies more efficient and effective?

Sensory marketing is neither new nor the ultimate antidote to what's wrong with marketing today. It does however, provide a solution to a huge opportunity gap in marketing today.

Multi-sensory media allows marketers to break through consumer "spam-filters" to unleash an instant emotional response to their messages. It's a way to present marketing messages at the same multi-sensory level—hi-res to hi-res—that consumers naturally use to understand external information in their lives.

In the end, consumer trust allows brands to compete at a much higher level than other brands, resulting in sustained purchase loyalty and many happy investors.

It's not that hard to do. I'd be happy to help. I'll even bring the wine... and you can be sure it will be a bottle with a cork in it! ■



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