

How to Engage Your Customers with Sensory Branding

March 24, 2017 by Anna Cruz



***Editor's Note:** Anna Cruz works with LD Products to promote sensory branding through multi-sensory marketing. Today she joins us with an exciting overview of the reasons why businesses should take sensory marketing seriously, and how to do it.*

Sensory branding involves curating a powerful physical connection to a product or brand by engaging the senses of prospective customers on every level. Since a growing number of consumers search for experiences and emotions that go beyond the mundane, more advertisers try to incorporate sensory cues on branded media with multisensory marketing.

According to research commissioned by brand consultant Martin Lindstrom, media that appeals to more than three senses can increase brand impact and engagement by over 70 percent. That may seem like a big number, but it makes a lot of sense when you consider how we're wired. In recent years, researchers studying the human brain discovered several new ways that senses - especially smell - are tied to memory and emotional experience. Harvard Business School cites research on pencils treated with tea-tree oil: respondents were given treated pencils and untreated pencils, and asked two weeks later to recollect specifics about each. The researchers found that,

"those given unscented pencils experienced a 73% decline in the information they could recall two weeks later, [while]

subjects given tea-tree-scented pencils experienced a decline of only 8%."

There's one important element that subjects tended to remember: **brand name.**

This evolution in media poses a challenge for marketing managers, especially those who don't have the budget to build technology that makes multisensory marketing possible. What can you do? One channel that is both affordable and disarmingly low-tech is print. While print is often perceived as a static and strictly 2-dimensional medium, advancements in print technology have opened up doors to manipulate traditional print in fascinating ways that utilize senses besides sight. Let's go over a few.

Touch

Readers often prefer physical books to virtual ones, because books have texture and weight. The sense of touch also has a big impact on consumers: we can identify luxury products by examining their weight and texture to judge their quality. This is especially true for paper - different kinds and characteristics are imbued with tradition and social significance. Heavy and lightly textured cardstock is associated with formal occasions like wedding invitations or other formal announcements. Smooth-textured cotton stock is associated with sophisticated affairs, and using it in advertisements endows your brand with prestige.

Beyond traditional paper stocks, printing options that were once out of reach for advertisers are now widely accessible and affordable thanks to the Internet. Print vendors like 4colorprint, Creator Print, and the Business Card Shoppe offer a wide range of specialty printing techniques like embossing, foil stamping, spot coatings, die cut, letterpress, and color edging. Each can be applied to standard or unconventional card stock such as silk, cold foil silk, suede, and cotton. For marketers who rely on cards to curate an image, this is a great way of bringing sensory branding to your efforts.



Cold foil silk cardstock adds incredible visual depth and texture not common in typical business cards



Letterpress combined with debossing on cotton cardstock results in a pillowy look that nobody can resist touching

When looking to accent the feel of your materials, don't just stop at paper. Consider alternative print materials like fabric, plastics, or

aluminum, which create a whole new sensation to pair with your aesthetic.

Sight

Believe it or not, sight is the most challenging of the five senses to grab and sustain for any amount of time. Competing with digital screens and the stimulus of the surrounding world is tough. Visual storytelling is one very effective way to draw the eye and engage the mind, as illustrated in [Lisa Buyer's B2B Social Visual Storytelling seminar](#).

While unique paper stock and production techniques have a lot to do with the success of your print, they will do much more when coupled with a well orchestrated visual hook, a strategic sense of hierarchy and smart use of typography. All visual and mental elements should come together if you want to keep a viewer intrigued. Canva, a resource-packed hub for everything design, is a great jump-off introduction to design concepts for marketers. Even if you are working with a professional graphic designer, learning the visual elements of style will help you to gauge the quality of your materials.

There's also a very futuristic way to grab your viewer's eye: holograms. Several print companies can produce remarkable holograms at an affordable cost, and according to Petapixel, holograms can even be printed at home with a good old inkjet printer! Gizmodo pulled together some [great examples](#) of what you can create with nothing more than a commercial printer and a little creativity.

Smell

Graphic Arts Mag calls our sense of smell one of the most primitive and emotional senses, partly because of the way aromas are built into our neural pathways through our recollections of the past. Advertisers have already incorporated smell into print for years: we've all received catalogs with scratch and sniff perfume samples, for instance. But that was years ago, and today's technology allows you to get more creative.

But before we jump on the tech, remember that successfully tapping into the power of smell starts with a well thought out strategy for utilizing a particular scent to enhance your message. How can you make your particular brand memorable through smell? The key may lie in the element of surprise, which usually comes when your readers don't need to do anything (like scratch and sniff your ad).

Applying scent to paper is easy, but knowing what scent to use isn't always. If you want to be remembered, you need to serve your readers something unexpected but still relevant to your message. If you're printing cards to promote your spa, why not infuse the smell of pine trees to suggest forest-bathing, or infuse the smell of lemons and fresh cut grass onto print ads that are meant to evoke joy or positivity?

Once you've figured out what scent to use, how *do* you infuse aromas onto print? There are two common ways to do it: scented paper, or scented inks. ScentSational Technologies offers a wide range of options for infusing scents onto packaging and ads. They offer touch-activated scents and, scented inks/coatings to name a few. Sixth Scents is another scent marketing company with similar offerings.

Some printers have also started developing **personalized smells** for clients. Scent marketing companies can create new aromas, much in the way perfume designers do, or tweak a range of ready-made smells for custom purposes. Scents range from conventional fare like coffee and chocolate to less common scents like rotting flesh and vomit, presumably for those with...unusual enterprises.

Hearing

Paper naturally creates a broad range of sounds when ripped, folded or crumpled. Think of the sound that tissue paper makes coming out of a gift box, or the exciting sound of opening a package. People connect with these sounds, and unconsciously associate them with a feeling.

We've come a long way from the original singing birthday cards, which were clunky, and produced tinny sound. New technology allows us to manufacture affordable chips, speakers, and batteries that are small enough to integrate with print. Similar to incorporating the sense of smell in your print, think of how an element of sound can create a memorable experience to the reader. What kind of sound is relevant to your message and compliments your brand? Jingles are an old way to associate a pleasant tone with a brand name, but what other avenues are there for marketers?

When you let creativity take the wheel, technology will find a way. A great example are these [printed Midi DJ Decks](#) designed for DJ QBert. This perfectly demonstrates how incorporating sound with print can create truly wild interactive experiences.

Taste

Taste and smell are closely associated. Food and beverage advertisers in particular are wise to take advantage of the synaptic cross-traffic between these senses whenever possible. Anyone who crosses paths with a bakery during their walk to work can attest to the power smell has on drawing out taste memories (and tummy rumbles, too).

Finding creative ways to apply taste to paper are a gamble - chances are, no one will want to lick a direct mail flyer, just because it claims to taste like jerky. One workaround for justified consumer anxiety about licking strange objects is First Flavor's Peel and Taste System, which involves removing a thin dissolving edible strip similar to Listerine's Breath Strips.

Conclusion

When it comes to advertising, you can't underestimate the power of sensory branding. In future years, refinements in technology will further the perceptive dimension of products and advertisements to a more interactive experience. Associating your brand with sensory cues can bury your branding into the unconscious memory of consumers, where it can revive months or years down the road. While there is a lot of progress to be made in designing multi-sensory ad products, we've already come a long way, and brands should be prepared to take the opportunity seriously.

About the LD Products Team

The LD Products Team researches and writes about the ways individuals and businesses can cost-effectively utilize printer technology for improved efficiency at home and in the office. They also stay on top of the latest printing tech to provide insider information that may be valuable to consumers.

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